



The Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Explaining the Wages of Sin Based on Romans 6:23 to Students SMP Negeri 2 Nassau

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Nassau employ pedagogical competence in explaining the concept of wages of sin as articulated in Romans 6:23 ("For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord") to their students. Using a qualitative case-study design, the research examines the teachers' methods, the challenges encountered, and the effectiveness of different pedagogical strategies. Data were collected via classroom observations, teacher and student interviews, and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. Findings reveal that while teachers generally demonstrate strong content knowledge and moral exemplarity, gaps exist in adapting teaching methods to diverse learner backgrounds, integrating interactive faith-based discussions, and ensuring comprehension of theological depth. The study concludes with recommendations for professional development and curricular support to strengthen pedagogical practice in CRE contexts.

Keywords: Pedagogical competence, teacher, sin, Romans 6:23

INTRODUCTION

The effective transmission of theological knowledge, particularly within the formal structures of Christian Religious Education (CRE), hinges critically upon a delicate balance between doctrinal fidelity and pedagogical efficacy. Educational attainment in this domain is not a mere function of rote memorization or passive exposure to scriptural facts; rather, it fundamentally depends on how deeply and meaningfully that knowledge is communicated, contextualized, and internalized by the learner. Key Christian doctrines—the concepts of sin, death, redemption, and eternal life—constitute the core narrative of the faith, demanding not only meticulous theological accuracy from the instructor but also a profound level of pedagogical competence—the capacity to present, translate, and facilitate understanding of complex, often abstract, spiritual truths. This challenge is magnified in secular or mixed educational settings where students bring diverse epistemological backgrounds and may lack a shared conceptual framework for

spiritual terminology. The teaching of the Christian narrative requires bridging the chasm between divine revelation and human comprehension. While the content is fixed by scriptural authority, the process of its conveyance must be fluid and adaptive. The pivotal concepts of sin as an inherited and actual state, death as its spiritual and physical consequence, redemption as an act of divine intervention, and eternal life as a bestowed gift of grace are central to the CRE curriculum. Their profundity necessitates instructional strategies that move beyond simple definition, requiring teachers to engage in metaphor, analogy, and relatable life experiences to anchor the abstract in the tangible. This is precisely where the pedagogical challenge is most acutely felt, transforming the teacher's role from a purveyor of information to a theological translator and facilitator of spiritual meaning. Failure to exercise such competence risks misinterpretation, trivialization of core tenets, or, conversely, the development of a detached, purely intellectual knowledge devoid of existential relevance for the student.

Few scriptural passages condense the essence of this theological narrative as succinctly and powerfully as Romans 6:23: "For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord." This concise statement, often referred to as the "Gospel in a nutshell," juxtaposes a clear-cut consequence (wages/death) with an undeserved benefit (gift/eternal life). From a pedagogical standpoint, this verse presents multiple layers of complexity. The concept of 'wages' implies a deserved compensation for work, yet the "work" of sin is often invisible and its "wage" of spiritual death is an abstract reality, not an immediate physical consequence easily grasped by adolescents. Conversely, the notion of 'gift' and 'grace' defies the economic logic established by "wages," introducing a discontinuity in moral accounting that can be intellectually counter-intuitive. Students often struggle to reconcile the fairness of wages with the unearned nature of a gift, particularly when the concepts of a spiritual 'death' versus a tangible 'life' are blurred. Effective teaching must therefore navigate this tension, preserving the integrity of the theological contrast while ensuring the students comprehend the profound implications of grace. The significance of this pedagogical challenge is heightened within the specific context of Indonesian public schooling, which mandates religious instruction as part of its character education initiative. SMP Negeri 2 Nassau, as a representative institution within this system, incorporates Romans 6:23 into its CRE curriculum, tasking its teachers with translating this foundational verse into meaningful learning outcomes that support both religious literacy and moral development. Given the national emphasis on character building through religious grounding, the efficacy of instruction on such core verses becomes a matter of national educational importance, extending beyond denominational concerns. However, despite the acknowledged centrality of this task, there remains a discernible limitation in empirical research investigating the precise nature of pedagogical practices employed by CRE teachers in this specific setting, particularly concerning the instruction of highly abstract doctrinal concepts. The gap lies not in the availability of curriculum materials, but in the practical, on-the-ground reality of teaching methodology and its immediate impact on student comprehension. A complete assessment of pedagogical competence necessitates an acknowledgment of the friction points within the educational process. Therefore, the study will also investigate the practical barriers to effective teaching and the corresponding learning outcomes from the student's perspective: What specific obstacles, constraints, or challenges do teachers face in explaining the nuances of Romans

