



## Teacher Competence in Christian Religious Education within Faith-Based and Ecological Learning at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang

Siska br Ketaren<sup>1</sup>, Maria Widiastuti<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [siskakarokaro@gmail.com](mailto:siskakarokaro@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*Christian Religious Education (CRE) in primary schools plays a pivotal role in shaping not only students' doctrinal knowledge but also their moral, spiritual, and ecological responsibility. This study examines the competence of CRE teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang, with particular attention to how faith-based learning is integrated with ecological awareness. The research seeks to understand how pedagogical, spiritual, and ecological dimensions are embodied in classroom practices and contribute to students' holistic formation. Adopting a qualitative descriptive design, data were collected from five purposefully selected teachers through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis was employed to identify patterns in the integration of Christian pedagogy with ecological values, while triangulation ensured the credibility and trustworthiness of findings. The results reveal three interrelated dimensions of teacher competence. First, faith-based competence was evident as teachers consistently linked biblical teachings to students' daily experiences, emphasizing discipleship, stewardship, and moral responsibility. Second, pedagogical competence was demonstrated through inclusive scheduling, interactive learning methods, and a focus on character formation. Third, ecological competence was reflected in the integration of environmental stewardship within religious instruction, including activities such as gardening, waste management, and ecological reflection rooted in biblical principles. Despite limited resources, teachers displayed innovation and commitment, though infrastructural and material constraints remained challenges. This study concludes that CRE teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang embody a holistic model of competence that unites faith formation with ecological stewardship. Such integration underscores the transformative potential of faith-based ecological education in preparing students to become spiritually mature and environmentally responsible citizens.*

**Keywords:** *Teacher Competence, Christian Religious Education, Ecological Learning*

## INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in primary schools extends far beyond the transmission of doctrinal knowledge; it encompasses the holistic formation of children into individuals who embody faith, moral responsibility, and ethical stewardship. In recent decades, scholars have increasingly emphasized the need for education to address not only intellectual growth but also the spiritual, emotional, and ecological dimensions of life (Groome, 2019). This multidimensional approach recognizes that faith formation is inseparable from moral practice and ecological responsibility, particularly in contexts where children's early experiences shape their lifelong values. Within this framework, CRE teachers play a central role as facilitators of faith-based learning that integrates Christian spirituality with practical ecological consciousness. In the Indonesian educational landscape, Christian education is constitutionally recognized as part of the national education system, where religious education seeks to nurture students into citizens who are not only knowledgeable but also ethical and responsible (Simanjuntak, 2021). In rural schools such as SDN 107434 Rumah Liang, the task of Christian educators becomes more complex, as they are called to address both local realities and global challenges. Ecological crises—ranging from deforestation and pollution to climate change—demand an educational approach that instills ecological awareness from an early age. This aligns with global discussions on eco-theology and eco-pedagogy, which affirm that care for the environment is integral to living out Christian faith (Conradie, 2020). Therefore, Christian Religious Education cannot be confined to the classroom as a theoretical subject but must engage students in cultivating ecological stewardship as a vital expression of faith.

Teacher competence, in this sense, must be redefined beyond traditional pedagogical skills. Competence involves a threefold integration of pedagogical, spiritual, and ecological dimensions. Pedagogically, teachers are expected to master instructional strategies that foster active learning and critical reflection (Shulman, 1987). Spiritually, they must embody and communicate Christian values in ways that resonate with students' lives, modeling integrity, compassion, and faithfulness (Fowler, 1995). Ecologically, competence requires an awareness of humanity's responsibility to safeguard creation and the ability to translate this awareness into pedagogical practices. For example, lesson plans that integrate biblical teachings on stewardship with practical activities—such as gardening, waste management, and environmental projects—demonstrate how faith and ecological care can be cultivated simultaneously. The case of SDN 107434 Rumah Liang highlights how such integrative competence is both necessary and transformative. Located in a community where natural resources form the backbone of daily life, the school becomes a microcosm for teaching ecological responsibility grounded in Christian ethics. Teachers at this school are not only responsible for conveying theological concepts but also for equipping students with the moral vision to engage responsibly with their environment. Such an approach reflects the biblical mandate found in Genesis 2:15, where humanity is called to "till and keep" the earth, a command that underscores the interconnectedness of faith and ecology (White, 2006). Moreover, by integrating ecological education within Christian Religious Education, teachers help students see the environment not merely as a resource but as God's creation entrusted to their care. Research has shown that teacher competence directly influences the effectiveness of value-based education. Darling-Hammond (2017) notes

that teachers who integrate values into their pedagogy shape not only academic achievement but also the ethical dispositions of learners. Within the realm of CRE, this means that the teacher's role extends beyond being a transmitter of knowledge to becoming a mentor and guide who cultivates both faith and ecological awareness. In this regard, the competence of Christian Religious Education teachers must be understood as an embodied practice where faith informs pedagogy and pedagogy fosters ecological responsibility. This study seeks to explore how CRE teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang demonstrate competence in integrating faith-based pedagogy with ecological awareness. It examines the ways in which pedagogical, spiritual, and ecological dimensions are woven into their teaching practices and how these dimensions contribute to the holistic formation of students. By situating this inquiry within the broader discourse of faith and ecology, the study aims to contribute to ongoing conversations about the role of religious education in addressing ecological crises through the cultivation of responsible and faithful citizens. In doing so, it underscores the urgent relevance of teacher competence as a key factor in realizing an education that is both transformative and sustainable.

