



Integrating Compassion and Competence in Christian Teaching: An Exegetical and Pedagogical Study of Matthew 9:36 at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli

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ABSTRACT

*This study examines the integration of compassion and professional competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) teaching, using Matthew 9:36 as a theological lens and SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli as the research locus. Grounded in a qualitative descriptive design, the research explored how CRE teachers perceive, embody, and apply compassion and competence within everyday instructional practice. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that compassion, understood through the exegetical insights of *blepō* (seeing with discernment) and *splagchnizomai* (responding with deep compassion), significantly shapes teachers' relational and instructional behavior. Teachers consistently demonstrated perceptive attention to students' emotional and spiritual needs, and responded through concrete actions that foster supportive and nurturing classroom environments. Competence emerged not merely as technical proficiency but as a moral expression of care, reflected in teachers' mastery of biblical content, structured lesson planning, and context-sensitive instructional strategies. The integration of compassion and competence produced a "shepherding pedagogy," in which teachers functioned as guides who nurture students holistically-academically, emotionally, and spiritually. Despite systemic challenges such as limited resources and emotional demands, teachers' sense of divine calling sustained their commitment. The study concludes that compassion and competence are inseparable in Christian teaching and should be intentionally cultivated through professional development and institutional support. The findings offer a holistic pedagogical framework for strengthening CRE practice in Indonesian schools and affirm the relevance of biblical principles for contemporary educational contexts.*

Keywords: *Compassion, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education in Indonesia continues to evolve in response to the increasing demands of twenty-first-century learning, emerging ethical challenges, and the spiritual needs of students. Within the setting of SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli, Christian Religious Education teachers are required not only to demonstrate pedagogical competence but also to embody the compassion of Christ in their daily teaching practices. This mandate aligns with the biblical witness, particularly Matthew 9:36, which recounts that Jesus “was moved with compassion when He saw the crowds, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd.” This verse provides a theological foundation for integrating two essential dimensions in Christian teaching practice: compassion and professional competence. In contemporary education, compassion is regarded as a pedagogical force that shapes classroom climate, nurtures interpersonal relationships, and strengthens students’ learning motivation. Noddings argues that the essence of genuine education lies in the caring relationship between teacher and student, in which compassion becomes the core of pedagogical action (Noddings, 2013). In the context of Christian Religious Education, compassion is not merely a moral value but a spiritual dimension rooted in the character of Christ Himself. Thus, CRE teachers are called to perceive students not only academically, but also emotionally and spiritually—mirroring the sensitivity and deep concern with which Jesus viewed the crowds in Matthew 9:36. Professional competence remains a fundamental element in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning. Shulman explains that teaching competence encompasses mastery of content knowledge, pedagogical knowledge, and the capacity to integrate both into effective instructional practice (Shulman, 1987). In Christian Religious Education, competence develops even more broadly, as teachers must be able to communicate biblical teachings clearly, design activities that support faith formation, and guide students in embodying Christian values in real-life contexts. Integrating compassion and competence thus becomes crucial so that learning is not only informative but also transformative. The locus of this study, SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli, represents a learning environment marked by rich social and spiritual dynamics. Many students come from lower-middle socioeconomic backgrounds and experience emotional pressures stemming from diverse family situations. Consequently, CRE teachers serve not only as instructors but also as pastoral figures who provide encouragement, guidance, and comfort. The conditions of students who are weary, stressed, or lacking parental support reflect the image of the crowd in Matthew 9:36—“sheep without a shepherd”—calling CRE teachers to both teach and shepherd (Banks, 1999). Matthew 9:36 reveals two key actions of Jesus: first, seeing with deep sensitivity (*blepō*), the capacity to discern one’s inner condition and deepest needs; and second, responding with compassion that propels concrete action (*splagchnizomai*). Both movements are highly relevant within Christian teaching. Effective learning cannot occur unless teachers first understand their students’ holistic needs. Compassion enables teachers to recognize students’ challenges, whereas competence equips them to respond to those needs through appropriate pedagogical strategies. To date, research on the integration of compassion and competence within Christian Religious Education in Indonesia remains limited. Many studies separate theological discourse from pedagogical practice, resulting in a gap between biblical principles and classroom implementation. This article seeks to bridge that gap by bringing together an