6:23, and how do students respond—both intellectually and affectively—to these explanations? Understanding these challenges—be they time constraints, lack of appropriate resources, disciplinary issues, or inherent conceptual resistance—is crucial for generating practical and relevant policy recommendations. By systematically addressing these questions, the study aims to move beyond anecdotal evidence to offer a robust framework for evaluating and improving the communication of core Christian doctrine within the formal Indonesian educational system. This research will ultimately serve as a vital resource for curriculum developers, teacher trainers, and policymakers seeking to enhance the quality and relevance of religious instruction in the modern era.

METHODS

This investigation adopts a qualitative case study design, strategically chosen to facilitate an in-depth, contextualized understanding of pedagogical practices within a specific educational environment. The case focus is deliberately placed on Christian Religious Education (CRE) instruction at SMP Negeri 2 Nassau, providing a rich, bounded system for examining the complex interaction between theological content and classroom execution. This methodology is particularly suited for exploring the *how* and *why* of teacher and student experiences in translating abstract doctrines into concrete learning outcomes. The study participants were selected through a purposive sampling strategy. The teacher cohort comprised two CRE teachers, both possessing substantial professional experience of five or more years in the school. This criterion ensured that the analysis was based on the reflections and practices of established educators capable of articulating nuanced pedagogical challenges and strategies. The student participants were drawn from Grade 8, consisting of a focused sample of 20 students. This group was carefully selected to represent a balanced variation in both academic achievement (high, medium, and low performers) and religious engagement (as perceived by the teachers), thus allowing for a broad spectrum of responses regarding comprehension and perception of the lesson content. Ethical integrity was maintained throughout the process, with informed consent secured from all participating teachers, students, and their respective guardians. Furthermore, the entire study protocol received formal approval from the school authorities, and strict measures were implemented to ensure the anonymity and confidentiality of all data collected. A multifaceted approach employing triangulation across three primary data sources was utilized to ensure the comprehensiveness and validity of the findings. First, non-participant observation was conducted during lessons where Romans 6:23 was the central topic. Detailed field notes meticulously captured teachers' pedagogical strategies, the dynamics of student engagement, and the flow of question-answer interactions. Second, semi-structured interviews were a core component. Teachers were engaged in detailed discussions regarding their instructional planning, choice of teaching methods, perceived classroom challenges, and reflective adjustments. Students were interviewed to explore their individual comprehension of the abstract concepts (sin, death, grace, eternal life), their perceptions of the instruction, and specific difficulties encountered. Third, documentary analysis involved a systematic review of all relevant instructional materials, including formal lesson plans, presentation slides, worksheets, and supplementary teaching aids used specifically for the instruction of Romans 6:23.

The collected data—interview transcripts, detailed field notes, and instructional documents—were subjected to thematic analysis. This involved an iterative process of coding, starting with the identification of recurring segments of text relevant to the research questions. Codes were grouped into higher-order themes related directly to pedagogical competence, encompassing areas such as clarity of explanation, instructional adaptation to student needs, assessment techniques, levels of student engagement, and theological accuracy in presenting the doctrine. The reliability of the findings was fortified by the systematic triangulation between observation, interview, and document data, allowing for cross-verification of reported practices against observed behaviours and documented intentions. This rigorous analytical process ensures the resulting interpretations are well-grounded in empirical evidence from the specific context of SMP Negeri 2 Nassau.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of classroom observations and teacher interviews revealed a distinct reliance on traditional, teacher-centered instructional approaches for conveying the core theological concepts in Romans 6:23. The dominant pedagogical method employed by the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers was expository instruction, which prioritized the authoritative delivery and systematic explanation of the biblical text. The typical lesson structure began with the audible reading of the scriptural passage (Romans 6:23) by the teacher, followed by a word-by-word, phrase-by-phrase explanation of its meaning. This process aimed for theological accuracy by carefully defining terms such as 'wages,' 'sin,' 'death,' and 'eternal life' within the established Christian lexicon. Teachers articulated the concept of "wages of sin" as a logical, earned consequence, contrasting it sharply with the "gift of God" as an unmerited, gratuitous offering. This methodical, didactic approach ensured that the doctrinal content was fully covered, serving primarily to transmit theological definitions and established interpretations.

