



Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Guiding Students to Recognize God's Presence: An Exegetical Study of Exodus 40:34 at SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi

Yusnita Krisnayanti Ziliwu

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: yusnitakrisnayanti@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers in guiding students to recognize God's presence, using an exegetical lens grounded in Exodus 40:34 and focusing on the contextual realities of SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi in West Nias. Through a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) of thirty-two high-quality studies published between 2000 and 2025, the research synthesizes key theoretical insights and pedagogical practices related to teacher spirituality, biblical interpretation, and student spiritual formation. The findings indicate that teacher competence in this domain is multidimensional, encompassing spiritual modeling, relational sensitivity, exegetical understanding, and pedagogical creativity. Teachers who cultivate a deep personal spirituality, demonstrate reverence, and embody moral integrity significantly influence students' openness to perceiving divine presence in everyday life. Exegetical insight into Exodus 40:34 provides a theological foundation for understanding the classroom as a sacred learning space where God's presence is both acknowledged and experienced. Moreover, relational competence-expressed through empathy, trust-building, and cultural responsiveness-emerges as essential for fostering a supportive environment for spiritual growth. The study also identifies effective pedagogical strategies, including reflective activities, narrative engagement, experiential learning, and symbolic interpretation, which help students internalize biblical principles and recognize signs of God's presence in creation, community, and personal experience. Overall, the research concludes that PAK teacher competence must be understood as an integrated framework that unites spiritual maturity, theological depth, interpersonal skill, and instructional effectiveness. Such holistic competence enables teachers to become mediators of divine presence, contributing to students' spiritual awareness, moral resilience, and holistic Christian formation.

Keywords: Professional Competence, Christian Religious Education, God's Presence

INTRODUCTION

Teacher professionalism in Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) encompasses not only pedagogical and subject-matter competence but also the ability to facilitate spiritual formation in students. Among the various dimensions of Christian education, guiding students to recognize God's presence represents a critical aspect of fostering holistic spiritual development. Exodus 40:34, which describes the glory of the Lord filling the tabernacle, offers a rich exegetical foundation for understanding how spiritual awareness and divine presence can be integrated into classroom practice. The verse states, *"Then the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle,"* illustrating the intersection of divine manifestation and human responsiveness. Within this narrative, Moses' obedience and the Israelites' attentiveness to God's guidance model an educational paradigm where awareness of the divine is cultivated through both structured observance and relational interaction with God's directives. In the context of SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi, located in West Nias, teachers operate in a diverse social and cultural environment where students encounter multiple sources of knowledge, moral guidance, and social influence. The professional competence of PAK teachers, therefore, extends beyond transmitting doctrinal knowledge; it includes the capacity to create learning experiences that help students perceive, reflect upon, and respond to God's presence in their daily lives. Such competence requires a synthesis of exegetical insight, pedagogical skill, and relational sensitivity. According to Palmer (1998), the teacher's inner life, including spiritual awareness, significantly shapes the classroom environment, influencing students' receptivity to both academic and spiritual instruction. In this sense, the teacher functions as a mediator between sacred texts and lived experience, translating biblical narratives into meaningful, experiential learning for young learners. Exodus 40:34 emphasizes that divine presence is both imminent and transformative, filling the physical and symbolic space of the tabernacle. This narrative informs the conceptualization of teacher competence in PAK as a dynamic interaction between knowledge, practice, and spiritual intentionality. Teachers must possess the capacity to design activities that encourage observation, reflection, and application of God's principles while maintaining sensitivity to students' developmental stages. For instance, learning tasks that invite students to identify signs of God's presence in creation, community life, and personal experiences foster experiential understanding that transcends rote memorization. Such an approach aligns with contemporary theories of Christian pedagogy, which posit that knowledge acquisition must be integrated with character formation and spiritual discernment (Holmes, 1987).

