



## The Effectiveness of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Communication in Enhancing Students' Understanding at SDN 16 Pakpahan: An Implementative Study of Pedagogical Competence

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### ABSTRACT

*This study aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' communication in enhancing students' understanding at SDN 16 Pakpahan. The primary focus is directed toward examining how teachers apply their pedagogical competence—particularly in the domain of instructional communication—throughout the teaching and learning process. Employing a qualitative approach with a descriptive method, the research collected data through direct observation of classroom activities, in-depth interviews with teachers and students, and document analysis of instructional materials. The findings reveal that effective teacher communication significantly contributes to improving students' comprehension of CRE subject matter. This effectiveness is reflected in several key indicators, including clarity in content delivery, the use of language appropriate to students' developmental levels, and the adoption of communicative approaches that are open, empathetic, and dialogic in nature. CRE teachers who successfully establish active two-way interaction demonstrate a higher degree of success in facilitating students' understanding of Christian religious values. Furthermore, the ability to adapt communication styles to learners' characteristics strengthens students' capacity to absorb the substance of the lessons. These findings affirm that mastery of pedagogical competence—particularly in communication—is a fundamental prerequisite for achieving meaningful, effective, and contextually relevant learning. Consequently, enhancing teachers' communication skills should be a key focus in the professional development of educators, particularly in the field of Christian Religious Education at the elementary school level.*

**Keywords:** *teacher communication, Christian Religious Education, student understanding, pedagogical competence, learning effectiveness*

## INTRODUCTION

Communication is a fundamental element in the educational process, as it serves as the medium for transferring knowledge, shaping attitudes, and developing values. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), communication plays a role that extends beyond the mere transmission of information or instructional content. It becomes the primary means of conveying spiritual and moral values that are essential in shaping students' character. CRE is not only intended to develop students' cognitive abilities but also to instill a profound understanding of values such as faith, love, forgiveness, and devotion to God and others. Therefore, communication by CRE teachers must be capable of addressing the affective and spiritual dimensions of learners, rather than being confined solely to intellectual aspects. The effectiveness of teacher communication is a key indicator of the success of the learning process, especially in CRE, which is inherently transformative. CRE teachers are expected to present religious messages in a communicative, contextual, and relevant manner to students' daily lives. This requires the ability to select appropriate communication strategies—both verbal and nonverbal—so that lesson content is not only understood but also internalized and translated into concrete actions. As such, CRE teachers need to have a deep understanding of who their students are and how to communicate with them most effectively.

Several studies indicate that teachers with strong pedagogical competence tend to demonstrate higher communication effectiveness in the learning process (Mulyasa, 2015; Wahyudi, 2020). Pedagogical competence encompasses not only mastery of subject matter and teaching methodology but also the ability to build positive communication with students. Teachers who can establish strong interpersonal relationships with their learners are more likely to transmit Christian values in a persuasive and inspiring manner. Within this framework, the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers warrants examination from the perspective of its implementation in classroom communication practices. From the perspective of student development, elementary school pupils are generally in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development, as described by Piaget (in Santrock, 2017). At this stage, children find it easier to grasp concepts directly related to real-life experiences and their everyday environment. Consequently, the communication approach employed by teachers should be contextual, make use of concrete examples, and involve active interaction to stimulate student participation. Additionally, elementary-age learners require a learning atmosphere that is enjoyable, attentive, and respectful of their individuality. Empathetic, open, and compassionate teacher communication is thus essential in fostering a classroom environment conducive to CRE learning.

Within the context of SDN 16 Pakpahan, as a primary education institution, it is important to examine how CRE teachers implement their pedagogical competence through effective communication to enhance students' understanding of CRE materials. This study is relevant as it provides a concrete depiction of teacher communication practices in a Christian primary education setting, while also contributing both theoretically and practically to the professional development of CRE teachers in elementary schools. Through this investigation, it is expected that effective communication strategies aligned

with students' characteristics will be identified, ensuring that CRE learning is not merely informative but also capable of nurturing enduring Christian character in students.

