



Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Guiding Students to Know God: A Reflection on Exodus 18:9-10 - A Study at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in guiding students to know God, drawing theological reflection from Book of Exodus 18:9-10. Conducted at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso, South Nias, the research focuses on a school community consisting of 80 Christian students and three Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. The narrative of Jethro's joyful response to God's saving acts serves as a theological framework for understanding how testimony, reflection, and communal rejoicing shape knowledge of God within educational practice. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. The findings reveal that pedagogical competence is expressed through narrative-centered instruction, dialogical engagement, relational sensitivity, contextualization of biblical texts, and consistent moral modeling. Teachers intentionally connect Scripture with students' lived experiences, creating participatory learning environments that foster gratitude, reflection, and personal confession of faith. The study concludes that guiding students to know God requires integrative pedagogy that unites professional instructional skills with theological intentionality. When teachers embody relational and reflective competence, the classroom becomes a communal space of testimony and spiritual growth, echoing the pattern of Exodus 18:9-10.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, God*

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) encompasses more than instructional technique; it involves the intentional guidance of students toward an experiential and relational knowledge of God. In Christian educational philosophy, teaching is not merely cognitive transmission but spiritual formation. The biblical

narrative of Jethro in Book of Exodus 18:9-10 provides a theological lens for understanding this formative process. In this passage, Jethro rejoices after hearing of God's saving acts for Israel and responds with praise, acknowledging the Lord's deliverance. The text portrays knowledge of God as emerging from testimony, communal reflection, and joyful recognition of divine intervention. Such a dynamic suggests that educators play a mediating role in enabling learners to perceive and respond to God's works. Scholars of Old Testament theology highlight that Exodus 18 functions as a narrative of recognition and confession. Brevard S. Childs argues that Jethro's response represents an expansion of covenant awareness beyond Israel, demonstrating how testimony leads to theological acknowledgment (Childs, 1974). Similarly, Terence E. Fretheim emphasizes that knowledge of God in Exodus is relational and historical, grounded in God's saving action rather than abstract doctrine (Fretheim, 1991). These interpretations indicate that guiding learners to know God requires pedagogical strategies that connect biblical narrative with lived experience. Knowledge is not isolated information but relational awareness shaped through storytelling and reflection. This relational dimension is central. Thomas H. Groome maintains that Christian teaching integrates lived experience with the Christian story, fostering a participatory understanding of faith (Groome, 2011). George R. Knight further explains that the ultimate purpose of Christian education is the restoration of the image of God in learners, which involves guiding them toward personal knowledge of the Creator (Knight, 2006). Pedagogical competence, therefore, includes the ability to interpret Scripture faithfully, contextualize it meaningfully, and create learning environments conducive to spiritual encounter. Without such competence, religious instruction risks becoming either moralism or rote memorization.

Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's capacity to design instruction, manage classrooms, assess learning outcomes, and understand student characteristics. However, in the context of CRE, these competencies must be integrated with theological intentionality. Effective lesson planning involves not only alignment with curriculum standards but also sensitivity to spiritual growth. Classroom management must reflect Christlike patience and fairness. Assessment should consider cognitive comprehension alongside reflective engagement. In rural contexts such as SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso, South Nias, where there are 80 Christian students and three Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, the relational proximity between teachers and students amplifies the impact of pedagogical practice. Teachers often interact with students across multiple settings, increasing opportunities for spiritual influence. Exodus 18:9-10 also underscores the communal dimension of faith learning. Jethro's joy emerges from hearing testimony within a relational setting. This suggests that knowing God is facilitated through dialogue and shared reflection. Walter Brueggemann observes that Israel's faith was sustained through narrative remembrance and communal affirmation of God's acts (Brueggemann, 1997). Applying this insight to Christian education implies that teachers must cultivate dialogical classrooms where students can articulate experiences, questions, and insights. Pedagogical competence thus involves fostering participation rather than passive reception. Many discussions remain theoretical without examining lived classroom realities. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how pedagogical competence is practiced by Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso, with

particular reflection on Exodus 18:9-10. By exploring instructional strategies, classroom interactions, and student perceptions, the research aims to illuminate how biblical testimony becomes transformative knowledge within a concrete educational community. Through this investigation, the study contributes to broader conversations on faith-based pedagogy by demonstrating that guiding students to know God requires intentional, reflective, and relational teaching practices. Inspired by Jethro's joyful recognition of God's saving work, CRE teachers are called to facilitate spaces where students encounter, interpret, and respond to divine activity in their own lives.