The study of professional competence in guiding students to recognize God's presence requires attention to contextual factors. Teachers in West Nias navigate unique challenges, including linguistic diversity, varying family backgrounds, and the integration of cultural norms with Christian ethical principles. Observational and interview-based studies in similar Indonesian contexts have demonstrated that teachers' competence in facilitating spiritual awareness depends on their ability to model reverence, cultivate reflection, and sustain relational trust with students (Situmorang, 2019). In practice, this competence manifests in intentional classroom rituals, guided prayer experiences, scriptural reflections, and discussions that encourage students to articulate personal

responses to divine guidance. By examining professional competence through the lens of Exodus 40:34, this study highlights the interplay between biblical exegesis, pedagogical strategy, and spiritual formation. The tabernacle narrative offers a paradigm for understanding how divine presence can be made perceptible and meaningful in educational contexts, suggesting that teachers' effectiveness is enhanced when they integrate scriptural insight with relational and instructional expertise. This approach not only strengthens students' understanding of God's presence but also fosters moral and spiritual maturity, preparing learners to navigate life with discernment, faith, and ethical awareness. This study seeks to explore how PAK teachers at SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi-West Nias exercise professional competence in guiding students to recognize God's presence, analyzing both the pedagogical strategies employed and the exegetical grounding that informs these practices. By focusing on this integration of spiritual formation and educational professionalism, the research aims to provide insights into effective approaches for holistic Christian education in culturally and socially diverse school settings.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to explore the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers in guiding students to recognize God's presence, grounded in the exegetical perspective of Exodus 40:34. The SLR method was chosen to comprehensively synthesize existing research, theoretical frameworks, and pedagogical practices related to teacher competence, spiritual formation, and biblical interpretation, thereby providing a robust evidence base for understanding effective educational strategies. According to Kitchenham (2004), SLR offers a transparent, replicable, and structured process for identifying, evaluating, and synthesizing relevant literature, ensuring that conclusions are grounded in systematically reviewed knowledge rather than anecdotal or fragmented sources. The literature search focused on peer-reviewed journals, books, dissertations, and credible conference proceedings published between 2000 and 2025. Databases were utilized with specific keywords. Inclusion criteria required that studies explicitly addressed teacher professional competence in the context of religious or moral education, the integration of spiritual or exegetical content into pedagogy, or the role of teacher modeling in student spiritual development. Exclusion criteria eliminated studies focusing exclusively on non-Christian religious contexts, primary theological exegesis without pedagogical implications, or studies lacking empirical or conceptual rigor. Data extraction was conducted using a standardized form to capture key study attributes, including author(s), publication year, research design, participant characteristics, pedagogical strategies, and key findings related to professional competence and spiritual guidance. Thematic analysis was applied to categorize recurring themes, which included teacher modeling of spiritual presence, integration of biblical narratives into classroom practice, relational and moral guidance, and contextual adaptation for diverse student populations. This approach allowed for both inductive and deductive coding, ensuring that themes were both data-driven and informed by theoretical frameworks, such as Holmes' (1987) model of integrated faith and learning and Palmer's (1998) insights on teacher spirituality. Quality appraisal of selected studies was conducted using established criteria for qualitative and mixed-method research, including clarity of research questions,

methodological transparency, theoretical grounding, and relevance to Christian education pedagogy. Studies that demonstrated methodological rigor and relevance to the research focus were prioritized in the synthesis. The SLR process was iterative, involving initial identification of 153 sources, followed by screening of titles and abstracts to remove duplicates and irrelevant studies, leaving 48 articles for full-text review. Ultimately, 32 studies met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed in depth. The synthesis emphasized practical applications of professional competence in fostering spiritual awareness, identifying strategies that enable teachers to guide students in recognizing God's presence through observation, reflection, and active engagement with biblical principles. By adopting the SLR approach, this study ensures a comprehensive understanding of how PAK teachers' professional competence can be operationalized in classrooms, bridging exegetical insights from Exodus 40:34 with practical, evidence-based pedagogical strategies in Christian education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this systematic literature review reveal several critical dimensions of professional competence that enable Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers to effectively guide students toward recognizing God's presence, particularly within the cultural and educational context of SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi-West Nias. Through the analysis of thirty-two high-quality studies, four major thematic clusters emerged: the teacher's spiritual modeling and inner life, integration of biblical narratives-particularly Exodus 40:34-into pedagogical practice, relational, moral, and contextual competence in culturally diverse classrooms, and instructional strategies that cultivate spiritual awareness through reflection, observation, and experiential learning. These themes collectively illustrate that professional competence in PAK is not merely a matter of transmitting theological content but involves a dynamic interplay of spirituality, pedagogy, interpretation, and classroom relationship-building. The findings further demonstrate that when teachers embody these competencies, students develop a deeper capacity to perceive, internalize, and respond to divine presence in both academic settings and everyday life. These results substantiate the relevance of Exodus 40:34 as an exegetical framework for spiritual pedagogy, as the narrative's emphasis on divine indwelling provides a metaphorical and practical guide for creating learning spaces where God's presence becomes perceptible and transformative. The first major finding concerns the significant role of the teacher's spiritual identity and inner life as foundational to their professional competence. Palmer's (1998) assertion that "we teach who we are" becomes evident across the literature, as numerous studies emphasize that the authenticity of a teacher's relationship with God profoundly shapes students' spiritual receptivity. In contexts similar to West Nias, where children often rely on teachers as moral and spiritual exemplars due to varied family backgrounds, the teacher's modeling of reverence, prayerfulness, and attentiveness to God becomes a central pedagogical tool. Exegetically, Exodus 40:34 describes the moment when "the cloud covered the tent of meeting, and the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle," indicating the transformative power of God's presence in the midst of His people. In educational application, teachers who demonstrate habits of spiritual attentiveness-through reflective prayer, humility, ethical consistency, and relational warmth-effectively mirror the readiness of Moses who stood

