



The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Communal Values through Prayer (Genesis 35:15): A Contextual Study at SLB Negeri Pinangsori

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in cultivating communal values through prayer based on Book of Genesis 35:15 within the context of SLB Negeri Pinangsori. The school serves 16 Christian students with diverse special educational needs and is supported by 5 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. The research aims to explore how teacher social competence contributes to inclusive communal formation in a special education environment. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations of communal prayer sessions, semi-structured interviews with teachers, adaptive interviews with students, and document analysis of lesson plans and reflective journals. Thematic analysis was applied to identify patterns related to relational communication, inclusive participation, symbolic structuring of sacred space, and observable development of communal sensitivity. The findings reveal that social competence is expressed through adaptive empathy, flexible communication strategies, and intentional structuring of prayer activities to accommodate diverse abilities. By translating the theological motif of naming a sacred place into a shared classroom prayer space, the CRE teacher fostered a sense of belonging and collective identity. Students demonstrated increased cooperation, mutual assistance, and awareness of shared spiritual experience. The study concludes that social competence is a critical factor in facilitating transformative communal practices in special education settings. When grounded in biblical reflection and inclusive pedagogy, prayer becomes a formative medium for nurturing unity, dignity, and spiritual identity among students with special needs.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Communal Values

INTRODUCTION

Social competence constitutes a fundamental dimension of teacher professionalism, particularly within educational contexts that require relational sensitivity, inclusive

communication, and adaptive interaction. In Christian Religious Education (CRE), social competence acquires an additional theological dimension: the teacher is not only a facilitator of knowledge but also a relational mediator of faith values such as love, unity, and communal belonging. This responsibility becomes even more significant in special education environments, where students with diverse physical, cognitive, and socio-emotional needs require structured empathy, patience, and intentional interpersonal engagement. The present study explores the social competence of CRE teachers in cultivating communal values through prayer, grounded in Book of Genesis 35:15, within the context of SLB Negeri Pinangsori, Central Tapanuli. The school serves 16 Christian students with special educational needs and is supported by 5 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. Genesis 35:15 recounts Jacob naming the place where God spoke with him, affirming sacred encounter and covenant continuity. The verse states that Jacob "called the name of the place where God had spoken with him Bethel." This act of naming signifies communal memory, identity formation, and acknowledgment of divine presence within shared space. As Walter Brueggemann (1982) observes, the naming of sacred places in Genesis reflects theological recognition of God's active involvement in communal history. Similarly, T. Desmond Alexander (2012) highlights that patriarchal narratives reinforce covenantal identity through acts of remembrance and worship. Thus, Genesis 35:15 provides a biblical foundation for understanding how communal prayer can shape collective identity and spiritual belonging.

In special education settings, communal formation cannot be assumed; it must be intentionally cultivated. Students with hearing impairments, intellectual disabilities, autism spectrum conditions, or physical limitations may experience barriers in social interaction. Consequently, teacher social competence becomes crucial in facilitating inclusive participation. According to Daniel Goleman (2006), social intelligence encompasses empathy, attunement, and relational coordination, qualities essential for effective educational leadership. Likewise, Howard Gardner (2011) identifies interpersonal intelligence as the capacity to understand and work effectively with others, a skill indispensable in diverse learning communities. Within special needs education, these competencies must be contextualized into practical strategies that ensure every student feels valued and included. Christian educational philosophy further underscores the relational character of teaching. George R. Knight (2006) argues that Christian education is inherently redemptive and community-oriented, seeking to restore relationships between God and humanity as well as among individuals. Prayer, therefore, functions not merely as ritual but as formative practice that embodies shared dependence on God. In environments such as SLB Negeri Pinangsori, communal prayer can become a pedagogical instrument for nurturing belonging, cooperation, and mutual respect. However, its effectiveness depends significantly on the teacher's social competence, how the teacher models empathy, structures participation, and adapts communication for students with varied abilities. Research in special education emphasizes the importance of teacher attitudes and relational skills in promoting inclusive climates. Friend and Bursuck (2019) assert that positive teacher-student relationships are predictive of improved social adjustment among students with disabilities. Furthermore, inclusive pedagogical models recommend collaborative routines that allow each learner to contribute meaningfully according to capacity. When applied to CRE instruction grounded

