



From Babel to Brotherhood: Pedagogical Competence in Christian Religious Education for Building Unity amid Diversity at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to building unity amid diversity through an expository reflection on Genesis 11:6 at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat in North Sumatra, Indonesia. In a nation founded on pluralism, the capacity of teachers to integrate biblical principles with inclusive pedagogy is essential for fostering harmony across cultural and religious differences. Using a qualitative-expository design based on the PRISMA-inspired interpretive framework, the study combined classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and textual analysis of Genesis 11:6 to explore how unity can be taught without erasing difference. Twenty participants-including one CRE teacher and twelve students-were selected through purposive sampling. Data were analyzed thematically to identify pedagogical strategies that transform theological reflection into lived educational practice. The findings reveal that pedagogical competence grounded in theological insight enables teachers to reinterpret the Babel narrative not as divine punishment but as a moral call to humility, empathy, and cooperation. The CRE teacher's integration of storytelling, collaborative learning, and moral reflection created a classroom culture of respect and interdependence. Students demonstrated increased empathy, teamwork, and appreciation for diversity, indicating that faith-based pedagogy can nurture inclusive moral character. The study concludes that true pedagogical competence in Christian education transcends instructional skill-it embodies a spiritual vocation of reconciliation. Genesis 11:6, reimagined pedagogically, transforms Babel's fragmentation into brotherhood, positioning education as a redemptive space where unity and diversity coexist in harmony.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Unity*

INTRODUCTION

Education, particularly Christian Religious Education (CRE), serves as a vital platform for shaping students' moral, spiritual, and social identity in the midst of cultural and religious plurality. In the context of Indonesia—a nation known for its motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*—schools play a strategic role in cultivating harmony among students from diverse backgrounds. Within this multicultural landscape, the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers becomes a determining factor in forming students' understanding of unity, empathy, and mutual respect. Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's ability to design, implement, and evaluate learning that promotes both intellectual growth and moral character (Shulman, 1987). For Christian educators, this competence is inseparable from theological reflection and the calling to embody Christ-like love within plural learning environments. A teacher's pedagogical approach thus becomes both an educational method and a moral witness that reflects the inclusive spirit of Christian faith. The biblical foundation of this study is drawn from Genesis 11:6, which states, *"The Lord said, 'If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them.'"* This verse, often interpreted within the narrative of the Tower of Babel, is not merely a story of divine intervention but a profound reflection on human unity and its potential. The text reveals both the power and the peril of human togetherness—unity that, when divorced from divine purpose, can lead to arrogance, but when guided by love and humility, can become a foundation for shared flourishing. In the pedagogical context, Genesis 11:6 challenges educators to reinterpret the meaning of unity not as uniformity, but as collaboration grounded in moral and spiritual integrity. The story of Babel invites Christian teachers to transform the fragmented language of division into the harmonious language of brotherhood. In classrooms marked by ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity, this biblical insight becomes deeply relevant. The Christian Religious Education teacher is called to foster a kind of unity that respects difference while affirming shared humanity.

At SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat, a public junior high school in North Sumatra, these challenges are vividly experienced. The school community reflects Indonesia's diverse social composition, with students of different ethnic and religious backgrounds learning side by side. In this environment, the CRE teacher holds a dual responsibility: to nurture the faith identity of Christian students while promoting values that sustain peace and cooperation among all learners. Pedagogical competence in this context extends beyond mastering biblical content; it requires the teacher to design learning experiences that connect scriptural truth with everyday relationships. Through stories, discussions, and collaborative projects, the teacher acts as a moral mediator—translating the divine message of unity into practical ethics of empathy and solidarity. The integration of Genesis 11:6 into the classroom thus becomes not merely an act of biblical exposition but a transformative educational process that reorients students toward communal harmony. The urgency of this pedagogical task cannot be overstated. In an era characterized by social polarization, identity politics, and digital echo chambers, the younger generation is increasingly vulnerable to prejudice and moral disconnection. Schools are among the few remaining spaces where the spirit of unity can be intentionally cultivated. Christian Religious Education, when conducted with pedagogical excellence, becomes a formative