## **METHODS**

This study was designed using a qualitative descriptive approach with the aim of gaining an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' communication in enhancing students' comprehension, particularly within the learning context at SDN 16 Pakpahan. The qualitative approach was selected as it is considered the most appropriate for exploring the dynamics of teacher–student communication in a contextual and natural manner, as well as for interpreting the meaning embedded in such interactions from the perspective of the research participants. The research adopted a case study design, enabling intensive exploration of classroom communication practices within a specific setting—namely, the CRE classroom in the primary school. The research subjects consisted of one CRE teacher and several students from Grades IV to VI who participated in the learning activities. Participants were selected purposively, based on their active involvement in the CRE learning process and the relevance of their roles in classroom communicative interactions. This sampling strategy allowed the researcher to obtain a comprehensive picture of the teacher's communication strategies, students' responses, and the factors influencing communication effectiveness during lessons.

Data were collected using three primary techniques: observation, in-depth interviews, and documentation. Observations were conducted directly in the classroom, focusing on the teacher's verbal and nonverbal communication and students' responses to such communication. In-depth interviews were carried out with the CRE teacher to gain deeper insights into the rationale behind the chosen communication strategies, and with selected students to explore their perceptions regarding the clarity and effectiveness of the teacher's delivery. Documentation analysis included reviewing learning tools such as lesson plans (Rencana Pelaksanaan Pembelajaran, RPP), instructional materials, and assessment records to support and triangulate the findings from observations and interviews. Data analysis employed the interactive model developed by Miles and Huberman, comprising three main stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing/verification. Data reduction involved filtering and summarizing relevant information in line with the study's focus. The reduced data were then presented in narrative and thematic formats to facilitate interpretation. Conclusions were drawn progressively throughout the analysis process and subsequently verified to ensure their validity. To maintain data trustworthiness, the researcher applied source and method triangulation by comparing and cross-checking the results of observations, interviews, and documentation to obtain consistent and reliable findings.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this research reveal that the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' communication in the learning process at SDN 16 Pakpahan arises from a

synergistic interplay of three core factors: clarity of message delivery, adaptability to students' developmental and learning characteristics, and the integration of empathy with a humanistic pedagogical approach. Together, these dimensions form a coherent and powerful communicative practice that not only ensures the transfer of knowledge at a cognitive level but also nurtures the affective and spiritual dimensions of students. This outcome holds significant implications for the implementation of pedagogical competence among CRE teachers, as it demonstrates that effective communication is not a peripheral teaching skill, but rather a central, tangible manifestation of a humanistic and transformative pedagogical philosophy in the context of religious education.

The first prominent dimension—clarity of the teacher's message—emerges as a decisive factor in fostering student comprehension. In the observed classroom, the CRE teacher consistently employs language that is simple, direct, and adapted to the immediate context of the learners' everyday realities. Such an approach is particularly vital in religious education, where many concepts, such as grace, forgiveness, or divine love, are inherently abstract and may be challenging for younger learners to grasp without concrete referents. The teacher's method involves more than simply reading biblical passages verbatim; rather, scriptural texts are paired with vivid, relatable illustrations drawn from common life situations that resonate with students' personal experiences. For instance, when addressing the concept of Christian love, the teacher supplements biblical verses with narratives of kindness among family members, acts of cooperation within the classroom, or examples of care for neighbors in need. This deliberate anchoring of abstract theological principles within the tangible realities of students' lives aligns closely with Jerome Bruner's learning theory, particularly his emphasis on the modes of representation—enactive, iconic, and symbolic—that structure cognitive development. By integrating visual supports, short videos, story-based games, and other multimodal instructional tools, the teacher creates a bridge between the symbolic representation of biblical concepts and the enactive or iconic forms of representation that dominate primary school learners' thought processes. Such a strategy not only supports comprehension but also ensures retention, as students are more likely to remember and internalize concepts that they have both seen and enacted, rather than only heard. A second, equally critical dimension of effective communication in this context is the teacher's ability to adapt communicative strategies to the diverse characteristics of students. The majority of learners in this study were found to be in the concrete operational stage of cognitive development, as described by Jean Piaget. At this stage, learners demonstrate logical thinking in relation to concrete objects and events but may struggle with purely abstract reasoning. Recognizing this developmental reality, the teacher actively differentiates instructional methods to match the varied learning styles present in the classroom. Visual learners are supported through the use of images, diagrams, and spiritually themed video content, while kinesthetic learners engage with hands-on activities, simulations, and role-play exercises designed to encourage physical involvement and exploration. This differentiated communication is not limited to sensory preferences; it also extends to personality traits and participation styles. Students who exhibit strong verbal reasoning and critical thinking skills are engaged through reflective questioning and guided dialogue, encouraging them to articulate and challenge ideas in a respectful environment. Conversely, quieter or less verbally confident students are