METHODS

A qualitative case study design was used to explore the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in guiding students to know God at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso, South Nias. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to understand instructional practices, classroom interactions, and theological interpretations as lived realities rather than as quantifiable variables. The case study framework enabled an in-depth and contextually grounded examination of one school community consisting of 80 Christian students and three Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. Given the relational nature of faith formation and the central role of teacher–student interaction in religious learning, qualitative inquiry was considered most appropriate for capturing meaning, intention, and experience. Participants were selected purposively based on their direct involvement in Christian education within the school. The primary participant was the CRE teacher responsible for delivering religious instruction. Two additional Christian subject teachers were included to examine how pedagogical competence related to guiding students toward knowledge of God might extend beyond formal CRE classes. To gain a learner-centered perspective, a representative group of Christian students from upper and lower grade levels was invited to participate in interviews. This combination of teacher and student participants allowed the study to explore both instructional intention and learner perception. Data collection was conducted through semi-structured interviews, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided flexibility to explore teachers' understanding of Exodus 18:9-10, their instructional planning processes, classroom management strategies, and approaches to facilitating students' spiritual understanding. Student interviews focused on their experiences during CRE lessons, their perceptions of how teachers explain biblical narratives, and their sense of knowing God through classroom learning. Classroom observations were carried out during CRE sessions and selected general subject lessons to examine pedagogical strategies, questioning techniques, use of storytelling, student engagement patterns, and opportunities for reflection or dialogue. Detailed field notes were recorded to capture both verbal and non-verbal interactions, classroom atmosphere, and contextual dynamics. Document analysis included review of lesson plans, syllabi, assessment tools, and school vision statements to identify explicit references to spiritual objectives and alignment with pedagogical standards. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure. All interview recordings were transcribed verbatim and, together with observation notes and documents, were read repeatedly to ensure familiarity with the data. Initial open coding was conducted to identify significant statements related to

instructional design, relational teaching, narrative interpretation, dialogical engagement, and assessment of spiritual understanding. Codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories representing dimensions of pedagogical competence in guiding students to know God. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents enhanced credibility by verifying consistency of findings. Member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with selected participants to confirm accuracy and reduce misrepresentation. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from teacher participants and from parents or guardians of student participants. Participation was voluntary, and confidentiality was maintained through the use of pseudonyms and the removal of identifying details. Through this qualitative methodological framework, the study sought to provide a rich and trustworthy account of how pedagogical competence is enacted in guiding students toward relational knowledge of God within a specific rural educational context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that pedagogical competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso, South Nias, is deeply intertwined with their theological understanding of guiding students to know God as portrayed in Book of Exodus 18:9–10. Within this school community of 80 Christian students and three Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, teaching is not perceived as the mere transmission of biblical information but as a relational and reflective process that invites students to recognize and respond to God's work in history and in their own lives. The passage describing Jethro's joyful response after hearing of God's deliverance became a thematic anchor for teachers' pedagogical orientation. Teachers frequently articulated that knowing God begins with hearing, reflecting, rejoicing, and confessing, movements that closely parallel the narrative flow of Exodus 18:9-10. This interpretive framework shaped how lessons were designed, delivered, and evaluated. Rather than emphasizing memorization alone, teachers prioritized narrative understanding, dialogical participation, and reflective application, demonstrating an integrated form of pedagogical competence. One major theme that emerged from the data is narrative-centered instruction. Classroom observations showed that the CRE teacher consistently framed lessons around storytelling, emphasizing the historical acts of God before drawing moral or doctrinal conclusions. Students were encouraged to retell biblical narratives in their own words, identify emotional responses within the story, and connect those responses to personal experiences. For example, when discussing Exodus 18, the teacher highlighted Jethro's joy and gratitude, then asked students to share moments when they felt grateful for God's help in family or school situations. This method fostered active engagement and made theological knowledge experiential rather than abstract. Students reported that such storytelling made them "mengerti lebih dalam" (understand more deeply) because they could relate the biblical account to their own circumstances. This approach aligns with Christian educational theory that emphasizes the integration of lived experience with biblical narrative as essential for authentic faith formation. Pedagogical competence, therefore, manifested in the ability to translate Scripture into accessible and meaningful dialogue.