in awe of God's glory. The literature consistently highlights that teachers who display emotional authenticity, moral clarity, and spiritual awareness create a learning atmosphere where students sense the sacredness of the educational encounter, thus increasing their openness to recognizing God's presence in daily activities. This aligns with Holmes' (1987) argument that spiritual formation occurs not through isolated religious instruction but through integrated learning environments where faith, character, and cognition intersect naturally. Within SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi, where teachers often serve as community role models, the spiritual integrity of PAK teachers becomes especially influential, positioning them as living tabernacles who embody the glory of God within the educational space. The second thematic cluster concerns the integration of biblical narratives-especially the exegetical insights from Exodus 40:34-into classroom teaching in ways that are developmentally appropriate and contextually meaningful. The literature demonstrates that effective PAK teachers do not merely read or explain Scripture; they interpret biblical narratives in ways that help students encounter God's presence experientially. Through thematic analysis, four sub-practices emerged: narrative retelling that emphasizes divine actions, dialogical interpretation that invites student reflection, symbolic application that connects scriptural motifs to everyday life, and ritual reinforcement through prayer, worship, or reflective silence. Exodus 40:34's depiction of the cloud of God's glory provides a potent metaphor for teaching divine presence, especially for younger students who respond strongly to sensory and symbolic imagery. Several studies highlight that when teachers emphasize the visibility of God's guidance in the Exodus story-such as through the cloud by day and fire by night-students begin to associate God's presence with observable signs in nature, community, and personal experience. This symbolic pedagogy resonates with children in West Nias, who grow up in close contact with natural landscapes, communal rituals, and shared cultural narratives. By situating biblical stories within the students' lived experiences, PAK teachers transform Scripture from abstract doctrine into concrete guidance. This exegetical-pedagogical synergy mirrors Moses' role as mediator in Exodus: just as Moses interpreted God's presence for the Israelites, teachers interpret God's nearness for their students, helping them develop theological imagination and spiritual discernment. The third major finding highlights the relational and contextual dimension of teacher competence, showing that the ability to create a trusting, inclusive, and culturally responsive classroom is essential for fostering spiritual awareness. Studies across Indonesia and other multicultural settings emphasize that spiritual formation is relationally mediated: students recognize God's presence more readily when they feel safe, valued, and emotionally supported. This is particularly significant in West Nias, where students bring diverse linguistic backgrounds, varying levels of economic stability, and differing expressions of local culture into the classroom. The literature reveals that culturally responsive teachers acknowledge and integrate local values-such as respect for elders, communal solidarity, and gratitude-as bridges for Christian spiritual formation. Rather than viewing culture as competing with Scripture, effective PAK teachers synthesize cultural elements with biblical teachings, allowing students to see God's presence within their inherited traditions. For example, the strong communal ethos in Nias culture provides fertile ground for teaching about God's presence in fellowship, mutual care, and shared responsibility. Teachers who maintain warm, respectful relationships with students model the relational nature of God's presence as depicted in Exodus 40:34, where God chooses to dwell in the midst of

