



## Pedagogical Competence in Nurturing Dependence on God: An Exegetical Study of Exodus 16:15 among CRE Teachers at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu

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### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in nurturing students' dependence on God through the teaching of Exodus 16:15 at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu, Indonesia. Grounded in the understanding that CRE is both an intellectual and spiritual formation process, the research explores how teachers integrate exegetical insight, instructional strategy, and spiritual modeling when presenting the manna narrative—a biblical account that embodies divine provision, trust, and experiential learning. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving two CRE teachers selected through purposive sampling. Thematic analysis revealed that teachers' exegetical understanding of Exodus 16:15 significantly shaped their pedagogical choices, influencing the depth and clarity with which the theme of dependence on God was communicated. Effective strategies included storytelling, reflective questioning, analogies, group discussions, and selective multimedia use, all of which helped contextualize the biblical message within students' lived experiences. The findings also show variation in pedagogical competence, particularly in lesson planning, instructional diversity, and assessment practices—areas where deeper integration of theological insight and student-centered methods could enhance spiritual formation. Challenges identified include limited resources, time constraints, and diverse student backgrounds, which sometimes hindered deeper engagement with the text. Despite these limitations, the study concludes that when CRE teachers combine robust exegesis, pedagogical skill, and authentic spiritual example, the classroom becomes a transformative space where students learn to trust God meaningfully. The research underscores the need for ongoing professional development in biblical pedagogy to strengthen CRE practice in Indonesian Christian schools.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Dependence on God*

## INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia is tasked not only with building students' cognitive understanding of biblical narratives but also with shaping spiritual attitudes that cultivate dependence on God in daily life. In the context of junior high school education, where students experience rapid emotional, social, and intellectual development, the role of the CRE teacher becomes essential in guiding learners toward a mature and grounded faith. Pedagogical competence is therefore not merely a professional requirement but a spiritual responsibility, especially when the content focuses on foundational theological themes such as divine provision and human dependence. SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu, as a Christian-oriented educational institution, provides an important setting for examining how teachers embody and transmit these values within formal classroom instruction. Exodus 16:15-*"When the Israelites saw it, they said to one another, 'Man hu?' for they did not know what it was. Moses said to them, 'It is the bread that the Lord has given you to eat'"*-serves as a central text for exploring the theme of dependence on God. The verse captures a transformative moment in Israel's wilderness journey where God interrupts human anxiety with divine provision. The expression *man hu?* ("What is it?") reflects both uncertainty and the beginning of recognition that sustenance ultimately comes from God's initiative rather than human effort. From an exegetical perspective, the text emphasizes God's pedagogical process: Israel is taught dependence not through abstract theology but through experiential learning. Each day's manna becomes an enacted curriculum, guiding Israel into trust, obedience, and gratitude. This theological insight has significant pedagogical implications for CRE teachers. Teaching dependence on God requires more than transferring biblical knowledge; it demands the ability to contextualize Scripture into students' lived realities. Pedagogical competence-often described through dimensions such as content mastery, classroom management, instructional strategy, and assessment-must be integrated with spiritual sensitivity and exegetical understanding. When CRE teachers grasp the historical and theological depth of Exodus 16:15, they are better equipped to design learning experiences that move students beyond superficial interpretations toward deep spiritual reflection. In the setting of SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu, the challenge becomes even more relevant because students come from diverse socioeconomic and spiritual backgrounds. Many learners wrestle with issues of insecurity, comparison, and identity formation-conditions that mirror Israel's anxieties in the wilderness. Thus, CRE teachers must adopt instructional approaches that connect the manna narrative with students' struggles, helping them internalize the message that dependence on God is not passive resignation but active trust. Strategies such as narrative pedagogy, reflective journaling, group discussions, and contextual analogies can enrich students' engagement with biblical texts while strengthening their spiritual formation. Preliminary observations and interactions with CRE practitioners suggest that not all teachers possess adequate competence in weaving biblical exegesis with pedagogical practice. Some tend to treat biblical stories as moralistic lessons without exploring their theological depth. Others use limited instructional strategies, reducing classroom sessions to lectures and recitations. This gap underscores the urgency of studying how CRE teachers interpret and teach Exodus 16:15, and how their pedagogical competence influences students' spiritual understanding. Based on these considerations, the present study seeks to examine the pedagogical competence of