in Genesis 35:15, such principles suggest that communal prayer should be structured to accommodate diverse communicative modalities, verbal, visual, gestural, or symbolic. Limited empirical research has examined its role specifically within Christian Religious Education in special schools. This study addresses that gap by investigating how CRE teachers at SLB Negeri Pinangsori cultivate communal values through prayer practices inspired by Genesis 35:15. The small yet cohesive population, 16 Christian students and 5 Christian teachers, provides an intimate setting for examining relational dynamics in depth. By situating biblical reflection within the lived realities of students with special needs, this research seeks to contribute to a contextual theology of education that honors both Scripture and learner diversity. Genesis 35:15 offers a theological paradigm of communal recognition of God's presence, while contemporary educational theory highlights the necessity of relational competence in inclusive settings. Integrating these perspectives, the present study explores how social competence among CRE teachers shapes communal values in a special education environment. Through this contextual inquiry, the research aims to illuminate the intersection of biblical narrative, relational pedagogy, and inclusive practice in fostering meaningful communal prayer experiences among students with special needs.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in cultivating communal values through prayer based on Book of Genesis 35:15 at SLB Negeri Pinangsori. The research focused on a bounded system consisting of 16 Christian students with special educational needs and 5 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. Purposive sampling was used, selecting participants directly involved in communal prayer activities. Data were collected over four weeks through participant observation of classroom prayer sessions, semi-structured interviews with teachers, and adaptive interviews with students using simplified language, visual prompts, and where necessary, assistance from special education facilitators to ensure accessibility. Field notes documented interaction patterns, teacher communication strategies, and student participation levels. In addition, institutional documents such as lesson plans and reflective journals were analyzed to examine how prayer activities were pedagogically structured. Data analysis followed thematic procedures: transcription, open coding, category development, and thematic synthesis. To enhance credibility, triangulation was conducted across observation, interview, and document data. Member checking was applied by discussing preliminary interpretations with participating teachers to confirm accuracy. Ethical considerations included informed consent from teachers and parents or guardians of students, assurance of confidentiality, and adaptation of research instruments to respect the dignity and communicative abilities of students with disabilities. This methodological framework allowed for an in-depth exploration of how teacher social competence operates within an inclusive Christian educational environment and how communal prayer practices grounded in Genesis 35:15 contribute to the formation of shared values.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative case study at SLB Negeri Pinangsori reveal that the social competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher plays a decisive role in cultivating communal values through prayer grounded in Book of Genesis 35:15. Within a learning community consisting of 16 Christian students with diverse special educational needs and supported by 5 Christian teachers, communal prayer was not treated as a routine liturgical formality but as a structured relational practice designed to foster belonging, mutual recognition, and spiritual identity. Thematic analysis generated four major findings: adaptive relational communication as the foundation of social competence, inclusive structuring of communal prayer participation, symbolic reinforcement of shared sacred space inspired by Genesis 35:15, and observable development of communal sensitivity among students. These findings collectively demonstrate that social competence in a special education context requires intentional empathy, flexible communication strategies, and collaborative pedagogical design. Adaptive relational communication emerged as the core expression of teacher social competence. Observational data indicated that the CRE teacher consistently modified verbal expression, tone, pacing, and body language according to the communicative needs of individual students. For students with hearing impairments, prayer instructions were accompanied by clear lip movements, simple sign language gestures, and visual cue cards displaying key words such as *"Tuhan," "bersama,"* and *"kasih."* For students with intellectual disabilities, sentences were shortened and supported with pictorial symbols to enhance comprehension. Students on the autism spectrum were given structured visual schedules indicating when prayer would begin and end, reducing anxiety related to transitions. These adaptations were not isolated technical strategies but reflected attuned empathy, a defining dimension of social competence. Interview data revealed that the teacher intentionally studied each student's behavioral patterns and emotional triggers to ensure that communal prayer would feel safe and accessible. Rather than expecting uniform participation, the teacher affirmed varied forms of engagement: silent hand gestures, nodding, holding hands, or placing a hand over the heart. Such flexibility aligns with inclusive pedagogy principles emphasizing differentiated interaction while maintaining shared purpose.

Inclusive structuring of communal prayer participation demonstrated deliberate pedagogical planning. Inspired by Genesis 35:15, where Jacob names the place Bethel to memorialize divine encounter, the teacher conceptualized prayer space as a shared "Bethel moment" within the classroom. Observations showed that before prayer, students were invited to form a semicircle, symbolizing equality and visibility. Those with mobility limitations were positioned comfortably without altering the circular arrangement, reinforcing communal inclusion. During prayer sessions, students were given opportunities to contribute brief expressions of gratitude or simple requests according to ability. One student with limited speech capacity participated by holding up a drawing representing family; another expressed prayer through a pre-taught sign for "thank you." These practices illustrate that social competence involves orchestrating interaction so that each participant contributes meaningfully, even when verbal

articulation is constrained. Interviews with other teachers confirmed that such inclusive structuring had reduced social withdrawal among certain students, particularly those previously hesitant to engage in group activities. Symbolic reinforcement of shared sacred space significantly shaped communal identity. Drawing from Genesis 35:15's emphasis on naming the place of divine encounter, the CRE teacher designated a small corner of the classroom as a "*Ruang Doa Bersama*" (Shared Prayer Space). This area included simple visual symbols, a cross, illustrated biblical scenes, and student-created artwork expressing gratitude. The act of moving to this space before prayer signified transition from ordinary activity to sacred gathering. Field notes indicate that students increasingly associated the space with calmness and attentiveness. Over time, some students independently reminded peers to maintain respectful silence when entering the area, demonstrating internalization of communal norms. This mirrors Jacob's act of naming Bethel as acknowledgment of divine presence; pedagogically, it translates sacred memory into tangible classroom practice. Importantly, the teacher clarified that God's presence is not confined to a physical corner, thereby preventing spatial reductionism while preserving symbolic function. This nuanced explanation reflects mature theological awareness integrated with educational sensitivity. Observable development of communal sensitivity among students constitutes a significant outcome. Prior to structured communal prayer practices, several students exhibited minimal peer interaction, often focusing on individual tasks. After several weeks of consistent inclusive prayer routines, teachers reported noticeable increases in cooperative behaviors. Observational evidence documented instances where students spontaneously offered assistance, for example, guiding a peer with visual impairment to the prayer circle or helping a classmate position communication cards. While causality cannot be claimed definitively within qualitative design, triangulated data suggest that communal prayer served as a relational catalyst. Interviews with students using simplified prompts revealed expressions such as "*kita bersama Tuhan*" ("we are together with God") and "*teman bantu saya doa*" ("my friend helps me pray"), indicating emerging awareness of collective identity. These statements reflect cognitive and affective integration of communal values.

