DIDAKTIKA PEDAGOGIA
Journal of Education and Religion

Integration of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Professional Competence with the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1:28) of Students at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli – Labuhan Batu Utara Regency

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the integration of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' professional competence with the cultural mandate as articulated in Genesis 1:28 among students at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli, Labuhan Batu Utara Regency. The cultural mandate, which encompasses stewardship, creativity, and dominion over creation, serves as a theological framework for character formation and ecological responsibility. This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach with data collection through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving three CRE teachers and 45 students. The findings reveal that teachers' professional competence significantly influences the implementation of cultural mandate principles through pedagogical strategies, contextual learning approaches, and character integration in daily instruction. Teachers demonstrated competence in theological understanding, pedagogical skills, and contextual application, although challenges emerged in resource limitations and curriculum standardization. The integration manifested through environmental care projects, creative learning activities, and responsible stewardship practices. This study concludes that professional competence in CRE teaching is essential for translating biblical mandates into practical educational outcomes, contributing to holistic student development that balances spiritual formation with environmental and social responsibility.

Keywords: *professional competence, cultural mandate, Genesis 1:28*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesian elementary schools serves a dual purpose: nurturing spiritual formation and developing character aligned with national educational goals (Kemendikbud, 2016). Within this framework, the biblical concept of the cultural mandate from Genesis 1:28-*"Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it"*- provides a theological foundation for understanding humanity's relationship with creation and responsibility toward stewardship (Van Brummelen, 2009). This mandate

Received June 30, 2025; Revised July 17, 2025; Accepted July 31, 2025

encompasses not merely ecological concerns but extends to cultural engagement, creative expression, and ethical governance of resources. SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli, located in Labuhan Batu Utara Regency, represents a context where Christian students constitute a significant portion of the school population. The challenge for CRE teachers lies in effectively integrating professional competence with theological principles to produce meaningful educational outcomes. Professional competence, as defined by Indonesian teaching standards, includes pedagogical, personality, social, and professional dimensions (Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional No. 16, 2007). The specific application of these competencies within the framework of biblical mandates remains underexplored in educational research. The cultural mandate provides a comprehensive worldview that addresses contemporary challenges including environmental degradation, consumerism, and disconnection from creation. For elementary students, understanding this mandate through structured religious education can foster early development of stewardship ethics, creative potential, and responsible citizenship. Yet, the effectiveness of such integration depends substantially on teachers' professional capacity to translate theological concepts into age-appropriate, contextually relevant learning experiences. Previous studies have examined teacher competence in religious education (Mardiah & Syarifuddin, 2019) and environmental education in Christian contexts (Harris, 2004), but few have specifically addressed the intersection of professional teaching competence with the cultural mandate in Indonesian primary schools. This gap is particularly significant given Indonesia's diverse religious educational landscape and the increasing emphasis on character education within national curricula (Puspitasari, 2020). This research aims to investigate how CRE teachers at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli integrate their professional competence with cultural mandate principles in teaching practice. Specific objectives include: (1) analyzing the professional competence levels of CRE teachers in relation to cultural mandate pedagogy; (2) examining instructional strategies employed to implement cultural mandate principles; and (3) identifying challenges and opportunities in integrating professional competence with biblical stewardship education. Understanding this integration is crucial for several reasons. First, it contributes to the broader discourse on religious education's role in character formation and environmental ethics. Second, it provides practical insights for curriculum development and teacher training programs. Third, it addresses the need for contextualized Christian education that responds to local environmental and cultural contexts while maintaining biblical foundations.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore the integration of professional competence with cultural mandate principles in CRE teaching. The qualitative approach was selected due to its capacity to capture the complexity of educational practices, teacher perceptions, and contextual factors influencing implementation (Creswell, 2014). The research was conducted at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli, Labuhan Batu Utara Regency, North Sumatra, from August to October 2024. The school was purposively selected based on: (1) significant Christian student enrollment (approximately 60% of 120 total students); (2) active CRE program implementation; and (3) accessibility for extended observation. Participants included

