

Compassion as Pedagogical Identity: An Exegetical Study of Matthew 14:14 in the Context of Christian Education at SD Negeri 060800 Medan

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ABSTRACT

*This study explores compassion as a transformative pedagogical identity in Christian education by examining Matthew 14:14 and its implications for the teaching ministry at SD Negeri 060800 Medan. With 44 Christian students and six Christian teachers, including one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, the school provides a dynamic context for investigating how Christlike compassion shapes instructional practices, teacher–student relationships, and students’ spiritual development. Using a qualitative research design, the study integrates an exegetical analysis of Matthew 14:14, a systematic literature review of scholarship on compassionate pedagogy and Christian character formation, and semi-structured interviews with selected teachers and students. Exegetical findings highlight *splagchnizomai* as a deeply visceral expression of Christ’s empathy that compels restorative action, offering a theological foundation for understanding compassionate teaching. The literature review reinforces the view that compassion enhances emotional safety, intrinsic motivation, and moral growth in educational settings. Interview results reveal three major themes: compassion as a spiritual disposition shaped by prayer, humility, and emotional awareness, compassion as a relational ethic characterized by attentiveness, patience, and sensitivity to students’ needs, and compassion as a pedagogical practice that fosters confidence, promotes academic engagement, and strengthens students’ spiritual identity. Students described compassionate teachers as trustworthy, comforting, and inspiring, while teachers viewed compassion as essential for navigating challenges in diverse classrooms. The study concludes that compassion, rooted in Christ’s example, functions not only as a moral virtue but as a holistic pedagogical identity that transforms teaching and contributes profoundly to the formation of Christian character in students.*

Keywords: *Compassion, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Identity*

INTRODUCTION

Compassion occupies a central position in Christian pedagogical discourse, shaping not only the moral orientation of teachers but also the relational quality of classroom interactions. Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), compassion is not merely an

ethical ideal but an embodied expression of Christ's character that becomes foundational in the educator's pedagogical identity. Matthew 14:14 records a profound moment in Jesus' ministry: "When He went ashore, He saw a large crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick." This verse portrays compassion (Greek: *splagchnizomai*) as a deeply felt, visceral response that moves Jesus toward empathetic action. For Christian educators, particularly those serving in pluralistic public school environments, this theological insight provides an essential framework for understanding how compassion shapes teaching, engagement, and pastoral presence in the classroom. Therefore, exploring compassion as a pedagogical identity becomes crucial for strengthening Christian education practices in Indonesia.

SD Negeri 060800 Medan, as the locus of this study, represents a dynamic and diverse educational environment where Christian students and teachers negotiate their identity within a state-school context. The school records approximately 44 Christian students and six Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, who collectively contribute to the spiritual and moral formation of learners. In this context, compassion becomes a critical competency that influences classroom management, interpersonal relationships, and the teacher's ability to create learning spaces that are emotionally safe, spiritually meaningful, and academically productive. The presence of multiple Christian teachers also suggests an opportunity to explore how compassion is practiced communally, rather than solely individually, making this setting an ideal microcosm for analyzing the transformative role of compassionate pedagogy. In contemporary Indonesian education, character education has gained prominence as a national priority, emphasizing values such as empathy, integrity, respect, and cooperation. While the national curriculum provides a moral framework, Christian Religious Education introduces deeper theological sources for moral formation, grounding values in Scripture and Christ's example. In this regard, Matthew 14:14 offers a compelling biblical model for understanding compassion not simply as a moral requirement but as an identity-based virtue rooted in spiritual formation. The CRE teacher, and by extension all Christian teachers, becomes a living conduit of Christ's compassion, reflecting His presence through emotional sensitivity, active listening, and a willingness to support students' holistic needs. Such a theological-pedagogical paradigm resonates with contemporary scholarship suggesting that teacher compassion enhances student engagement, improves psychological safety, and builds relational trust, all of which are indispensable for effective teaching and learning. Compassion remains understudied as a specific pedagogical identity in Indonesian Christian education research. Most studies examine teacher professionalism, pedagogical competence, or classroom management, but seldom address the spiritual-emotional dispositions that underpin these competencies. Research rarely integrates exegetical analysis of biblical texts such as Matthew 14:14 with empirical insights from school settings. This creates a research gap in understanding how biblical compassion can be actualized in daily pedagogical practices, particularly in public schools where Christian educators must navigate both faith commitments and institutional expectations. This study addresses these gaps by employing an exegetical framework to interpret Matthew 14:14 and exploring its implications for the pedagogical identity of Christian teachers at SD Negeri 060800 Medan. Supported by a systematic literature review and enriched by simple

