



Christian Religious Education Teachers' Competence in Teaching Social Justice: An Exegetical Study of Exodus 23:2 at SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

This study examines Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence in teaching social justice through an exegetical analysis of Exodus 23:2 within the instructional context of SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru. The biblical text warns against following the majority in wrongdoing and emphasizes judicial integrity rooted in covenantal fidelity. In a school where approximately 200 Christian students are served by one CRE teacher, the effectiveness of pedagogical competence becomes critical for transforming scriptural ethics into lived moral awareness. Using a quantitative descriptive method with a correlational approach, the study involved 60 randomly selected Christian students from the total population. Data were collected through a structured Likert-scale questionnaire measuring two primary variables: teacher competence (including mastery of biblical content, contextual exegesis, instructional strategy, classroom management, and assessment design) and students' understanding of social justice in Exodus 23:2. The instrument underwent expert validation and reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson's Product-Moment correlation. The findings reveal a positive and statistically significant relationship between perceived teacher competence and students' comprehension of biblical social justice. Students demonstrated stronger interpretive and applicative understanding when instruction integrated exegetical depth with dialogical engagement and contextual relevance. The study concludes that pedagogical competence functions as a critical bridge between Scripture and ethical formation, enabling students to internalize covenantal justice as moral courage in resisting unjust majority pressure within contemporary social contexts.

Keywords: Teachers' Competence, Christian Religious Education, Social Justice

INTRODUCTION

The discourse on social justice has increasingly occupied a central place in educational theory, public ethics, and theological reflection. In pluralistic societies, schools function not merely as sites of cognitive transmission but as formative spaces where moral

imagination, civic responsibility, and ethical discernment are cultivated. Within the Indonesian educational framework, teachers are entrusted not only with delivering subject content but also with shaping students' character in alignment with national and moral values. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers bear a distinctive responsibility: they must integrate biblical theology with contemporary ethical challenges, including issues of fairness, integrity, and resistance to unjust social pressure. The present study examines Christian Religious Education teachers' competence in teaching social justice through an exegetical study of Exodus 23:2 at SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru, where approximately 200 Christian students are served by one CRE teacher. Exodus 23:2 states, "You shall not follow a majority in wrongdoing; when you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not side with the majority to pervert justice" (NRSV). This verse is embedded within the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22–23:33), a corpus of legal material that articulates the ethical contours of Israel's covenant life. Scholars observe that this legal section emphasizes impartiality, protection of the vulnerable, and resistance to corrupt social dynamics (Wright, 2004). The prohibition against following the majority in wrongdoing underscores a countercultural ethic: justice is not determined by consensus but by fidelity to divine moral order. In pedagogical terms, this text challenges both teacher and student to cultivate moral courage, the capacity to resist collective pressure when it compromises truth and equity. Social justice in the Old Testament is deeply rooted in the covenant relationship between God and Israel. As Christopher J. H. Wright argues, Israel's ethical obligations were grounded in God's redemptive character and covenantal faithfulness (Wright, 2004). Thus, justice was not an abstract principle but a relational expression of loyalty to God. Terence E. Fretheim further notes that the Covenant Code situates legal instructions within the narrative of liberation from Egypt, linking justice to the memory of oppression and divine deliverance (Fretheim, 1991). In Exodus 23:2, the warning against majoritarian injustice reflects a concern for judicial integrity and communal righteousness.

Teaching social justice requires more than doctrinal explanation; it demands pedagogical competence. Lee S. Shulman's concept of pedagogical content knowledge emphasizes that effective teaching involves not only mastery of subject matter but also the ability to transform that knowledge into forms comprehensible to learners (Shulman, 1987). For CRE teachers, this entails translating ancient legal texts into meaningful ethical frameworks applicable to contemporary student life, such as resisting peer pressure, confronting bullying, and maintaining integrity in academic settings. Without such pedagogical mediation, biblical texts risk remaining historically distant and ethically inert. Paulo Freire's critical pedagogy underscores the importance of conscientization, the development of critical awareness that enables learners to recognize and challenge oppressive structures (Freire, 2000). Although Freire's framework arises from a different ideological tradition, its emphasis on ethical consciousness resonates with the prophetic and covenantal demands of Exodus 23:2. When CRE teachers guide students to analyze social dynamics critically, they participate in the formation of morally discerning citizens. At SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru, where 200 Christian students rely on a single CRE teacher, the challenge is substantial. The teacher must navigate large class sizes, diverse levels of theological literacy, and a pluralistic school environment while maintaining fidelity to biblical teaching and pedagogical effectiveness. The competence required includes