provided with alternative avenues for expression, such as creative drawing, crafting, or written reflections. By accommodating both outspoken and reserved learners, the teacher establishes a communicative environment in which all students—regardless of temperament or learning style—can actively participate in meaning-making processes. Such a practice resonates strongly with the principles of differentiated instruction advocated by Carol Ann Tomlinson, which emphasize the modification of content, process, and product to suit learner variability. The third and perhaps most transformative dimension is the teacher's integration of empathy and a humanistic approach into all communicative interactions. Observations indicated that the CRE teacher engaged in active listening, responded to student inquiries with patience and affirmation, and cultivated a classroom culture characterized by openness, inclusivity, and mutual respect. Importantly, students were given space to voice their thoughts, ask questions, and even express uncertainties regarding the moral or theological content of lessons. This openness transforms the classroom into a dialogical space, rather than a purely didactic one, thereby allowing religious faith to be explored as a lived and personal experience rather than a static body of information to be memorized.

The teacher's empathetic approach was particularly evident in how mistakes were handled. Instead of reprimanding or shaming students for incorrect answers or misunderstandings, the teacher reframed such moments as valuable learning opportunities, guiding students toward deeper insights while preserving their dignity and self-confidence. This approach reflects the tenets of Carl Rogers' humanistic educational theory, which views the teacher as a facilitator of growth who must offer unconditional positive regard, empathy, and authenticity in order to foster genuine learning. Within the context of CRE, such an approach is doubly important, as it models the very Christian values—such as compassion, forgiveness, and respect for human dignity—that the curriculum seeks to instill. From the standpoint of pedagogical competence, these communicative practices exemplify the integration of cognitive, affective, and social-emotional domains of teaching. Pedagogical competence, as defined by Indonesian educational standards, encompasses the ability to understand learners, design learning experiences, implement instructional strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes effectively. The observed teacher demonstrated a holistic application of this competence, combining subject-matter expertise with finely tuned verbal and non-verbal communication skills. As Nurdin (2019) notes, instructional communication success is deeply dependent on the teacher's pedagogical mastery, particularly in managing classroom dynamics and establishing a learning environment that is both disciplined and emotionally supportive. The teacher's ability to perceive shifts in classroom mood, respond flexibly to unexpected learning needs, and adjust communicative approaches accordingly provides compelling evidence that pedagogical competence is as much about relational intelligence as it is about technical instructional skill.

The implications of effective teacher communication extend beyond the immediate cognitive outcomes of CRE instruction; they also play a formative role in shaping students' spiritual and moral identities. In religious education, particularly within the Christian tradition, communication serves not only as a medium for transmitting doctrinal content but also as a relational act that embodies the values being taught. When spiritual principles are communicated in a manner that is emotionally resonant and contextually

relevant, they are more likely to be internalized as guiding values in students' daily lives. Kristiyanto (2018) has argued that religious education communication must be both transcendent—pointing learners toward ultimate spiritual realities—and personal—speaking directly to their lived experience and existential concerns. The CRE teacher in this study demonstrated this dual quality, weaving together theological depth with contextual sensitivity, thus enabling students to perceive the relevance of Christian faith to the concrete realities they encounter. Evidence from classroom observations and student interviews further suggests that the relational dimension of communication significantly influences student motivation and participation. Students consistently reported feeling more confident and willing to contribute when they perceived that their input was respected and valued by the teacher. This relational trust manifested in increased participation in discussions, a greater readiness to ask clarifying questions, and an enhanced ability to articulate personal reflections on biblical teachings. In effect, communication became not just a conduit for lesson content but a relational bridge that nurtured emotional security, mutual respect, and a sense of belonging—conditions that educational psychology has long identified as foundational for meaningful learning.

