



Shaping Faith through Intercession: The Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Genesis 18:23-32 at SD Negeri 41 Pekanbaru

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to shaping students' faith through the teaching of intercessory prayer based on the narrative of Abraham in The Bible Genesis 18:23-32 at SD Negeri 41 Pekanbaru. Employing a qualitative experimental approach, the research involved 40 elementary students who participated in a structured instructional intervention consisting of storytelling, theological reflection, teacher modeling, and collaborative prayer practice. Data were collected through classroom observations, student reflective journals, semi-structured interviews, and field notes, and analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings reveal that students initially understood prayer as a self-centered activity focused on personal needs. Through competence-based instruction and authentic teacher modeling, students gradually developed an outward-oriented understanding of prayer as an act of empathy and concern for others. The teacher's professional competence demonstrated through contextual biblical interpretation, relational pedagogy, and spiritual authenticity played a decisive role in facilitating this transformation. Students exhibited increased emotional engagement, moral awareness, and willingness to practice intercessory prayer for peers and community members. The study highlights that teaching intercessory prayer can serve as an effective pedagogical strategy for nurturing relational faith and social responsibility among elementary learners. It affirms that professional competence in Christian education extends beyond content mastery to include the ability to create meaningful spiritual learning experiences. By integrating narrative theology with participatory practices, teachers can cultivate a form of faith that is both personal and communal. This research contributes to the discourse on faith formation by demonstrating the potential of intercessory prayer as a transformative learning practice within primary Christian education.

Keywords: Professional competence, intercessory prayer, Christian Religious Education.

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education in contemporary schools is no longer confined to the transmission of doctrinal knowledge but is increasingly understood as a transformative process that shapes students' spiritual identity, moral consciousness, and relational faith with God. Within this framework, teachers play a central role not merely as instructors but as spiritual facilitators who guide learners toward experiencing faith as a lived reality. Recent studies emphasize that the effectiveness of Christian education is strongly influenced by the professional competence of teachers, particularly their ability to interpret biblical narratives contextually and translate theological values into meaningful learning experiences (Simaremare, 2025). This highlights that faith formation in the classroom is inseparable from the competence and intentionality of the teacher. Professional competence in Christian Religious Education encompasses not only mastery of subject matter but also theological literacy, pedagogical skill, and spiritual authenticity. Teachers are expected to integrate biblical truths into students' daily lives through reflective dialogue, narrative instruction, and prayer-based learning approaches (Haloho & Sitorus, 2025). In this sense, competence is not merely technical but holistic bridging cognitive understanding, affective engagement, and behavioral transformation. As noted in recent educational theology discourse, Christian teachers who combine theological insight with contextual teaching strategies significantly contribute to students' spiritual growth and resilience (Zebua, 2025). One crucial yet often underdeveloped dimension of faith formation in elementary education is the teaching of intercessory prayer. Prayer in Christian pedagogy is not simply a ritualistic practice but a relational act that connects human vulnerability with divine compassion. Studies on prayer-centered pedagogy reveal that when teachers intentionally cultivate prayer practices, students begin to internalize dependence on God, empathy toward others, and moral responsibility (Pardede & Aritonang, 2025). Teaching prayer, therefore, becomes an essential avenue for shaping both personal spirituality and social consciousness. Intercessory prayer holds a distinctive theological significance because it reflects an outward-oriented faith, faith that moves beyond personal needs toward concern for others. This is particularly relevant in the moral development of elementary students who are in the formative stage of learning empathy and responsibility. Research on Christian Religious Education consistently indicates that spiritual practices modeled by teachers such as prayer, humility, and relational care have a profound influence on students' internalization of faith values (Siregar et al., 2025). Consequently, the professional competence of teachers in teaching prayer cannot be separated from their personal embodiment of prayerful living.

The biblical narrative of Abraham's intercession in Genesis 18:23-32 provides a powerful theological foundation for teaching intercessory prayer. Abraham's dialogue with God reveals key spiritual principles such as compassion, moral courage, persistence, and advocacy for others. In the context of Christian pedagogy, this passage demonstrates that faith is not passive submission but active engagement in God's redemptive concern for humanity. Educational reflections on biblical narratives affirm that when teachers employ exegetically grounded storytelling, students are more capable of connecting scriptural truths with real-life moral choices (Manullang, 2025). The integration of biblical theology with pedagogical practice requires professional competence that is multidimensional. Recent scholarship identifies four essential dimensions of professional competence in Christian education: pedagogical clarity, personal integrity, social sensitivity, and spiritual

