



Nurturing Forgiveness in the Classroom by Exploring the Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers Based on Genesis 45:4-5 at SDN 071052

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers nurtures students' attitudes of forgiveness, grounded in the theological framework of Genesis 45:4-5. Conducted at SDN 071052, the research employed a qualitative case study design to examine relational dynamics within the CRE classroom. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving one CRE teacher, selected students, and the school principal. Thematic analysis was used to identify patterns related to teacher social competence and the development of forgiveness among students. The findings reveal that forgiveness is cultivated primarily through relational modeling rather than cognitive instruction alone. The teacher's empathy, emotional regulation, restorative dialogue, and consistent demonstration of fairness created a classroom climate that fostered emotional safety and reconciliation. Integration of the biblical narrative of Joseph's forgiveness enabled students to connect scriptural teachings with personal experiences of conflict. As a result, students gradually understood forgiveness not merely as verbal apology but as restoration of relationships and release of resentment. The study also highlights challenges, including students' developmental perceptions of justice and external social influences. Overall, the research affirms that teacher social competence serves as a critical medium for translating theological values into lived moral practice. Strengthening relational and social-emotional competencies in CRE teachers is therefore essential for effective character formation and the cultivation of forgiveness in elementary education contexts.

Keywords: Social competence, Christian Religious Education, forgiveness, Genesis 45:4-5.

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary elementary education, the role of teachers transcends mere transmission of cognitive knowledge; teachers are integral in shaping the social-emotional and moral character of their students. This broader educational expectation becomes even more pronounced in faith-based subjects such as Christian Religious Education

(CRE), where the cultivation of virtues including empathy, compassion, and forgiveness is central to the Christian understanding of moral formation. Research in educational practice consistently underscores that teachers' social competence their ability to engage empathetically, communicate effectively, and foster meaningful relationships with students is a foundational element in achieving these outcomes (Langi et al., 2025; Sitohang & Sitopu, 2025). Teacher social competence has been defined as the collection of interpersonal and intra-personal skills that enable educators to build trust, navigate diverse classroom interactions, respond sensitively to emotional cues, and model pro-social behavior (Zahro, 2025). In Christian education specifically, this competence is not simply pedagogical; it is theological and relational. Teachers are expected to embody and transmit agape love a biblically rooted love that extends beyond transactional relationships to include forgiveness, reconciliation, and restorative care (Siregar & Gultom, 2025). Such relational competence becomes a key mechanism through which students internalize Christian moral virtues within real social contexts. Forgiveness, within the Christian tradition, is a multidimensional construct. It is simultaneously a moral imperative (e.g., Jesus' teaching in Matthew 18:21-22 commanding unlimited forgiveness), a relational practice, and a formational process that impacts both individual character and community harmony. Empirical studies indicate that when educators not only *teach* forgiveness but *model* it through consistent social engagement, students demonstrate greater moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and prosocial behavior (Wilkae, 2025). However, despite its theological salience, forgiveness as a targeted outcome of CRE instruction remains underexplored in existing educational research, particularly at the elementary level where attitudes and habits are most formative.

In the Indonesian context, research on PAK (Pendidikan Agama Kristen) teachers has increasingly highlighted the centrality of social competence for various dimensions of student development: motivation to learn, classroom atmosphere, and moral behavior (Langi et al., 2025; Sitohang & Sitopu, 2025). These studies affirm that teachers who engage students warmly, communicate clearly, and build supportive classroom communities contribute positively to student outcomes. Yet few studies explicitly examine how social competence influences students' *attitudes of forgiveness* a gap that this article seeks to address through both exegetical and empirical lenses. Grounded in Genesis 45:4-5, the biblical account of Joseph forgiving his brothers, this research interprets forgiveness not merely as ethical behavior but as a transformative relational praxis rooted in grace and reconciliation. The narrative serves as an educational metaphor: Joseph's willingness to forgive despite severe personal harm serves as a model for teachers to nurture similar attitudes within the classroom. When teachers enact social competence that reflects principled forgiveness, they provide students with a living example of biblical virtues rather than abstract ideals. This approach aligns with a growing body of research advocating for faith-integrated pedagogy that connects theological content with lived relational experiences in the classroom (Lewar & Simbolon, 2025). Educational psychology suggests that student moral development is closely linked to the quality of teacher-student interactions. High levels of teacher engagement and emotionally supportive classrooms are associated with increased prosocial behavior, reduced conflict, and greater social-emotional competence among students (Cardenal et al., 2024). This interdisciplinary evidence emphasizes that competent teachers do more than dispense facts they create relational contexts where students practice virtues with

