



## Pedagogical Competence and Experiential Faith Formation: Learning from Exodus 33:11 in Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the role of pedagogical competence in shaping experiential faith formation within Christian Religious Education, using Exodus 33:11 as a theological and pedagogical foundation. The verse—"The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend"—illustrates a model of intimate, transformative learning grounded in relational encounter. This biblical motif serves as a framework for understanding how CRE teachers can cultivate learning experiences that move beyond cognitive instruction toward spiritual formation. The research, conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o in West Nias, Indonesia, employed a qualitative-exegetical approach combining theological reflection with classroom observation and interviews. The study involved one CRE teacher and twelve students, focusing on how experiential learning and relational teaching practices foster students' understanding of faith, character, and moral responsibility. Findings reveal that pedagogical competence in CRE involves not only mastery of content but also the ability to create learning encounters that mirror divine communication—personal, dialogical, and transformative. The teacher's role as a spiritual mentor, rather than a mere instructor, was central in helping students internalize biblical values through reflection, participation, and lived experience. Theologically, the study interprets Moses' face-to-face encounter with God as a pedagogical paradigm where teaching becomes an act of communion and transformation. The results affirm that experiential pedagogy, rooted in spiritual competence, enables Christian education to form not only knowledge about God but relationships shaped by His presence—transforming classrooms into sacred spaces of encounter and growth.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Faith Formation*

### INTRODUCTION

Christian education, at its core, is a holistic endeavor that seeks not only to transmit biblical knowledge but also to shape faith through lived experience. Within this dynamic process, the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers becomes a vital foundation for ensuring that teaching goes beyond cognitive understanding toward

personal and spiritual transformation. Pedagogical competence, as articulated by Shulman (1987), refers to the teacher's ability to integrate content knowledge, instructional design, and the understanding of learners into a coherent act of teaching. In the context of Christian Religious Education, this competence is deepened by theological reflection, spiritual maturity, and the capacity to guide students into experiential encounters with faith. Education, therefore, becomes an act of ministry—a sacred dialogue between divine truth and human experience. The biblical foundation for this study is drawn from Exodus 33:11, which declares, *"The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend."* This verse encapsulates one of the most intimate portrayals of divine-human relationship in Scripture. Moses' encounter with God represents not only a theological revelation but also a pedagogical model—learning through direct, personal experience rather than abstract instruction. The "face-to-face" dialogue symbolizes a mode of teaching grounded in authenticity, relationality, and trust. For Christian educators, this becomes a paradigm for experiential faith formation: teaching that allows students to encounter God personally, to reflect on His presence in their lives, and to respond through action and transformation. Unlike didactic or purely cognitive instruction, experiential teaching invites learners into a journey of participation—learning by doing, reflecting, and living out faith in real contexts.

At SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o, located in West Nias, Indonesia, this biblical insight takes on profound relevance. The school represents a community where students come from varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds, yet share a common need for moral and spiritual grounding. The Christian Religious Education teacher in such a setting must possess not only professional skill but also spiritual discernment—the ability to recognize how divine truths intersect with students' lived realities. In a world increasingly dominated by digital distractions and moral fragmentation, the classroom becomes one of the few remaining spaces where young people can experience genuine relationships, reflection, and faith development. Thus, pedagogical competence in CRE is not merely about instructional excellence but about the capacity to cultivate encounters—spaces where students can "see" and "hear" God through meaningful experiences, guided reflection, and community engagement. The story of Moses and God's intimate communication provides a framework for understanding this pedagogical model. Moses' leadership was shaped not through theory but through encounter—through his experiences of God's presence in the wilderness, the tent of meeting, and the journey with Israel. Similarly, Christian teachers are called to lead and teach from the depth of their own encounters with God. Their teaching becomes effective not because of eloquence or authority, but because of authenticity and relational presence. As Nouwen (1975) emphasizes, spiritual leadership involves guiding others from the heart of one's own spiritual experience. Therefore, pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education must integrate both spiritual authenticity and experiential methodology. It is not enough for teachers to explain faith; they must model it, embody it, and invite students to participate in it. Experiential learning theories support this biblical principle. According to Kolb (1984), learning occurs through a cycle of concrete experience, reflective observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation. In Christian Religious Education, this cycle is mirrored in faith development: believers experience God's work, reflect on Scripture, understand divine truth, and apply it in daily

