

## Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching the Identity of God's People: An Exodus 19:4-Inspired Study at SD N 174 Tanjung Jabung Barat

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching the identity of God's people, inspired by Exodus 19:4, within the learning context of SD N 174 Tanjung Jabung Barat. Social competence, encompassing communication, collaboration, empathy, and intercultural sensitivity, plays a critical role in shaping students' understanding of their identity as God's covenant community. With 160 Christian students and 32 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, the school presents a unique microcosm for exploring how biblical identity formation is mediated through teacher-student interaction. Using a qualitative descriptive approach, this study employs a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) enriched with limited interviews involving three CRE teachers and two Christian students. The SLR synthesizes recent scholarship on teacher social competence, faith-based identity formation, and biblical pedagogy. Exodus 19:4, depicting God's saving act and covenantal calling, serves as the theological anchor for evaluating how teachers communicate belonging, dignity, and responsibility as God's people. Findings reveal that teachers with strong social competence demonstrate effective relational communication, culturally responsive engagement, and the ability to contextualize biblical identity in students' daily experiences. Teachers also model covenantal values such as care, responsibility, and respect, which enhances students' self-understanding as God's treasured people. This study concludes that social competence is indispensable for CRE teachers in fostering biblical identity formation. Schools are encouraged to develop structured training in relational communication, culturally grounded pedagogy, and collaborative learning communities to sustain the integration of Exodus 19:4 values within Christian education.*

**Keywords:** *Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Identity*

### INTRODUCTION

The identity of God's people stands at the core of Christian Religious Education (CRE) because it shapes how students understand who they are within God's redemptive

narrative and how they are called to live as a community that reflects His character; at SDN 174 Tanjung Jabung Barat, where approximately 160 Christian students and 32 Christian teachers are present, the social competence of the CRE teacher becomes critically important since the pluralistic context of the school requires teaching that integrates not only cognitive knowledge but also relational and practical formation. A socially competent CRE teacher can convey the biblical narrative, that God's people are those who are carried, protected, and shaped by Him, in ways that foster emotional attachment, communal awareness, and ethical responsibility, rather than mere doctrinal memorization; the inspirational text for this study, Exodus 19:4 *"You yourselves have seen what I did to Egypt, and how I carried you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself"* presents identity as a salvific action involving liberation, divine care, and a calling into responsible covenant relationship. In practice, social competence includes the ability to build a safe, empathetic, inclusive, and communicative classroom climate; to manage group dynamics among students of diverse backgrounds; to facilitate dialogue on what it means to be God's people in contexts marked by plurality; and to instill values of harmony, justice, and service, while consistently integrating the Exodus narrative that emphasizes identity as inseparable from God's concrete acts of deliverance and formation. In addition to its theological demand, contextual alignment with national education policy is equally essential: Indonesia's curriculum underscores the strengthening of character and the *"Profil Pelajar Pancasila,"* meaning that teaching Christian identity requires sensitivity to the nation's educational goal of producing morally grounded and socially responsible citizens. Yet classroom realities often present significant challenges, large class sizes, limited instructional time, performance pressures, and varied levels of parental support, demanding that the CRE teacher possess high interpersonal skills, pedagogical creativity, and reflective capacity in order to integrate faith content with students' lived experiences. Contemporary studies on teacher competency consistently affirm that social competence is not an optional soft skill but an essential foundation for effective value-based instruction; teachers who are capable of building meaningful relationships foster students' sense of belonging, making identity formation not merely a normative directive but a transformative learning encounter. Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the social competence of the CRE teacher at SDN 174 is enacted in teaching the identity of God's people, how the teacher interprets Exodus 19:4 pedagogically, what relational strategies are used to cultivate a sense of Christian community in the classroom, and what barriers and opportunities arise in the process, with the aim of offering practical recommendations for enhancing teacher formation and designing CRE curricula that are more responsive to the spiritual and social needs of Christian students in Indonesia's public schools.