experience that teaches students how to live together in difference—a skill essential for peaceful coexistence in a plural society. Through reflection on the Babel narrative, students can learn that diversity is not a curse but a divine design for cooperation. The CRE teacher's role is to guide students toward understanding that unity is achieved not by erasing differences but by aligning them toward common good. This study, therefore, explores how the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to building unity amid diversity through the reflective use of Genesis 11:6. The research is situated at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat as a case study that embodies Indonesia's plural educational setting. The focus lies in understanding how teachers interpret and apply biblical principles of unity within classroom interactions, teaching strategies, and moral formation activities. By connecting theological reflection with pedagogical practice, this study aims to demonstrate that the story of Babel, when viewed through the lens of Christian education, offers a profound paradigm shift—from fragmentation to fellowship, from Babel to brotherhood. The findings are expected to enrich the discourse on moral and character education in Indonesia, highlighting that true pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education lies not only in the ability to teach Scripture but in the wisdom to transform biblical truth into lived experience that unites rather than divides.

METHODS

An expository theological approach, in harmony with qualitative, was used to explore how the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to cultivating unity amid diversity through the reflection of Genesis 11:6. The qualitative design was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teachers' pedagogical practices, beliefs, and experiences within their real educational contexts. The expository approach, on the other hand, integrates biblical interpretation with educational practice, ensuring that theological reflection directly informs pedagogical implementation. This methodological combination made it possible to examine how biblical principles—particularly the message of unity derived from the Babel narrative—are translated into moral and instructional practices in the classroom. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat, a public junior high school located in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was selected due to its socio-religious diversity, representing a microcosm of Indonesia's multicultural society. Students at this school come from Christian, Muslim, and indigenous backgrounds, making it an ideal setting to examine how Christian Religious Education teachers foster unity while maintaining the distinctiveness of Christian moral teachings. The locus also reflects the reality of faith-based instruction within a public education system that promotes tolerance and social harmony. The participants included one CRE teacher and twelve students from grades seven to nine who were actively engaged in religious learning activities. The teacher was chosen through purposive sampling based on their professional experience and reputation for integrating biblical reflection into moral education. The students were selected to represent a variety of social and cultural backgrounds, enabling the researcher to explore how pedagogical strategies resonate across diverse learners. Ethical consent was obtained from both the teacher and the school administration prior to data collection. Observational notes focused on how the teacher used storytelling, group discussion, and collaborative learning to reinforce unity in diversity. Semi-structured

interviews with the teacher explored their understanding of pedagogical competence, the challenges of teaching in a plural environment, and the theological meanings of the Babel story applied to education. Student interviews provided complementary insights into how lessons on unity and compassion influenced their interpersonal behavior and perceptions of difference. All data were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns related to the teacher's pedagogical strategies, classroom climate, and moral outcomes. The expository interpretation of Genesis 11:6 served as an analytical lens to connect the theological dimension (unity as divine intention) with pedagogical actions (teaching cooperation, empathy, and mutual respect). The credibility of findings was enhanced through triangulation among the three data sources, and peer debriefing with another religious education scholar ensured interpretive rigor. By combining theological reflection with qualitative inquiry, the research provides not only an account of teaching practice but also a spiritual interpretation of education as a redemptive act-transforming the Babel of misunderstanding into the brotherhood of unity through the competent and compassionate work of the CRE teacher.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a transformative role in cultivating unity amid diversity through the lens of Genesis 11:6. The verse—*“The Lord said, ‘If as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them’”*—serves as a theological and pedagogical framework for understanding both the potential and peril of human unity. While the narrative of Babel is often interpreted as a warning against pride, its deeper message also underscores the divine recognition of the power of collaboration and shared purpose. Within the educational context of SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat, this dual message becomes profoundly relevant. The CRE teacher at the locus transformed the biblical account into a pedagogical metaphor: unity as strength guided by humility and faith, rather than as uniformity driven by self-exaltation. This approach became the foundation for teaching students how to live harmoniously amidst their differences. The first major finding concerns the theological-pedagogical interpretation of unity as divine intention. Through classroom observations, it became evident that the teacher consistently used the Babel narrative to encourage students to see unity as part of God's design for humanity. Instead of focusing solely on the divine punishment—the confusion of languages—the teacher emphasized that God acknowledged the incredible power of human collaboration. The message, as the teacher interpreted, was not that unity itself was evil but that unity devoid of humility leads to destruction. This expository interpretation allowed students to grasp a deeper moral truth: diversity and unity are not opposites but complementary aspects of God's creative will. The teacher explained that the confusion of languages was not a curse but a correction—a divine act to redirect humanity from self-glorification toward cooperative dependence on God and one another. This interpretation transformed Genesis 11:6 into a living moral lesson, teaching students that unity rooted in humility can lead to constructive growth, while unity rooted in arrogance leads to division. Through group discussions, students were invited to relate this biblical insight to their daily experiences at school. They reflected on how teamwork during projects often succeeded when