His people rather than apart from them. The literature also demonstrates that relational competence includes the teacher's ability to manage classroom conflict, respond empathetically to students' emotional needs, and maintain consistency between spoken teachings and lived behavior. Such relational integrity creates a tabernacle-like environment—a sacred educational space where students feel secure enough to engage in spiritual reflection and expression. The fourth theme emerging from the literature concerns pedagogical strategies that cultivate spiritual awareness through observation, reflection, and experiential learning. The reviewed studies identify multiple practices that enhance students' ability to perceive and respond to God's presence, including guided reflection activities, contemplative prayer exercises, outdoor learning experiences, artistic expression, and community service projects. These strategies resonate strongly with developmental psychology, which emphasizes that children learn spiritual concepts more deeply through experience than verbal instruction alone. Several authors demonstrate that when students are guided to observe the beauty of creation, the kindness of peers, or the resolution of conflicts, they begin to understand these moments as signs of God at work—a direct parallel to how the Israelites recognized God's guidance through the cloud. Furthermore, reflective practices such as journaling, silence, and group sharing help students process spiritual experiences and articulate their understanding of God's nearness. Within SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi, where natural surroundings and communal interaction play central roles in students' daily lives, experiential pedagogies are particularly effective. For example, teachers may facilitate nature walks that connect creation with the theme of divine presence, or they may encourage students to express their awareness of God through drawing, storytelling, or singing—methods that align with local learning preferences. This approach mirrors the transformative function of the tabernacle, which served not only as a ritual site but as a tangible reminder of God's ongoing involvement with His people. The literature underscores that effective PAK teachers integrate these four competence areas holistically rather than sequentially. Professional competence emerges when teachers combine spiritual modeling, exegetical insight, relational warmth, and creative pedagogy into a coherent educational practice. This holistic competence is especially necessary in contexts like West Nias, where students may face socio-economic challenges, limited parental involvement, or cultural transitions, making the school environment a crucial site for spiritual grounding. Several studies confirm that when PAK teachers adopt holistic pedagogical frameworks, students demonstrate increased spiritual curiosity, stronger moral reasoning, deeper empathy, and greater consistency in religious practice. These findings indicate that guiding students to recognize God's presence is not an isolated educational activity but an ongoing process requiring teacher intentionality, spiritual maturity, and contextual sensitivity. Another central finding concerns the transformative role of exegesis—particularly the interpretation of Exodus 40:34—in shaping teacher professionalism. The literature reveals that teachers who engage deeply with biblical exegesis develop a stronger theological foundation for their pedagogical decisions, enabling them to teach with greater clarity and spiritual authority. Exodus 40:34 highlights the centrality of God's initiative: it is God who fills the tabernacle with His glory, yet human readiness determines the extent to which this divine presence is perceived and experienced. Teachers who internalize this principle understand their role not as manufacturing spiritual experiences but as preparing the educational environment—much like Moses prepared the tabernacle—for

God's presence to be encountered. Such preparation includes fostering reverence, maintaining ethical integrity, designing meaningful learning activities, and nurturing supportive teacher-student relationships. Exegetical competence also empowers teachers to address students' theological questions with confidence, helping them develop a grounded understanding of God's nature and activity. The literature suggests that students respond positively to teachers who demonstrate both spiritual conviction and intellectual humility, as this combination reflects the biblical model of leadership exemplified by Moses—a leader who was firm in faith yet dependent on God's guidance. Thus, exegetical grounding is not merely an academic exercise but a crucial component of professional competence that shapes the teacher's identity, relationships, and pedagogical choices. The findings indicate that contextual challenges in West Nias—such as limited educational resources, socio-economic disparities, and differing levels of parental support—require PAK teachers to exercise resilience, adaptability, and creativity in guiding students toward spiritual awareness. Several studies on rural Indonesian schools demonstrate that teachers often compensate for resource limitations through innovative, low-cost pedagogical strategies that still promote spiritual reflection. For example, teachers may integrate simple storytelling techniques, local proverbs, or natural materials into their lessons to communicate biblical principles. In areas where students face emotional or family instability, teachers serve as significant spiritual anchors, offering consistent guidance and pastoral care. This reflects the pastoral dimension of teacher competence highlighted in the literature: teachers act not only as educators but also as shepherds who accompany students through spiritual and moral development. The narrative of Exodus 40:34 reinforces this pastoral role, as Moses' leadership included guiding the people's awareness of God's presence during times of uncertainty. Thus, in contexts like SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi, professional competence involves not only pedagogical and theological expertise but also emotional availability, spiritual attentiveness, and cultural sensitivity. Several reviewed studies emphasize that teachers grow in their ability to guide spiritual awareness when they participate in professional communities of practice, engage in regular devotions, receive mentorship, and collaborate with church or community leaders. Although the present study focuses on teacher competence rather than institutional policy, the literature indicates that systemic support enhances the teacher's capacity to create tabernacle-like learning environments where divine presence is recognized and celebrated. In West Nias, strengthening partnerships between schools, churches, and families could significantly enhance the effectiveness of PAK instruction, enabling teachers to situate biblical teachings within a broader communal and cultural framework. This holistic support system mirrors the communal nature of the tabernacle in Exodus, where the entire community participated in building and maintaining a sacred space for encountering God. The findings of this SLR demonstrate that guiding students to recognize God's presence is a multidimensional process requiring teachers to integrate spiritual depth, exegetical insight, relational competence, and creative pedagogical strategies. Exodus 40:34 provides a rich theological foundation for this process, emphasizing that divine presence fills the space where human readiness, obedience, and attentiveness converge. In the context of SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi, PAK teachers play a vital role in preparing such spaces—both metaphorically and literally—through their identity, relationships, and instructional practices. As students observe their teachers' reverence, engage with biblical narratives, experience supportive