exegesis of Matthew 9:36 and concrete pedagogical practices in SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli. Such an approach aims to yield a teaching model that reflects the heart of Christ while meeting contemporary standards of teacher professionalism. This study aims to: analyze the exegetical meaning of compassion in Matthew 9:36, examine how CRE teachers integrate compassion and competence in their teaching practices, and develop a pedagogical framework that incorporates both spiritual sensitivity and professional skill. In doing so, this study not only contributes to the theoretical development of Christian Religious Education but also strengthens teaching practices that are contextually relevant and educationally impactful in elementary school settings.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to explore the integration of compassion and professional competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in light of Matthew 9:36 at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli. The qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and pedagogical practices within their real-life context. Qualitative inquiry allows the researcher to examine not only observable teaching behaviors but also the deeper meanings that teachers attach to their roles, especially in relation to the theological and exegetical dimensions of compassion. A descriptive orientation was used to provide a clear and systematic portrayal of how compassion and competence are enacted in daily teaching, without manipulating variables or imposing external interventions. This methodological choice aligns with Creswell's view that descriptive qualitative research is appropriate for studies aiming to depict phenomena as they naturally occur within specific educational settings (Creswell, 2014). The participants in this study consisted of Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli, selected using purposive sampling. This type of sampling was chosen because the research required participants who were directly involved in the practice of Christian teaching and who possessed relevant experience in integrating biblical principles into classroom pedagogy. The inclusion criteria were: at least one year of teaching CRE at the school, willingness to participate voluntarily, and ability to articulate teaching reflections based on biblical and pedagogical considerations. The final sample included two CRE teachers who represented the entire Christian education function within the school context. Although the sample size was small, qualitative research emphasizes depth rather than breadth, allowing the researcher to gather rich and detailed insights. Data collection was conducted using three primary techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews enabled the researcher to explore teachers' perspectives on compassion, competence, and their understanding of Matthew 9:36 within pedagogical practice. The flexibility of semi-structured interviews allowed participants to express their experiences freely while ensuring that core themes—such as spiritual motivation, emotional responsiveness, instructional strategies, and student needs—were consistently addressed. Classroom observations were carried out to capture the teachers' actual teaching behaviors, especially how compassion was demonstrated in interactional patterns, feedback, classroom management, and support for students facing emotional or academic challenges. Observations also enabled the researcher to examine the implementation of

professional competence, including lesson planning, instructional clarity, and assessment strategies. Document analysis was performed on lesson plans, teaching reflections, and school policies to triangulate the findings from interviews and observations. Triangulation strengthened the study's credibility by ensuring that data were examined from multiple angles (Patton, 2015). Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures, guided by Braun and Clarke's six-phase framework (Braun & Clarke, 2006). First, all interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were read multiple times to achieve data familiarization. Second, initial codes were generated to identify significant ideas related to compassion, competence, and biblical integration. Third, the codes were organized into broader categories, forming preliminary themes. Fourth, the themes were reviewed and refined to ensure coherence and alignment with the research questions. The fifth step involved defining and naming each theme, clarifying the unique contribution of each theme to the overall analysis. Finally, a comprehensive narrative synthesis was developed to present the findings. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the voluntary nature of participation, and the confidentiality of their identities. The school provided written permission, and pseudonyms were used to protect participant anonymity. By ensuring ethical rigor, this study aimed to maintain trustworthiness, authenticity, and scholarly integrity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a complex and deeply interconnected relationship between compassion and professional competence in the teaching practices of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli, especially when examined through the theological lens of Matthew 9:36. The findings illustrate that compassion, as conceptualized in the biblical text, functions not merely as an emotional disposition but as a pedagogical force that shapes teachers' responsiveness, instructional decisions, and relational commitments. Professional competence is shown not only as a technical mastery of content and pedagogy but as a moral and spiritual responsibility that aligns closely with Christlike shepherding. The integration of these two dimensions emerged consistently across interview data, classroom observations, and document analysis, demonstrating that the teachers' practice is rooted in a holistic understanding of Christian teaching where emotional, spiritual, and instructional elements cannot be separated. The first major finding highlights that CRE teachers demonstrate a perceptive compassion that aligns with the verb *blepō* in Matthew 9:36, which implies "seeing with understanding." Teachers consistently engaged in attentive observation of students' emotional states and learning needs before initiating instructional activities. During classroom observations, teachers were seen scanning the classroom to identify signs of distress, withdrawal, confusion, or lack of confidence among students. This perceptive stance enabled them to make pedagogical adjustments such as modifying instruction, offering additional support, or initiating relational conversations. Interviews revealed that teachers view this act of seeing as a spiritual responsibility that stems from their faith and understanding of Christ's ministry. They described how Jesus' capacity to see beyond outward appearances in Matthew 9:36 inspires them to engage in more empathetic and discerning interactions with students. This finding indicates that compassion, when grounded in exegetical insight, becomes a form of pedagogical discernment that guides instructional decision-making and classroom management. A second major finding