CRE teachers in nurturing students' dependence on God through an exegetical engagement with Exodus 16:15. By focusing on SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu as the locus, the study aims to contribute to ongoing conversations on improving CRE pedagogical quality in Indonesia, particularly regarding spiritual themes that require deep contextualization and theological clarity. The research aspires to show that when teachers combine exegetical insight with pedagogical skill, CRE becomes a transformative learning experience that shapes students' reliance on God in meaningful and lasting ways.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach designed to explore in depth how Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu demonstrate pedagogical competence in nurturing students' dependence on God through the teaching of Exodus 16:15. A qualitative design was chosen because the research sought to understand meaning, interpretation, and pedagogical practice rather than measure variables numerically. Such an approach allows the researcher to capture the complexity of classroom interaction, teachers' exegetical understanding, and the contextual realities influencing instructional decision-making. In line with Merriam and Tisdell's assertion that qualitative research aims to interpret phenomena within their natural setting, this study positioned the classroom as an authentic environment where pedagogical competence can be observed and analyzed holistically. The primary participants in this research were two CRE teachers who actively teach biblical narratives, including the story of manna in Exodus 16:15, within the curriculum of SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu. These teachers were selected using purposive sampling based on their teaching experience, willingness to participate, and direct engagement in lessons related to faith, dependence, and biblical interpretation. Purposive sampling enabled the researcher to obtain rich and relevant data from individuals most capable of providing insights into the intersection between pedagogy and Scripture. In addition to teachers, supplementary data were gathered from students to validate and enhance the interpretation of teacher practices, though students were not treated as primary units of analysis. Semi-structured interviews allowed for flexibility in exploring teachers' understanding of Exodus 16:15, their exegetical approaches, and their pedagogical considerations when teaching spiritual dependence. Interview questions probed teachers' perceptions of biblical symbolism, their instructional strategies, classroom challenges, and the ways in which they encourage students to internalize theological messages. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes to ensure accuracy in transcription and analysis. Classroom observations were conducted across multiple teaching sessions to capture real-time interactions, teaching strategies, student engagement, and the integration of Scripture into learning activities. An observation checklist was developed based on indicators of pedagogical competence, such as clarity of instruction, contextualization of biblical material, use of learning media, questioning techniques, and facilitation of reflection. Field notes were taken to document classroom dynamics, teacher gestures, student responses, and spontaneous theological explanations that may not be captured through structured tools. These documents provided valuable insights into teachers' preparation, theological framing, and pedagogical priorities. Data analysis consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing. First, interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were

repeatedly read, coded, and categorized. Codes were derived both deductively-from theoretical constructs such as pedagogical competence and exegetical depth-and inductively from emerging patterns within the data. The coding process identified themes such as teachers' understanding of Exodus 16:15, instructional strategies, contextualization efforts, and the relationship between pedagogy and spiritual formation. Data display was conducted through thematic matrices that facilitated comparison across data sources and enabled the researcher to trace logical connections between exegetical interpretation and pedagogical action. Finally, conclusions were drawn by synthesizing findings into coherent narratives that answer the research questions. To ensure trustworthiness, the study implemented triangulation of data sources, peer debriefing with experts in Christian education, and member checking, allowing participants to review and confirm the accuracy of interpretations. The school administration granted permission for observations, and the research process was conducted with respect for the school's schedule, culture, and pedagogical norms. Through these methodological decisions, the study sought to generate credible, contextual, and theologically informed insights into how CRE teachers at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu cultivate dependence on God among students by grounding their pedagogy in the exegetical richness of Exodus 16:15.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted portrait of how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu demonstrate pedagogical competence in nurturing students' dependence on God through their teaching of Exodus 16:15. The teaching of dependence on God, especially through the manna narrative, requires not only mastery of biblical content but also exegetical sensitivity, spiritual maturity, and the ability to translate ancient theological truths into the lived experiences of contemporary adolescents. Through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, several major themes emerged: teachers' exegetical understanding of Exodus 16:15, pedagogical strategies used to communicate dependence on God, the alignment of instructional practice with indicators of pedagogical competence, challenges and limitations encountered by teachers, and implications for spiritual formation within the school context. These themes collectively illuminate the dynamic interaction between scriptural interpretation and pedagogical execution. The first major finding concerns teachers' exegetical understanding of Exodus 16:15, which significantly influenced their pedagogical approach. Both CRE teachers demonstrated a foundational grasp of the narrative, recognizing manna as a divine response to Israel's physical need and spiritual anxiety. Their understanding aligned with scholarly interpretations that view the manna event as a pedagogical tool used by God to cultivate trust and obedience (see Hamilton, 2011; Brueggemann, 1994). One teacher explained that the Israelites' expression *man hu?* ("What is it?") represented not only confusion but also a moment of revelation, signaling a shift from self-reliance to divine dependence. This interpretation reflects the theological insight that God teaches Israel through concrete experience rather than abstract doctrine. The teachers appreciated that the manna narrative was not merely about miraculous provision but about the formation of habits of trust-an insight also emphasized by Sarna (1991), who describes manna as a daily spiritual test rather than a physical solution alone. This exegetical depth shaped the teachers' instructional choices, with both seeking to help

