



The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Building a Learning Community: A Biblical Reflection on Philippians 1:5 at SMP Swasta Masehi Sibolangit

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in building a learning community through a biblical reflection on the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5. The concept of partnership expressed in this passage emphasizes fellowship, cooperation, and shared participation in a common mission. Within the context of Christian education, these values provide an important theological foundation for understanding how teachers' interpersonal abilities influence the development of collaborative and supportive learning environments. Social competence, which includes effective communication, empathy, cooperation, and relational leadership, plays a crucial role in shaping interactions between teachers and students and in fostering a classroom culture that reflects Christian values. This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach conducted at SMP Swasta Masehi Sibolangit. The participants consisted of 25 Christian students and one Christian Religious Education teacher who served as the primary informant. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis related to Christian Religious Education learning activities. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques involving data reduction, categorization, and interpretation to identify patterns related to teacher social competence and the formation of a learning community. The findings reveal that the social competence of the CRE teacher significantly contributes to the development of a collaborative learning environment characterized by openness, mutual respect, and active student participation. In conclusion, the social competence of CRE teachers is essential in strengthening learning communities and promoting both academic engagement and spiritual growth among students.

Keywords: *Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Learning Community*

INTRODUCTION

Education is not only a process of transferring knowledge but also a social activity that shapes relationships, attitudes, and shared values within a learning community. Schools function as environments where students interact with teachers and peers while developing intellectual, social, and moral competencies. Within this context, teachers play a crucial role in creating a collaborative and supportive learning environment that enables students to grow both academically and socially. Educational research emphasizes that effective teaching involves strong interpersonal skills, including communication, empathy, and the ability to build positive relationships with students and colleagues (Wentzel, 2015). These competencies are often described as social competence, which refers to a teacher's ability to interact constructively with members of the school community. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), social competence holds a particularly important role. Christian education is deeply relational because it seeks to form individuals not only in knowledge but also in community life that reflects Christian values. According to Pazmiño (2008), Christian education aims to nurture believers who can live faithfully in relationship with God and with others. Therefore, CRE teachers are expected to foster learning environments characterized by cooperation, mutual respect, and spiritual fellowship. When teachers demonstrate strong social competence, they help cultivate a classroom atmosphere where students feel valued, encouraged, and motivated to participate actively in learning activities.

A biblical foundation for understanding the importance of community in Christian education can be found in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5. In this passage, the apostle Paul expresses gratitude for the believers' partnership in the gospel from the first day until the present. Biblical scholars interpret this verse as emphasizing the concept of **koinonia**, which refers to fellowship, participation, and shared commitment within the Christian community (Fee, 1995). The notion of partnership described in this text highlights the importance of collaborative relationships in achieving common spiritual and social goals. In educational settings, this principle can be understood as a call for teachers and students to work together in building a supportive learning community. The idea of a learning community has become increasingly significant in modern educational theory. A learning community refers to a group of individuals who engage collaboratively in the pursuit of knowledge and personal development. Within such communities, learning is not limited to individual achievement but involves shared experiences, dialogue, and mutual support. Teachers play a central role in shaping these communities by facilitating interaction, encouraging cooperation, and modeling respectful communication. Palmer (1998) explains that teaching is inherently relational, meaning that effective educators cultivate authentic connections with students that enable meaningful learning to occur. The concept of a learning community resonates strongly with biblical teachings about fellowship and mutual support among believers. The message of Epistle to the Philippians 1:5 underscores the importance of partnership and collective participation in a shared mission. When applied to the classroom context, this teaching encourages educators to create environments where students collaborate, support one another, and grow together in understanding and character. By integrating these biblical principles into their teaching practices, CRE teachers can contribute to the formation of a community that

