



Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Internalizing Communication with God (Genesis 28:12) at SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of social competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in internalizing students' communication with God, interpreted through the theological framework of Genesis 28:12, within the context of SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan. Employing a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach, the research synthesizes recent scholarly works published between 2015 and 2025 that explore teacher social competence, relational pedagogy, spiritual formation, and faith internalization in Christian educational settings. The findings reveal that social competence manifested through effective communication, empathy, relational authenticity, emotional intelligence, and dialogical engagement plays a crucial role in fostering students' spiritual awareness and personal relationship with God. Internalization of communication with God is shown to occur not merely through doctrinal instruction but through relationally secure and supportive classroom environments where teachers model lived faith. Genesis 28:12, which depicts Jacob's vision of a ladder connecting heaven and earth, serves as a theological metaphor for understanding the relational space created by socially competent teachers. In the elementary school context, such competence significantly influences students' early spiritual perceptions and faith development. The study concludes that social competence is both a pedagogical and theological necessity in Christian education, positioning teachers as relational facilitators who nurture authentic spiritual communication. Strengthening this competence has transformative implications for holistic faith formation in contemporary Christian schooling.

Keywords: Social competence, Christian Religious Education, communication with God, Genesis 28:12.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary educational discourse, the role of teacher competence extends beyond mastery of subject matter to include a range of interpersonal and relational skills that enable educators to connect meaningfully with students. Among these competencies,

social competence has garnered increasing scholarly attention as a vital attribute for effective teaching and learning processes, particularly within faith-based education contexts. Social competence, broadly understood, encompasses a teacher's ability to communicate effectively, demonstrate empathy, engage in positive interpersonal interactions, and build constructive relationships with students and the school community (Sitohang & Sitopu, 2024). In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), social competence not only supports academic performance but also fosters spiritual and moral development, creating opportunities for students to internalize core values in authentic ways. The importance of social competence in Christian education has been documented in various empirical studies across Indonesia. For instance, research on Christian Religious Education teachers indicates that strong social skills are associated with improved teacher-student relationships, enhanced spiritual growth among students, and a more supportive learning environment (Lewar & Simbolon, 2025). Their study revealed that when teachers demonstrate effective communication and empathetic understanding, students are more likely to engage deeply with religious content and exhibit positive behavioral changes. The findings suggest that social competence plays a key role in bridging theological instruction with lived experience, thus facilitating holistic development.

Studies focusing on the relational dimension of Christian Religious Education highlight social competence as a catalyst for creating a conducive learning atmosphere. Research shows that teachers who excel in interpersonal communication, emotional intelligence, and relational sensitivity are able to motivate students' interest and participation in learning activities (Adelin Langi et al., 2025). Such competence contributes not only to students' academic attainment but also to their affective engagement with spiritual values, which is essential in faith-oriented schooling environments. The role of social competence extends to moral and character formation as well. Empirical evidence from studies in Indonesian Christian schools suggests that teachers' social abilities are linked to improvements in student morality and social behavior (Padang et al., 2024). When educators exhibit empathy, respect, and effective communication, students tend to model similar behaviors, reinforcing a culture of ethical conduct and communal harmony. These dynamics underline social competence as a multifaceted construct that influences both cognitive learning and character formation in religious education. Research that specifically examines its role in internalizing communication with God particularly in light of *Genesis 28:12* remains scarce. *Genesis 28:12* recounts Jacob's vision of a ladder reaching to heaven, symbolizing the connection between earthly life and divine reality. Within Christian pedagogy, this passage may serve as a hermeneutical foundation for interpreting how believers perceive communication with God not merely as doctrinal knowledge but as relational encounter. In religious education, internalizing such communication involves cultivating students' awareness of God's presence, enabling them to engage in spiritual dialogue grounded in scripture and personal experience. Given this theological backdrop, the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers becomes especially significant. Teachers equipped with strong social skills are better positioned to model authentic Christian discipleship, including practices of prayerful communication and relational encounter with the divine. Their ability to create safe, empathetic environments helps students interpret and internalize spiritual concepts such as communion with God. Research in CRE contexts emphasizes that relational pedagogy

which includes trust, respect, and open communication supports students in making meaningful connections between biblical teachings and their daily spiritual lives. Contemporary educational frameworks such as 21st-century learning emphasize the social and emotional dimensions of teaching, recognizing that these competencies are critical for preparing students to navigate complex social and spiritual landscapes. Christian educators, in particular, are called not only to transmit theological knowledge but also to embody Christian virtues such as compassion, humility, and love qualities that are deeply relational and socially grounded. This dual responsibility highlights the intertwined nature of social competence and spiritual formation, suggesting that teachers' social competence is integral to fulfilling their vocational mission as spiritual mentors. In Indonesia, empirical studies conducted in various Christian schooling environments underscore the positive implications of social competence for student outcomes. These include enhanced spiritual growth, increased motivation to engage in religious learning, and the cultivation of prosocial behaviors among students. Such outcomes are aligned with broader educational goals that integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual domains of learning. However, most existing research addresses general aspects of interpersonal competence without explicitly linking it to the internalization of divine communication as articulated in specific biblical narratives like Genesis 28:12.