## **METHODS**

This study adopted a qualitative descriptive design combining exegetical reflection and field-based inquiry to examine how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is enacted in teaching the identity of God's people (Exod 19:4) at SDN 174 Tanjung Jabung Barat, where approximately 160 Christian students and 32 Christian teachers create a distinctive context for relational pedagogy (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The qualitative approach was selected because social competence and identity formation are essentially interpretive, relational, and situational phenomena that require

rich, contextualized description rather than purely quantitative measurement (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018). Data collection combined three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were held with the CRE teacher, a purposive sample of Christian classroom teachers, and a representative group of Christian students to probe how Exodus 19:4 is understood, translated into pedagogy, and embodied relationally in the classroom (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Classroom observations focused on observable indicators of social competence-teacher warmth, empathetic listening, inclusive questioning, conflict management, and facilitation of peer relationships-and were guided by contemporary teacher-competence frameworks (Van Brummelen, 2018; Hattie & Clarke, 2019). Data analysis followed an inductive thematic approach adapted from Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarization with transcripts and fieldnotes, open coding, axial grouping into categories, and synthesis into higher-order themes that integrated exegetical insights with classroom practices (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Given the theological dimension of the project, the exegetical component used a historical-grammatical method to interpret Exodus 19:4, attending to linguistic nuance, covenantal context, and intertextual echoes, so that biblical meaning could be responsibly related to pedagogical practice (Osborne, 2017). Practical constraints (time on site, school calendar, and resource limits) were documented and considered as part of the contextual analysis so that findings are reported with due attention to transferability rather than universal generalization (Patton, 2015).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex yet coherent picture of how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers at SD N 174 Tanjung Jabung Barat cultivate students' understanding of the identity of God's people through their social competence, interpreted in light of Exodus 19:4. Integrating insights from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR), semi-structured interviews, and the exegetical dimension of the text, the results demonstrate that the teacher's relational capacity, cultural sensitivity, communicative skill, and ethical modeling form the core mechanisms through which students develop a sense of belonging to God's covenant community. Through these factors, the identity of God's people, based on divine rescue (*"I carried you on eagles' wings"*) and covenantal calling (*"to be my treasured possession"*), is translated into the lived experiences of the 160 Christian students taught by 32 Christian teachers, including the PAK educator. The combination of biblical insight and classroom praxis indicates that social competence in Christian education is not merely pedagogical but fundamentally theological, shaping how students perceive themselves before God and interact within the school community. The SLR findings showed that social competence in faith-based pedagogical environments is consistently described as the ability of teachers to build meaningful interactions marked by empathy, fairness, openness, and mutual respect (Kim & Lamb, 2021; Walker, 2020). Scholars emphasize that students develop religious identity not only through doctrinal instruction but primarily through interpersonal encounters characterized by acceptance and care (Lynn & Wright, 2022). In the context of Christian education, this identity-building process is closely tied to the biblical metaphor of God forming a covenant people through relational acts of love, guidance, and correction

(Waltke, 2019). When interpreted through Exodus 19:4, where God reminds Israel of divine rescue and faithful accompaniment, these relational actions constitute the primary theological foundations for a Christian understanding of identity formation. Through this lens, the PAK teacher's social competence becomes an embodied witness of God's relational covenant, an educational reenactment of divine care. This insight from the literature is supported by field findings in the school.

Interviews with the PAK teacher revealed that her approach to interacting with students consciously reflects relational values rooted in Scripture, especially the idea that God forms His people through compassionate accompaniment. The teacher explained that she emphasizes personal attention, patient guidance, and consistent affirmation because these qualities mirror how God "carried Israel on eagles' wings" (personal interview, 2025). Her testimony resonates with research showing that teachers with strong spiritual and social competence internalize biblical narratives and re-express them through pedagogical behaviors (Johnson & Hodge, 2020). Students interviewed confirmed that the teacher is perceived as approachable, "warm," and "always willing to listen." This finding is significant because relational closeness between teacher and student is documented as a key predictor of moral and spiritual development, particularly in diverse or rural school environments (Harding, 2020; Chen & Delgado, 2023). The children's testimonies suggest that social competence is not experienced abstractly but concretely: in how teachers greet them, correct them, respond to mistakes, and encourage their efforts. These micro-interactions shape students' understanding of what it means to belong to God. Another theme emerging from the interviews is that the teacher intentionally nurtures a community ethos where students view themselves as a unified group belonging to God. She frequently uses biblical language such as "*kita adalah umat Tuhan*" (we are God's people) and integrates a covenantal worldview into classroom prayers, discussions, and conflict mediation. Students explained that when conflicts arise, the teacher reminds them that "God wants His children to love each other" and that "God has chosen us to show good behavior." These everyday practices mirror scholarly insights stressing that identity as God's people is cultivated through relational narratives repeatedly reinforced in communal settings (Stewart, 2019; Thompson, 2021). This also corresponds with covenantal pedagogy models where rituals, words, and shared actions reinforce collective belonging (Vanhooser, 2020). Thus, the teacher's relational method aligns closely with biblical patterns of identity formation.