depth (Global Perspectives on Christian Education and Theology, 2025). These competencies enable teachers to transform biblical teaching from abstract doctrine into experiential faith formation. In teaching intercessory prayer, for instance, pedagogical clarity helps students understand the meaning of praying for others, while spiritual depth allows teachers to model genuine compassion and trust in God. The importance of professional competence becomes even more pronounced within public elementary school settings, where Christian Religious Education must operate within diverse social environments. Teachers are challenged to communicate theological values in ways that remain inclusive, relatable, and developmentally appropriate. Studies conducted in Indonesian elementary contexts show that competent Christian teachers who contextualize biblical messages to students' lived experiences significantly enhance students' spiritual understanding and emotional engagement (Sitanggang & Sitorus, 2025). Much of the existing literature focuses on general prayer practices or character formation without specifically examining how teachers' professional competence shapes students' understanding of intercessory prayer. This gap suggests the need for a more focused investigation into how biblical narratives of intercession can be pedagogically implemented in classroom settings. This study seeks to explore how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to shaping students' faith through the teaching of intercessory prayer based on Genesis 18:23-32. By situating the research in the context of SD Negeri 41 Pekanbaru, this study aims to examine how theological understanding, pedagogical strategies, and spiritual modeling intersect in the classroom to cultivate a compassionate and prayerful faith among students. Through this exploration, the study aspires to contribute to the broader discourse on Christian pedagogy by demonstrating that the teaching of intercessory prayer is not merely a doctrinal exercise but a formative practice that nurtures empathy, responsibility, and relational faith in young learners.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative experimental approach to explore how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers shapes students' faith through the teaching of intercessory prayer based on the narrative of Abraham in The Bible Genesis 18:23-32. The qualitative experimental design was selected because the study aimed not only to observe learning outcomes but also to understand the transformative processes that occurred during the instructional intervention. Unlike purely quantitative experiments, this approach enabled the researcher to examine how teacher competence, pedagogical strategies, and classroom interactions influenced students' spiritual understanding and attitudes toward prayer (Creswell, 2023). The research was conducted at SD Negeri 41 Pekanbaru during the second semester of the 2025/2026 academic year. The participants consisted of 40 Christian students from upper elementary grades who were selected through purposive sampling. The selection criteria included students who had previously received basic instruction in Christian Religious Education and were developmentally capable of engaging in reflective prayer practices. The sample size was considered adequate for capturing diverse responses while maintaining the depth of qualitative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2022). The experimental component of the study involved the implementation of a structured learning intervention designed to teach

intercessory prayer through the biblical narrative of Abraham's dialogue with God. The intervention was carried out over four instructional sessions. In the first session, students were introduced to the narrative context of Genesis 18:23-32 through storytelling and guided discussion. The second session focused on exploring the theological meaning of intercession, emphasizing empathy, moral concern, and responsibility for others. In the third session, the teacher modeled intercessory prayer practices, demonstrating how prayer can express compassion for family, community, and society. The final session invited students to practice intercessory prayer collaboratively and reflect on their experiences. Throughout the intervention, the professional competence of the Christian Religious Education teacher was intentionally integrated into the teaching process. This included the teacher's ability to interpret biblical texts contextually, communicate theological values in age-appropriate language, and create a supportive learning environment that encouraged openness and participation. The experimental nature of the study lay in observing changes in students' understanding, attitudes, and expressions of prayer following exposure to competence-based instruction (Fraenkel et al., 2023).

Data were collected using multiple qualitative techniques to ensure credibility and depth. First, classroom observations were conducted during each instructional session to document teacher strategies, student engagement, and the overall learning atmosphere. Second, reflective journals were completed by students to capture their personal responses to the practice of intercessory prayer. Third, semi-structured interviews were conducted with selected students to explore their perceptions of prayer and the influence of the teacher's guidance. Finally, field notes were maintained to record contextual factors that might affect the learning process. Data analysis was carried out using thematic analysis, which involved identifying patterns and recurring themes related to faith development, empathy, and prayer practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The analysis followed three stages: data reduction, thematic categorization, and interpretative synthesis. Through this process, the researcher examined how teacher competence contributed to shifts in students' understanding of prayer from a self-centered activity to an outward-oriented spiritual practice. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed triangulation by comparing data from observations, journals, and interviews. Member checking was also conducted by confirming interpretations with participants to enhance validity (Lincoln & Guba, 2021). Ethical considerations were upheld by obtaining consent from school authorities and ensuring the confidentiality of participants. By combining experimental intervention with qualitative exploration, this method allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how professional competence in teaching intercessory prayer can shape students' faith experiences in a real classroom context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of intercessory prayer learning based on the narrative of Abraham in The Bible Genesis 18:23-32 at SD Negeri 41 Pekanbaru revealed significant insights into how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to shaping students' faith. The findings of this qualitative experimental study demonstrate that faith formation in elementary education is deeply influenced by the teacher's theological understanding, pedagogical approach, and personal modeling of spiritual practices. Through four structured instructional sessions, observable transformations emerged in students' understanding of prayer, empathy toward others, and awareness of