concerns the teachers' responsive compassion, which corresponds to the Greek verb *splagchnizomai*-a compassion that moves one toward concrete action. Classroom observations demonstrated multiple instances of this responsive compassion. Teachers often paused instruction to address students' emotional struggles, offered personal encouragement, and provided additional explanation for learners who lagged behind. One teacher, for example, used her break time to pray with a student who expressed anxiety about family issues. Another teacher provided tailored learning materials for a student who struggled with literacy, explaining that "teaching the Word of God must always be accompanied by caring for the child's wholeness." These actions reveal that compassion is not incidental but intentionally integrated into the teaching process, shaping both relational dynamics and instructional strategies. This is consistent with pedagogical literature that argues compassion involves active, intentional engagement with learners' needs, producing a learning environment that is safe, supportive, and spiritually enriching. The third finding relates to competence as an expression of compassion. Contrary to assumptions that competence and compassion function as separate domains, teachers in this study articulated that competence is, in fact, a form of love and responsibility toward students. They expressed that preparing well-structured lessons, mastering biblical content, employing effective teaching methods, and evaluating learning outcomes fairly are all ways of honoring the dignity and potential of their students. Lesson plans analyzed in this study showed evidence of clear learning objectives, age-appropriate activities, and integration of moral and spiritual reflection. Teachers also demonstrated strong mastery of biblical content and were able to explain the meaning of passages with clarity while connecting them to students' everyday experiences. This suggests that competence is not only technical but deeply ethical, affirming what scholars describe as "moral professionalism" in Christian education. Competence ensures that compassion does not become mere sentimentality but is grounded in purposeful and transformative teaching practice. A fourth finding highlights how the integration of compassion and competence creates a shepherding pedagogy modeled after Christ's ministry. Teachers viewed themselves not only as instructors but also as shepherds tasked with guiding, nurturing, correcting, and strengthening their students. Classroom observations revealed that teachers frequently employed metaphors of care, guidance, and protection when interacting with students. For example, one teacher described her classroom as a "safe pasture" where students can learn, grow, and express themselves freely without fear of judgment. The shepherding model was also evident in how teachers approached discipline. Instead of punitive measures, teachers opted for restorative dialogue, helping students understand the impact of their actions, seek reconciliation, and rebuild trust. This aligns with the pastoral nature of Jesus' ministry as depicted in Matthew 9:36, where compassion leads to both guidance and redemptive action. The integration of these elements demonstrates how biblical narratives can shape pedagogical identity and practice within contemporary educational contexts. The fifth major finding relates to the challenges teachers face in sustaining compassionate and competent teaching. Teachers highlighted emotional fatigue, limited resources, large class sizes, and high administrative demands as factors that strain their ability to consistently integrate compassion into their practice. They explained that while compassion is essential, it is also emotionally demanding, especially when students face complex socioeconomic challenges such as poverty, broken homes, and low parental

involvement. Moreover, teachers expressed that professional development opportunities in the school are limited, making it difficult to continually enhance pedagogical competence. However, despite these challenges, teachers' commitment to compassion and competence remains strong, largely because they view their work as a divine calling. This sense of calling provides internal motivation that helps them persevere and remain faithful to their mission. The findings highlight a tension between ideal pedagogical aspirations and systemic constraints, suggesting the need for institutional support to sustain teacher well-being and professional growth.

The discussion of these findings indicates that the integration of compassion and competence in Christian teaching is best understood as a dynamic interplay, rather than a simple combination of two separate skills. Compassion shapes how teachers perceive students, understand their needs, and form relational bonds. Competence shapes how teachers respond effectively, design meaningful learning experiences, and facilitate academic and spiritual growth. Together, these elements form a holistic approach that reflects Christ's ministry as depicted in Matthew 9:36. The biblical text serves not only as a theological anchor but also as a practical guide that influences real-world pedagogical decisions and interactions. The study's findings contribute to the broader discourse on Christian pedagogy by demonstrating that biblical exegesis can inform and transform educational practice. Exegetical insights into Matthew 9:36 help teachers interpret their role not merely as educators but as shepherds entrusted with the spiritual and emotional well-being of their students. This enriches the pedagogical vision of Christian teaching, moving it beyond content delivery toward relational, compassionate, and transformative engagement. It also challenges the false dichotomy often constructed between "heart" and "skill" in teacher professionalism, showing that both dimensions are essential and mutually reinforcing in nurturing students' spiritual, emotional, and academic development. The findings also highlight important implications for teacher training and professional development. Schools and educational institutions should develop programs that strengthen both the spiritual formation and pedagogical competence of CRE teachers. Spiritual formation initiatives can help teachers cultivate compassion, resilience, and discernment, while pedagogical training can enhance instructional skills, assessment literacy, and classroom management. Integrating these two domains would create a comprehensive professional development model aligned with the holistic needs of Christian educators. Moreover, mentorship programs involving experienced teachers can provide ongoing support, encouragement, and practical guidance for sustaining compassionate and competent teaching practices. Another implication lies in the need for supportive school environments that empower teachers to live out compassion and competence effectively. Administrative policies should acknowledge the emotional labor involved in compassionate teaching and provide resources such as counseling support, manageable class sizes, and opportunities for collaborative planning. Building a school culture rooted in care, respect, and shared mission can also strengthen teachers' motivation and resilience. When teachers feel valued and supported, they are better able to extend compassion and excellence to their students. The integration of compassion and competence in CRE teaching at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli reflects a broader vision for Christian education in Indonesia—one that is relational, contextual, and deeply rooted in Scripture. In a rapidly changing educational landscape, Christian teachers are called to

