

Pedagogical Implications of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16): A Case Study at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pedagogical implications of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) within the Christian Religious Education (CRE) context at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso, a school in South Nias with 37 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers. The parable, which challenges conventional notions of fairness, merit, and reward, offers a rich theological and moral framework for shaping students' character, guiding teacher-student relationships, and cultivating a classroom ethos grounded in grace and humility. Using a qualitative descriptive design, this research combines biblical-exegetical analysis with empirical insights gathered through classroom observations and interviews with CRE teachers and students. The findings demonstrate that the parable's central themes—divine grace, the critique of envy and entitlement, trust in God's sovereign goodness, and the model of compassionate leadership embodied by the landowner—provide significant educational value for contemporary Christian pedagogy. The study reveals that teaching divine grace helps students develop healthier self-worth beyond performance-based identities, reducing comparison and insecurity. Addressing the parable's portrayal of envy and entitlement helps students recognize destructive emotional patterns and cultivate gratitude, cooperation, and contentment. Moreover, teachers who emulate the landowner's fairness, clarity, and compassion foster a relational environment that promotes trust and unity. Students also learn to interpret personal challenges and perceived injustices through a theological lens, strengthening resilience and spiritual maturity. Overall, the research concludes that Matthew 20:1-16 offers a transformative pedagogical resource for CRE teachers, enabling the development of holistic, grace-centered, and relationally mature learners within the school's Christian learning community.

Keywords: *Pedagogical, Christian Religious Education, the Parable*

INTRODUCTION

The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) stands as one of the most pedagogically provocative teachings of Jesus because it disrupts conventional expectations about fairness, merit, and reward. While the parable is traditionally

interpreted theologically in relation to divine grace, its educational significance has gained increasing attention in contemporary Christian pedagogy, particularly in contexts where teachers must guide students to understand justice, compassion, humility, and the value of every individual. At SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso in South Nias, where 37 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, form a minority Christian learning community within a diverse social environment, the parable offers formative insights for shaping attitudes, classroom culture, and character development. The school context requires pedagogical approaches that prepare students not only to excel academically but also to embody values that foster integrity, empathy, and solidarity. This parable challenges traditional human logic about proportional reward, presenting instead a divine perspective that prioritizes generosity over merit. The landowner gives each worker the same wage regardless of the hours worked, creating tension among the first-hired workers who perceive the outcome as unfair. For young learners, and many adults, this narrative raises difficult yet important questions: What is fairness? Why does God's generosity sometimes appear unjust from a human perspective? How should individuals respond when others receive what seems "undeserved"? These questions are foundational not only to moral and spiritual formation but also to classroom life, where issues of fairness, comparison, competition, and envy frequently emerge. The pedagogical implications are therefore significant for CRE teachers who seek to help students internalize God's values and practice them in daily interactions.

In the context of SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso, Christian Religious Education plays an essential role in helping students develop moral reasoning grounded in Scripture. Many students come from family backgrounds where concepts of fairness and reward are shaped by social, economic, and cultural realities, including experiences of inequality or competition for limited resources. Teachers, likewise, carry distinct perspectives shaped by their own upbringing, professional training, and theological understanding. The CRE teacher, together with the 10 other Christian teachers, bears the strategic responsibility of cultivating an environment where biblical values can be reflected in interpersonal relationships, academic motivation, conflict resolution, and student self-perception. The parable provides three major pedagogical themes relevant to this task. First is the principle of divine grace, which teaches that human value does not depend on performance or merit but on God's loving initiative. Students often measure themselves by academic results, social standing, or approval from adults; thus, teaching grace helps them form a healthier identity that is not dominated by comparison or fear of inadequacy. Second is the critique of envy and entitlement, as the first-hired workers complain not because they received less than promised but because others received equal treatment. This moral tension is frequently mirrored in the classroom, where jealousy and competition can undermine unity, cooperation, and self-worth. Third is the affirmation of God's sovereign goodness, inviting learners to trust God's purposes even when outcomes challenge their expectations. This theme offers valuable guidance for students navigating disappointment, frustration, or feelings of unfairness in school life. The parable's social dynamics hold pedagogical significance for teachers themselves. The landowner models compassionate leadership, equitable treatment, and clarity in communication, qualities essential for educators who seek to inspire rather than merely instruct. Christian teachers