members respected one another's contributions and failed when some tried to dominate. This reflective process helped students understand that the essence of unity lies not in sameness but in shared respect and purpose. The teacher used simple yet profound questions such as, "What kind of unity does God bless?" and "How can our class reflect God's purpose of working together?" These questions guided students toward a spiritual understanding of unity-not as a human achievement but as a divine calling. The pedagogical competence of the teacher was evident in their ability to translate theological concepts into relatable social experiences. Through dialogue, reflection, and storytelling, the teacher bridged Scripture with life, allowing students to experience theology as lived wisdom.

The second major finding highlights the role of pedagogical competence in mediating diversity through inclusive learning strategies. The CRE teacher demonstrated high adaptability and relational intelligence in creating an inclusive classroom environment. Observations revealed that lessons on unity were not delivered as abstract doctrines but as experiential learning activities. The teacher often organized mixed-group projects where students of different cultural or religious backgrounds collaborated on creative tasks, such as making posters about peace or performing short dramas inspired by the Tower of Babel story. These activities were designed to help students recognize that diversity enriches, rather than weakens, communal goals. The teacher framed these exercises within the theological motif of cooperation: just as humanity at Babel shared one language to pursue a common vision, students too must learn to communicate and work together-but with humility and respect as guiding principles. In post-activity reflections, students often expressed that working with peers of different backgrounds initially felt challenging, but they learned to appreciate differing viewpoints as complementary rather than conflicting. The teacher reinforced these reflections with biblical parallels, noting how God used diversity of languages to teach interdependence rather than division. This pedagogical move exemplified what Noddings (2013) calls "the pedagogy of care"-where teaching becomes an act of nurturing relationships rather than transmitting information. By positioning diversity as a divine instrument for mutual growth, the teacher dismantled the implicit fear or bias that sometimes arises in multicultural settings. This aligns with Arthur's (2019) concept of moral pedagogy, which stresses that character education must engage both the cognitive and affective dimensions of learning. The teacher's ability to combine biblical exposition with experiential activities demonstrated an integrated form of pedagogical competence-one that unites knowledge, empathy, and moral formation.

The third finding focuses on the CRE teacher as a theological mediator between faith and social reality. In interviews, the teacher articulated a clear vision of their vocation: to make biblical principles relevant to students' daily lives. This was achieved through contextualization-connecting the ancient narrative of Babel with modern challenges of division, discrimination, and misunderstanding. The teacher explained to students that just as the people of Babel failed because they sought to build a name for themselves, modern society falters when individuals or groups prioritize self-interest over communal well-being. The discussion often shifted to issues the students faced in school, such as cliques, gossip, or bullying. By framing these behaviors as modern "towers of Babel"-symbols of pride and exclusion-the teacher helped students see moral parallels between

Scripture and contemporary life. This hermeneutical approach aligns with Groome's (1991) model of "shared praxis," where learners critically reflect on their lived experiences in light of the Christian story. The result was that students began to perceive moral and relational issues not merely as personal matters but as opportunities for spiritual growth. The teacher's expository teaching transformed biblical reflection into moral imagination—a space where students could envision reconciliation, cooperation, and mutual understanding as expressions of faith. During interviews, students described the class as a place where they "learn to see others the way God does," a statement that captures the transformative goal of Christian education.