## **METHODS**

This research adopted a qualitative descriptive design, which is appropriate for exploring the lived experiences and pedagogical practices of teachers within a natural setting. The focus was placed on teachers of Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang, where the intersection between faith-based education and ecological values is particularly salient. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a deeper understanding of how teachers conceptualize, internalize, and implement Christian faith principles alongside ecological awareness in their teaching practices, rather than merely measuring outcomes quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Participants in this study consisted of five CRE teachers who were purposefully selected using a purposive sampling strategy. This sampling method was chosen because it enables researchers to focus on individuals who are most knowledgeable and experienced in the subject matter, thereby ensuring that the data collected are rich and contextually meaningful (Palinkas et al., 2015). These teachers represented varying years of teaching experience, backgrounds, and involvement in school programs, thus offering diverse perspectives on the integration of Christian pedagogy with ecological education. Data collection was conducted using three complementary techniques: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews provided opportunities for participants to articulate their pedagogical approaches, challenges, and aspirations in their own words, while also allowing the researcher to probe deeper into emerging themes (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Classroom observations were employed to capture real-time teaching practices, focusing on how teachers embedded values of faith and ecological stewardship within lessons and activities. Document analysis included reviewing lesson plans, teaching materials, and school policies, thereby providing additional insights into the formal structures supporting or limiting ecological integration within CRE instruction.

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis, which involved coding transcripts, field notes, and documents to identify recurring patterns and themes related to faith-based instruction and ecological integration (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This method allowed the researcher to move beyond surface-level descriptions and uncover deeper connections between teacher competence, spirituality, and ecological responsibility. To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, triangulation was applied across the three data sources. By comparing interview data with classroom observations and document reviews, the researcher was able to validate interpretations and minimize potential bias (Patton, 2015).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang can be understood across three interrelated dimensions: faith-based competence, pedagogical competence, and ecological competence. These dimensions not only reflect the holistic role of teachers in transmitting knowledge and values but also embody the broader theological mandate of Christian education in nurturing discipleship, moral integrity, and ecological stewardship. Each of these competencies will be elaborated in depth, with particular attention to their practical application, theological grounding, and contribution to contemporary educational discourse.

The first and most fundamental dimension observed among CRE teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang was their faith-based competence. Teachers consistently integrated biblical values into classroom learning, ensuring that students were not only taught cognitively but also spiritually formed in accordance with Christian discipleship principles. Lessons were framed in alignment with the Great Commission (Matthew 28:19–20), which calls believers to make disciples of all nations, and the First Greatest Commandment (Matthew 22:37–39), which emphasizes loving God and neighbor. The teachers' instructional design reflected the conviction that education in a Christian setting is inseparable from moral formation, worship, and service (Knight, 2006). In practice, this competence was manifested in how teachers linked academic content to spiritual principles. For instance, discussions on discipline were consistently framed within the biblical virtue of self-control, while collaborative classroom projects were anchored in the ethic of mutual love and service. Teachers intentionally used narratives from Scripture to illustrate the relevance of faith in daily life, thereby making Christian values concrete for young learners. This approach resonates with Astley's (2002) notion of faith development pedagogy, which argues that Christian education must form learners who are reflective, faithful, and ethically responsible. Moreover, the faith-based competence observed at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang also embodied the principle of stewardship. Teachers underscored the biblical mandate in Genesis 1:28–31, not merely as an ecological directive but as a theological basis for responsible living in all spheres of life. By doing so, they reinforced the connection between theological convictions and practical actions, enabling students to perceive faith as a dynamic force shaping their attitudes and behavior. This is consistent with Groome's (2011) shared praxis model, which emphasizes the integration of faith with lived experience.