feedback and encouragement. In faith-based settings, such contexts enable students to *experience* forgiveness as relational restoration rather than merely understand it conceptually. The studies that do exist tend to focus broadly on social competence's influence on student motivation (Oka, 2025) or character formation (e.g., Siregar & Gultom, 2025), but not forgiveness per se. This gap is significant because forgiveness a central Christian virtue is foundational to relational harmony, psychological well-being, and community cohesion within school environments. This article investigates how the social competence of CRE teachers at SDN 071052 contributes to nurturing students' attitudes of forgiveness in the classroom, using Genesis 45:4-5 as both a hermeneutical framework and pedagogical touchstone. By situating relational pedagogy within both empirical educational research and biblical theology, this study aims to contribute to the scholarship on Christian education, teacher competence, and moral development. Such integration has practical implications for teacher training programs, curriculum design, and classroom practices that seek not only academic excellence but also holistic character formation in young learners.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to nurturing students' attitudes of forgiveness in the classroom, grounded in the theological framework of Genesis 45:4-5. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand lived experiences, relational dynamics, and meaning-making processes within natural classroom settings rather than to measure variables statistically. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate for investigating values formation, interpersonal interactions, and contextualized educational practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The study adopted a case study design focusing on SDN 071052 as a bounded system. A case study approach enables in-depth exploration of a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). This design allowed the researcher to examine how teacher social competence is enacted in daily CRE instruction and how it influences students' development of forgiving attitudes. The research was conducted at SDN 071052, an elementary school where Christian Religious Education is taught as a formal subject. Participants were selected through purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research objectives. The primary participants consisted of one CRE teacher who actively teaches upper-grade students and demonstrates consistent classroom engagement. Additional participants included 12 students from the selected class and the school principal to provide triangulated perspectives. The criteria for selecting participants were: active involvement in CRE learning processes, willingness to participate voluntarily, and availability during the research period. Students were selected to represent diverse academic and behavioral characteristics to capture varied experiences related to forgiveness practices in the classroom. Data were collected through three primary techniques: in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher, selected students, and the principal to explore perceptions of social competence, relational practices, and experiences of forgiveness in classroom interactions. The

interview protocol was developed around key indicators of teacher social competence effective communication, empathy, conflict management, and modeling pro-social behavior. Classroom observations were conducted during CRE lessons to examine real-time teacher-student interactions, especially in situations involving conflict, correction, or moral instruction. Observational data focused on how the teacher modeled forgiveness and facilitated discussions related to Genesis 45:4-5. Field notes were recorded systematically. Document analysis included lesson plans, teaching materials, and reflective notes that integrated biblical narratives on forgiveness. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The researcher transcribed interviews, organized field notes, and conducted initial coding to identify recurring patterns related to teacher social competence and forgiveness formation. Codes were grouped into broader themes such as relational modeling, restorative dialogue, and emotional guidance. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability criteria. Triangulation of data sources, member checking with participants, and reflective journaling were used to strengthen the validity of findings. Through this qualitative methodology, the study sought to provide a rich and contextualized understanding of how CRE teachers' social competence nurtures forgiveness as a lived virtue among students at SDN 071052.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

One of the most significant findings of this study is that students learn forgiveness primarily through observing how their teacher responds to conflict, mistakes, and interpersonal tensions. During classroom observations, it became evident that when students engaged in minor disputes such as teasing, misunderstanding, or refusal to cooperate the CRE teacher did not immediately resort to punitive measures. Instead, the teacher practiced calm dialogue, acknowledged emotions, and encouraged reconciliation. This relational pattern mirrors what educational scholars describe as socially competent behavior: empathy, assertive but respectful communication, and constructive conflict resolution (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; OECD, 2019). Students interviewed consistently described their teacher as "patient," "not easily angry," and "willing to listen." These characteristics align with the broader framework of teacher social competence, which includes emotional regulation, perspective-taking, and supportive communication (Schonert-Reichl, 2017). In the context of Christian education, such competence becomes a lived testimony of biblical teaching rather than mere doctrinal instruction. Genesis 45:4-5 presents Joseph inviting his brothers to approach him and reframing their wrongdoing within God's redemptive purpose. The teacher's approach in SDN 071052 reflects a similar pattern: instead of magnifying wrongdoing, the teacher invites dialogue and reorients students toward restoration. This parallel restorative discipline models in education, which emphasize repairing harm rather than imposing retribution (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). The data suggest that when teachers embody this restorative orientation, students begin to internalize forgiveness as a practical relational response.