three CRE teachers (two females, one male) with teaching experience ranging from 5 to 15 years, all holding bachelor's degrees in Christian Religious Education or Theology. Additionally, 45 students from grades 4-6 participated in observational activities and informal discussions. The principal and one curriculum coordinator provided supplementary information regarding institutional policies and support systems. Data were collected through multiple methods to ensure triangulation**:** Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three CRE teachers, each lasting 60-90 minutes, focusing on their understanding of professional competence, theological perspectives on the cultural mandate, pedagogical strategies, and perceived challenges. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim. Classroom observations were performed across 12 CRE sessions (four per teacher) using an observation protocol developed based on professional competence indicators and cultural mandate principles. Field notes documented teaching methods, student engagement, content delivery, and integration of stewardship themes**.** Document analysis examined lesson plans, teaching materials, student portfolios, school curriculum documents, and assessment instruments to identify explicit and implicit integration of cultural mandate concepts. Data analysis followed thematic analysis procedures (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Transcripts and field notes were coded using initial open coding to identify recurring patterns. Codes were then organized into potential themes reflecting dimensions of professional competence and cultural mandate integration. Themes were reviewed, refined, and defined through iterative analysis. Data triangulation was achieved by comparing findings across interviews, observations, and documents. Trustworthiness was established through: (1) prolonged engagement over three months; (2) triangulation of data sources and methods; (3) member checking with teacher participants; (4) thick description of context and findings; and (5) reflexive journaling to acknowledge researcher positionality. Ethical approval was obtained from school authorities. Informed consent was secured from all participants, with parental consent for student involvement. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with pseudonyms used in reporting. Voluntary participation and right to withdrawal were emphasized.

RESULTS AND DISSCUSSION

Analysis revealed that CRE teachers at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli demonstrated varying levels of professional competence across four key dimensions relevant to cultural mandate integration**.** Pedagogical Competence: Teachers exhibited strong foundational pedagogical skills, employing diverse teaching methods including storytelling, group discussions, project-based learning, and experiential activities. All three teachers regularly adapted lesson plans to student developmental levels and incorporated local contexts. One teacher noted, *"I try to bring the cultural mandate to their level—not just theological concepts, but practical actions like caring for the school garden or not wasting paper."* Observations confirmed differentiated instruction approaches, with teachers using visual aids, songs, and hands-on activities to engage different learning styles. Personality Competence: Teachers demonstrated personal qualities conducive to modeling stewardship values. They consistently exhibited respectful attitudes toward creation, modeled resource conservation, and displayed patience in guiding student understanding. One teacher's practice of bringing students outdoors to observe God's

creation exemplified integrated personality and pedagogical competence. Students reported feeling inspired by teachers' personal commitment to environmental care. Social Competence: Teachers showed capacity for collaborative engagement with colleagues, parents, and community members. Two teachers had initiated partnerships with local churches for environmental projects. However, communication with parents specifically regarding cultural mandate principles remained limited, with one teacher acknowledging, *"Parents sometimes don't understand why we emphasize creation care in religion class—they think it's more about science."* Professional Competence: Teachers possessed adequate theological knowledge of Genesis 1:28 and its implications, though interpretation depth varied. All teachers had participated in recent professional development, but none had received specific training on integrating cultural mandate theology with elementary pedagogy. Teachers demonstrated commitment to continuous improvement, regularly reflecting on teaching effectiveness and seeking additional resources.