embody Christ's compassion while maintaining high standards of professional integrity. The findings of this study demonstrate that such integration is not only possible but already unfolding in meaningful ways within real classrooms. However, it also reveals the need for continuous reflection, institutional support, and intentional formation to sustain this integration over time. The results and discussion of this study affirm that compassion and competence are inseparable elements in Christian teaching, particularly when guided by the biblical insight of Matthew 9:36. Compassion enables teachers to perceive and respond to students' needs with empathy and care, while competence equips them to teach effectively and nurture holistic growth. Together, they form a robust pedagogical framework that reflects Christ's shepherding heart and advances the mission of Christian education. Teachers at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli exemplify how these dimensions can be woven into daily practice, contributing to a transformative learning environment where students are seen, valued, and guided toward becoming whole persons in Christ.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the integration of compassion and competence in Christian Religious Education teaching, grounded in the theological insight of Matthew 9:36, forms a holistic and transformative pedagogical framework highly relevant for the context of SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli. The findings demonstrate that compassion, as depicted in the biblical terms *blepō* (seeing with discernment) and *splagchnizomai* (responding with deep, active compassion), functions not merely as an emotional quality but as a pedagogical posture that shapes teachers' daily interactions, instructional judgments, and classroom climate. Compassion enables teachers to perceive students' emotional, academic, and spiritual needs more deeply, establishing a relational foundation upon which effective teaching can occur. At the same time, professional competence emerges as a necessary extension of compassion, ensuring that care for students is operationalized through meaningful instructional strategies, mastery of biblical and pedagogical content, and structured learning experiences that promote holistic growth. The study also reveals that the teachers' sense of calling plays a crucial role in sustaining their commitment to compassionate and competent teaching. Their understanding of teaching as a ministry inspired by Christ's shepherding model in Matthew 9:36 provides internal motivation that helps them navigate systemic challenges such as limited resources, emotional fatigue, and diverse student needs. This vocational perspective allows teachers to view competence not simply as a professional requirement but as a moral and spiritual responsibility—a way of honoring God and serving students faithfully. Consequently, competence becomes an expression of love, integrity, and stewardship, reinforcing the inseparable nature of these two pedagogical dimensions. The integration of compassion and competence also contributes to the formation of what can be described as a shepherding pedagogy, in which teaching is approached as guiding, nurturing, protecting, and empowering students. This model emphasizes restorative discipline, relational engagement, and contextualized instruction that speaks to both the intellectual and emotional dimensions of learning. Such an approach aligns with contemporary educational perspectives that highlight socio-emotional learning, relational teaching, and inclusive pedagogy, while maintaining a distinctly Christian identity rooted in biblical narratives and theological reflection. The findings confirm that when compassion and competence operate

together, the classroom becomes a safe and vibrant space where students feel valued, encouraged, and supported in their academic and spiritual journeys. The study also identifies the need for institutional structures that support teachers in sustaining this integration. Continuous professional development, spiritual formation programs, collaborative learning communities, and administrative support are essential to ensure that teachers are equipped both emotionally and professionally. Without such support, the burden of compassionate teaching can become overwhelming and may compromise the quality of instructional practice. Schools and educational stakeholders should invest in strengthening teachers' well-being, pedagogical skills, and spiritual resilience. The conclusion of this research underscores that compassion and competence are not optional or interchangeable components of Christian teaching, but mutually reinforcing foundations that reflect the heart of Christ's ministry. By integrating both dimensions, Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 106864 Hutanauli demonstrate a model of teaching that is relationally sensitive, theologically grounded, and pedagogically sound. This model has significant implications for the broader field of Christian education in Indonesia, offering a framework that honors both the spiritual mission and academic responsibilities of teachers. Ultimately, the study affirms that faithful Christian teaching requires seeing students as Christ saw the crowds—deeply, empathetically, and purposefully—and responding with actions that nurture their full humanity while guiding them toward meaningful learning and spiritual maturity.

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