Exegetical engagement with Exodus 19:4 deepens this understanding. The phrase "I carried you on eagles' wings" employs a powerful imagery of protection, guidance, and intimate care. Biblical scholars note that the metaphor illustrates God's active role in shaping Israel's self-understanding through relational experience rather than through abstract doctrine alone (Hamilton, 2018). Likewise, the PAK teacher's social competence, expressed in empathy, patience, and affirming presence, functions analogously as the pedagogical mechanism through which students internalize the reality of being chosen and loved by God. As scholarly work shows, children's theological identity is formed most effectively not through cognitive instruction alone but through embodied relational encounters that mirror biblical patterns (King, 2017). Therefore, social competence shapes theological identity. The SLR further revealed that teachers who practice relational justice, fair treatment, clear expectations, and balanced discipline, significantly influence

students' perception of spiritual belonging and moral responsibility (Walker, 2020; Davis, 2019). At SD N 174, students reported that the PAK teacher was consistent in applying rules, never showing favoritism, and always explaining the reasons behind discipline. One student recounted that when she broke school regulations, the teacher corrected her not with anger but with a tone that conveyed concern. This approach echoes studies emphasizing that relational fairness reinforces students' sense of dignity and strengthens their alignment with moral community values (Hargreaves, 2020). In biblical perspective, this corresponds to how God guided Israel, firmly yet compassionately, shaping them into a people who understood that divine authority is rooted in love (Childs, 2019).

Social competence also appeared in the teacher's cultural sensitivity and ability to navigate the multiethnic environment of Tanjung Jabung Barat, where Christian students coexist with peers from other religious traditions. She described her role as one of cultivating peace, respect, and cooperation while affirming Christian identity in ways that do not demean or marginalize others. This reflects scholarship emphasizing that in pluralistic settings, social competence includes the ability to affirm one's own religious identity while respecting difference (Banks, 2017; Jackson, 2021). Students shared that the teacher often highlights biblical values of gentleness, humility, and respect toward others. This helps students understand that being part of God's people does not imply exclusivity but calls for ethical living among all neighbors, a central theme in biblical covenant identity (Wright, 2006). One of the strongest themes from both the interviews and SLR is the idea that social competence is inseparable from spiritual maturity. Scholars argue that teachers with strong spiritual formation naturally express greater relational wisdom, patience, and humility (Foster, 2020). During interviews, the PAK teacher said that she regularly prays for her students by name, seeks the Holy Spirit's guidance before class, and views her work as a divine calling. These practices corroborate studies showing that teachers who internalize faith-based motivations develop stronger relational influence on students' spiritual identity (Wilkins, 2019). Students echoed this perception, stating that they feel "seen," "valued," and "understood," which contributes significantly to their self-concept as God's people. The results also indicate that social competence strengthens biblical identity formation by modeling what covenant relationship looks like in daily interactions. Through the teacher's behavior, students witness a living demonstration of God's love and faithfulness. This aligns with the theological argument that teachers serve as "representatives of God's relational character," acting as mediators of divine identity formation (Smith, 2016). The PAK teacher's actions, gentle correction, supportive guidance, shared prayer, and compassionate discipline, construct an interpretive framework through which students understand Exodus 19:4 not merely as ancient history but as a continuing relational reality. Scholars explain that identity is internalized when students experience congruence between biblical teaching and relational practice (Parker, 2020).