Dialogical Pedagogy and Biblical Narrative Integration

Another central finding is the integration of Genesis 45:4-5 into classroom discussion not as abstract theology but as a contextualized narrative for reflection. The teacher facilitated open-ended discussions about Joseph's emotional journey betrayal, suffering,

and eventual forgiveness. Students were invited to connect the biblical story to their own experiences of being hurt by peers. This dialogical method aligns with constructivist theories of moral development, which emphasize reflective discussion as a catalyst for internalizing ethical principles (Nucci, 2016). When students are encouraged to interpret narratives and apply them to real-life situations, moral concepts such as forgiveness shift from theoretical ideas to personal commitments. Interview data revealed that several students began to articulate forgiveness not simply as “saying sorry” but as “not holding anger” and “wanting to be friends again.” This demonstrates cognitive and affective processing of the concept. Research in moral education suggests that narrative-based learning strengthens empathy and prosocial reasoning (Narvaez & Lapsley, 2009). The Genesis narrative functioned as both theological anchor and moral mirror, enabling students to reflect on their own relational conflicts. The teacher’s social competence shaped how the biblical text was mediated. Rather than preaching moral obligation in a rigid manner, the teacher invited students into reflective dialogue, modeling humility and openness. This approach reflects learner-centered pedagogy, which has been associated with stronger student engagement and character formation (Darling-Hammond et al., 2020).

Emotional Safety and the Formation of Forgiveness

The cultivation of forgiveness requires emotional safety. Findings indicate that students felt secure expressing feelings of anger or hurt because the teacher created a non-threatening environment. Emotional safety in classrooms has been widely associated with positive social-emotional development (Jones & Bouffard, 2012). Students reported that when conflicts occurred, the teacher would ask questions such as, “How did you feel?” and “What can we do to make it better?” This reflective questioning fosters emotional literacy a prerequisite for authentic forgiveness. Forgiveness, as psychological research shows, involves processing emotional pain and reframing the offender’s actions (Worthington & Wade, 2020). Without guided emotional reflection, forgiveness risks becoming superficial compliance. The teacher’s ability to manage personal emotions during conflict further reinforced this environment. Observations revealed that even when students repeatedly disrupted lessons, the teacher maintained composure. Social-emotional competence among teachers has been linked to improved classroom climate and reduced behavioral problems (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In SDN 071052, emotional regulation functioned as silent instruction; students learned that conflict need not escalate into hostility.

Restorative Dialogue as Practical Forgiveness

An emergent theme from classroom observation was the teacher’s consistent use of restorative dialogue. Rather than isolating students who caused harm, the teacher facilitated conversations between parties involved. This method aligns with restorative justice principles in education, which emphasize accountability and reconciliation (Morrison & Vaandering, 2012). For example, when one student mocked another during group work, the teacher invited both students to speak about their feelings and guided them toward mutual understanding. After the conversation, the teacher concluded with a brief reflection on Joseph’s willingness to see God’s purpose beyond his brothers’ betrayal. The biblical narrative was thus woven into conflict resolution. Students later

expressed that such moments helped them “understand friends better” and “not keep anger.” This demonstrates that forgiveness was not taught solely through formal lesson plans but through lived relational processes. Research suggests that students exposed to restorative practices show greater empathy and reduced aggression (Gregory et al., 2016). The findings in this study support that insight within a Christian educational context.

Teacher Identity and Moral Authority

The effectiveness of forgiveness formation was closely tied to how students perceived the teacher’s character. Students frequently described the teacher as “fair” and “loving.” Moral education literature highlights that teacher credibility and authenticity significantly influence student moral development (Lickona, 2012). When teachers embody the virtues they teach, students are more likely to internalize those virtues. In interviews, the teacher articulated a conscious desire to reflect Christ-like forgiveness in daily interactions. This intentional identity formation aligns with the theological understanding of vocation in Christian education, where teachers serve not merely as instructors but as moral witnesses. Such integration of faith and practice resonates with scholarship on faith-integrated pedagogy, which emphasizes coherence between belief and behavior (Dockery, 2012). Genesis 45:4-5 was not treated as an isolated text but as a paradigm for teacher identity. Just as Joseph reframed harm within divine providence, the teacher sought to guide students toward redemptive perspectives in conflicts. This theological framing gave moral authority to the teacher’s actions and strengthened students’ trust. Despite positive findings, the study identified challenges. Some students initially interpreted forgiveness as weakness or unfairness. This reflects developmental tendencies in children who often equate justice with immediate punishment (Nucci, 2016). The teacher addressed this misconception by explaining the difference between accountability and revenge. Another challenge involved external influences. Students’ experiences outside school such as family conflicts or peer culture sometimes contradicted the forgiving values promoted in class. Moral formation research acknowledges that character development is influenced by multiple social systems (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). Thus, teacher influence, though significant, operates within broader ecological contexts. Limited instructional time constrained deeper exploration of biblical narratives. The teacher expressed a desire for integrated character education across subjects, suggesting that forgiveness formation would be more effective if reinforced consistently throughout the school environment.