at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso are therefore called not only to explain the story but also to embody its values in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader school community. In this sense, the parable becomes a transformative framework for developing educational practices rooted in grace, relational justice, and holistic formation. Given these considerations, this study aims to explore the pedagogical implications of Matthew 20:1-16 for the CRE learning context at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso, examining how the parable informs teaching strategies, student character formation, relational dynamics, and the ethos of Christian education. The study seeks to contribute to the growing discourse on biblical pedagogy by demonstrating how a challenging parable can guide practical, context-sensitive educational transformation.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design was used to explore the pedagogical implications of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) within the specific learning context of SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso. Qualitative inquiry was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of how biblical narratives shape educational practices, relational dynamics, and moral formation among students and teachers (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The nature of the research questions, which focus on meaning-making, interpretation, and lived experience, requires methods that capture participants' perceptions, reflections, and behavioral patterns in their natural environment (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study therefore integrates three methodological components: exegetical analysis of the biblical text, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), and simple semi-structured interviews with participants. These three sources of data were triangulated to ensure analytical depth and trustworthiness (Nowell et al., 2017). The exegetical component involved a close reading of Matthew 20:1-16 using grammatical-historical methods that examine the parable's literary structure, theological motifs, and first-century socio-cultural context. Commentaries, biblical dictionaries, and peer-reviewed journal articles were consulted to interpret themes of grace, fairness, divine sovereignty, and human response (Keener, 2019; France, 2007). Exegesis was essential for establishing a reliable theological foundation from which pedagogical principles could be derived. The goal was not merely to restate doctrinal interpretations but to identify educational values, such as the critique of entitlement, the affirmation of intrinsic worth, and the importance of compassionate leadership-that could inform classroom practice (Wright, 2018). The SLR was conducted to gather contemporary insights from scholarship on Christian pedagogy, moral education, and the educational use of parables. Searches were carried out through databases. Publications from the last ten years were prioritized to ensure relevance to modern educational discourse (Booth et al., 2021). The review process followed systematic steps of identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and thematic synthesis (Snyder, 2019). Through this process, literature on pedagogical fairness, character education, and classroom relational ethics was integrated with the theological findings, enabling a holistic analysis of how the parable can shape contemporary teaching practices. Semi-structured interviews constituted the empirical component of the research. Participants consisted of the 11 Christian teachers at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso, including the CRE teacher, as well as 12 purposively selected Christian students representing different grade levels. Purposive sampling was used to ensure participants were directly involved in Christian Religious Education and had

adequate familiarity with the parable (Palinkas et al., 2015). Interviews explored participants' perceptions of fairness, reward, envy, grace, classroom comparisons, and leadership attitudes. Questions were open-ended to allow rich narrative responses and enable participants to articulate personal experiences and reflective insights. The methodological integration allowed the study to move beyond theoretical reflection toward practical, transformative educational application rooted in Scripture, contemporary scholarship, and lived experience.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a multidimensional and context-sensitive picture of how the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) shapes pedagogical practice, classroom dynamics, and character formation among Christian students at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso. Through classroom observations, interviews with the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher and the 10 other Christian teachers, and analysis of relevant documents, four overarching themes emerged: the pedagogical integration of divine grace as a foundation for student identity, the reorientation of fairness from merit-based logic to relational justice, the mitigation of envy and comparison in student interactions, and the embodiment of compassionate, value-driven leadership by teachers. These themes demonstrate that the parable provides a transformative pedagogical framework not limited to doctrinal instruction but extending to relational, ethical, and motivational aspects of classroom life. Interpreted exegetically, the parable challenges both teachers and students to rethink fairness, humility, and human value in alignment with God's kingdom perspective, which contrasts sharply with cultural norms of merit, status, and comparison (Keener, 2014). The findings show that, when taught relationally and contextually, the parable contributes significantly to shaping students' attitudes, self-perception, and interpersonal behavior. The finding concerns the way the CRE teacher employs the parable to cultivate an identity of grace rather than performance among students. Observations revealed that the teacher consistently emphasized that each worker in the parable received the same wage not because of equal merit but because of the landowner's generosity. In class discussions, this theme was explained to students as a reflection of God's grace, an unconditional acceptance that does not depend on ability, achievement, or seniority. Students often enter school with preexisting insecurities, particularly in a rural context where economic hardship or limited resources may shape their self-perception. Several students interviewed admitted that they sometimes felt "not as good as others" academically or socially. The CRE teacher used the parable to counteract these feelings, teaching that their value in God's eyes does not depend on how "early" or "late" they arrive in terms of accomplishments. This approach aligns with educational psychology literature demonstrating that students who develop identity security based on intrinsic rather than performance-based factors exhibit greater resilience, motivation, and relational openness (Dweck, 2017). It also reflects theological scholarship that interprets the parable as a radical affirmation of God's grace independent of human merit (France, 2007). By internalizing this grace-centered identity, students at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso became more willing to participate, less fearful of mistakes, and more open to supporting one another. Classroom observations showed that the teacher reinforced this theme through repeated phrases such as, "God loves you because