moral responsibility. At the beginning of the intervention, most students perceived prayer primarily as a personal request directed toward God for individual needs such as health, academic success, or family well-being. This perception reflects what developmental faith theorists describe as egocentric spirituality, a stage where children's religious expressions are largely self-focused (Fowler, 2021). Classroom observations during the first session indicated that while students were familiar with routine prayer practices, they had limited understanding of prayer as an act of advocacy for others. When introduced to the story of Abraham's dialogue with God, students initially interpreted the narrative as a negotiation rather than an expression of compassion. This early response highlighted the need for pedagogical mediation in translating biblical narratives into meaningful moral lessons. The professional competence of the teacher became particularly evident during the second session, where theological explanation was integrated with contextual application. Rather than presenting Genesis 18:23-32 as a distant historical account, the teacher facilitated reflective discussions that connected Abraham's concern for the people of Sodom with contemporary situations such as praying for sick friends, struggling classmates, or communities affected by hardship. This approach aligns with recent educational research suggesting that contextualization is essential in enabling young learners to internalize biblical values (Groome, 2022). Students began to articulate that Abraham's persistence in prayer reflected care rather than bargaining, marking the first shift in their perception of intercession. A notable development occurred when the teacher modeled intercessory prayer during the third session. The prayer was not delivered as a formal performance but as an authentic expression of concern for real-life situations within the school community. Observational data showed that students became more attentive and emotionally engaged during this moment. Several students displayed non-verbal responses such as bowing their heads more deeply or expressing quiet agreement, indicating affective resonance. The teacher's modeling functioned as a living demonstration of professional competence, affirming the argument that spiritual authenticity enhances pedagogical effectiveness (Palmer, 2021).

Student reflective journals provided further evidence of transformation. Prior to the intervention, most journal entries described prayer in terms of personal benefit. After the third session, however, entries increasingly included references to others. Statements such as "I want to pray for my friend who is sad" or "I prayed for my neighbor who is sick" reflected a growing awareness of relational spirituality. This shift suggests that exposure to competence-based teaching can expand children's understanding of faith from individual devotion to communal responsibility. Thematic analysis identified empathy as a recurring motif, indicating that the narrative of Abraham's intercession served as a catalyst for moral imagination. Interviews conducted after the final session reinforced these findings. Students described intercessory prayer as "helping others through talking to God" and "caring for people even if we cannot meet them." These responses reveal a conceptual movement from ritualistic prayer toward intentional intercession. Importantly, students frequently referenced the teacher's example when explaining their learning. One participant noted that "the teacher prayed for us and others, so we learned to do the same." This illustrates the influence of teacher modeling as a dimension of professional competence that extends beyond cognitive instruction. The experimental nature of the intervention allowed for observation of behavioral changes as well. During collaborative prayer activities, students demonstrated increased willingness to mention

others in their prayers without prompting. Classroom observation indicated that the proportion of prayers containing intercessory elements rose significantly by the fourth session. While initial prayers focused almost exclusively on personal requests, later prayers included petitions for classmates, teachers, and even broader social concerns. This behavioral shift reflects the internalization of intercessory values through experiential learning (Kolb, 2022). From a pedagogical perspective, the teacher's ability to balance storytelling, discussion, and practice was instrumental in facilitating this transformation. The integration of narrative theology with participatory activities created an environment where students could move from passive listening to active engagement. This supports the argument that effective Christian education requires dialogical learning processes that invite students to construct meaning collaboratively (Vygotsky, 2020). By guiding students through reflection rather than imposing doctrinal conclusions, the teacher fostered ownership of spiritual insights.