curriculum planning, contextual hermeneutics, dialogical instruction, classroom management, and formative assessment. Such competence is not merely technical but integrative, combining theological depth with educational professionalism. This study seeks to explore how Christian Religious Education teachers' competence shapes the teaching of social justice through an exegetical engagement with Exodus 23:2. By situating the biblical text within both its ancient covenantal context and the contemporary Indonesian high school setting, the research aims to demonstrate that pedagogical competence functions as a bridge between scriptural ethics and students' lived moral experience. In doing so, it contributes to ongoing discussions regarding the intersection of biblical theology, educational theory, and character formation in Christian schooling contexts.

METHODS

A quantitative descriptive design with a correlational approach was used to examine the relationship between Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence and students' understanding of social justice as reflected in Exodus 23:2 at SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru. The quantitative paradigm was selected because it allows for systematic measurement of instructional variables and statistical examination of relationships between teacher competence and student learning outcomes (Creswell, 2014). The correlational model was appropriate to determine whether a statistically significant association exists between the perceived competence of the CRE teacher and students' comprehension of biblical social justice principles. The population of the study consisted of 200 Christian students enrolled at the school during the academic year in which the research was conducted. Using proportional random sampling, 60 students were selected as respondents to ensure representativeness while maintaining statistical feasibility. The CRE teacher, as the sole instructor responsible for Christian Religious Education at the school, was not treated as a respondent but as the focal subject whose pedagogical competence was evaluated through student perceptions and instructional documentation. Data were collected through a structured questionnaire developed using a five-point Likert scale ranging from strongly disagree (1) to strongly agree (5). The instrument comprised two primary variables. The first variable measured the competence of the CRE teacher, including indicators such as mastery of biblical content, clarity in explaining exegetical context, ability to connect Scripture to contemporary social realities, use of dialogical and participatory teaching methods, classroom management effectiveness, assessment strategies, and ethical modeling. These indicators were adapted from established teacher competence frameworks and pedagogical theory (Shulman, 1987; Mulyasa, 2013). The second variable assessed students' understanding of social justice in Exodus 23:2, including their ability to interpret the covenantal context, explain the prohibition against following the majority in wrongdoing, identify contemporary examples of majority pressure (e.g., bullying, academic dishonesty, social media conformity), and articulate personal commitments to justice-oriented behavior. To ensure content validity, the instrument was reviewed by two experts in biblical studies and educational methodology. Construct validity was examined through factor analysis, and reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a threshold of 0.70 considered acceptable for internal consistency (Creswell, 2014). Prior to data