you belong to Him, not because you are the smartest” (fieldnote, 2025). This pedagogical practice mirrors the landowner’s declaration, “Am I not allowed to do what I choose with what belongs to me?” (Matt 20:15), which underscores divine sovereignty and generosity rather than competitive achievement (Hagner, 2012).

The next finding concerns the transformation of students’ concept of fairness. During interviews, students described fairness primarily in merit-based terms, that those who work harder should receive more. Many students strongly sided with the first-hired workers in the parable who complained about receiving the same wage as those who arrived later. When the CRE teacher asked students whether they felt the landowner’s decision was “fair,” most responded negatively. This initial reaction confirmed existing research showing that children’s moral reasoning about fairness is predominantly distributive, based on proportional reward, until shaped by broader ethical and spiritual frameworks (Killen & Smetana, 2015). The CRE teacher used this moment of moral tension as a pedagogical opportunity. Through guided questioning, she encouraged students to reconsider fairness through the lens of kindness, relational justice, and God’s goodness. She explained that fairness in God’s kingdom is not about strict proportional reward but about ensuring that everyone receives what they need, echoing the landowner’s concern that each worker should be able to feed his family for the day (contextual interpretation shared by teacher, 2025). Over time, observational notes recorded a shift in student responses, with more students expressing that “fairness is helping others even if they don’t do the same as us” or “God is fair because He is good, not because He gives what we expect” (fieldnote excerpts). This shift parallels theological interpretations suggesting that the parable redefines fairness as God’s gracious generosity rather than human-centered meritocracy (Blomberg, 2012). It reflects pedagogical literature emphasizing that teaching children to understand fairness relationally, not competitively, promotes empathy, reduces conflict, and enhances cooperative learning (Wentzel, 2016). The shift in students’ understanding had practical effects: teachers reported fewer complaints of favoritism and reduced interpersonal conflict, especially during group activities. The finding pertains to envy and comparison, issues strongly highlighted in both the parable and the school context. Interviews with students revealed that feelings of jealousy often emerged during academic ranking, sports events, or the allocation of classroom responsibilities. Several students confessed that they sometimes felt “upset when others get chosen” or “sad when a friend is better at something.” The parable directly addresses these emotions: the first-hired workers are not dissatisfied because they were treated unfairly but because they could not bear seeing others treated generously. The CRE teacher used this narrative to initiate conversations about the destructive nature of envy, explaining that it blinds people to their own blessings and leads to unnecessary conflict. During observations, she often reminded students, “Do not look at what others get; be thankful for what God gives you” (fieldnote, 2025). Over time, students’ attitudes shifted. Some began openly expressing gratitude for others’ accomplishments, and classroom interactions showed increased encouragement among peers. This transformation aligns with psychological studies indicating that pedagogical strategies grounded in gratitude and compassion can significantly reduce envy and promote emotional well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003). Theologically, this shift reflects the kingdom ethic articulated in the parable, where the landowner challenges the envious workers: “Are you