life. When teachers design lessons that engage students in storytelling, reflection, service learning, and personal prayer, they create pathways for transformative learning that echoes Moses' face-to-face encounter. Such pedagogical approaches allow students not only to know about God but to know Him personally. In the pluralistic Indonesian context, where public schools must balance faith instruction with respect for diversity, the experiential approach becomes even more significant. It allows Christian educators to teach faith inclusively-emphasizing values like compassion, humility, and service that resonate across traditions while remaining rooted in biblical truth. The teacher's role is to ensure that these experiences are guided by reflection, connecting moral actions to faith understanding. Thus, the CRE teacher's pedagogical competence serves as both a professional skill and a spiritual vocation—a bridge between theology and life. This study aims to explore how Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o demonstrate pedagogical competence in forming students' faith through experiential learning, using Exodus 33:11 as a reflective framework. By examining how teachers translate the principle of "face-to-face" learning into classroom practice, the research seeks to illuminate how experiential pedagogy deepens spiritual growth and moral awareness among students. The findings are expected to contribute to the broader discourse on Christian education by showing that effective pedagogy is not merely about instruction but about encounter-transforming both teacher and learner through authentic engagement with God and one another.

## **METHODS**

A qualitative reflective-exegetical design was implemented to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers demonstrate pedagogical competence through experiential learning, guided by the biblical reflection of Exodus 33:11. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables a rich, contextualized understanding of how teachers embody spiritual and pedagogical principles in real classroom settings. The reflective-exegetical dimension integrates theological interpretation with educational practice, ensuring that Scripture is not treated merely as a textual reference but as a living guide for pedagogy. By combining biblical exegesis with classroom observation and reflection, this method captures both the spiritual meaning of the text and its pedagogical manifestation in teaching. The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o, a junior high school located in West Nias, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school represents a diverse educational environment where students come from varied cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. This locus was intentionally selected because it reflects the reality of Christian education in a pluralistic, public-school setting—where the Christian Religious Education teacher must navigate between faith-based instruction and inclusive moral education. The school provides a living laboratory for observing how teachers implement experiential faith formation amid everyday challenges of diversity, discipline, and moral development. The participants included one Christian Religious Education teacher and twelve students from grades seven to nine, selected through purposive sampling. The teacher was chosen based on their professional reputation for reflective and experiential teaching practices, while the students were selected to represent a variety of learning abilities, backgrounds, and personal faith expressions. Ethical considerations were carefully observed throughout the study. Permission was obtained from the school administration, and informed consent was collected from all participants. Confidentiality

was maintained by anonymizing participant names and responses. Observations were conducted over four consecutive weeks to capture authentic teaching interactions and experiential learning activities. The researcher observed how the teacher facilitated reflection, storytelling, role-play, and service-learning activities that encouraged students to “encounter” faith rather than merely discuss it. Special attention was paid to how the teacher demonstrated relational closeness, active listening, and emotional engagement-qualities that parallel the “face-to-face” dynamic of Exodus 33:11. The teacher interview explored perceptions of pedagogical competence, strategies for experiential faith formation, and personal reflections on the theological significance of Exodus 33:11. Questions such as “How do you interpret God’s face-to-face communication with Moses in your teaching?” and “What challenges arise in making students experience faith personally?” guided the dialogue. Student interviews sought to understand how they perceived and experienced learning that involved reflection, participation, and spiritual connection. Their responses provided insight into how pedagogical practices influenced moral and faith development. The analysis process involved familiarization with the data, open coding, and the identification of recurring themes such as “learning through encounter,” “faith in action,” and “relational pedagogy.” The exegetical interpretation of Exodus 33:11 served as a theological lens through which these themes were analyzed. The “face-to-face” metaphor was interpreted pedagogically as the teacher’s capacity to foster personal connection, authenticity, and reflective dialogue with students. This integrated methodology allowed for a comprehensive understanding of how pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education is actualized through experiential faith formation. The reflective-exegetical approach bridged Scripture and practice, showing how Exodus 33:11 can serve as a living pedagogical model-where teachers, like Moses, lead students into encounters with God through learning that is relational, reflective, and transformative.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education is most powerfully demonstrated through experiential learning that fosters relational encounters with God, with others, and with self. The expository reflection of Exodus 33:11-*“The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend”*-served as both the theological and pedagogical foundation of this research. Within the context of SMP Negeri 4 Moro’o, this verse was not treated as a distant historical statement but as a living paradigm for teaching that emphasizes presence, dialogue, and transformation. The teacher’s pedagogical competence was evident not merely in lesson design or instructional skill, but in the capacity to create learning environments where students could experience the reality of faith through relational and reflective engagement. The integration of biblical reflection, classroom observation, and student testimony consistently highlighted one central theme: faith formation becomes authentic when teaching becomes an encounter-when the teacher, like Moses, meets students “face to face” with humility, attentiveness, and love. The first major finding concerns the theological-pedagogical interpretation of “face-to-face” learning as a model of experiential faith formation. In the biblical context, Moses’ face-to-face encounter with God symbolizes intimate communication and reciprocal trust. God does not merely