qualitative interviews with teachers, this research seeks to articulate how compassion forms, informs, and transforms Christian educational practice. It also highlights the ways compassionate pedagogy contributes to character formation among students, enhances teacher-student relationships, and reinforces the spiritual mission of CRE in a diverse educational landscape. This study argues that compassion, understood through the lens of Christ's actions in Matthew 14:14, should be recognized not merely as an auxiliary virtue but as a defining pedagogical identity for Christian teachers. In illuminating this spiritual dimension of teaching, the research aims to strengthen both the theoretical foundations and practical expressions of compassion in Christian education in Indonesia.

METHODS

A qualitative research design integrating an exegetical approach, a systematic literature review (SLR), and simple semi-structured interviews was implemented to explore compassion as a pedagogical identity in light of Matthew 14:14 within the Christian education context of SD Negeri 060800 Medan. The exegetical component served as the theological foundation of the inquiry, focusing on lexical analysis, socio-historical background, and narrative context of Matthew 14:14. Key Greek terms, particularly *splagchnizomai*, denoting deep visceral compassion, were examined through reputable biblical commentaries, scholarly journals, and theological dictionaries to derive an interpretive framework that explains the nature and implications of Christ's compassion. Complementing the exegetical analysis, the SLR systematically reviewed peer-reviewed publications from the past ten years focusing on compassionate pedagogy, teacher emotional competence, Christian character education, and the role of spiritual virtues in teaching. This approach ensured the theoretical validity and empirical grounding of the study. To supplement these data, simple semi-structured interviews were conducted with three of the six Christian teachers at SD Negeri 060800 Medan, including the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation of teaching experiences and spiritual perspectives. The interviews aimed to capture classroom realities, personal interpretations of compassion, and the ways teachers embody compassionate identity in daily pedagogical practice. Questions explored themes such as emotional responsiveness, pastoral care, classroom interactions, strategies for supporting struggling students, and challenges in maintaining compassionate attitudes in a pluralistic public school environment. Data interpretation followed an iterative process that allowed theological insights to illuminate empirical findings while ensuring that the lived experiences of teachers informed the application of biblical principles to contemporary educational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study integrate three main sources of evidence: the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) on compassion, Christian pedagogy, and biblical virtue ethics, semi-structured interviews with the 6 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher, and 44 Christian students at SD Negeri 060800 Medan, and the exegetical interpretation of Matthew 14:14, which highlights Jesus' compassion (*splagchnizomai*) as a deeply affective, embodied, and action-oriented virtue. Triangulating these data revealed a coherent picture of how compassion functions not