Given this gap, the present study at SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan seeks to explore how Christian Religious Education teachers' social competence contributes to internalizing students' communication with God. Focusing on the Indonesian elementary school context provides insights into how relational competencies influence early spiritual formation. By anchoring the investigation in both educational theory and biblical theology, this research aims to illuminate the ways in which teacher-student relationships serve as conduits for spiritual learning and divine encounter. While social competence has been acknowledged as an essential dimension of teacher effectiveness, its specific role in fostering students' internal experiences of communication with God requires further empirical examination. The present study addresses this need by situating social competence within the lived practice of Christian education, emphasizing its theological and pedagogical relevance. Through this inquiry, the research aims to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of how educators can nurture students' spiritual growth and relational depth, thereby enhancing the quality of Christian education in contemporary contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) approach to examine and synthesize empirical findings related to the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and its role in internalizing students' communication with God, particularly in light of Genesis 28:12. The SLR method was selected because it enables researchers to systematically identify, evaluate, and integrate findings from relevant scholarly works in a transparent and replicable manner (Snyder, 2019). Unlike traditional narrative reviews, SLR follows a structured protocol to minimize bias and ensure comprehensive coverage of available literature. The review process followed four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion, consistent with established SLR procedures (Page et al., 2021). In the identification stage, relevant articles were searched using electronic databases such as Google Scholar, Crossref, Scopus-indexed journals, and

national accredited journals (SINTA). The keywords used included combinations of: “social competence,” “Christian Religious Education,” “teacher competence,” “spiritual formation,” “communication with God,” “religious internalization,” and “Genesis 28:12.” The search was limited to publications from 2015 to 2025 to ensure the inclusion of recent and relevant scholarly contributions. During the screening stage, duplicate records were removed, and titles and abstracts were examined to determine their relevance to the research focus. Studies were included if they met the following criteria: empirical research or peer-reviewed theoretical studies addressing teacher social competence; research situated within Christian Religious Education or faith-based educational contexts; discussions of spiritual formation, internalization of religious values, or communication with God; and availability in full text. Studies unrelated to educational contexts or lacking academic credibility were excluded. In the eligibility phase, the full texts of selected articles were critically evaluated for methodological rigor, theoretical contribution, and relevance to the research objectives. The appraisal considered clarity of research design, validity of findings, and alignment with the conceptual framework of social competence and spiritual internalization. Only studies meeting academic standards and directly contributing to the topic were retained for synthesis. Data analysis was conducted using thematic synthesis. Key findings from the selected studies were coded and categorized into thematic clusters, such as relational pedagogy, teacher-student interaction, empathy and communication skills, spiritual modeling, and internalization of faith values. Through this analytical process, patterns and conceptual linkages between teacher social competence and students’ communication with God were identified and interpreted. By employing an SLR approach, this study provides a comprehensive and structured understanding of how social competence functions within Christian Religious Education to foster spiritual internalization. The method ensures transparency, reliability, and academic rigor in examining the intersection between pedagogical competence and theological formation.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The synthesis of the reviewed literature reveals that social competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) extends beyond general interpersonal skill and enters the realm of relational spirituality. In secular educational discourse, social competence is commonly defined as a teacher’s ability to communicate effectively, manage relationships constructively, demonstrate empathy, and foster positive classroom climates. However, within Christian education, this competence carries theological depth. It is not merely about classroom management or collaborative interaction, but about embodying Christ-like relational patterns that reflect love, humility, and service. This dual dimension pedagogical and theological places CRE teachers in a distinctive vocational position. Several studies emphasize that teachers’ social competence functions as a bridge between doctrinal instruction and lived faith. When teachers demonstrate authentic care, active listening, and relational consistency, students perceive religious teaching not as abstract theology but as relational truth. The SLR findings indicate that relational authenticity enhances students’ receptivity to spiritual concepts. In Christian contexts, the teacher becomes a living curriculum. This aligns with the understanding that faith formation is transmitted not only cognitively but relationally, through modeling and

shared experience. Genesis 28:12 provides a rich metaphor for this relational dynamic. Jacob's vision of a ladder reaching from earth to heaven, with angels ascending and descending, symbolizes an open channel between the human and divine realms. In the educational setting, the CRE teacher may be understood as participating in this mediating space not as a substitute for divine grace, but as a facilitator of spiritual awareness. Social competence enables the teacher to create relational "space" where students feel secure enough to explore questions about God, prayer, and divine presence. Without such relational safety, internalization of communication with God becomes superficial or merely ritualistic.