relationships, and participate in reflective activities, they develop an increased capacity to perceive God at work in their surroundings and within themselves. This outcome not only fulfills the goals of Christian education but also contributes to students' moral development, resilience, and holistic well-being. The results thus affirm that teacher professionalism in Christian Religious Education is inseparable from spiritual formation and that teachers who embody these competencies become powerful mediators of God's presence in the educational lives of their students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in guiding students to recognize God's presence is a multidimensional construct that integrates spirituality, pedagogy, biblical exegesis, and contextual sensitivity. Through a systematic review of thirty-two relevant studies, it becomes evident that effective PAK teachers are not merely transmitters of doctrinal knowledge but formative agents who cultivate a spiritually rich learning environment. At the core of this competence is the teacher's inner spiritual life, which shapes their character, decision-making, and relational disposition in the classroom. Consistent with Palmer's (1998) insight that teaching flows from one's identity, the findings affirm that teachers who model reverence, humility, and attentiveness to God naturally inspire students to develop a similar awareness. Their spiritual integrity becomes a living testament of divine presence, serving as the first and most influential layer of spiritual pedagogy. The study highlights that exegetical grounding—particularly the interpretation of Exodus 40:34—plays a pivotal role in shaping teachers' pedagogical vision. The image of God's glory filling the tabernacle illustrates that divine presence is both imminent and transformative, providing a theological framework for understanding how God may be encountered within the educational space. Teachers who interpret Scripture not only accurately but also imaginatively help students experience God's presence beyond the text, connecting biblical narratives with daily life. This exegetical-pedagogical integration ensures that learning becomes dynamic, experiential, and spiritually meaningful, fostering a holistic formation that encompasses knowledge, character, and faith. The results also emphasize that relational competence is essential for cultivating spiritual awareness in students. The ability to build trust, demonstrate empathy, and create a safe emotional environment enables children to engage in reflection and spiritual expression without fear. This relational foundation parallels the communal dimension of the tabernacle narrative, where God chooses to dwell among His people, reinforcing the concept that divine presence is best recognized within supportive and caring relationships. In the context of SD Negeri 078494 Tuhendraowi—characterized by cultural diversity, socio-economic variation, and strong communal values—relational competence becomes especially critical in nurturing students' spiritual insight. The study finds that pedagogical strategies that promote observation, reflection, and experiential learning significantly enhance students' ability to perceive God's presence. Activities such as guided prayer, reflective journaling, nature observation, creative expression, and dialogical engagement help make spiritual concepts tangible and personally relevant. These practices align with both developmental psychology and Christian educational theory, showing that children learn spirituality through active experience rather than passive reception. Teachers who employ such

approaches effectively create “educational tabernacles,” spaces where students can encounter God through creation, community, and personal reflection. The study concludes that professional competence in guiding students to recognize God’s presence requires holistic integration-spiritual maturity, biblical literacy, relational warmth, and creative pedagogy must function together rather than in isolation. For PAK teachers in West Nias, this competence becomes even more vital, as the school environment often compensates for varying levels of spiritual guidance at home. This integrated competence not only strengthens students’ awareness of God but also contributes to their moral resilience, emotional well-being, and faith development. Ultimately, the findings affirm that when PAK teachers embody these multidimensional competencies, they become mediators of God’s presence and catalysts of transformative spiritual growth in the lives of their students.

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