students understand that true dependence on God involves recognizing God's initiative in meeting human needs. While the teachers demonstrated reasonable exegetical awareness, their interpretations varied in depth. One teacher tended to emphasize the moral dimension—"God provides, so we must trust"—without deeper historical contextualization. The other engaged more thoroughly with the socio-historical setting of the wilderness, explaining the Israelites' psychological state and God's pedagogical intention. Classroom observations confirmed that greater exegetical depth led to richer discussions, more nuanced questions, and greater student engagement. Lessons that incorporated historical context, linguistic insight, or narrative dynamics prompted students to reflect more deeply on the meaning of dependence. These findings affirm Groome's (2011) assertion that Scripture must be taught not only for information but for transformation, and that transformation is more likely when teaching is grounded in solid exegesis. The second major theme concerns the pedagogical strategies used by CRE teachers to communicate the concept of dependence on God. Several strategies were observed, including storytelling, analogy, reflective questioning, multimedia use, group discussion, and personal testimony. Storytelling emerged as the most dominant strategy, reflecting its suitability for middle school students who respond well to narrative-based instruction. Teachers narrated the manna story with dramatic pacing, emphasizing key moments such as the people's complaints, God's response, and the surprise of the manna itself. This approach made the story vivid and accessible, allowing students to imagine the challenges faced by the Israelites and to relate those challenges to their own experiences. Storytelling was frequently accompanied by analogies—such as comparing manna to unexpected blessings in modern life—to help students grasp the relevance of the text. Reflective questioning also played a significant role in the teaching process. Teachers asked students questions such as "What would you feel if you were in the desert without food?" or "Can you think of a time when you had no solution and God helped you unexpectedly?" Such questions aligned with inquiry-based learning principles, encouraging students to think critically and personally. These strategies reflect effective pedagogical practice supported by scholars such as Osborne (2006), who emphasizes that biblical interpretation in classrooms must invite students into dialogue with the text. The observations show that students responded positively to reflective questioning, often sharing personal stories that connected faith with their daily challenges.

Multimedia was used selectively but effectively. One teacher used visual aids showing images of desert landscapes, manna depictions, and Hebrew words, which helped students visualize the setting and engage more concretely with the narrative. Another teacher used a short video clip illustrating the wilderness wandering, which provided additional sensory context. These practices demonstrate the teachers' awareness of diverse learning styles and align with pedagogical competence indicators related to instructional variation and learner engagement. Group discussions enabled collaborative interpretation and allowed students to explore the idea of dependence on God collectively. In several sessions, students were asked to work in small groups to identify modern "manna experiences" in their lives or to compare Israel's struggles with their own sense of insecurity. This participatory approach fostered community learning and encouraged students to articulate their faith experiences. The teachers' use of group discussions reflects constructivist principles, suggesting an understanding that students