envious because I am generous?" (Matt 20:15). Scholars argue that this rhetorical question unveils the deeper moral issue not of fairness but of disordered desire (Wright, 2012). By confronting envy through biblical reflection and relational practice, the teacher helped students cultivate humility and gratitude, qualities essential for Christian character formation. A next finding concerns the role of teachers in embodying the values modeled by the landowner in the parable. Classroom observations revealed that the CRE teacher and several Christian teachers consistently demonstrated behaviors aligned with compassionate, relationally just leadership. These included speaking kindly, giving equal attention to each student, listening without rushing to judgment, and offering correction with gentleness. The CRE teacher specifically applied the parable's themes during disciplinary moments. For example, when one student complained that another "did not deserve" the same praise or privilege, the teacher responded by referencing the parable and explaining why feelings of entitlement can damage relationships. She frequently emphasized that teachers should treat each student with respect and compassion regardless of background or ability. This reflects leadership models in Christian education that highlight servant-heartedness, grace-based discipline, and relational justice (Van Brummelen, 2018). Interviews with the 10 other Christian teachers revealed that the parable also influenced their understanding of fairness in grading, group assignments, and classroom support. One teacher explained, "Sometimes we forget that every child is different. The parable reminds us to see students not only by achievement but by their value before God" (teacher interview, 2025). This echoes educational research indicating that teachers' attitudes toward fairness and compassion deeply shape classroom climate and student behavior (Wentzel, 2016; Hattie, 2012). The landowner's leadership in the parable, marked by generosity, clarity, and consistency, served as a practical model for teachers navigating diverse student needs and expectations.

The other theme emerging from the results concerns the integration of the parable into broader school culture, particularly in relation to collaborative behaviors, conflict resolution, and motivation. Teachers reported that after several months of sustained engagement with the parable, students showed a noticeable increase in willingness to collaborate rather than compete. During group activities, students who previously struggled with sharing responsibilities now demonstrated greater cooperation. Observations showed that students became more patient with slower learners and more encouraging toward peers who lacked confidence. These changes reflect the theological insight that the parable undermines competitive hierarchies and calls for a community grounded in generosity and mutual respect (Green, 2011). Interviews with students confirmed that they felt more comfortable helping others because they recognized that "God does not compare people based on how much they do" (student interview, 2025). This internalization of grace-based motivation aligns with educational theory showing that intrinsic motivation and pro-social behavior flourish in environments where students feel valued unconditionally (Deci & Ryan, 2017). Another important aspect of the findings is the impact of the parable on students' responses to disappointment and unmet expectations. Several students shared experiences of not being selected for leadership roles, not winning competitions, or receiving grades lower than hoped. Previously, these disappointments often led to frustration or withdrawal. After learning the parable, however, students increasingly articulated trust in God's timing and sovereignty. The CRE

teacher used the narrative to teach that God's purposes often exceed human logic, and that believers must learn to trust divine goodness even when outcomes differ from expectations. This resonates with theological interpretations that emphasize the parable's function in challenging entitlement and cultivating trust in God's wisdom (Keener, 2014). Students' enhanced emotional resilience mirrors psychological findings that faith-based interpretations of disappointment can buffer stress and improve coping mechanisms (King & Boyatzis, 2015). In classroom practice, students demonstrated more patience, reduced complaining, and greater openness to learning from mistakes. A final theme emerging from the data is the transformative role of biblical storytelling in moral and spiritual formation. Observations revealed that the CRE teacher employed imaginative retelling, role-play, and reflective questioning to help students inhabit the experiences of the workers in the parable. This aligns with pedagogical theories suggesting that narrative engagement deepens moral reasoning by enabling learners to experience ethical tension empathetically rather than abstractly (Loughlin, 2019). Students reported that imagining themselves as different workers helped them see how envy, entitlement, or generosity shape emotional and relational outcomes. The teacher also encouraged students to identify modern parallels, such as differences in academic ability, family income, or physical strength. This contextualization made the parable more relevant and actionable in students' daily lives, reflecting best practices in contextual Christian pedagogy (Estep, Anthony, & Allison, 2012). Teachers noted that narrative-based learning helped students internalize values more deeply compared to simple doctrinal explanation, supporting the view that biblical stories have unparalleled formative power when used pedagogically (Wright, 2018). The findings demonstrate that the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard provides a rich, multidimensional framework for character formation, relational ethics, and value-driven leadership at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso. Through grace-centered identity formation, reoriented fairness, diminished envy, compassionate leadership, enhanced collaboration, improved emotional resilience, and narrative-based understanding, the parable significantly shapes students' spiritual, moral, and social development. These findings contribute to both biblical scholarship and educational practice by showing how a challenging parable, when taught relationally and contextually, becomes a powerful tool for holistic transformation in Christian education.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the pedagogical implications of the Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard (Matthew 20:1-16) within the learning environment of SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso, focusing particularly on how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers can translate the parable's theological depth into meaningful educational practice. Anchored in a qualitative descriptive design that integrates biblical exegesis with field-based insights from observations and interviews, the findings highlight that the parable provides a robust framework for shaping character formation, guiding relational interactions, and cultivating classroom cultures rooted in grace, humility, and fairness grounded in God's perspective rather than human merit (Wright, 2019). The study concludes that the parable's central message of divine grace holds powerful pedagogical potential for nurturing students' identity and self-worth. In a learning environment where comparison, competition, and the pressure to perform often dominate students' experiences, the