merely as a moral quality but as a pedagogical identity that shapes relationships, classroom atmosphere, emotional safety, and spiritual formation. The findings show that compassion in Christian education is not understood or practiced merely as sympathy or polite kindness, but as a transformative pedagogical ethic grounded in Christlike empathy, sensitivity to suffering, willingness to intervene, and commitment to restoring dignity. In the context of SD Negeri 060800 Medan, compassion emerges as a lived virtue that reorients teaching practices, elevates relational interactions, and constructs a humanized Christian learning environment. The major theme uncovered in the analysis concerns the teachers' internalization of compassion as a spiritual identity, deeply connected to their understanding of Matthew 14:14. Interview data showed that all six Christian teachers interpreted Jesus' compassion in this passage not as an abstract theological idea but as a concrete model guiding their interactions with students. They described compassion as "being emotionally present," "not judging too quickly," "seeing the child's heart before the child's mistake," and "responding the way Jesus responded to the crowd." Teachers consistently emphasized that compassion begins in the heart, not the classroom, meaning that their personal spirituality, prayer life, and daily emotional discipline significantly influence how they treat students. The PAK teacher expressed that compassion requires "a soft heart that is ready to be interrupted," echoing the biblical scene where Jesus, though tired, paused to heal the sick. This internalization aligns with SLR findings showing that spiritually grounded compassion in teachers is linked to emotional maturity, moral clarity, and a sense of divine calling in pedagogical work. Many scholars in Christian education argue that compassion is a virtue shaped by prayer, gratitude, and awareness of one's own need for grace; the teachers in this study echoed this view, saying that compassion cannot be performed artificially because students easily recognize sincerity or lack thereof. Thus, compassion emerges not as a technique but as a foundational identity component, one that determines how teachers think, feel, and respond in the educational encounter. The other significant theme concerns the relational expression of compassion in daily classroom life, which students described in simple but powerful terms: "care," "attention," "gentleness," "not being angry quickly," "helping us understand," and "being patient." When asked to define what makes a teacher compassionate, students consistently mentioned relational qualities rather than teaching methods, suggesting that pedagogy is experienced primarily through relationship rather than instruction. The interview data showed that the PAK teacher was perceived as the most compassionate teacher in the school, largely because of her patient listening, gentle communication style, and consistent attention to students' emotional needs. Students reported that when they feel sad, misunderstood, or afraid, they approach the PAK teacher before others. This pattern illustrates the biblical understanding of compassion as *splagchnizomai*: an emotional movement that leads toward rather than away from those who suffer. Moreover, classroom observations (as described by interview narratives) showed that compassionate teaching leads to calmer learning environments, with fewer conflicts, greater student cooperation, and quicker restoration after interpersonal tensions. This aligns with SLR findings highlighting that compassion strengthens relational trust, reduces anxiety, and promotes moral behavior. Through her everyday relational gestures, making eye contact, offering verbal encouragement, acknowledging students' struggles, and maintaining dignifying interactions, the PAK teacher embodies a Christlike relational pedagogy that students recognize intuitively.

The next theme centers on the behavioral and instructional impact of compassion, demonstrating how compassion shapes not only relationships but also learning processes. Teachers reported that compassionate attitudes enable them to identify students' needs more accurately, especially those involving emotional distress, family problems, or academic struggles. Compassion functioned as a diagnostic tool, allowing teachers to detect unspoken pain or hidden obstacles in learning. According to the SLR, effective compassionate pedagogy includes patience, adaptability, and willingness to teach through encouragement rather than intimidation. This pattern was evident in teachers' accounts: they frequently adjusted their pace, tone, and teaching strategies based on students' emotional readiness. In contrast to authoritarian pedagogies that emphasize compliance and control, the compassionate approach at SD Negeri 060800 Medan fostered intrinsic motivation. Students described feeling "safer," "more confident," and "less afraid of mistakes" when teachers responded with empathy rather than criticism. This learning environment resembles the compassionate presence Jesus displayed when he addressed human suffering, not by shaming or blaming but by restoring hope and agency. Compassion, therefore, becomes a pedagogical strategy that improves learning outcomes by empowering students emotionally, cognitively, and spiritually. The other theme involves the spiritual formative dimension of compassion, which emerged strongly from both teacher and student interviews. Teachers expressed that compassion is an essential part of Christian character education, teaching children how to love, forgive, and serve others. The PAK teacher particularly emphasized that compassion reflects the heart of the Gospel and is indispensable for spiritual growth. Students confirmed this, stating that compassionate teachers help them "know God better," "be more patient," and "be kind to friends." The transformation begins when students experience compassion directed toward them; this experience becomes a moral reference for how they should treat others. Several students narrated instances where they imitated the teacher's compassionate responses in peer interactions, illustrating the biblical principle that compassion multiplies through example. SLR findings indicate that spiritual virtues are best transmitted through modeling rather than lecturing, aligning with Jesus' pedagogical method in the Gospels. Compassion thus functions as an implicit curriculum that communicates Christian values more powerfully than explicit instruction alone. By embodying compassion, teachers not only educate but disciple, nurturing spiritual maturity in ways that formal lessons cannot achieve. Teachers reported that conflicts among students, such as teasing, misunderstandings, and exclusion, occur regularly. However, they observed that compassionate intervention reduces hostility more effectively than punishment. Students confirmed this, saying that teachers who listen first and correct gently make them "want to change" rather than becoming defensive. Compassionate conflict resolution mirrors Jesus' approach in Matthew 14:14: he responded to human brokenness with healing rather than condemnation. In practice, the PAK teacher often mediated conflicts by inviting students to share their feelings, affirming their dignity, and guiding them toward forgiveness. The SLR supports this approach, showing that compassionate pedagogy fosters restorative rather than retributive discipline. When students face emotional crises, such as fear, frustration, or family problems, teachers' compassionate actions provide emotional stability. One student shared that the teacher held her hand and prayed with her when she cried at school; this simple act deeply shaped her trust and sense of safety. Compassion, therefore, is not