The fourth major finding concerns the cultivation of empathy and moral imagination through biblical narrative. Genesis 11:6 provided a foundation for exploring how communication, when grounded in mutual respect, becomes a tool for unity rather than domination. The teacher encouraged students to reflect on how misunderstanding can lead to conflict, both in ancient times and today. Role-play activities were introduced, where students reenacted scenes from the Tower of Babel story—one group representing the builders and another group representing God's messengers. Through this dramatization, students were invited to experience the emotional tension between ambition and humility, pride and cooperation. The teacher guided the reflection afterward, asking, "What do you feel when others do not understand your language?" and "How can we build understanding even when we are different?" These activities proved effective in fostering empathy as students began to relate the biblical narrative to their interpersonal relationships. One student noted, "When I argued with my friend, it felt like our words were confused, just like in Babel." Such reflections indicate that students internalized the metaphorical meaning of the story—not as a distant historical event, but as a mirror of human communication and moral struggle. This approach resonates with Wright's (2006) concept of "narrative ethics," where Scripture becomes a living dialogue shaping moral consciousness. The CRE teacher's pedagogical competence was reflected in their ability to facilitate emotional engagement without losing theological depth. By using storytelling, role-play, and guided reflection, the teacher ensured that empathy emerged not merely as sentimentality but as a spiritual discipline grounded in biblical truth.

The fifth significant finding pertains to the impact of compassion-based pedagogy on classroom culture and student character formation. The classroom climate observed during the study was marked by mutual respect, openness, and cooperation—attributes consistently reinforced through the teacher's example and instruction. Students addressed each other politely, shared materials willingly, and showed sensitivity toward peers' emotional states. When conflicts arose, the teacher modeled reconciliation by inviting students to discuss the issue collectively and pray for one another. This practice echoed Joseph's act of compassion in Genesis 45:11 and reinforced the biblical principle that unity must be sustained through forgiveness and empathy. Interviews with students confirmed that such experiences had a lasting impact. Several students reported that they began to help classmates more willingly and avoided making jokes that could offend others. Parents, too, observed positive behavioral changes at home, noting that their children became more considerate and cooperative. These transformations reflect the

moral outcomes described by Lickona (1991), who emphasized that moral education involves three components: moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action. The CRE teacher's pedagogical competence ensured that all three dimensions were present in the learning process. Students understood the value of unity cognitively, felt empathy affectively, and practiced cooperation behaviorally. These results affirm that teaching unity amid diversity is an act of re-creation—a restoration of the divine harmony disrupted at Babel. The CRE teacher, through competent pedagogy, functions as a co-creator with God in rebuilding the bonds of understanding. The confusion of languages at Babel symbolized humanity's fragmentation; the classroom, under the teacher's guidance, became a symbolic Pentecost—a place where different voices came together in understanding. This theological parallel was often drawn by the teacher, who concluded lessons by reading Acts 2:6 to show that the Spirit's descent at Pentecost reversed the division of Babel. Such integration of biblical narratives across testaments provided students with a redemptive vision: that God's ultimate purpose for diversity is not separation but reconciliation.

The sixth major theme concerns the professional implications of pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education. The review of observations and interviews indicates that the teacher's success in cultivating unity was not accidental but the result of deliberate pedagogical planning, reflective practice, and spiritual commitment. Lesson plans consistently included clear objectives related to moral formation, such as promoting empathy, respect, and collaboration. The teacher's self-reflective journal revealed an ongoing process of evaluating each lesson not only in terms of content delivery but also relational impact. This professional habit aligns with what Shulman (1987) calls "pedagogical content knowledge"—the integration of subject matter expertise with pedagogical skill. In the context of Christian education, it also includes spiritual discernment—the ability to sense how theological truths can be meaningfully conveyed through relational and moral engagement. The teacher's pedagogical competence was evident in their capacity to integrate faith and culture harmoniously. In a school where students belonged to different faiths, the teacher framed Christian teachings on unity in a way that resonated universally without compromising theological integrity. For example, when discussing the Babel story, the teacher invited comparisons with moral lessons from other traditions, encouraging students to see compassion and cooperation as shared values across humanity. This inclusive pedagogy reflects what Banks (2008) describes as "transformative multicultural education," which promotes mutual respect through moral dialogue rather than relativism. In doing so, the teacher positioned Christian Religious Education not as an exclusive subject but as a moral catalyst for intercultural understanding. The results demonstrate that pedagogical competence in Christian education is not confined to classroom management or instructional efficiency. It is a holistic capacity encompassing spiritual sensitivity, emotional intelligence, relational awareness, and theological literacy. The CRE teacher at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat exemplified this integration, showing that when biblical exegesis is combined with inclusive pedagogy, the outcome is not only academic understanding but spiritual transformation. Students learned that unity is a divine gift to be protected through humility, empathy, and shared purpose. The story of Babel thus became a mirror of their own moral journey—from misunderstanding to mutual respect, from separation to