emphasis on God's unconditional acceptance helps learners move beyond the fear of inadequacy and the insecurity born from social comparison (Willard, 2021). By teaching students that value does not depend on achievement but on God's loving initiative, CRE teachers can cultivate resilient, confident learners who see themselves and others through the lens of divine grace. This aligns with contemporary Christian educational theory, which stresses the formation of whole persons and the cultivation of spiritual-emotional maturity alongside cognitive development (Smith & Knight, 2020). The parable challenges prevailing attitudes of envy, entitlement, and resentment by exposing the inner motivations of the first-hired workers. These attitudes frequently surface among students, manifesting in jealousy, rivalry, and conflict in academic and social contexts. By exploring the parable with practical classroom illustrations, CRE teachers can guide students to recognize unhealthy emotional responses and replace them with gratitude, cooperation, and contentment (Johnson, 2020). The study found that students respond positively when teachers frame discussions of fairness not merely in terms of equal distribution but in light of God's sovereign generosity, prompting them to reflect more deeply on the meaning of justice and kindness in daily life. The landowner's behavior in the parable serves as a model of compassionate, communicative, and principled leadership for teachers themselves. The findings show that teachers who intentionally embody these qualities, such as treating students equitably, communicating expectations clearly, and addressing conflicts with patience, create a classroom ethos that mirrors the moral world of the parable (Estes, 2018). Teachers at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso reported that adopting these values helped reduce tensions among students, strengthened trust, and fostered a sense of community that transcended academic competition. This confirms the notion that biblical pedagogy is most effective when teachers become living examples of the values they teach (Knight, 2016). The parable's affirmation of God's sovereign goodness provides students with a theological grounding for coping with disappointment, perceived injustice, and unmet expectations. Many students expressed that learning the parable helped them interpret challenging experiences, such as receiving lower grades, not being chosen for leadership roles, or feeling overshadowed by peers, in a more constructive and spiritually grounded way. This aligns with prior research showing that Christian narratives can strengthen students' resilience by nurturing a perspective anchored in divine purpose rather than human comparison (McCarthy, 2022). This study demonstrates that the parable's implications go beyond individual character formation and extend to the wider ethos of the school. When teachers consistently integrate the themes of grace, fairness, humility, and trust in God into their pedagogy, a transformative culture emerges, one that promotes mutual respect, emotional maturity, and spiritual depth within the learning community. The integration of Matthew 20:1–16 into CRE practice thus represents not merely a lesson in biblical interpretation but a holistic, contextually grounded approach to Christian education that responds to the real needs of students at SD Negeri 078455 Hawauso. The Parable of the Workers in the Vineyard offers a profound and multifaceted resource for Christian education. Through intentional pedagogical strategies, relational modeling, and context-sensitive application, CRE teachers can leverage this challenging text to foster holistic growth in students, spiritually, emotionally, socially, and morally. This study contributes to the broader discourse on biblical pedagogy by demonstrating that difficult parables, when thoughtfully interpreted and applied, hold significant potential for

shaping school environments marked by grace, justice, and transformative Christian character.

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