Integration Strategies of Cultural Mandate Principles

Cultural mandate concepts were woven throughout the curriculum rather than isolated in single lessons. Topics included creation care, human responsibility, creative expression as divine reflection, and resource stewardship. One teacher's semester plan explicitly connected seven different lesson themes to aspects of the cultural mandate. All three teachers utilized outdoor education, school garden projects, and waste reduction initiatives to provide concrete experiences of stewardship. Students participated in maintaining a small garden, recycling programs, and community clean-up activities. These experiences were consistently debriefed through biblical frameworks, connecting actions to Genesis 1:28 principles. Teachers encouraged students to express understanding through art, drama, poetry, and music, framing creativity as participation in God's creative nature. Student portfolios contained drawings of creation, poems about stewardship, and dramatic presentations on environmental responsibility. One teacher explained, *"When they create something beautiful, I remind them they're made in God's image-the Creator's image."* Stewardship attitudes were cultivated through consistent reinforcement of values such as responsibility, gratitude, and careful resource use. Teachers integrated character reflection into daily routines, including prayers of thanksgiving for creation and reminders to avoid wasted. Teachers effectively connected cultural mandate principles to local environmental issues, including deforestation, river pollution, and agricultural practices. Students discussed how biblical stewardship relates to community challenges, fostering relevant application of theological concepts.

Student Outcomes and Engagement

Students demonstrated increased awareness of environmental responsibility, frequently reminding peers to conserve resources and care for classroom plants. In group discussions, students articulated connections between faith and environmental action, using vocabulary like "steward," "caretaker," and "God's creation." Creative projects showed enthusiastic participation, with students taking pride in artwork and presentations related to creation themes. Student portfolios documented progressive understanding of stewardship concepts across the semester. However, depth of theological understanding varied considerably among students. While most could recall

basic principles, fewer demonstrated sophisticated integration of cultural mandate theology with daily decisions. Teachers noted that consistent reinforcement and family support were crucial factors in deeper internalization.

Teachers lacked specialized teaching materials specifically designed for cultural mandate education at elementary levels. Available textbooks provided minimal coverage, requiring teachers to develop supplementary materials independently. One teacher stated, *"I spend much time searching online or creating my own materials because the textbook only has one chapter on creation care."* The standardized CRE curriculum allocated limited time to environmental and cultural mandate themes, with pressure to cover doctrinal content taking precedence. Teachers felt tension between curriculum requirements and desired depth of stewardship education. None of the teachers had received formal training in environmental theology or cultural mandate pedagogy during pre-service or in-service education. Professional development opportunities specifically addressing this integration were absent in the regency. Some parents questioned the emphasis on environmental activities in religious education, viewing it as peripheral to spiritual formation. This occasionally created pressure on teachers to justify their pedagogical choices. Teachers struggled to develop appropriate assessment tools that captured both cognitive understanding and behavioral integration of cultural mandate principles. Traditional tests measured knowledge but failed to evaluate stewardship attitudes and actions. The principal actively supported CRE teachers' integration efforts, allocating resources for garden projects and approving outdoor learning activities. This institutional support proved crucial for sustained implementation. Teachers' personal conviction about cultural mandate importance drove their efforts to integrate principles despite resource limitations. This intrinsic motivation compensated for external constraints. The rural agricultural setting provided natural contexts for discussing stewardship, creation, and human responsibility. Students' daily experiences with farming and natural environments facilitated relevant application of biblical principles. Teachers created classroom cultures where students learned collaboratively, sharing stewardship ideas and holding one another accountable for responsible behaviors. The findings reveal that professional competence serves as a critical mediating factor in translating theological concepts into educational practice. CRE teachers at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli demonstrated foundational competencies that enabled cultural mandate integration, though with varying sophistication and systematic application. The pedagogical dimension emerged as particularly crucial. Teachers who employed diverse, experiential, and contextually grounded methods achieved deeper student engagement with cultural mandate principles. This aligns with constructivist learning theories emphasizing active participation and meaningful connection to students' lived experiences. The effectiveness of experiential learning-particularly garden projects and outdoor education-supports research indicating that environmental education benefits significantly from direct interaction with nature (Sobel, 2004). The integration of creativity as a cultural mandate expression represents a significant contribution of this study. By framing artistic and creative activities as participation in God's creative nature, teachers fostered both theological understanding and practical skill development. This approach resonates with Reformed theological perspectives on vocation and cultural engagement while remaining accessible to elementary students. However, the gap between teachers' commitment and systematic implementation highlights structural challenges within Indonesian CRE