collection, formal permission was obtained from the school administration. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, assured of confidentiality, and asked to complete the questionnaire voluntarily to minimize response bias. Data analysis was conducted in two stages: descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage distribution) were used to describe the overall level of teacher competence and students' understanding of social justice, and inferential analysis was performed using Pearson's Product-Moment correlation to test the relationship between the two variables. Statistical significance was evaluated at the 0.05 level. Through this methodological procedure, the study aimed to provide empirical evidence regarding the extent to which CRE teacher competence contributes to students' theological literacy and ethical discernment concerning social justice as articulated in Exodus 23:2.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a substantial and statistically significant relationship between Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence and students' understanding of social justice as articulated in Exodus 23:2 within the learning context of SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru. Descriptive statistical analysis indicated that students generally perceived the CRE teacher's competence at a high level across multiple dimensions, including mastery of biblical content, clarity of exegetical explanation, contextualization of scriptural ethics, classroom management, dialogical pedagogy, and assessment strategies. The mean score for teacher competence fell within the "high" interpretive range of the Likert scale, suggesting that the majority of respondents recognized consistent professionalism in instructional delivery. Simultaneously, students' understanding of social justice, measured through their ability to interpret Exodus 23:2 contextually, explain its ethical implications, and apply its principles to contemporary social dynamics, also demonstrated a strong mean score. Pearson's Product-Moment correlation analysis yielded a positive correlation coefficient that was statistically significant at the 0.05 level, indicating that higher perceived teacher competence corresponded with stronger student comprehension of biblical social justice. Although correlation does not imply causation, the strength and direction of the relationship suggest that pedagogical competence functions as a significant mediating variable in the internalization of scriptural ethical principles. Exodus 23:2 stands within the Covenant Code (Exod 20:22 - 23:33), a legal corpus designed to shape Israel's communal life under divine sovereignty. The prohibition against following the majority in wrongdoing directly confronts social conformity when it undermines justice. In the ancient Near Eastern context, judicial proceedings could be influenced by communal pressure, economic power, or tribal allegiance. The text therefore safeguards juridical integrity by emphasizing fidelity to divine standards over popular consensus. In classroom implementation, the CRE teacher's competence in explaining this socio-legal background proved essential. Students reported higher levels of understanding when the teacher articulated the covenantal framework, linking the command to Israel's identity as a redeemed people, and clarified that justice in biblical theology is relational and theocentric rather than merely procedural. This aligns with Christopher J. H. Wright's argument that Old Testament ethics are grounded in covenantal relationship and divine character, not abstract moralism (Wright, 2004). The data suggest that when the teacher

explicitly framed Exodus 23:2 within covenant theology, students were better able to move beyond superficial interpretation and grasp the moral gravity of resisting unjust majoritarian influence.

Students' responses indicate that contextualization played a decisive role in comprehension. The CRE teacher reportedly employed contemporary illustrations such as peer pressure in academic dishonesty, cyberbullying, social media mob mentality, and conformity in friendship groups. These examples served as hermeneutical bridges, translating the ancient legal warning into recognizable adolescent experiences. In doing so, the teacher operationalized what Lee S. Shulman defines as pedagogical content knowledge, the transformation of subject matter into teachable and comprehensible forms (Shulman, 1987). Students demonstrated stronger agreement with statements affirming their ability to identify modern parallels to Exodus 23:2 when classroom discussion incorporated interactive case studies and group reflection. This suggests that competence in pedagogical design, specifically, dialogical and participatory strategies, enhances ethical internalization. The findings resonate with Paulo Freire's emphasis on critical awareness, wherein learners develop the capacity to analyze social realities rather than passively absorb information (Freire, 2000). While Freire's framework emerges from a different intellectual tradition, its pedagogical insight into critical engagement parallels the teacher's effort to cultivate moral discernment in light of biblical norms. The discussion component further reveals that competence in classroom management and assessment strategies contributed indirectly to theological understanding. In large instructional settings given the presence of approximately 200 Christian students and only one CRE teacher, organizational clarity becomes vital. Students reported that structured lesson sequencing, clear learning objectives, and consistent feedback mechanisms improved their ability to retain exegetical insights and articulate ethical applications. Formative assessments, including reflective essays and scenario-based evaluations, were particularly effective in measuring students' capacity to apply Exodus 23:2 to real-life dilemmas. The teacher's competence in designing evaluative tools thus reinforced cognitive and moral learning outcomes. These findings align with contemporary educational theory asserting that assessment, when aligned with instructional objectives, strengthens conceptual mastery and value formation (Creswell, 2014).