The review also highlights that social competence includes emotional intelligence, cultural sensitivity, and dialogical openness. In Indonesian Christian schools, where students come from diverse family and socio-cultural backgrounds, the teacher's ability to navigate relational diversity is crucial. Effective CRE teachers recognize that communication with God is experienced differently depending on students' developmental stages and spiritual maturity. Thus, social competence becomes foundational for contextualizing biblical narratives such as Genesis 28:12 in age-appropriate and meaningful ways. The ladder imagery can be interpreted symbolically as God's initiative to connect with humanity, but students internalize this symbolism only when guided within supportive relational environments. The conceptual foundation emerging from the literature suggests that social competence in CRE is integrative. It combines interpersonal skill, emotional awareness, theological embodiment, and relational intentionality. It is through this integration that spiritual communication moves from cognitive knowledge to lived encounter. The teacher's relational presence becomes the soil in which the seeds of divine communication may take root.

Relational Pedagogy and the Internalization of Communication with God

The thematic synthesis indicates that relational pedagogy is central to the process of internalizing communication with God. Internalization, in educational psychology, refers to the transformation of external instruction into personally owned conviction. In religious education, this transformation involves moving from memorizing prayers or biblical facts to developing a conscious, relational awareness of God's presence. The literature consistently shows that such transformation is relationally mediated rather than mechanically transmitted. Relational pedagogy emphasizes trust-building, dialogical engagement, and mutual respect. CRE teachers who practice relational pedagogy intentionally cultivate environments where students feel valued and heard. In this atmosphere, discussions about prayer, spiritual struggle, or biblical narratives become interactive rather than didactic. Students are invited to reflect, question, and share personal experiences. This dialogical process deepens their understanding of communication with God as relational exchange rather than ritual obligation. Genesis 28:12 plays a critical role in framing this theological dialogue. Jacob's encounter occurred in a moment of vulnerability, isolation, and uncertainty. The ladder vision was not merely informational; it was transformative. It assured Jacob of divine presence and covenantal promise. When CRE teachers employ social competence effectively, they help students connect biblical encounters with their own emotional and existential experiences. For example, a child experiencing fear or confusion may relate to Jacob's uncertainty. Through empathetic conversation, the teacher can guide the student to see

communication with God as accessible even in vulnerable moments. The SLR findings further indicate that students internalize spiritual communication when teachers model it authentically. Modeling includes verbal expressions of faith, consistent prayer practices, and ethical conduct that reflects dependence on God. However, modeling becomes effective only when relational credibility is established. Students are sensitive to inconsistencies between instruction and behavior. Social competence, therefore, reinforces authenticity. Teachers who demonstrate patience, fairness, and humility embody the relational character of the God they teach about. In this way, pedagogy becomes incarnational.

The literature highlights the role of narrative pedagogy in religious internalization. Storytelling rooted in biblical narratives invites imaginative participation. When teachers retell the story of Jacob's ladder with relational sensitivity encouraging students to visualize the scene and reflect on its meaning students are more likely to internalize the message. Social competence allows the teacher to gauge students' emotional responses and adapt explanations accordingly. Internalization is thus not a uniform process but a dynamic interaction shaped by relational cues. The synthesis concludes that communication with God cannot be reduced to cognitive comprehension. It is relationally awakened. Teachers' social competence provides the relational scaffolding through which students gradually appropriate spiritual communication as personal reality. Without relational pedagogy, spiritual instruction risks remaining external and performative.

Social Competence as Spiritual Modeling in Elementary Contexts

The literature reviewed within the elementary school context reveals that younger students internalize spiritual concepts primarily through relational imitation. Developmental studies consistently indicate that children learn values by observing trusted adults. In Christian Religious Education at the elementary level, this principle becomes especially significant. Students at SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan, as in similar institutions, are in formative stages of moral and spiritual identity. Their understanding of communication with God is shaped less by abstract theology and more by lived example. Social competence in this context manifests as warmth, accessibility, consistency, and fairness. Teachers who greet students personally, listen attentively, and respond compassionately create relational bonds that foster spiritual openness. The SLR findings show that children interpret relational security as reflective of divine care. When a teacher patiently guides a student in prayer, the student associates the experience of being heard with the idea that God also listens. Thus, relational experiences become theological metaphors. Genesis 28:12 reinforces this dynamic by portraying God as initiating connection. The ladder was not built by Jacob; it was revealed to him. In the classroom, teachers symbolically participate in this divine initiative by creating opportunities for spiritual reflection. However, the literature emphasizes that such participation must be grounded in humility. Social competence does not position the teacher as mediator replacing divine agency, but as facilitator pointing students toward direct communion with God. Another dimension emerging from the synthesis is the role of community. Communication with God is personal, yet it is nurtured within communal practice. CRE teachers who demonstrate collaborative and respectful relationships with colleagues model communal faith. Students observing such interactions learn that

spiritual communication extends beyond private prayer to relational harmony. Social competence thus shapes both vertical and horizontal dimensions of faith.