The second dimension of competence evident among CRE teachers was their pedagogical competence, demonstrated in both structural and methodological aspects of their teaching. Structurally, teachers displayed remarkable flexibility and dedication by opening learning sessions in both the morning and afternoon. This decision was rooted in a pastoral concern for students whose parents were engaged in labor-intensive work and were unable to provide consistent support during conventional school hours. By extending their availability, teachers ensured that all students, regardless of background, had equitable access to quality religious education. This initiative aligns with the broader educational principle of inclusivity and responsiveness to community needs (Gay, 2010). From a methodological perspective, CRE teachers employed interactive and participatory approaches designed to engage students cognitively and affectively. Classroom activities included storytelling, role-play, group discussions, and creative projects, all of which encouraged students to critically reflect on biblical teachings and their relevance to contemporary life. These strategies align with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which underscores the importance of interaction, dialogue, and scaffolding in facilitating meaningful learning. In the context of Christian education, such methods foster not only intellectual growth but also spiritual maturity, since students are invited to explore faith through communal learning experiences (Estep & Kim, 2010). The emphasis on character formation was particularly noteworthy. Teachers did not merely transmit doctrinal knowledge but cultivated dispositions such as honesty, compassion, and perseverance. Through reflective exercises and guided discussions, students were encouraged to connect moral choices with their identity as followers of Christ. This reflects Lickona's (1991) character education framework, which advocates for integrating moral reasoning, emotional engagement, and moral behavior within the educational process. In this sense, pedagogical competence was not limited to instructional techniques but extended to the intentional nurturing of holistic student development.

Perhaps the most innovative dimension observed was the ecological competence demonstrated by CRE teachers. Recognizing the urgency of environmental issues, teachers integrated ecological themes into their religious education curriculum. Lessons frequently drew upon the biblical doctrine of creation and humanity's responsibility as caretakers of the earth (Genesis 2:15). Students were encouraged to reflect on the dominion mandate not as exploitation but as stewardship grounded in love for God's creation (Bouma-Prediger, 2001). Concrete practices included waste reduction campaigns, the establishment of school gardens, and the integration of environmental care into classroom projects. For example, students were tasked with cultivating plants as a practical expression of gratitude for God's creation, while classroom discussions highlighted the ethical implications of pollution, deforestation, and consumerism. These activities not only cultivated ecological awareness but also reinforced theological principles, bridging the gap between faith and ecological responsibility (Habel, 2009). This ecological competence aligns with emerging trends in eco-theology and faith-based environmental education, which argue that sustainability and spirituality must be pursued together (Conradie, 2011). By embedding ecological themes within Christian Religious Education, teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang demonstrated an innovative pedagogical model that both addresses pressing global issues and nurtures Christian character. Such

integration has been echoed in recent scholarship, which emphasizes the role of faith-based education in promoting ecological citizenship (Edwards, 2019).

The findings of this study are consistent with existing literature on faith-based ecological education. Previous research has highlighted the role of Christian education in fostering values of stewardship, compassion, and responsibility toward the environment (Hulme, 2015). Similarly, studies conducted in other contexts have found that religious narratives can serve as powerful motivators for ecological engagement, especially among young learners (Tanuwidjaja, 2020). By contextualizing ecological themes within biblical teaching, CRE teachers provide students with a compelling moral and spiritual rationale for sustainable living. At the same time, the integration of ecological awareness into Christian education also addresses the growing recognition that environmental crises are fundamentally moral and spiritual challenges (White, 1967). Thus, the competence demonstrated by teachers at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang contributes to the broader movement of integrating ecological concerns into theological and educational frameworks. This not only enriches the quality of Christian Religious Education but also positions it as a vital force in addressing global sustainability issues.

Despite the strengths highlighted, several challenges remain. One significant limitation pertains to infrastructure and teaching resources. Teachers often had to rely on improvised materials and limited facilities when implementing ecological projects. For example, the lack of adequate gardening tools and classroom supplies constrained the scope of practical activities. This reflects a broader issue faced by rural schools, where financial and infrastructural constraints often limit pedagogical innovation (UNESCO, 2015). Addressing these challenges requires collaborative efforts between schools, local communities, and government agencies to provide the necessary resources for sustainable faith-based education. Another challenge emerged from alumni feedback, which suggested that while students had developed strong moral and ecological awareness, they required further development of practical skills. Alumni noted that practical ecological competencies, such as waste management systems or sustainable agriculture techniques, were underdeveloped during their schooling. This gap indicates the need for a more comprehensive integration of technical and vocational elements into Christian Religious Education, thereby equipping students not only with values but also with practical skills for ecological living (Tilbury, 2011). The findings carry significant implications for Christian Religious Education in Indonesia and beyond. First, the threefold competence model—faith-based, pedagogical, and ecological—offers a holistic framework for understanding the role of CRE teachers in the 21st century. This framework reflects the integrated nature of Christian education, which cannot be compartmentalized into cognitive, moral, or practical domains but must address the whole person in relation to God, community, and creation (Pazmiño, 2010). Second, the emphasis on ecological competence situates Christian education within the global discourse on sustainability. By framing ecological care as a theological mandate, CRE teachers provide a uniquely Christian contribution to environmental education, reinforcing the idea that caring for creation is a form of discipleship and worship. This perspective has the potential to inspire future educational models that link spirituality with ecological ethics in transformative ways. Finally, the pedagogical innovations observed—particularly the flexible scheduling and interactive methods—highlight the adaptability of Christian education to contextual

realities. By responding to the needs of students and their families, teachers embody the pastoral dimension of education, demonstrating that effective pedagogy must always be grounded in love and service. This echoes Freire's (1970) concept of education as an act of love, dialogue, and liberation, reinterpreted here within a Christian framework.