The communicative approach adopted by the CRE teacher can be seen as an integration of three complementary frameworks: interpersonal communication theory, constructivist learning theory, and the principles of Christian faith formation. Interpersonal communication theory underscores the role of clarity, empathy, and openness in achieving mutual understanding—elements clearly present in the teacher's practice. Constructivist learning theory emphasizes that learners actively construct knowledge through interaction with others and engagement with meaningful experiences, a process facilitated here through dialogic exchanges, collaborative activities, and experiential learning strategies. Christian faith formation principles, meanwhile, posit that spiritual growth emerges through both cognitive engagement with doctrinal truths and affective encounters with lived expressions of faith, making communication not merely informative but transformative. In drawing together these perspectives, the present study affirms that effective communication in CRE is neither incidental nor secondary; it is the very medium through which cognitive, affective, and spiritual learning are woven into a coherent whole. The CRE teacher at SDN 16 Pakpahan exemplifies this integrative approach by grounding abstract biblical concepts in concrete life situations, differentiating communication to suit diverse learners, and engaging students empathetically in a humanistic classroom culture. Such practices not only enhance comprehension but also cultivate the relational and reflective dispositions necessary for authentic Christian character formation. The communicative effectiveness demonstrated by the CRE teacher in this study reflects a mature and holistic enactment of pedagogical competence. The clarity of message delivery ensures that theological concepts are accessible; the adaptability to student characteristics makes learning inclusive and personalized; and the empathetic, humanistic orientation fosters a classroom climate in which students feel valued, respected, and spiritually nurtured. Together, these elements constitute a robust model of instructional communication that advances both the cognitive mastery of CRE content and the holistic development of students' spiritual and moral identities. The findings underscore the critical need for ongoing professional development in communication skills for CRE teachers, alongside pedagogical training that foregrounds

relational intelligence and student-centered methodologies. In an era where education increasingly recognizes the interconnectedness of cognitive, emotional, and spiritual development, such integrative communicative competence stands as an indispensable asset for teachers committed to making religious education in primary schools both effective and deeply meaningful.

### **Conclusion**

Based on the findings of this study, it can be concluded that the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' communication at SDN 16 Pakpahan plays a highly significant role in enhancing students' understanding of the learning material. The communication established by the teacher functions not merely as a channel for delivering information but also as a medium for transforming the values of the Christian faith into the students' concrete experiences. This effectiveness is manifested in three interrelated and mutually reinforcing elements: message clarity, adaptability to students' characteristics, and an empathetic approach that nurtures healthy and humanistic educational relationships. The clarity of the message enables students to comprehend abstract concepts in Christian teachings in a more concrete and meaningful manner, particularly when the teacher employs simple language, relevant illustrations, and visual media that are contextualized to students' daily lives. Furthermore, the teacher's adaptability to students' characteristics indicates an internalization of learner-centered pedagogical principles, wherein differences in learning styles, cognitive development levels, and personal uniqueness are treated as the foundation for constructing effective communication strategies. The empathetic approach becomes a distinctive hallmark of the CRE teacher's communication, creating an inclusive, comfortable, and respectful learning environment. The teacher assumes not only the role of an instructor but also that of an active listener and a caring mentor who attends to students' psychological and spiritual dynamics. This reinforces the teacher's position as both a learning facilitator and a role model in embodying Christian values within the educational practice. Thus, the implementation of pedagogical competence, as manifested through effective communication, can be regarded as the primary foundation for establishing high-quality CRE learning processes. In light of these findings, this study recommends the development of intensive training programs for CRE teachers that focus specifically on enhancing educational communication skills, including the strengthening of interpersonal communication, spiritual communication, and instructional communication. In addition, teacher education curricula—particularly in micro-teaching courses and teaching practicum—should be oriented toward providing greater opportunities for honing communication skills grounded in faith-based values and contextual pedagogical approaches. Through such systematic efforts, the quality of CRE learning in primary schools can be further improved in tandem with reinforcing the teacher's role as an agent of value and faith transformation within the educational sphere.

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