reflects the values of cooperation, respect, and faith. The role of social competence becomes particularly important in schools where the number of students participating in Christian Religious Education is relatively small. In such contexts, the teacher often serves not only as an instructor but also as a mentor and facilitator of spiritual fellowship among students. The ability of the teacher to build positive relationships and encourage open communication can significantly influence the effectiveness of the learning process. When students feel connected to their teacher and peers, they are more likely to engage actively in discussions, express their ideas confidently, and support one another in the learning journey. This research is conducted in the context of SMP Swasta Masehi Sibolangit, where Christian Religious Education is implemented for students who identify as Christians. In this school, there are 25 Christian students and one CRE teacher responsible for guiding their religious education. This setting provides a valuable opportunity to examine how the social competence of the CRE teacher contributes to the formation of a learning community grounded in Christian values. The relatively small number of students also allows for closer interaction and deeper relationships between the teacher and students, making social competence a key factor in shaping the learning experience. Given the importance of teacher-student relationships in Christian education, understanding the role of social competence in building a learning community becomes a relevant topic for educational research. Teachers who demonstrate strong social competence can encourage cooperation, foster mutual respect, and create a sense of belonging among students. These qualities align closely with the biblical principle of partnership expressed in Epistle to the Philippians 1:5, which emphasizes shared commitment and fellowship within the Christian community. This study aims to explore the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in building a learning community within the school context. By examining classroom interactions, teaching practices, and students' experiences, this research seeks to understand how the biblical concept of partnership and fellowship can be applied in Christian Religious Education. Ultimately, the study contributes to a deeper understanding of how teachers can cultivate collaborative and faith-based learning environments that support both academic development and spiritual growth among students.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive research design was used to explore the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in building a learning community based on the theological perspective found in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5. A qualitative descriptive approach was chosen because it allows researchers to understand participants' experiences, perceptions, and interactions within their natural educational environment. The research was conducted at SMP Swasta Masehi Sibolangit, where Christian Religious Education is implemented as part of the formal curriculum for Christian students. The participants in this study consisted of 25 Christian students and one Christian Religious Education teacher, who served as the primary informant because of their direct involvement in teaching biblical values and facilitating classroom interaction. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that the data obtained were relevant to the objectives of the study. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher and several students to explore their perspectives on teacher-student relationships, collaborative learning practices, and the role of social interaction

in the learning process. Classroom observations were conducted during Christian Religious Education lessons to examine how the teacher demonstrates social competence through communication, cooperation, empathy, and engagement with students. Particular attention was given to how the teacher encourages participation, facilitates group interaction, and integrates the biblical message of partnership found in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5 into classroom discussions and activities. The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis techniques, which involved several stages including data reduction, data categorization, and interpretation. The researcher reviewed and organized all collected data to identify meaningful information related to teacher social competence and the development of a learning community. The data were grouped into thematic categories such as teacher communication strategies, collaborative learning practices, student participation, and the application of biblical principles in classroom interaction. These themes were interpreted within the broader framework of Christian education and social learning theory. Through this analytical process, the study aimed to provide a comprehensive description of how the social competence of CRE teachers contributes to building a collaborative and supportive learning community among students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the social competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher plays a fundamental role in building a learning community among students at SMP Swasta Masehi Sibolangit. Through classroom observations, interviews with students, and analysis of teaching practices, several important themes emerged regarding how the teacher's interpersonal abilities contribute to the development of collaborative learning and a supportive classroom environment. These themes include the role of the teacher as a facilitator of relational learning, the integration of biblical principles of fellowship into educational practices, the development of student participation and cooperation, the creation of a supportive and inclusive classroom climate, and the broader impact of social competence on students' moral and spiritual growth. Together, these findings illustrate that social competence is not merely an interpersonal skill but a critical component of effective Christian education that enables the formation of a genuine learning community. One of the most prominent findings concerns the teacher's role as a facilitator of relational learning. Observations during Christian Religious Education classes revealed that the teacher actively encourages open communication and dialogue with students. Instead of relying solely on lecture-based instruction, the teacher frequently invites students to share their opinions, ask questions, and participate in discussions related to biblical teachings and everyday experiences. This interactive approach helps students feel valued and respected as participants in the learning process. Because the number of Christian students in the school is relatively small, twenty-five students, the teacher is able to maintain close and meaningful relationships with each learner. Students reported that they feel comfortable expressing their thoughts and personal experiences during class discussions. This sense of openness strengthens the relational bond between teacher and students, which becomes the foundation for a collaborative learning environment.