The next finding involves dialogical classroom practice. Observations revealed that the CRE teacher employed open-ended questioning rather than exclusively closed factual questions. Instead of asking only “What happened?” the teacher asked, “Why did Jethro rejoice?” and “What does it mean to rejoice because of what God has done?” Such questions encouraged interpretive thinking and spiritual reflection. Students were not passive listeners but participants in theological conversation. This dialogical atmosphere reflects the communal dimension of knowledge implied in Exodus 18:9-10, where testimony leads to shared rejoicing. In this school context, dialogue served as a pedagogical bridge between text and life. Interviews with students confirmed that they felt comfortable expressing uncertainty or asking questions about biblical stories. They described the classroom as a safe environment where they could speak without fear of ridicule. Such emotional safety is itself a product of pedagogical competence, particularly classroom management that balances order with openness. The study also identified relational sensitivity as a key dimension of pedagogical competence. The small number of Christian teachers relative to the student population creates close teacher-student relationships. Teachers reported intentionally learning about students’ family backgrounds, church involvement, and personal challenges. This relational knowledge informed lesson examples and pastoral guidance. When students faced difficulties, teachers often referenced biblical narratives of deliverance and faithfulness, connecting classroom learning to personal encouragement. Students expressed appreciation that their teachers “*peduli*” (care) about them beyond academic performance. This relational approach echoes the communal joy expressed in Exodus 18:9-10, suggesting that knowing God is nurtured within caring relationships rather than isolated instruction. Pedagogical competence in this context includes emotional intelligence and attentiveness to student development. Another significant finding concerns instructional planning and curriculum integration. Document analysis of lesson plans revealed clear learning objectives aligned with national curriculum standards, yet the CRE teacher consistently embedded spiritual goals alongside cognitive targets. For instance, objectives included not only “students can explain the story of Jethro” but also “students demonstrate gratitude for God’s help in daily life.” This dual focus illustrates an integrative pedagogical vision. Teachers recognized that knowledge of God involves both understanding and disposition. Assessments therefore included reflective writing, oral sharing, and group discussion, allowing students to articulate personal responses to Scripture. This broadened assessment strategy reflects pedagogical competence that values formative spiritual engagement alongside academic comprehension.

The findings further highlight the importance of contextualization. South Nias possesses strong communal traditions and storytelling practices. Teachers intentionally connected biblical narratives to local cultural experiences, such as communal celebrations and family gatherings, drawing parallels between Jethro’s communal rejoicing and local expressions of gratitude. This contextual bridge enhanced relevance and reinforced the idea that God’s acts are not confined to ancient Israel but continue within contemporary communities. Students responded positively to such contextualization, indicating increased interest and comprehension. Pedagogical competence thus involves cultural sensitivity and the ability to interpret Scripture within local realities. Classroom management practices also reflected theological intentionality. Observations showed