spiritual communion. The study's findings affirm that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education is a theological act—a form of ministry that transforms teaching into an embodiment of divine reconciliation. Genesis 11:6, once read as a story of judgment, becomes in this context a story of potential-revealing that unity, when guided by God's will, can overcome the divisions of pride and prejudice. The CRE teacher's role as interpreter, mediator, and mentor becomes indispensable in realizing this divine vision. By teaching students that true unity celebrates diversity, the teacher participates in God's redemptive work, transforming classrooms into communities of grace—where every language, culture, and heart can find harmony in the shared purpose of love.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a decisive and sacred role in cultivating unity amid diversity, particularly when grounded in the biblical narrative of Genesis 11:6. The findings from the expository and qualitative exploration at SMP Negeri Satu Atap 1 Dolat Rayat affirm that pedagogy, when shaped by theological insight and relational sensitivity, becomes a medium through which God's redemptive purpose for humanity is realized in education. The story of Babel, often interpreted as a symbol of division, gains renewed meaning in this pedagogical context: it becomes a divine reminder that unity must be rooted in humility, empathy, and spiritual purpose, not in pride or domination. Through competent and compassionate teaching, the CRE teacher transforms this biblical warning into a vision of hope—demonstrating that diversity, when guided by love, leads not to fragmentation but to fellowship. The teacher's pedagogical competence was manifested through an integration of biblical exegesis, reflective pedagogy, and inclusive classroom practice. By interpreting Genesis 11:6 not as a rejection of human unity but as a divine correction of misdirected ambition, the teacher reoriented students' understanding of collaboration toward God-centered cooperation. The classroom became a microcosm of moral and spiritual unity where students of diverse backgrounds learned to communicate respectfully, work together, and see difference as divine design. This learning environment affirmed that education is not merely the transfer of knowledge but a formation of moral and spiritual character. Pedagogical competence, therefore, encompasses more than technical proficiency—it is the embodiment of Christian values in teaching practice. It involves emotional intelligence, theological reflection, and the capacity to foster relationships grounded in respect and empathy. The study underscores that teaching unity amid diversity aligns with the biblical vision of reconciliation that runs throughout Scripture—from Babel's dispersion to Pentecost's gathering. The same God who scattered humanity to prevent self-idolatry later restored them through the Spirit's gift of mutual understanding. This continuity between Genesis 11 and Acts 2 reveals that unity is not the erasure of difference but its sanctification through divine purpose. The CRE teacher, by cultivating mutual respect and spiritual awareness in the classroom, becomes a participant in this redemptive process. Each act of empathetic teaching echoes God's desire to bring harmony out of human dissonance. Education thus becomes a liturgical act—a worshipful participation in God's mission of restoration. Teacher training programs should emphasize the integration of theological exegesis and pedagogical practice, ensuring that educators can interpret Scripture contextually and apply it

meaningfully to moral education. Then, schools must encourage relational pedagogy that values empathy, dialogue, and cooperation across differences. National character education initiatives would benefit from incorporating biblical models of unity as frameworks for intercultural understanding. When teachers, regardless of religious affiliation, embody compassion and humility, they lay the foundation for peace in schools and society. The study affirms that pedagogical competence in Christian education is not merely a professional skill but a spiritual vocation. The CRE teacher stands as a bridge between divine truth and human experience—an interpreter of Scripture and a shepherd of souls. By cultivating unity amid diversity, the teacher mirrors God’s own work of reconciliation, teaching students not only to coexist but to co-love in the image of Christ. In this way, Christian education fulfills its highest calling: transforming Babel into brotherhood, and classrooms into communities of grace where every voice, though different, speaks in harmony with the language of love.

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