Theological Reflection: Genesis 45:4-5 as Pedagogical Model

Genesis 45:4-5 reveals Joseph inviting reconciliation while reframing harm within God’s salvific plan. The teacher’s approach mirrored three theological dimensions evident in the text: proximity “come near to me”, reinterpretation of harm “do not be distressed”, and redemptive purpose “God sent me before you”. These elements translated pedagogically into relational closeness, emotional reassurance, and constructive reframing. The study demonstrates that when such theological principles are embodied through socially competent teaching, students experience forgiveness as relational restoration rather than moral obligation. Forgiveness becomes not merely compliance with doctrine but participation in a reconciled community. The findings suggest several implications. First,

teacher training programs should emphasize social-emotional competence alongside theological knowledge. Second, biblical narratives should be integrated with reflective dialogue and restorative practice. Third, schools should cultivate consistent character education frameworks to reinforce forgiveness beyond the CRE classroom. Forgiveness, as observed in this study, emerges not from isolated lessons but from sustained relational engagement. Social competence functions as the medium through which theological virtues become lived realities. In SDN 071052, the CRE teacher's empathetic communication, restorative discipline, and emotional stability collectively created an environment where forgiveness was practiced, modeled, and gradually internalized. The research findings confirm that the social competence of CRE teachers plays a decisive role in nurturing forgiving attitudes among students. Through relational modeling, dialogical engagement, emotional safety, and restorative practices, forgiveness moved from biblical narrative to classroom culture. Genesis 45:4-5 served not merely as a textual reference but as a transformative pedagogical lens guiding teacher practice. The study reinforces the idea that in Christian education, moral formation is inseparable from relational competence, and forgiveness is best taught through embodied example.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SDN 071052 contributes to nurturing students' attitudes of forgiveness, grounded in the theological framework of Genesis 45:4-5. The findings demonstrate that forgiveness is most effectively cultivated not through doctrinal instruction alone, but through relational modeling, emotionally responsive teaching, and restorative classroom practices embodied by the teacher. Social competence emerges as the primary medium through which theological values are translated into lived experiences for students. The qualitative evidence reveals that when CRE teachers demonstrate empathy, patience, fairness, and constructive conflict resolution, students begin to internalize forgiveness as a relational habit rather than merely a moral command. The teacher's ability to create emotional safety within the classroom enables students to process feelings of hurt and anger openly, which is a necessary foundation for authentic forgiveness. Through reflective dialogue and restorative conversations, students learn to reinterpret conflict in ways that prioritize reconciliation over retaliation. Genesis 45:4-5 provided a powerful hermeneutical lens for understanding forgiveness as redemptive reframing. Just as Joseph invited his brothers into restored relationship and interpreted their wrongdoing within God's greater purpose, the CRE teacher at SDN 071052 guided students to see conflict not as a permanent rupture but as an opportunity for growth and restoration. This theological narrative, when integrated into classroom interactions, reinforced forgiveness as a transformative virtue grounded in grace. The study also underscores that teacher identity plays a decisive role in moral formation. Students are more likely to adopt forgiving attitudes when they perceive authenticity and consistency between what the teacher teaches and how the teacher behaves. Social competence therefore functions not only as a pedagogical skill but as moral witness. In the context of Christian education, it embodies the integration of faith and practice, demonstrating that character formation occurs through lived example. The findings also indicate that forgiveness formation faces challenges, including developmental perceptions of justice and external influences

beyond the classroom. This suggests that while CRE teachers hold significant influence, nurturing forgiveness requires collaborative reinforcement within the broader school community and family context. This research affirms that the social competence of CRE teachers is central to cultivating forgiveness in elementary classrooms. By embodying empathy, restorative dialogue, and Christ-centered relational engagement, teachers transform biblical teachings into experiential realities. Forgiveness, therefore, becomes not only a lesson derived from Scripture but a culture formed through daily interaction. Strengthening teacher social competence should thus be a strategic priority in Christian teacher education programs, as it directly shapes students' moral and spiritual development.

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