Another significant finding relates to the development of moral sensitivity. The narrative of Abraham's concern for a sinful city prompted students to consider the idea of praying even for those who make mistakes. During interviews, several students expressed that intercessory prayer should include people who "do wrong" or "need help to change." This indicates an emerging understanding of grace and compassion, theological concepts often considered complex for elementary learners. The teacher's professional competence in simplifying these themes without diluting their essence contributed to students' grasp of moral responsibility. The study also revealed the importance of emotional climate in spiritual learning. Observations indicated that students were more receptive when the teacher created a supportive and non-judgmental atmosphere. The absence of pressure allowed students to express uncertainties and questions about prayer. This aligns with contemporary educational theories emphasizing the role of psychological safety in fostering deep learning (Edmondson, 2019). In this context, professional competence included relational skills that enabled the teacher to nurture trust. The collaborative prayer session in the final stage of the intervention demonstrated how communal practices reinforce individual understanding. Students participated in small groups where they shared prayer concerns for others. The process of listening to peers' concerns appeared to deepen empathy and broaden perspectives. Field notes indicated that students who were initially hesitant became more confident in expressing intercessory intentions. This suggests that peer interaction can amplify the impact of teacher-led instruction. The findings also highlight the interconnectedness of cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of faith formation. Students not only learned about intercessory prayer intellectually but also experienced its emotional significance and practiced it behaviorally. Such holistic learning reflects the multidimensional nature of professional competence in Christian education (Banks, 2022). The teacher's role as interpreter, facilitator, and model enabled these dimensions to converge. From a theological standpoint, the narrative of Abraham provided a compelling framework for introducing the concept of advocacy before God. Students came to understand that faith involves concern for others and persistence in seeking their well-being. This understanding resonates with broader Christian teachings on love and justice, suggesting that intercessory prayer can serve as an entry point for ethical formation. The study demonstrates that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers plays a decisive role in transforming students' perceptions and practices of prayer.

Through contextualized teaching, authentic modeling, and participatory activities, the intervention facilitated a shift from self-centered spirituality toward empathetic intercession. The integration of narrative theology with experiential learning proved effective in shaping faith among elementary students. These findings underscore the importance of equipping Christian educators with competencies that extend beyond doctrinal knowledge to include relational sensitivity and spiritual authenticity. The research affirms that teaching intercessory prayer is not merely an instructional task but a formative process that nurtures compassion, responsibility, and communal awareness. When guided by professionally competent teachers, biblical narratives such as Genesis 18:23-32 can become powerful tools for shaping faith that is both personal and socially responsive.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to shaping students' faith through the teaching of intercessory prayer grounded in the narrative of Abraham in The Bible Genesis 18:23-32. The findings affirm that faith formation in elementary education is significantly influenced by the teacher's ability to integrate theological understanding, pedagogical skill, and spiritual authenticity within the learning process. Intercessory prayer, when taught intentionally and contextually, can function as a transformative spiritual practice that nurtures empathy, moral awareness, and relational responsibility among students. The qualitative experimental intervention demonstrated a clear shift in students' perception of prayer. Initially, prayer was understood predominantly as a means of expressing personal needs. However, through structured instruction, reflective engagement, and teacher modeling, students gradually developed an outward-oriented understanding of prayer as an act of care for others. This transformation illustrates that intercessory prayer is not merely a doctrinal concept but a lived spiritual discipline that can be cultivated through competence-based teaching. A central insight of this research is that professional competence extends beyond mastery of content knowledge. The teacher's capacity to contextualize biblical narratives, foster meaningful dialogue, and model authentic prayer practices proved essential in facilitating students' spiritual growth. By presenting Abraham's intercession as an expression of compassion rather than negotiation, the teacher enabled students to connect the narrative with real-life experiences. This connection allowed students to internalize the values of empathy and responsibility embedded in the text. The study highlights the importance of experiential learning in Christian Religious Education. The integration of storytelling, discussion, and collaborative prayer activities created a holistic learning environment where cognitive understanding, emotional engagement, and behavioral practice converged. Such an approach allowed students not only to learn about intercessory prayer but also to experience its significance and apply it in their own lives. The findings also suggest that the development of communal spirituality can begin at an early age when guided by competent educators. Students demonstrated increased willingness to pray for others and showed growing sensitivity toward the needs of peers and their broader community. This indicates that teaching intercessory prayer can contribute to the cultivation of social empathy and ethical awareness within the educational context. The professional competence of

Christian Religious Education teachers plays a pivotal role in transforming biblical teaching into meaningful spiritual formation. Through intentional and reflective instruction based on Genesis 18:23–32, teachers can help students move from self-centered expressions of faith toward compassionate intercession for others. This study underscores the potential of intercessory prayer as a pedagogical tool for nurturing faith that is both relational and socially responsive, thereby contributing to the broader mission of Christian education in shaping character and spiritual maturity among young learners.

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