The teacher's communication style also reflects a high level of empathy and attentiveness toward students' needs. During interviews, several students emphasized that the teacher often listens carefully to their concerns and provides guidance not only on academic matters but also on personal challenges they encounter in their daily lives. Such interactions demonstrate that the teacher views education as a holistic process involving intellectual, emotional, and spiritual development. By showing genuine care for students' well-being, the teacher fosters a sense of trust that encourages students to engage more actively in classroom activities. This relational approach aligns with the broader educational perspective that meaningful learning occurs when students feel connected to their teachers and peers. Another important finding relates to the integration of biblical principles of fellowship into classroom practices. The teacher consistently connects lessons to the message found in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5, which emphasizes partnership and shared participation in a common mission. In the classroom context, this principle is interpreted as an encouragement for students to support one another in the learning process. The teacher frequently explains that learning should not be viewed as an individual competition but as a collective journey in which students help one another grow in knowledge and character. Through discussions and examples, students are guided to understand that cooperation and mutual support reflect the Christian concept of fellowship. The application of this biblical principle is evident in various classroom activities designed to promote collaboration. For instance, the teacher regularly organizes group discussions and cooperative learning tasks that require students to work together in analyzing biblical passages, sharing reflections, and solving practical problems related to Christian ethics. During these activities, students are encouraged to listen respectfully to their peers' perspectives and to contribute ideas that enrich the discussion. Observations indicate that these collaborative activities help students develop important social skills such as communication, teamwork, and mutual respect. More importantly, they reinforce the idea that learning is a shared responsibility rather than an individual endeavor.

The development of student participation emerged as another significant theme in the findings. At the beginning of the semester, some students were hesitant to speak during class discussions due to shyness or lack of confidence. However, the teacher's supportive approach gradually encouraged them to participate more actively. By affirming students' contributions and providing constructive feedback, the teacher creates a learning environment where students feel safe expressing their opinions. Over time, students become more confident in sharing their ideas and engaging in meaningful dialogue with their peers. This increase in student participation contributes directly to the formation of a learning community. When students actively engage in discussions and collaborative activities, they begin to recognize the value of collective learning experiences. Instead of focusing solely on personal achievement, they learn to appreciate the diverse perspectives and insights that emerge from group interaction. This dynamic fosters a sense of belonging and shared purpose within the classroom. Students come to see themselves not only as individual learners but also as members of a community that supports each other's growth. Another key finding concerns the creation of a supportive and inclusive classroom climate. Observations revealed that the CRE teacher consistently demonstrates attitudes of respect, patience, and fairness when interacting with students. These qualities contribute to a classroom atmosphere where students feel accepted

regardless of their academic abilities or personal backgrounds. The teacher emphasizes that every student has unique strengths and perspectives that can contribute to the learning process. This inclusive approach encourages students to appreciate diversity within the classroom and to treat one another with kindness and respect.