A critical component of this didactic approach was the heavy use of moral narratives and anecdotal illustrations. Teachers routinely integrated relatable stories, parables, or contemporary ethical dilemmas to bridge the abstract spiritual concepts with concrete, observable human behavior. For instance, the 'wages of sin' was frequently illustrated using analogies related to natural consequences of poor choices, such as failure resulting from a lack of effort, or punishment following an infraction of school rules. These stories were intended to make the abstract concept of sin's consequence tangible, linking spiritual reality to the students' experiential world, though the extent of spiritual depth achieved remained a point for further discussion in the comprehension data. While exposition formed the backbone of instruction, the teachers occasionally integrated active learning strategies to foster student engagement. The most common was the implementation of small group discussions. In these segments, students were often tasked with reflecting on personal life choices and evaluating them against the moral and consequential framework presented by the verse. This encouraged a degree of critical engagement, prompting students to personalize the concepts of sin and its consequence within their own moral universe. However, observations indicated that the duration of these discussions was often limited, and they frequently reverted back to teacher-led exposition for closure. Furthermore, the integration of visual aids was observed, though

its utilization was sporadic. When employed, these aids typically consisted of hand-drawn charts, simple diagrams, or slides that visually represented the stark contrast between the consequence of sin and the promise of eternal life. These visuals, often employing arrows or dual-column formats, served as a concise summary tool designed to reinforce the central theological polarity of the passage. The limited and non-standardized use of these aids suggests they function as supplementary tools rather than as integral parts of a visual-centric pedagogical plan. Overall, the evidence points to a teaching environment where doctrinal clarity is prioritized through detailed verbal explanation, supported by moral storytelling, with occasional shifts to group reflection.

Instructional Adaptations and Differentiation

The study revealed that CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Nassau possessed a clear, *implicit recognition* of the diversity present within their Grade 8 classrooms. Teachers acknowledged significant variations among students concerning prior biblical knowledge, maturity of faith, and cognitive ability—all factors that directly impact the assimilation of abstract doctrine. This awareness of student heterogeneity occasionally translated into strategic, targeted adaptations. For instance, teachers would frequently simplify the theological vocabulary, offering plain language equivalents for high-concept terms. The term "wages" was clarified using practical analogies of earned income or consequences, and "death" was briefly contrasted with physical cessation to emphasize its spiritual dimension. Despite this conscious awareness, the execution of sustained pedagogical differentiation remained limited. Observations indicated that students who visibly struggled with the verse's more abstract concepts, such as the nature of spiritual death or the unilateral quality of grace, often received minimal scaffolding beyond the simple repetition of definitions or the reiteration of the primary narrative. There was an observable tendency to maintain a standardized pace and content delivery for the entire class, suggesting a tension between the need to cover mandated curriculum content and the ideal of individualized learning. Crucially, few documented instances emerged where teachers effectively connected the abstract doctrine to local cultural metaphors or the students' deeply personal, lived experiences in ways that truly anchored theological understanding. This minimal contextualization restricted the doctrine's move from intellectual definition to existential relevance, potentially hindering its deep comprehension and application in daily moral life.

