



A Reflection on the Personality Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers Regarding the Cultural Mandate for Students at SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai Kuala Tanjung – Batu Bara

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ABSTRACT

This research examines the personality competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in implementing the cultural mandate among students at SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai, Kuala Tanjung, Batu Bara. The cultural mandate, rooted in Genesis 1:28, emphasizes human responsibility to cultivate, develop, and care for God's creation. This study investigates how teachers' personality competence—encompassing integrity, spiritual maturity, and exemplary character—influences students' understanding and application of the cultural mandate in their daily lives. Using a qualitative descriptive approach with observations, interviews, and documentation analysis, this research reveals that personality competence significantly affects students' moral development and environmental stewardship attitudes. Findings indicate that teachers who demonstrate strong personality competence effectively model Christian values, fostering students' sense of responsibility toward their surroundings. However, challenges such as limited teaching resources, diverse student backgrounds, and sociocultural contexts require teachers to continuously develop their competencies. This study contributes to understanding the critical role of teacher personality in religious education and provides recommendations for enhancing CRE teacher training programs to strengthen their personality competence in fulfilling the cultural mandate.

Keywords: *personality competence, Christian Religious Education, cultural mandate*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesian elementary schools plays a vital role in shaping students' spiritual, moral, and ethical foundations. Beyond transmitting theological knowledge, CRE teachers are expected to embody Christian values and serve as role models for their students. The personality competence of teachers—defined as the capacity to demonstrate mature, stable, wise, and authoritative behavior—becomes particularly significant in religious education contexts where character formation is paramount (Sidjabat, 2019). The cultural mandate, derived from Genesis 1:28, represents

a fundamental theological concept instructing humanity to "be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." This mandate extends beyond reproduction to encompass stewardship, cultural development, and responsible engagement with creation (Tomatala, 2018). In contemporary educational settings, the cultural mandate provides a theological framework for environmental education, social responsibility, and ethical citizenship. SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai, located in Kuala Tanjung, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra, serves a diverse student population including Christian students who receive religious instruction according to their faith. The school's location in a coastal agricultural area presents unique opportunities for contextualizing the cultural mandate through environmental awareness and community engagement. However, preliminary observations suggest that students' understanding of their role as stewards of creation remains limited, raising questions about the effectiveness of current teaching approaches. Teacher personality competence encompasses several dimensions: stable and mature behavior, work ethics aligned with religious values, exemplary conduct, and positive influence on students and community (Kemendikbud, 2018). For CRE teachers, personality competence is inseparable from spiritual authenticity—the congruence between proclaimed faith and lived experience. Teachers who embody Christian virtues naturally inspire students to internalize religious teachings rather than merely memorizing them. Despite the recognized importance of personality competence, limited research has examined how CRE teachers' personality traits specifically influence students' comprehension and application of the cultural mandate. Previous studies have focused primarily on pedagogical competence or general teacher effectiveness, leaving a gap in understanding the unique role of personality in religious education outcomes (Purwanto, 2020). This research addresses three primary questions: (1) How is the personality competence of CRE teachers manifested in teaching the cultural mandate at SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai? (2) What is the students' level of understanding regarding the cultural mandate as taught by their CRE teachers? (3) What challenges do teachers face in developing their personality competence to effectively convey the cultural mandate? The significance of this study lies in its potential to inform CRE teacher preparation and professional development programs. By identifying specific personality traits that facilitate effective teaching of the cultural mandate, this research contributes to both educational practice and theological education theory. Furthermore, understanding the contextual challenges faced by teachers in rural settings can guide policy development to support religious education in diverse Indonesian contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the personality competence of CRE teachers and its relationship to students' understanding of the cultural mandate. The qualitative paradigm was chosen for its capacity to capture the complexity of human experiences, values, and behaviors that characterize personality competence in educational contexts (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The research was conducted at SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai, located in Kuala Tanjung District, Batu Bara Regency, North Sumatra Province. The school serves approximately 250 students from grades 1-6, with Christian students constituting approximately 20% of the student body.