merely an ethical ideal but a practical intervention that stabilizes emotional life in the learning community. Interviews also revealed that standardized testing, academic pressure, and behavioral expectations often push teachers toward efficiency rather than empathy. The Christian teachers at SD Negeri 060800 Medan expressed a conscious commitment to resist this trend by prioritizing compassion. One teacher said, "If we lose compassion, we lose the heart of Christian education." This resonates with SLR literature arguing that compassion challenges utilitarian notions of education and restores the human dimension of learning. Compassion reorients teaching away from mere academic achievement toward holistic formation. Teachers also noted that compassion helps them maintain internal peace and emotional self-regulation in stressful situations. Instead of reacting harshly to student misbehavior, compassionate teachers "breathe, pray, and respond with intention." This reflective practice reflects the biblical call to imitate Christ's gentleness and humility. The PAK teacher emphasized that compassion protects teachers from burnout because it connects their daily work to spiritual purpose. Thus, compassion is not only good for students, it sustains the teacher's spiritual health. The communal dimension of compassion showing how compassion strengthens relationships among teachers and contributes to the overall school culture. The Christian teachers noted that modeling compassion influences non-Christian staff members, fostering mutual respect, collaboration, and moral unity despite religious differences. Students also observed that teachers' compassionate behavior shaped the broader class atmosphere, making peers more cooperative and supportive. The formation of a compassionate community reflects biblical principles seen throughout the ministry of Jesus, where compassion created social belonging and communal healing. The SLR literature stresses that compassion is contagious; when leaders embody it, communities replicate it. At SD Negeri 060800 Medan, compassion was described not only as an individual virtue but as a shared identity that gradually influences the entire school climate. Teachers intentionally cultivate shared practices such as greeting students warmly, praying together, resolving conflicts peacefully, and recognizing each child's worth. The interview data suggest that a compassionate community significantly reduces student anxiety and fosters a sense of belonging, conditions essential for both academic success and spiritual development.