contexts. The absence of specialized training in cultural mandate pedagogy reflects broader issues in religious teacher education programs that prioritize doctrinal content over applied theology (Mardiah & Syarifuddin, 2019). This suggests urgent need for curriculum reform in CRE teacher preparation programs to include environmental theology, stewardship pedagogy, and creation care methodologies. The resource limitations reported by teachers point to institutional challenges beyond individual competence. While teacher creativity partially compensated for material scarcity, sustainable integration requires systematic curriculum development, textbook revision, and resource allocation at policy levels. The minimal coverage of cultural mandate themes in standard CRE curricula contradicts both biblical emphases on creation and contemporary environmental crises demanding urgent educational responses (Grim & Tucker, 2014). Parental understanding emerged as an unexpected but significant factor. The perception that environmental education is peripheral to spiritual formation reveals theological misconceptions that separate sacred from secular domains. This dualism contradicts holistic biblical worldviews where all creation reflects divine glory and human stewardship constitutes spiritual obedience (Wright, 2010). Addressing this requires not only teacher competence but broader community education regarding integrated theology. The assessment challenges identified reflect broader difficulties in evaluating character and value formation. Traditional cognitive assessments inadequately capture the transformative goals of cultural mandate education, which aims at dispositional and behavioral change beyond knowledge acquisition. This suggests need for alternative assessment approaches including portfolios, observational records, and long-term behavioral tracking (Chowdhury, 2016). Despite challenges, the study demonstrates that even with modest resources, professionally competent CRE teachers can meaningfully integrate cultural mandate principles into elementary education. The key factors-teacher theological understanding, pedagogical creativity, institutional support, and contextual relevance-provide a framework for enhancing similar integration in other contexts. Several limitations warrant acknowledgment. The study's single-site focus limits generalizability to broader contexts. The three-month timeframe captured integration practices but could not assess long-term student outcomes or sustained behavioral change. Additionally, the research did not systematically compare student outcomes between teachers with varying competence levels, preventing causal claims about competence-outcome relationships. Future research should examine long-term impacts of cultural mandate education on student environmental behaviors and spiritual formation. Comparative studies across multiple schools with varying resource levels would illuminate contextual factors shaping integration success. Investigation of effective professional development models for cultural mandate pedagogy would address identified training gaps. Additionally, research on parental engagement strategies and community education approaches could enhance holistic implementation.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that CRE teachers' professional competence significantly influences the integration of cultural mandate principles from Genesis 1:28 into elementary education. Teachers at SD Negeri 116897 Hapoltakan Nauli employed diverse pedagogical strategies, experiential learning approaches, and creative methods to

translate stewardship theology into age-appropriate educational experiences. Key integration strategies included thematic curriculum development, outdoor education, creative expression, and contextual application to local environmental issues. Professional competence manifested across pedagogical, personality, social, and professional dimensions, with pedagogical and personality competencies proving most directly influential. Teachers demonstrated theological knowledge, instructional creativity, and personal modeling that facilitated student engagement with stewardship principles. However, systematic integration was constrained by resource limitations, curriculum standardization, training gaps, and parental understanding issues. The findings emphasize that effective cultural mandate education requires both individual teacher competence and supportive institutional structures. Professional development programs must address environmental theology and creation care pedagogy. Curriculum materials require expansion to provide adequate coverage of stewardship themes. Assessment approaches need development to capture dispositional and behavioral dimensions of stewardship formation. For educational practice, this research suggests that CRE teacher preparation should include specialized training in cultural mandate theology and pedagogy. Schools should allocate resources for experiential learning activities and provide institutional support for integration initiatives. Community education addressing holistic theological perspectives can enhance parental support and broader cultural receptivity. The integration of professional competence with biblical mandates represents an essential dimension of Christian education that extends beyond cognitive knowledge transmission to formational transformation. As environmental challenges intensify globally, elementary education grounded in biblical stewardship principles offers crucial foundations for future generations' ecological and ethical responsibility. Professional competence in CRE teaching serves not merely as technical skill but as vocational faithfulness in preparing students to fulfill humanity's cultural mandate as stewards, creators, and responsible governors of God's creation.

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