The research focused on grades 4-6 (ages 10-12), as students in this age range demonstrate greater capacity for abstract thinking about stewardship and responsibility. Participants included two CRE teachers with teaching experience ranging from 8 to 15 years, twelve students (four from each grade level 4-6) selected through purposive sampling based on their active participation in CRE classes, and two school administrators familiar with the CRE program. The selection criteria for student participants included regular attendance in CRE classes, willingness to participate, and parental consent. Data were collected through multiple methods to ensure triangulation and validity. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers to explore their understanding of personality competence, teaching philosophy regarding the cultural mandate, and self-assessment of their role modeling. Each interview lasted 60-90 minutes and was audio-recorded with permission. Student focus group discussions (three groups of four students) examined their perceptions of their teachers' personality traits, understanding of the cultural mandate, and application of these teachings in daily life. These sessions lasted 45-60 minutes each. Classroom observations were conducted during six CRE lessons focusing on cultural mandate themes, documenting teacher behavior, teaching methods, student engagement, and classroom atmosphere. An observation protocol guided data recording. Document analysis included lesson plans, teaching materials, student assignments, and school policies related to character education. Field notes supplemented all data collection activities, capturing contextual details and researcher reflections. Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. Audio recordings were transcribed verbatim, and transcripts were read repeatedly for familiarization. Initial codes were generated inductively from the data, identifying meaningful segments related to personality competence and cultural mandate teaching. Codes were then organized into potential themes representing patterns across the dataset. Themes were reviewed against coded extracts and the entire dataset to ensure internal coherence and distinctiveness. Theme definitions were refined, and relationships between themes were mapped. Finally, vivid examples were selected to illustrate each theme in the findings. NVivo 12 software assisted in organizing and coding data. Credibility was established through triangulation of data sources and methods, member checking with participants to verify interpretations, and prolonged engagement at the research site. Dependability was ensured through maintaining a detailed audit trail of research decisions and processes. Confirmability was achieved by grounding findings in actual data and acknowledging researcher reflexivity. Ethical approval was obtained from the relevant education authorities and the school principal. Written informed consent was secured from all adult participants and parents of student participants, with verbal assent from students. Confidentiality was maintained through pseudonyms, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any time without consequences.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Both teachers exhibited genuine spiritual commitment that extended beyond classroom instruction. Teacher A (15 years' experience) stated, *"I cannot teach about God's mandate for stewardship if my own life doesn't reflect care for what He's created. My students watch how I treat people, how I handle resources, even how I maintain my classroom*

environment." Observations confirmed that teachers integrated personal faith testimonies into lessons, shared struggles and growth experiences, and demonstrated prayer as authentic communication rather than ritualistic performance. Students recognized this authenticity. One grade 6 student noted, *"Miss doesn't just tell us to care for the environment—she brings reusable bags, waters the school plants, and picks up trash during break time. We want to be like her."* This alignment between professed values and lived practice created credibility that enhanced teaching effectiveness. Teachers demonstrated consistent emotional regulation even in challenging situations. Observations documented patient responses to disruptive behavior, calm problem-solving when lesson plans required adjustment, and appropriate emotional boundaries while maintaining warmth. Teacher B (8 years' experience) explained, *"Working with children from diverse backgrounds, some facing difficulties at home, requires me to be their stable anchor. I can't bring my personal frustrations into the classroom."* This emotional maturity created a safe learning environment where students felt comfortable exploring spiritual concepts. Administrator 1 noted, *"Our CRE teachers rarely send students to the office for discipline. They handle conflicts with wisdom, using them as teaching moments about forgiveness and restoration—living out Christian principles."* Teachers maintained high ethical standards in professional conduct, demonstrating punctuality, thorough preparation, fair assessment practices, and respectful communication with all stakeholders. This consistency extended to small details—Teacher A was observed returning borrowed items promptly, admitting when she didn't know an answer, and apologizing when she made mistakes. Student participants consistently mentioned their teachers' honesty as a defining characteristic. A grade 5 student shared, *"When Teacher makes a mistake grading our work, she corrects it immediately and apologizes. She teaches us that being honest is more important than being right."* This modeling of integrity provided practical lessons in Christian ethics that complemented formal instruction. Teachers inspired students through enthusiasm, encouragement, and genuine belief in students' potential. Observations revealed that teachers used affirming language, celebrated student efforts and progress, connected lessons to students' lived experiences, and expressed confidence in students' capacity to make a difference. Teacher A articulated her philosophy: *"These children are future stewards of God's creation. My role is to help them see themselves as capable and called to transform their communities. If I don't believe in them, why would they believe in themselves?"* This inspirational quality motivated students to move beyond passive learning toward active engagement. Students reported initiating environmental projects, mediating peer conflicts using biblical principles, and discussing CRE concepts with family members—indicating internalization of teachings.