that the CRE teacher addressed misbehavior with calm explanation rather than harsh reprimand, often framing correction in terms of mutual respect as children of God. This approach modeled the relational character of divine guidance portrayed in Exodus. Students reported that discipline felt fair and instructive rather than punitive. Such consistency between teaching about God's character and demonstrating patience in practice strengthened credibility. Pedagogical competence in this sense includes the embodiment of values that support spiritual learning. Discussion of these findings indicates that pedagogical competence in guiding students to know God is multidimensional, encompassing narrative fluency, dialogical engagement, relational care, contextual awareness, and ethical consistency. The influence of Exodus 18:9-10 is evident not only in lesson content but in pedagogical structure. Teachers emulate the narrative's progression from testimony to rejoicing by facilitating similar movements within the classroom. Hearing Scripture, reflecting together, expressing gratitude, and confessing faith become recurring pedagogical rhythms. This pattern supports the idea that knowledge of God is cultivated through repeated communal practices rather than isolated cognitive events. The presence of three Christian teachers within the school contributed to a supportive environment for faith integration. Although only one serves formally as CRE teacher, the others reinforced spiritual values in their respective subjects. For example, mathematics and language lessons occasionally incorporated expressions of gratitude or references to divine order and creativity. Such reinforcement created coherence across the school day. Students perceived that faith was not confined to a single subject but woven into the broader educational fabric. This interdisciplinary collaboration enhanced the overall effectiveness of pedagogical efforts.

The findings also suggest that student agency plays a crucial role. Teachers who encouraged students to articulate personal reflections observed greater engagement and retention. Students who shared testimonies of answered prayer or family experiences expressed stronger confidence in speaking about faith publicly. This indicates that pedagogical competence includes empowering learners to become witnesses themselves, paralleling Jethro's confession of God's greatness. When students transition from passive recipients to active confessors, knowledge deepens into conviction. Teachers reported limited access to teaching resources and technological aids. However, they compensated through creativity, utilizing dramatization, drawing, and group role-play to animate biblical stories. Observations confirmed that students responded enthusiastically to such participatory methods. These strategies demonstrate adaptive competence, an essential element of effective pedagogy in resource-constrained contexts. Theological motivation appeared to sustain such creativity; teachers expressed that guiding students to know God was a sacred responsibility worth additional effort. In evaluating overall impact, student interviews indicated increased awareness of God's presence in daily life. Many students could articulate specific ways they experienced gratitude similar to Jethro's joy. While the study does not claim measurable spiritual transformation, qualitative evidence suggests that pedagogical practices fostered reflective faith awareness. Students described praying more intentionally and recognizing blessings in family and school contexts. Such responses imply that narrative-based and dialogical teaching methods effectively bridge biblical text and lived experience. Pedagogical competence at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso is characterized by intentional narrative interpretation, relational

engagement, dialogical openness, contextual sensitivity, and moral consistency. Inspired by Exodus 18:9-10, teachers guide students toward knowledge of God through communal storytelling and reflective rejoicing. The integration of professional instructional skills with theological intentionality creates a learning environment where faith is encountered rather than merely described. Within this rural South Nias context, such competence proves essential for nurturing a generation capable of recognizing and celebrating God's work in their own lives.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pedagogical competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri Lauso 078584 Lauso, South Nias, plays a vital role in guiding students to know God in a relational and experiential manner. Inspired by the theological movement in Book of Exodus 18:9-10, where testimony leads to rejoicing and confession, teachers design and implement learning processes that move beyond cognitive explanation toward reflective engagement and spiritual awareness. The findings demonstrate that effective guidance toward knowledge of God is achieved through narrative-centered instruction, dialogical classroom interaction, relational sensitivity, contextualization of biblical texts, and consistent ethical modeling. Teachers intentionally connect Scripture with students' lived experiences, creating space for reflection, gratitude, and shared testimony. This integrative approach strengthens both understanding and personal response, allowing biblical knowledge to become meaningful and transformative. The presence of three Christian teachers within the school community fosters a collaborative spiritual environment in which faith values are reinforced across subjects and daily interactions. Pedagogical competence in this context is not limited to lesson planning and classroom management but includes the capacity to nurture safe, participatory spaces where students can articulate their faith journeys. Guiding students to know God requires more than doctrinal accuracy; it demands relationally grounded, contextually sensitive, and spiritually intentional pedagogy. When teachers embody such competence, the classroom becomes a communal space of testimony and rejoicing, echoing the pattern of Exodus 18:9-10 and enabling students to recognize and respond to God's work in their own lives.

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