build meaning through interaction. Another notable strategy was the use of personal testimony. Teachers occasionally shared personal stories of experiencing God's provision during difficult times. These testimonies had a strong emotional impact on students and reinforced the message of divine dependence. Although testimonial pedagogy must be used cautiously to avoid overemphasizing subjective experience, in this context it functioned as a powerful tool for bridging biblical narrative and contemporary faith. Students expressed that these moments made the lesson "real" and "related to life," indicating strong pedagogical resonance. The third major theme deals with the alignment between observed instructional practices and recognized indicators of pedagogical competence. Analysis of lesson plans, teaching strategies, classroom management, and assessment practices showed that both teachers possessed adequate but varied levels of pedagogical competence. In terms of planning, lesson plans were generally well-structured and included learning objectives, key concepts, biblical references, and activity outlines. However, the extent to which the plans integrated exegetical insights differed. One teacher's lesson plan incorporated linguistic and historical notes derived from commentaries, while the other relied primarily on textbook summaries. This difference affected classroom delivery, with the former demonstrating more confidence and flexibility when answering student questions. Classroom management was consistently strong. Teachers established respectful and supportive environments, encouraged participation, and maintained disciplined but warm atmospheres. Students felt free to ask questions and share doubts, indicating a psychologically safe learning climate. This aligns with educational research suggesting that relational competence is integral to effective pedagogy, especially in faith-based contexts (see Groome, 2011). With regard to instructional strategies, as discussed earlier, both teachers employed multiple approaches, although one showed more variety and integration. Assessment practices, however, revealed a significant gap. Most assessments tended to be factual, focusing on whether students remembered details of the manna story rather than evaluating their ability to reflect theologically or apply the principle of dependence on God. While factual knowledge is important, the lack of reflective or application-based assessment limited opportunities for students to internalize the deeper message of the text. This finding aligns with Kemp (2020), who notes that Christian education often fails to assess spiritual understanding because assessment tools remain largely cognitive. The fourth major theme concerns challenges and limitations faced by teachers. Interviews revealed that teachers often struggled with time constraints, balancing curriculum requirements with the desire for deeper theological discussion. Some lessons were compressed due to school schedules, limiting opportunities for reflection or group dialogue. Teachers also mentioned limited access to theological commentaries or digital resources, which hindered the deepening of their exegetical preparation. Additionally, students' varied spiritual backgrounds posed a challenge. Some students came from families with strong Christian practices, while others had minimal exposure to Scripture outside school. This heterogeneity required teachers to differentiate instruction, which was not always easy within a single class session. Another challenge was the tendency for some students to view biblical stories as distant and disconnected from modern reality. Teachers needed to work harder to bridge this gap, especially with students who struggled with personal or socioeconomic difficulties. The manna narrative's emphasis on dependence on God was relevant but needed to be communicated sensitively to avoid simplistic or moralistic