Students' Understanding of the Cultural Mandate

All student participants could articulate fundamental aspects of the cultural mandate using language appropriate to their developmental level. A grade 4 student explained, *"God gave us the world to take care of. We shouldn't damage it or waste things because it belongs to God."* Students generally understood the mandate as encompassing environmental stewardship, responsible behavior toward others, and using talents for positive purposes. However, comprehension remained somewhat anthropocentric, focusing primarily on human needs and benefits. For example, students frequently

mentioned caring for the environment "so we can live healthy lives" rather than valuing creation intrinsically as God's handiwork. This suggests a need for deeper theological exploration of creation theology. Students demonstrated application of cultural mandate principles through concrete actions. Focus group discussions revealed numerous examples: participating in school garden projects, reducing plastic waste, resolving conflicts peacefully, helping younger students, and engaging in community service. A grade 6 student described, *"Our CRE class started a 'creation care team.' We remind others to turn off lights, we sort recycling, and we teach grade 3 students about protecting God's creation."* Teachers confirmed these observations, noting increased student initiative in environmental and social responsibility projects following lessons on the cultural mandate. Teacher B stated, *"I see the change in how they treat school property, how they interact with cleaning staff, how they think about their choices. They're connecting faith to daily life."* Application remained primarily limited to school contexts. Students struggled to articulate how the cultural mandate might influence future career choices, civic engagement, or systemic issues like poverty or environmental degradation. This suggests that teaching approaches successfully fostered immediate behavioral change but required strengthening to develop long-term stewardship vision. Older students (grades 5-6) demonstrated emerging theological understanding, recognizing connections between the cultural mandate and other biblical teachings. One grade 6 student reflected, *"The cultural mandate is like the parable of the talents. God gives us the world and our abilities, and He expects us to use them well, not bury them."* Such connections indicated developing biblical literacy and theological integration. However, most students' theological understanding remained at a concrete operational level, with limited engagement with abstract concepts like imago Dei, redemptive stewardship, or cultural transformation. When asked about the relationship between the cultural mandate and Jesus' redemptive work, students provided vague responses or changed the subject to more familiar topics. This finding suggests that teachers might benefit from pedagogical strategies that scaffold increasingly sophisticated theological thinking.

Challenges in Developing Personality Competence

Both teachers expressed frustration with the scarcity of professional development specifically addressing personality competence or cultural mandate pedagogy. Teacher A stated, *"Training sessions focus on curriculum changes or technological skills, which are important, but no one discusses how we develop as spiritual mentors or how we grow in personal maturity to better serve our students."* The rural location of SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai compounded this challenge, as travel to training venues required significant time and expense. Teachers relied primarily on self-directed learning through reading and online resources, without benefit of mentorship or peer learning communities. Students came from families with varying levels of Christian commitment, theological understanding, and socioeconomic status. This diversity created pedagogical challenges in teaching the cultural mandate. Teacher B explained, *"Some students come from homes where faith is central and environmental stewardship is practiced. Others come from homes where Christianity is cultural rather than practiced, or where economic pressures make concepts like 'caring for creation' seem luxurious."* Teachers needed considerable skill to honor diverse backgrounds while maintaining educational standards, requiring sensitivity, cultural competence, and adaptability that placed demands on their

personality competence. The emotional labor of bridging these differences contributed to teacher stress. The local context of Kuala Tanjung, characterized by rapid industrial development, environmental pressures, and socioeconomic disparities, presented both opportunities and challenges. Teachers recognized the relevance of the cultural mandate to local issues like coastal erosion, industrial pollution, and resource management, yet felt inadequately prepared to address these complex topics. Administrator 2 noted, *"Our teachers want to connect biblical teachings to real community issues, but they lack training in environmental science, social analysis, or community engagement methodologies. They're religious educators, not environmental scientists or social workers."* This gap between aspiration and expertise created tension for teachers committed to relevant, transformative education. As a public elementary school, SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai allocated limited time to religious education (2 hours weekly), constraining depth of engagement with topics like the cultural mandate. Additionally, CRE teachers served multiple schools to reach all Christian students in the district, limiting their presence at any single school and reducing opportunities to build deep relationships with students or participate fully in school community life. Teachers also noted tension between standardized curriculum expectations and contextually responsive teaching. Teacher A reflected, *"The curriculum provides general guidelines, but truly effective teaching of the cultural mandate requires deep knowledge of students' lives, communities, and challenges. Finding time to gain that knowledge while meeting curricular requirements is difficult."* Teachers acknowledged areas of personal growth that affected their personality competence. Teacher B candidly shared, *"I'm still learning emotional regulation, especially when facing difficult parents or challenging student behaviors. I'm growing, but I'm not the fully mature, wise teacher I aspire to be."* This self-awareness, while positive, indicated that even experienced teachers recognized ongoing personality development needs. Both teachers identified spiritual growth as essential yet challenging to maintain amidst professional demands. The lack of peer support, spiritual mentorship, or professional supervision specifically for CRE teachers left them feeling isolated in their developmental journey.