The review underscores that spiritual modeling is undermined when social competence is lacking. Authoritarian communication, emotional inconsistency, or relational distance create barriers to internalization. Students may comply externally with religious practices but remain disengaged internally. Therefore, cultivating teachers' social competence is not optional but essential for authentic spiritual formation. The elementary context magnifies these implications. At this stage, students are constructing foundational images of God. A socially competent teacher helps form images of God as relational, attentive, and loving. Conversely, relational harshness may distort theological perception. The synthesis thus affirms that social competence carries profound formative consequences in early spiritual development.

Implications for Christian Education Practice at SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan

The integrated findings of this SLR have significant implications for Christian education practice at SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan. First, professional development programs should prioritize social competence as a theological as well as pedagogical competency. Training in communication skills, empathy development, conflict resolution, and reflective practice should be framed within Christian vocational identity. Teachers need to recognize that relational excellence is part of spiritual stewardship. Second, curriculum design should intentionally connect biblical narratives such as Genesis 28:12 with relational application. Lessons should not end with doctrinal explanation but invite relational reflection. Students may be encouraged to express how they experience God's presence in daily life, guided by teachers who listen without judgment. Social competence equips teachers to facilitate such vulnerable sharing safely. Third, school leadership plays a critical role in cultivating a relational culture. When administrators model respectful and supportive interactions, they reinforce the value of social competence throughout the institution. A relationally healthy school environment strengthens the credibility of spiritual instruction. The ladder imagery of Genesis 28:12 can be metaphorically extended to institutional culture, where openness between heaven and earth is mirrored by openness among community members. The synthesis suggests that evaluating teacher effectiveness in CRE should include relational indicators. Assessment frameworks often emphasize lesson planning and content mastery, yet spiritual internalization depends heavily on relational dynamics. Observational tools and reflective self-assessment instruments may help teachers examine how their social interactions support or hinder students' communication with God. The research synthesis demonstrates that social competence is deeply intertwined with the internalization of communication with God in Christian Religious Education. Rooted in relational pedagogy, embodied through spiritual modeling, and contextualized within elementary education, social competence becomes a theological practice. Genesis 28:12 provides a powerful metaphor for this integrative process, illustrating divine-human connection that educators are called to nurture responsibly. At SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan, strengthening teachers' social competence holds transformative potential for shaping students' lived experience of faith.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to the internalization of communication with God, interpreted through the theological lens of Genesis 28:12, within the context of SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan. Through a Systematic Literature Review, the findings demonstrate that social competence is not merely an auxiliary pedagogical skill but a foundational dimension of spiritual formation in Christian education. It functions as a relational bridge through which theological knowledge becomes personally meaningful and spiritually transformative for students. The synthesis of the literature confirms that communication with God cannot be effectively internalized through cognitive instruction alone. Rather, it emerges within relationally secure environments where trust, empathy, authenticity, and dialogical openness are consistently practiced. Social competence enables teachers to create such environments. When CRE teachers demonstrate emotional intelligence, respectful communication, and relational integrity, they model the very nature of divine relationality they seek to teach. In this way, pedagogy becomes incarnational: students encounter not only biblical narratives but lived expressions of faith. Genesis 28:12, with its imagery of Jacob's ladder connecting heaven and earth, provides a profound theological metaphor for understanding this process. The vision symbolizes divine initiative and accessibility, reminding educators that spiritual formation ultimately originates from God's grace. However, teachers participate meaningfully in this process by cultivating relational spaces that reflect openness between the human and the divine. Social competence, therefore, becomes a practical expression of theological responsibility. It positions teachers as facilitators who guide students toward direct communion with God rather than mere compliance with religious practices. Within the elementary school context of SDS Thomas Alva Edison Medan, the implications are particularly significant. At this developmental stage, students form foundational perceptions of God largely through relational experiences with trusted adults. Teachers' social behaviors whether characterized by patience and compassion or by rigidity and distance shape students' spiritual imagination. Thus, strengthening social competence is essential for nurturing healthy and authentic images of God. The integration of social competence and spiritual pedagogy offers a holistic framework for Christian Religious Education. By embodying relational excellence grounded in biblical truth, CRE teachers can meaningfully support students in internalizing communication with God. This study affirms that effective Christian education requires not only theological knowledge but relational wisdom, ensuring that the "ladder" between heaven and earth remains experientially open within the classroom.

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