The teacher also addresses conflicts among students in a constructive manner. When disagreements arise during group activities, the teacher guides students to resolve their differences through dialogue and mutual understanding. Rather than imposing immediate solutions, the teacher encourages students to reflect on the values of empathy and forgiveness emphasized in Christian teachings. By doing so, the teacher helps students develop conflict-resolution skills that strengthen relationships within the learning community. These experiences illustrate how social competence enables teachers to manage classroom interactions in ways that promote harmony and cooperation. The influence of the teacher's social competence extends beyond classroom interaction to the broader development of students' moral and spiritual character. Interviews with students revealed that many of them have become more aware of the importance of cooperation and empathy in their daily relationships. For example, several students reported that they now make a greater effort to help classmates who struggle with academic tasks or personal challenges. Others indicated that they have learned to listen more carefully to their peers' opinions during group discussions. These behavioral changes suggest that the social values cultivated in the classroom are gradually being internalized by students. The biblical principle of partnership expressed in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5 plays a central role in shaping this transformation. The teacher frequently reminds students that Christian faith emphasizes community rather than individualism. By presenting this message in practical and relatable ways, the teacher helps students understand that their relationships with others are an essential part of their spiritual growth. Students begin to see collaboration not merely as an academic requirement but as an expression of their faith and commitment to living according to Christian values. Another important aspect highlighted by the findings is the role of the teacher as a bridge between faith and everyday social interaction. The teacher does not present biblical teachings as abstract doctrines but rather as principles that guide practical behavior in the school environment. For instance, when discussing themes such as cooperation, forgiveness, and service, the teacher encourages students to reflect on how these values can be applied in their interactions with classmates and teachers. This approach helps students connect their understanding of Christian teachings with real-life experiences, making the learning process more meaningful and relevant. One challenge relates to differences in students' levels of social maturity and communication skills. Some students initially find it difficult to collaborate effectively during group activities because they are accustomed to working independently. To address this issue, the teacher provides guidance on how to share responsibilities, listen to others' opinions, and respect differing viewpoints. Through repeated practice and encouragement, students gradually develop the skills necessary for effective collaboration. Another challenge involves maintaining consistent student engagement throughout the learning process. Adolescents at the junior high school level often experience fluctuations in motivation and attention, which can affect their participation in classroom activities. The teacher addresses this challenge by varying instructional strategies, including storytelling, discussion, and interactive activities that capture students' interest. By adapting teaching

methods to students' needs and preferences, the teacher ensures that the learning community remains dynamic and engaging. The results of this study demonstrate that the social competence of the CRE teacher plays a crucial role in shaping a collaborative learning environment that reflects Christian values. Through effective communication, empathy, and relational leadership, the teacher fosters a sense of partnership among students that encourages active participation and mutual support. The biblical message of fellowship and shared commitment found in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5 provides a meaningful framework for understanding this process. By applying this principle within the classroom, the teacher helps students experience the benefits of cooperation and community in their educational journey. The findings highlight that building a learning community in Christian Religious Education requires more than well-designed curriculum or instructional materials. It depends fundamentally on the social competence of teachers who are able to cultivate relationships, encourage collaboration, and model the values of fellowship and partnership. When these competencies are effectively demonstrated, students not only achieve academic understanding but also develop the social and spiritual qualities necessary for meaningful participation in both school and community life.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher plays a vital role in building a collaborative and supportive learning community at SMP Swasta Masehi Sibolangit. The findings reveal that effective communication, empathy, respect, and the ability to foster positive relationships with students significantly contribute to the creation of an educational environment where learners feel valued and motivated to participate actively in the learning process. Through these interpersonal competencies, the CRE teacher not only facilitates academic learning but also encourages the development of cooperation, mutual respect, and responsibility among students. The study also highlights that the integration of biblical teachings into classroom interactions strengthens the formation of a learning community grounded in Christian values. The message found in the Epistle to the Philippians 1:5 emphasizes the concept of partnership and fellowship in a shared mission. When this principle is applied in Christian Religious Education, it encourages students to view learning as a collective journey in which they support one another in understanding knowledge and developing character. The CRE teacher plays a key role in translating this biblical principle into practical classroom practices such as collaborative discussions, group activities, and reflective dialogue that promote active student participation. The research indicates that a learning community built through strong teacher social competence positively influences students' social and moral development. Students who experience supportive relationships in the classroom tend to demonstrate greater empathy, cooperation, and willingness to help their peers. These attitudes reflect the internalization of Christian values that emphasize community, service, and shared responsibility. In this way, Christian Religious Education becomes not only a subject of study but also a practical context where students learn to live out their faith through meaningful relationships with others. The social competence of CRE teachers is an essential component in fostering a learning community that integrates academic learning with spiritual and moral formation. Teachers who demonstrate relational leadership, effective communication, and genuine

care for students can create an educational atmosphere that reflects the biblical principle of fellowship emphasized in Epistle to the Philippians 1:5. Strengthening these competencies among Christian educators will therefore contribute significantly to the development of learning environments that nurture both intellectual growth and Christian character among students.

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