Teacher Personality as Pedagogical Tool

The manifestation of personality competence among CRE teachers at SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai aligns with Palmer's (2017) assertion that "we teach who we are." In religious education contexts, where the goal extends beyond cognitive knowledge to character transformation and spiritual formation, the teacher's personality becomes an essential pedagogical instrument. The spiritual authenticity, emotional maturity, ethical consistency, and inspirational presence demonstrated by participants exemplify what Sidjabat (2019) describes as "integrated teacher identity"—the coherence between personal faith, professional practice, and pedagogical approach. Particularly significant is the finding that students perceived and valued their teachers' authenticity. This resonates with research indicating that adolescents possess sophisticated "authenticity detectors" and respond more positively to adults whose actions align with professed values (Denton et al., 2020). For Christian education specifically, this authenticity serves as incarnational pedagogy—teachers embody Christian teachings, making abstract theological concepts concrete and accessible.

The emotional stability demonstrated by participating teachers created what Noddings (2013) terms "caring relationships," which are foundational for moral and spiritual education. Students' willingness to explore spiritual concepts, admit confusion, and risk behavioral change suggests a learning environment characterized by psychological safety—a direct outcome of teacher personality competence.

Cultural Mandate Pedagogy

Students' understanding of the cultural mandate revealed both strengths and limitations in current teaching approaches. The basic comprehension and practical application demonstrated by students indicate successful translation of theological concepts into age-appropriate language and actions. This achievement should not be minimized, as research consistently shows the challenge of making abstract religious concepts meaningful for concrete operational thinkers (Fowler, 2020). However, the limited theological depth and somewhat anthropocentric understanding suggest areas for pedagogical enhancement. The cultural mandate represents a rich theological concept encompassing creation theology, imago Dei, redemptive stewardship, and eschatological hope (Bartholomew & Goheen, 2020). Current teaching approaches, while producing behavioral outcomes, may not fully develop the theological framework necessary for sustained, mature Christian stewardship as students mature. This finding aligns with Groome's (2018) critique of religious education that emphasizes moral behavior without corresponding theological depth. Groome advocates for "shared Christian praxis"—an approach integrating experience, critical reflection, biblical narrative, and visioning for future transformation. Applying this framework to cultural mandate education might deepen students' theological understanding while maintaining practical relevance. The localized application of the cultural mandate (primarily within school contexts) suggests that teaching strategies successfully fostered immediate behavioral change but less effectively developed transferable stewardship dispositions. This pattern reflects what Perkins and Salomon (2019) describe as "context-bound learning"—knowledge and skills that remain tethered to learning environments rather than transferring to diverse situations. Developing pedagogies that explicitly support transfer—including metacognitive reflection, varied practice contexts, and connection to broader life domains—could enhance the lasting impact of cultural mandate education.

The challenges identified by participants illuminate systemic issues affecting CRE teacher effectiveness. The scarcity of professional development addressing personality competence reveals a gap in teacher education philosophy. Traditional teacher training emphasizes content knowledge and pedagogical skills while often neglecting the personal formation essential for religious educators (Buchanan & Hyde, 2021). This gap reflects broader tensions between professional and vocational understandings of teaching—tensions particularly acute in religious education where teaching constitutes a spiritual calling requiring ongoing personal and spiritual development. The rural context of this research site amplified access challenges common to teachers in remote areas. While technology offers potential solutions through online professional development, effective teacher formation requires more than information transmission. Teachers benefit from mentorship, peer learning communities, and supervised practice—modalities difficult to replicate virtually. Developing sustainable professional development systems for rural CRE teachers requires creative, context-sensitive approaches. The diversity of student

backgrounds highlights the cultural competence required of contemporary CRE teachers. In pluralistic settings, teachers must navigate theological, socioeconomic, and cultural differences while maintaining educational integrity. This navigation constitutes complex emotional labor requiring highly developed personality competence—empathy, flexibility, cultural humility, and sophisticated communication skills (Zembylas, 2020). Yet teacher preparation rarely addresses this complexity, leaving teachers to develop these competencies through trial and error. Institutional constraints reflect broader challenges facing religious education in public school contexts. The limited time allocation, multiple-school assignments, and standardized curriculum expectations create structural barriers to the deep, contextualized, relational pedagogy most effective for spiritual formation. Addressing these constraints requires policy-level intervention and advocacy for religious education as essential rather than supplementary to student development.