Another finding emerging from the study is that the collective environment created by the teacher fosters a covenant community among students. As they described, classroom practices include group reflections, collaborative prayer, and discussions on Christian living. Research shows that communal practices are essential for forming collective identity because they reinforce feelings of belonging, shared purpose, and divine calling

(Westerhoff, 2018). At SD N 174, these practices help students see themselves not simply as individuals but as part of a community called to represent God, an essential aspect of Exodus 19:4, where God addresses Israel as a collective entity. The teacher's social competence helps students connect the idea of divine deliverance with their personal experiences. Students explained that when they face challenges, the teacher encourages them by reminding them of God's care and past faithfulness. This aligns with theological research showing that narratives of divine rescue, when embodied through relational encouragement, help students integrate faith into emotional and moral development (Bruner, 2019). The metaphor of "eagles' wings," therefore, becomes a living pedagogical narrative: the teacher becomes a symbolic representation of God's uplifting guidance. The SLR also shows that children's identity formation is significantly enhanced when teachers demonstrate consistent emotional presence (Davis, 2019; Lynn & Wright, 2022). At SD N 174, students repeatedly described the PAK teacher as someone who "always understands," "never quickly judges," and "never gets angry easily." This emotional stability contributes to psychological safety, which scholars identify as a key component in allowing students to explore their faith identity confidently (Roeser, 2021). The exegetical component also revealed that Exodus 19:4 contains an implied relational trajectory: God carries His people not only away from danger but toward covenant relationship. This "two-direction movement" helps explain the dual role of the PAK teacher: she protects students emotionally through relational care and directs them toward moral and spiritual growth. This mirrors the biblical pattern in which God shapes Israel through both rescue and instruction (Hahn, 2018). The teacher's relational behaviors serve as pedagogical acts of formation. Findings indicate that social competence is the bridge between biblical identity and lived student experience. Through empathetic communication, relational justice, emotional stability, and communal practices, the teacher enables students to internalize the theological truth that they are God's people. Social competence becomes the primary medium through which Exodus 19:4 is actualized within the classroom environment.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers plays a decisive role in shaping students' understanding of the identity of God's people, as inspired by Exodus 19:4, within the learning context of SD N 174 Tanjung Jabung Barat. Through an integrated analysis of exegetical interpretation, systematic literature review (SLR), and semi-structured interviews, the research confirms that social competence is not merely an interpersonal skill but a theological and pedagogical framework that guides how students internalize their covenant identity as children of God. The biblical text highlights God's relational act of carrying Israel "on eagles' wings" as the foundation for forming a covenant people, and this relational paradigm becomes a mirror for the teacher's pedagogical character. The findings reveal that social competence, expressed through empathy, relational justice, emotional availability, cultural sensitivity, and communicative clarity, creates a classroom environment in which 160 Christian students experience a sense of belonging, value, and moral responsibility. These relational dynamics foster spiritual and moral growth, enabling students to view themselves not merely as learners but as members of God's covenant community. The PAK teacher's embodiment of compassion, fairness, patience, and consistent guidance

serves as a living expression of God's nurturing character, making theological identity tangible to students through daily relational encounters. The study further concludes that social competence functions as the bridge between biblical teaching and the lived experiences of students. Identity formation does not occur solely through doctrinal instruction but through the relational patterns that echo God's covenantal relationship with His people. Thus, the teacher's social presence becomes a pedagogical vehicle that transforms Exodus 19:4 from an ancient narrative into a contemporary experience of divine care and calling. In a pluralistic environment like Tanjung Jabung Barat, social competence also empowers students to maintain a strong Christian identity while practicing respect and peace toward those of other faiths. The research affirms that social competence is essential for Christian educators seeking to impart the identity of God's people in ways that are biblically faithful, pedagogically sound, and contextually relevant. By embodying relational qualities that reflect God's love, guidance, and justice, PAK teachers serve as covenantal agents who help students understand their identity, purpose, and calling. Therefore, strengthening social competence should be a priority in the professional development of Christian educators, ensuring that biblical identity formation continues to flourish in Indonesian schools.

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