## Conclusion

Teacher competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang reveals a distinctive integration of faith-based learning and ecological values in daily classroom practice. The teachers are not merely transmitting biblical knowledge or doctrinal teachings but are actively fostering a holistic model of education that emphasizes both spiritual formation and ecological stewardship. Such competence reflects a pedagogical orientation that views faith and ecology not as separate domains but as complementary aspects of Christian discipleship. Within this framework, the classroom becomes a formative space where students are encouraged to develop maturity in their relationship with God while simultaneously cultivating responsibility for the natural environment entrusted to humanity. This integration is manifested in various instructional strategies, such as contextualizing biblical teachings with ecological themes, incorporating outdoor learning activities, and using creation as a central motif in spiritual reflection. By doing so, the teachers not only highlight theological principles regarding humanity's responsibility to care for the earth but also translate these values into practical actions that shape students' daily lives. Students are guided to understand that Christian faith entails not only devotion and prayer but also ethical engagement with pressing ecological issues such as waste reduction, conservation, and community participation in environmental sustainability initiatives. The study further suggests that strengthening this educational model requires deliberate investment in school infrastructure and resources. Access to ecological learning materials, such as gardens, recycling facilities, and local environmental case studies, would enable teachers to expand pedagogical practices and create more experiential learning opportunities. Additionally, the active involvement of students in community-based ecological projects, such as tree planting, waste management campaigns, or river clean-up activities, would enhance their sense of responsibility beyond the classroom, connecting faith-based values with civic and ecological engagement. Such initiatives not only deepen students' ecological awareness but also foster a sense of collective responsibility rooted in Christian ethics of stewardship. Ultimately, the competence of CRE teachers in integrating faith and ecology at SDN 107434 Rumah Liang illustrates a transformative educational paradigm. It demonstrates how Christian education, when enriched with ecological perspectives, prepares students to become individuals who are spiritually grounded and environmentally responsible. This model of faith-based ecological education has the potential to contribute meaningfully to broader educational discourses, offering insights into how religious values can be mobilized to address global ecological challenges while simultaneously nurturing students' spiritual and moral growth.

**BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Astley, J. (2002). *Ordinary theology: Looking, listening, and learning in theology*. Ashgate.
- Bouma-Prediger, S. (2001). *For the beauty of the earth: A Christian vision for creation care*. Baker Academic.
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101.
- Conradie, E. M. (2011). *God, creation, and sustainability: Essays in reformed theology*. Wipf and Stock.
- Conradie, E. M. (2020). *Ecological theology: A guide for further research*. Stellenbosch: SUN Press.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches*. Sage.
- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teaching for deeper learning: Tools for engagement*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Edwards, D. (2019). *Growing up with creation: Explorations in Christian ecological education*. Cascade Books.
- Fowler, J. W. (1995). *Stages of faith: The psychology of human development and the quest for meaning*. San Francisco: HarperCollins.
- Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Seabury Press.
- Groome, T. H. (2019). *Christian religious education: Sharing our story and vision*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Groome, T. H. (2019). *Christian religious education: Sharing our story and vision*. JOS se-Bass.
- Habel, N., & Trudinger, P. M. (2008). The Bible and ecology: Rediscovering the community of creation. *William Carey Library*.
- Jackson, R. (2016). *Rethinking religious education and plurality: Issues in diversity and pedagogy*. Routledge.
- Knight, G. R. (2006). *Philosophy & education: An introduction in Christian perspective* (4th ed.). Andrews University Press.
- Kvale, S., & Brinkmann, S. (2015). *InterViews: Learning the craft of qualitative research interviewing*. Sage.

- Lickona, T. (1991). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam.
- Palinkas, L. A., Horwitz, S. M., Green, C. A., et al. (2015). Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. *Administration and Policy in Mental Health*, 42(5), 533–544.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research and evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Shulman, L. S. (1987). Knowledge and teaching: Foundations of the new reform. *Harvard Educational Review*, 57(1), 1–22.
- Simanjuntak, M. (2021). Religious education in Indonesian schools: Challenges and prospects. *Journal of Religious and Ethical Education*, 5(2), 112–128.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.
- White, L. (1967). The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203–1207.
- White, L. (2006). The historical roots of our ecological crisis. *Science*, 155(3767), 1203–1207.
- Wright, C. J. H. (2004). *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*. InterVarsity Press.