interpretations. Teachers expressed a desire for further professional development in biblical pedagogy to enhance their confidence and creativity in addressing such challenges. The fifth major theme explores the broader implications for spiritual formation in the school. The findings suggest that when pedagogical competence is combined with exegetical depth, CRE classrooms become transformative spaces where students begin to see their lives through the lens of biblical truth. Lessons that effectively connected the manna narrative with students' experiences encouraged learners to reflect on God's presence in moments of uncertainty, such as academic stress, family financial struggles, or interpersonal conflicts. Students reported that they felt more aware of God's guidance and more willing to trust in divine provision after the lessons. This suggests that the teachers' efforts to foster dependence on God through biblical instruction had meaningful spiritual impact, aligning with Wright's (2006) emphasis on Scripture as a narrative of divine mission that shapes human identity. The findings also highlight the importance of CRE teachers as spiritual mentors. Beyond pedagogical competence, teachers' personal faith and authenticity strongly influenced student perception and learning. Observations showed that teachers who embodied the message of dependence on God-through humility, prayerfulness, and reflective language-modeled the very attitude they sought to teach. Students were more responsive when teachers displayed integrity between their teaching and their behavior. This supports Torrance's (1996) argument that Christian teaching is inherently incarnational; the teacher's life becomes part of the curriculum. Integrating these findings, the study demonstrates that pedagogical competence in CRE is deeply intertwined with theological understanding, personal spirituality, and instructional skill. The teaching of Exodus 16:15 at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu was most effective when teachers employed a combination of exegetical insight, narrative pedagogy, reflective questioning, and contextual application. When these elements were present, students demonstrated higher engagement, deeper reflection, and stronger connections between biblical content and personal faith. Nonetheless, certain gaps remain, particularly in the areas of assessment, resource availability, and exegetical training. These gaps highlight the need for ongoing professional development to help CRE teachers refine their pedagogical approaches, deepen their biblical knowledge, and strengthen their ability to nurture holistic spiritual growth in students. Enhancing teachers' access to commentaries, workshops on biblical pedagogy, and collaborative learning communities would significantly improve teaching quality and spiritual impact. The results and discussion indicate that nurturing dependence on God through the teaching of Exodus 16:15 requires a pedagogically competent teacher who understands Scripture not merely as a historical narrative but as a dynamic and transformative text. At SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu, teachers' efforts-though varied in depth-reflect a sincere commitment to guiding students toward a mature faith grounded in trust, obedience, and awareness of God's provision. Their work exemplifies the powerful interplay between exegesis, pedagogy, and spiritual formation, demonstrating that when teachers teach from a place of both skill and devotion, the classroom becomes a space where God's daily "manna" continues to form hearts and minds.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pedagogical competence in nurturing dependence on God among Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu is a multifaceted construct shaped by theological understanding, pedagogical content knowledge, and spiritual modeling. Through an exegetical lens grounded in Exodus 16:15, the findings demonstrate that teachers' interpretations of the manna narrative significantly influence how they frame the concept of divine dependence in the classroom. Teachers who engage deeply with the text-recognizing its theological layers of divine provision, testing, and relational formation-are more likely to communicate its relevance in ways that guide students toward a lived, relational trust in God. This highlights the essential role of biblical literacy and exegetical competence as foundations for effective Christian pedagogy. The results indicate that pedagogical content knowledge serves as the mediating structure that transforms theological truth into accessible learning experiences. Teachers with high pedagogical competence effectively bridge the cognitive and affective domains of learning by using interactive strategies, contextual illustrations, reflective prompts, and student-centered activities. These methods enable students not merely to know about God's provision but to internalize the value of depending on Him in their own life circumstances. Conversely, teachers with lower pedagogical competence tend to rely on rote or unidirectional instruction, which limits students' capacity to grasp the depth of the theological message. This study therefore affirms that excellence in Christian teaching requires both robust theological insight and pedagogical skill. The findings also emphasize the indispensable importance of spiritual modeling. Students are highly receptive to the authenticity of their teachers' faith, and they evaluate the credibility of theological instruction through observable behavior and relational posture. Teachers who embody reliance on God-through humility, prayerfulness, vulnerability, and consistent spiritual practices-provide living examples that reinforce the biblical lessons they teach. Their lives become a hermeneutical bridge between Scripture and students, demonstrating that dependence on God is not an abstract ideal but a practical rhythm of life. The congruence between teachers' beliefs and actions thus stands as a critical component of pedagogical competence in Christian settings. Institutional culture further shapes the effectiveness of efforts to teach divine dependence. While SMP Swasta Bakti Pancur Batu provides a supportive climate for spiritual formation, the study identifies tensions between academic requirements and the deeper formative aims of Christian education. Teachers express the need for systemic support through integrative programs, theological workshops, and collaborative professional development initiatives that strengthen their exegetical and pedagogical capacities. This underscores that fostering dependence on God is not merely an individual teacher's responsibility but a collective endeavor embedded within the school's mission and ethos. Overall, the study affirms that nurturing dependence on God requires a holistic pedagogical model where biblical interpretation, instructional strategy, and spiritual authenticity converge. Exodus 16:15 serves as a theological compass guiding teachers toward practices that shape students' trust in God's faithful provision-trust that mirrors Israel's transformative journey in the wilderness. When teachers intentionally integrate exegesis, pedagogy, and spiritual embodiment, their classrooms become spaces where students encounter not only biblical knowledge but also the lived reality of God's

sustaining presence. This holistic integration represents the heart of Christian education and stands as the key recommendation for future training and institutional development.

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