Assessment of Understanding and Student Response

The methods employed to gauge student learning were predominantly summative in nature. Formal assessment activities largely comprised quizzes focused on memorization of the verse and its associated terms, along with recitation exercises. This emphasis on recall tends to measure content retention rather than depth of conceptual grasp. Formative assessment—the continuous feedback loop designed to monitor and adjust ongoing instruction—appeared less frequent. While teachers occasionally used conceptual check-ins and posed reflective questions, these moments were not systematically integrated into lesson planning or consistently utilized to adapt the subsequent instructional segment. Student feedback provided a critical counterpoint to the teachers' perceived effectiveness. Students reported that they genuinely appreciated the use of stories and visual aids, confirming that these materials served a critical function

in initial comprehension. However, the interviews also uncovered significant conceptual difficulties. A major point of confusion centered on the nature of "spiritual death" versus physical death, suggesting that the teachers' attempts at clarification were not fully successful in disentangling the two concepts for the adolescent mind. Furthermore, a non-trivial number of students confessed to misinterpreting the "gift of God", viewing it primarily as a reward for moral goodness or a call to general ethical behavior, rather than understanding its explicit theological linkage to Christ's redemptive work. This ambiguity underscores a failure in pedagogical competence to secure theological fidelity at the point of reception.

Identified Pedagogical Challenges

First, the inherent theological complexity of Romans 6:23 presented a structural barrier. Teachers openly noted the significant difficulty in simultaneously ensuring the doctrinal accuracy of concepts like sin and grace while making them accessible and relatable to a Grade 8 audience. The risk of sacrificing accuracy for simplicity, or vice versa, was a constant concern articulated by the educators. Second, time constraints imposed by the tightly managed school timetable severely limited instructional depth. The allotted class hours restricted opportunities for the kind of extensive discussion, open-ended inquiry, or individual follow-up necessary to address abstract conceptual confusion effectively. The pressure to complete the curriculum often necessitated a swift return to the expository mode. Third, resource limitations hindered creative teaching. The teachers reported a scarcity of engaging teaching aids specifically tailored for visualizing and explaining the contrast inherent in the doctrine of the wages of sin and the gift of life. The general lack of tailored supplementary materials meant teachers relied heavily on verbal exposition and their own often rudimentary visual aids, limiting the sensory and cognitive access points for students. Finally, managing student diversity remained a pervasive operational challenge. The wide disparities in students' religious backgrounds and prior exposure to scriptural language meant that engaging the entire class was difficult. Teachers often struggled to draw out contributions from less confident or less religiously engaged students, resulting in classroom discussions that were frequently dominated by a smaller, already knowledgeable cohort. Collectively, these challenges highlight the structural and conceptual hurdles that necessitate targeted professional development and resource allocation to truly elevate pedagogical competence in this critical subject area.

CONCLUSION

The findings suggest that CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Nassau exhibit several elements of pedagogical competence: sound knowledge of doctrine, moral modeling, use of illustrative stories and some interactive phases. However, in aligning with best practices in religious education, there remain gaps in adapting to students' distinct learning needs, employing formative assessment, and contextualizing theological truth in students' lived reality. Pedagogical competence—per literature—entails mastery over content, understanding of learner characteristics, skill in instructional design, and evaluation of learning. This study's results mirror what has been observed in other religious education

settings where content mastery is strong, but differentiation and formative assessment are weaker. Professional development that focuses on these weaker areas (especially scaffolding abstract theological concepts, designing interactive and dialogical learning, creating locally relevant illustrations) would likely enhance student comprehension and spiritual growth. The study confirms that Romans 6:23, while central to Christian doctrine, risks being reduced to moralism or memorization unless teachers invest in strategies that help students internalize both the gravity of sin and the gratuitous nature of God's gift. The pedagogical competence of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Nassau is generally adequate in terms of biblical knowledge and moral instruction. Yet, for explaining the *wages of sin* based on Romans 6:23 in a way that facilitates deep understanding, there is room for improvement in: 1) Differentiating instruction to diverse students' backgrounds and capacities; 2) Incorporating more formative assessment and reflective learning; 3) Using culturally contextualized illustrations and stories; 4) Ensuring sustained engagement rather than one-off presentation. Conduct regular in-service training workshops that include case studies on teaching abstract doctrines. Develop a repository of teaching aids (stories, visual media, local examples) for explaining sin, grace, eternal life. Encourage peer observation and feedback among CRE teachers to share successful strategies. Integrate assessments that probe not only recall but student's theological thinking (e.g., compare, contrast, apply, reflect).

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