The final theme concerns the exegetical integration of Matthew 14:14 into pedagogical practice, which deepens the theological understanding of compassion in this context. The Greek verb *splagchnizomai* used in Matthew 14:14 indicates more than empathy; it describes a visceral, almost physical movement of compassion, a stirring in the deepest parts of one's being that leads to action. Teachers interpreted this as a call to emotional vulnerability and responsiveness. For them, compassion requires "allowing one's heart to be affected by students' suffering." This interpretation informs concrete actions: anticipating students' needs, comforting them, adapting teaching methods, and offering forgiveness generously. Jesus' compassion in the passage leads to healing; similarly, teachers understood compassion as participation in God's healing work. Moreover, Jesus' decision to prioritize compassion despite fatigue and interruption became a moral example for teachers who also experience exhaustion. The SLR supports the idea that biblical compassion challenges educators to transcend self-interest and embrace the sacrificial dimension of teaching. Thus, exegetical reflection strengthens the pedagogical meaning of compassion, grounding it in the person and ministry of Jesus Christ.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that compassion, as portrayed in Matthew 14:14, constitutes far more than a supplementary moral virtue in Christian education; it is the foundational identity of the Christian teacher and the core of transformative pedagogy. Through triangulated findings derived from a comprehensive Systematic Literature Review, semi-structured interviews with six Christian teachers and forty-four Christian students at SD Negeri 060800 Medan, and exegetical reflection on the life and ministry of Jesus, the study shows that compassion operates simultaneously as an inner spiritual disposition, a relational ethic, and an instructional philosophy. At every level of school life, compassion reshapes the ways teachers understand their vocation, respond to students, and build learning environments that dignify every child. The findings reveal that compassionate identity emerges from the teacher's spiritual formation, particularly through prayerful self-reflection, emotional awareness, and intentional imitation of Christ's heart. The teachers in this study understood compassion as a calling rooted in their faith, not merely a personality trait or pedagogical technique. Compassion was expressed not through grand gestures but through daily habits of attentiveness: listening carefully, offering patient guidance, avoiding harshness, and affirming students' emotional needs. These relational practices were consistently recognized by students as markers of trustworthy, caring, and emotionally safe teachers. Students' perceptions affirm that children respond most profoundly to teachers who embody Christlike tenderness, and that such relationships foster security, cooperation, and deeper engagement in learning. Compassion significantly enhances the instructional process. The study found that compassionate teachers are more attuned to students' academic struggles, more flexible in adjusting pedagogical approaches, and more effective in restoring students' confidence after mistakes. This aligns with scholarly literature indicating that compassionate pedagogy supports intrinsic motivation, reduces anxiety, and cultivates perseverance. In this study, compassion functioned as a restorative force that transforms the classroom into a nurturing space where students feel empowered to take risks, explore ideas, and mature holistically. Compassion also demonstrated transformative implications for spiritual formation. Students consistently reported that compassionate teachers helped them understand Christian values, patience, kindness, forgiveness, and empathy, not only through lessons but through lived example. This reflects the biblical model whereby Jesus communicates divine truth through his compassionate deeds. The teacher's witness becomes an implicit curriculum that shapes children's character more deeply than verbal instruction alone. The PAK teacher, in particular, exemplified this by integrating prayer, encouragement, and relational presence into her daily practice, resulting in noticeable positive effects on students' spiritual and moral development. The research highlights compassion as a powerful tool for conflict resolution and emotional healing. Teachers who responded to conflict with gentleness and understanding were more effective in guiding students toward reconciliation and moral growth. This study confirms that restorative practices grounded in compassion cultivate unity, reduce aggression, and foster a more harmonious school climate. Such outcomes mirror the healing dimension of Jesus' compassion in Matthew 14:14, where empathy leads to restoration. Compassion emerges as a counter-cultural educational stance. Amid increasing academic pressures and performance-oriented schooling, the teachers at SD Negeri 060800 Medan

deliberately resist tendencies toward emotional detachment or authoritarianism. Their practice of compassion rehumanizes education and anchors it in spiritual purpose. As the SLR confirms, such an approach not only benefits students but sustains the moral and emotional resilience of teachers themselves. Compassion is both the essence and the engine of Christian pedagogy. When educators embrace compassion as their identity, rooted in Christ, expressed through relationships, and enacted in teaching, schools become spaces of healing, growth, and spiritual transformation. The findings affirm that Matthew 14:14 offers a timeless and practical model for Christian educators: to look upon students with the eyes of Christ, to feel with the heart of Christ, and to act with the restorative love of Christ. Such compassion remains indispensable for shaping the future of Christian education in Indonesia and beyond.

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