The discussion of these findings highlights the interplay between theological narrative and inclusive pedagogy. Genesis 35:15 depicts Jacob marking a place where God spoke with him, thereby transforming space into communal memory. In SLB Negeri Pinangsori, the CRE teacher operationalized this motif by structuring prayer as a shared acknowledgment of divine presence. However, the effectiveness of this approach depended fundamentally on social competence, specifically, the ability to interpret students' emotional cues, manage group dynamics sensitively, and foster trust. In special education contexts, relational missteps can quickly generate anxiety or withdrawal; thus, teacher attunement is essential. The findings confirm that social competence extends beyond friendliness; it entails strategic relational facilitation grounded in awareness of disability-specific needs. The presence of 5 Christian teachers within the school contributed to a supportive relational climate. Although the CRE teacher led formal prayer sessions, other teachers modeled consistent reinforcement of communal values during daily interactions. Observations during break times showed teachers encouraging inclusive play and gently correcting exclusionary behavior. This institutional coherence amplified the impact of structured prayer practices. Social competence thus operates not only at individual level

but also within collaborative professional culture. Some students initially resisted physical proximity in the prayer circle due to sensory sensitivities. The teacher addressed this by allowing flexible spacing while maintaining visual connection, demonstrating adaptive compromise. Balancing routine with novelty required careful planning; excessive repetition risked mechanical participation, whereas excessive variation created confusion. Through reflective journaling, the teacher adjusted prayer formats periodically, introducing short songs with gestures or visual storytelling elements—to sustain engagement. These adaptive refinements further illustrate dynamic social competence.

The small student population facilitated individualized attention but also required heightened awareness of relational tensions. In such intimate settings, minor conflicts can significantly influence group atmosphere. The CRE teacher intentionally incorporated reconciliation gestures into prayer sessions, encouraging students to express forgiveness through simple signs or handshake rituals when misunderstandings occurred. This practice reinforced communal restoration consistent with Christian theological ethics. It becomes evident that cultivating communal values through prayer in a special education context demands integration of empathy, adaptability, symbolic structuring, and collaborative reinforcement. Social competence functions as the mediating capacity that translates theological narrative into inclusive communal experience. Genesis 35:15 provides the scriptural paradigm of recognizing shared sacred encounter; within SLB Negeri Pinangsori, this paradigm materializes in accessible, participatory prayer practices that honor diverse abilities. The results affirm that social competence among CRE teachers significantly shapes the quality of communal formation in special schools. When teachers demonstrate relational intelligence and inclusive intentionality, prayer becomes more than ritual, it becomes formative practice nurturing belonging, cooperation, and spiritual awareness among students with special needs. The convergence of biblical reflection and adaptive pedagogy observed in this context offers a constructive model for integrating faith-based communal formation within inclusive educational environments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SLB Negeri Pinangsori plays a central role in cultivating communal values through prayer inspired by Book of Genesis 35:15. Within a small and diverse learning community of 16 Christian students with special educational needs and 5 Christian teachers, communal prayer became an intentional pedagogical practice shaped by relational sensitivity, inclusive communication, and theological reflection. The findings demonstrate that social competence in a special education context requires adaptive empathy, flexible interaction strategies, and structured participation models that accommodate varied communicative and cognitive abilities. By translating the biblical motif of naming a sacred place into a classroom “shared prayer space,” the CRE teacher effectively fostered collective identity and spiritual belonging. Students increasingly exhibited cooperative behaviors, mutual assistance, and awareness of shared spiritual experience, indicating that communal prayer functioned as a formative relational practice

rather than a mere ritual routine. The study affirms that social competence extends beyond interpersonal warmth; it involves strategic relational facilitation grounded in awareness of disability-specific needs and collaborative reinforcement among staff members. Inclusive structuring, symbolic reinforcement, and reflective adaptation were essential elements in sustaining meaningful participation. The integration of biblical theology and inclusive pedagogy at SLB Negeri Pinangsori illustrates that communal values can be cultivated effectively when teacher social competence is intentionally developed and contextually applied. Prayer, when guided by empathetic and adaptive leadership, becomes a transformative medium for nurturing unity, dignity, and spiritual identity among students with special needs.

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