Another notable outcome concerns the integration of theological depth with civic awareness. Students demonstrated heightened sensitivity to issues of justice in school governance, classroom participation, and interpersonal relationships. For instance, many respondents indicated that after engaging with Exodus 23:2, they were more conscious of resisting collective pressure to marginalize peers or engage in dishonest practices. This behavioral self-report suggests that effective CRE instruction can foster moral agency. Importantly, the correlation analysis implies that such moral awareness is significantly associated with perceived teacher competence. In other words, theological literacy does not develop in isolation from pedagogical quality. Where the teacher effectively integrated exegetical rigor with contextual dialogue, students displayed stronger ethical articulation and commitment. The findings also highlight the vocational dimension of CRE teaching. With only one CRE teacher serving 200 Christian students, the role extends beyond mere content delivery to spiritual and ethical mentorship. Competence,

therefore, encompasses not only cognitive mastery but also personal integrity and ethical modeling. Students' survey responses revealed that perceptions of the teacher's fairness, consistency, and openness to discussion reinforced their trust in the instructional process. Such relational credibility amplifies the persuasive power of biblical ethics. In the context of Exodus 23:2, which warns against distortion of justice, the teacher's impartial treatment of students became an embodied demonstration of the text's principle. This convergence of doctrine and practice underscores the holistic nature of pedagogical competence in religious education. A minority of respondents expressed moderate uncertainty regarding their ability to apply the text in complex societal contexts beyond school life, such as political participation or media consumption. This suggests that while classroom instruction effectively addressed immediate peer-related dynamics, further curricular development could expand the scope of application. Future instructional strategies might incorporate interdisciplinary dialogue with civic education, sociology, or media studies to deepen students' engagement with systemic dimensions of justice. Such integration would reflect the broader biblical narrative in which covenantal ethics inform public life. The results demonstrate that Christian Religious Education teachers' competence significantly correlates with students' understanding of social justice in Exodus 23:2. The discussion affirms that effective pedagogy, characterized by exegetical accuracy, contextual relevance, dialogical engagement, structured assessment, and ethical modeling, facilitates the transformation of ancient covenantal commands into contemporary moral commitments. Within the pluralistic environment of SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru, this competence becomes especially critical, as students navigate diverse social influences and majority pressures. The study therefore reinforces the thesis that pedagogical professionalism is not peripheral but central to theological education. By mediating between scriptural text and adolescent experience, competent CRE instruction cultivates moral courage, critical awareness, and covenantal fidelity.

CONCLUSION

This study examined Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence in teaching social justice through an exegetical engagement with Exodus 23:2 within the instructional context of SMA Negeri 12 Pekanbaru. The findings demonstrate a positive and statistically significant relationship between perceived teacher competence and students' understanding of biblical social justice. Specifically, higher levels of pedagogical competence, reflected in mastery of content, contextualized exegesis, dialogical methodology, structured classroom management, and aligned assessment practices, corresponded with stronger student comprehension and application of the text's ethical mandate. Exodus 23:2 presents a countercultural imperative: justice must not be subordinated to majority opinion. Within the Covenant Code, this command safeguards judicial integrity and communal righteousness, rooting ethical action in fidelity to divine authority rather than social consensus. The study shows that when the CRE teacher effectively articulated this covenantal framework and translated its meaning into contemporary adolescent realities, such as peer pressure, academic dishonesty, and social conformity, students were better able to internalize the principle as a living moral directive rather than a distant legal artifact. In a school setting where one CRE teacher serves approximately 200 Christian students, pedagogical competence assumes

heightened significance. The teacher's role extends beyond information transmission to moral formation and ethical modeling. The research indicates that structured lesson planning, interactive discussion, and formative evaluation strengthen theological literacy and cultivate moral courage. Students not only demonstrated cognitive understanding of Exodus 23:2 but also expressed greater awareness of their responsibility to resist unjust collective pressure in daily school life. Future research may employ mixed-method designs incorporating classroom observation and in-depth interviews to enrich interpretive depth and explore long-term behavioral impact. Expanding the research to multiple schools would also enhance generalizability. This study affirms that pedagogical competence is a decisive factor in the effective teaching of biblical social justice. When exegetical rigor is integrated with professional instructional practice, Scripture becomes a formative resource for ethical discernment. Strengthening CRE teachers' competence is therefore both an educational and theological imperative, enabling students to embody covenantal justice within pluralistic social contexts.

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