Implications for Theory and Practice Reflection on the Personality Competence

These findings contribute to religious education theory by demonstrating the mediating role of teacher personality competence in student spiritual formation. While previous research has established the importance of teacher quality generally, this study specifies how particular personality dimensions (authenticity, emotional maturity, ethical consistency, inspirational presence) function pedagogically in religious education contexts. This specificity can inform teacher competency frameworks, evaluation criteria, and professional development priorities. For practice, this research suggests several recommendations. First, CRE teacher preparation programs should incorporate explicit attention to personal and spiritual formation alongside pedagogical training. This might include spiritual direction, reflective practice, character development curricula, and mentorship by experienced educators who model integrated personality competence. Second, school systems should develop professional learning communities specifically for CRE teachers, providing peer support, shared reflection on practice, and collaborative problem-solving. Such communities could address the isolation identified by participants while distributing expertise and fostering collective growth. Third, curriculum development for cultural mandate education should employ scaffolded approaches that progressively deepen theological understanding while maintaining age-appropriate concreteness. This might involve carefully sequenced curriculum across grade levels, explicit teaching of theological concepts using varied pedagogies, and intentional connection-making between the cultural mandate and other biblical themes. Fourth, partnerships between schools, churches, and theological education institutions could provide resources, expertise, and support beyond what individual schools can offer. Such partnerships might include guest speakers, field experiences, service-learning projects, and access to theological resources that enrich cultural mandate education. Finally, advocacy for structural changes supporting religious education—including adequate time allocation, reasonable teacher assignments, and resources for professional development—should involve collaboration among educators, administrators, religious communities, and policymakers. The small sample size and single-site focus limit generalizability. Future research should include multiple sites representing diverse contexts (urban/rural, various regions, different school types) to identify contextual variations in personality competence and cultural mandate pedagogy.

The cross-sectional design captured teachers and students at a single point in time. Longitudinal research could examine the development of teacher personality competence over career stages and the long-term impact of cultural mandate education on students' stewardship attitudes and behaviors into adolescence and adulthood. This study focused on CRE teachers' perspectives and observable behaviors. Future research could employ psychological instruments to measure personality traits, spiritual maturity, or professional identity development more precisely. Additionally, examining students' perspectives through age-appropriate methods (drawings, storytelling, play-based activities) could provide richer understanding of their cultural mandate comprehension. Comparative research examining cultural mandate teaching across different religious education traditions could illuminate varied theological and pedagogical approaches. Similarly, research exploring how cultural mandate education addresses contemporary issues (climate change, social justice, technology) could enhance practical relevance. Finally, intervention research evaluating professional development programs designed to enhance CRE teacher personality competence could provide evidence-based guidance for teacher education. Such research might employ experimental or quasi-experimental designs to assess program effectiveness while identifying critical components of successful interventions.

CONCLUSION

This research demonstrates that personality competence of Christian Religious Education teachers significantly influences effective teaching of the cultural mandate and student spiritual formation. At SDN UPT Negeri 27 Sukaramai, teachers who exhibited spiritual authenticity, emotional stability, ethical consistency, and inspirational presence successfully modeled Christian stewardship values, fostering students' moral development and environmental responsibility. Students demonstrated basic comprehension and practical application of cultural mandate principles, evidenced by increased engagement in environmental stewardship and social responsibility activities. However, theological depth remained limited, suggesting opportunities to enhance pedagogical approaches that develop more sophisticated understanding of creation theology and redemptive stewardship. Teachers face significant challenges including limited professional development opportunities, diverse student backgrounds, complex sociocultural contexts, and institutional constraints. Addressing these challenges requires multifaceted approaches including reformed teacher education emphasizing personal formation, professional learning communities for mutual support, contextualized curriculum development, school-church-institution partnerships, and structural advocacy for adequate resources and time allocation. The findings contribute to religious education theory by specifying how personality competence functions pedagogically in spiritual formation contexts. For practice, this research provides empirical foundation for prioritizing teacher personality development alongside pedagogical skill acquisition, recognizing that in religious education, the teacher's being is inseparable from effective teaching. As Christian communities seek to prepare future generations for faithful stewardship of God's creation, investing in the personal and spiritual formation of religious educators emerges not as a luxury but as essential. Teachers who embody Christian values authentically inspire students to embrace their calling as image-bearers

entrusted with the cultural mandate—cultivating, developing, and caring for creation to God's glory. This research affirms that such transformation occurs not primarily through curriculum or techniques, but through the lived witness of teachers whose integrated personality competence makes the Gospel tangible and compelling.

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