instruct Moses; He reveals Himself through personal presence. This same dynamic was mirrored in the classroom as the teacher prioritized relational closeness and authenticity in teaching. Observations revealed that the teacher intentionally minimized the hierarchical distance between teacher and students, fostering an atmosphere of openness and trust. For instance, rather than beginning lessons with formal lectures, the teacher often opened sessions with reflective conversations about the students' experiences-questions like, "What do you feel when someone listens to you sincerely?" or "How do you know when God is near you?" Such questions not only engaged the students emotionally but also invited them to connect everyday experiences with spiritual understanding. The teacher's pedagogical strategy echoed the divine pedagogy of Exodus 33:11: faith grows not through distant instruction, but through personal encounter. This relational mode of teaching was also reflected in the teacher's use of eye contact, tone of voice, and attentive silence-subtle yet profound gestures that communicated care and presence. Students consistently described their teacher as "a person who listens from the heart," and several mentioned that they felt "seen and understood." This reflects what Palmer (1998) refers to as "the courage to teach," where the authenticity of the teacher's presence becomes the conduit for spiritual formation. The teacher's "face-to-face" engagement allowed students to experience what it means to encounter God's love through human relationships. This approach transformed the classroom into a sacred space, where learning became an act of communion rather than information transfer. The second key finding emphasizes the role of reflection and dialogue as pathways of experiential faith learning. In line with Exodus 33:11, where divine communication occurs in the intimacy of dialogue, the teacher employed dialogical pedagogy to facilitate personal discovery. Observations revealed frequent use of reflective discussions following storytelling or Bible reading sessions. For example, after reading the account of Moses' encounter with God, students were encouraged to write short journals describing moments when they felt God's guidance in their lives. The teacher then guided open dialogue sessions where students voluntarily shared their reflections, often revealing deep emotional insights. One student wrote, "I felt God spoke to me when I forgave my friend after our fight." Another reflected, "When I help my younger sibling, I think that's how I talk to God." These reflections demonstrate that experiential faith formation does not rely on doctrinal memorization but on inner awareness shaped through relational dialogue. The teacher's pedagogical competence was evident in the ability to guide these discussions without imposing rigid interpretations. Instead, the teacher used open-ended prompts, gentle affirmations, and theological framing to help students interpret their experiences in light of Scripture. This approach aligns with Groome's (1991) concept of shared praxis, in which learners engage Scripture and life experience in mutual dialogue, leading to transformative moral and spiritual insight. By connecting the "face-to-face" conversation between God and Moses with students' personal interactions, the teacher cultivated a reflective habit of faith-a pedagogy that teaches students to recognize God's presence in ordinary human encounters. A third major finding highlights the integration of experiential learning activities that transform biblical lessons into lived practice. The teacher designed creative and participatory methods such as dramatizations, community service, and reflective journaling to translate theological concepts into experiential understanding. For instance, during one lesson, students were divided into small groups to dramatize scenes from Exodus 33, emphasizing the relational aspect of Moses'

leadership. In their performances, students depicted moments of prayer, doubt, and divine reassurance, portraying Moses not as a distant hero but as a friend of God who listens and responds. Following the activity, students discussed how faith requires not only obedience but ongoing communication. One student commented, "Moses talked to God because he trusted Him. That means faith is about being honest to God." In another activity, the teacher organized a community-cleaning project as a form of "faith in action," connecting it to the theme of encountering God through service. Students were encouraged to reflect afterward on how working together allowed them to "see God's face" in their classmates. These experiential exercises served as what Dewey (1938) calls learning by doing, but infused with theological meaning-where action becomes the medium through which faith is internalized. The CRE teacher's pedagogical competence was displayed in the capacity to design such activities that balance spiritual depth with practical relevance.

The fourth finding relates to the embodiment of humility and empathy in teaching as a reflection of divine pedagogy. Exodus 33:11 presents a picture of divine humility-God choosing to speak to Moses "as a friend." The teacher mirrored this humility through approachable leadership and empathetic engagement. Observations revealed that the teacher consistently responded to student mistakes with patience rather than reprimand. For example, when a student failed to complete an assignment, the teacher reframed the situation as a learning opportunity rather than a moral failure, asking, "What can we learn from this experience about responsibility and grace?" This gentle guidance communicated a theology of compassion-teaching students that failure is not final when met with understanding and forgiveness. The teacher's spiritual composure modeled emotional intelligence infused with theological grace, reinforcing the idea that faith education is not only about righteousness but about restoration. Interviews with students confirmed that the teacher's attitude had a profound emotional impact. Several students expressed that they felt comfortable approaching the teacher about personal struggles, viewing them as a "spiritual parent" who could listen without judgment. This dynamic resonates with Noddings' (2013) ethics of care, where the teacher's presence itself becomes a moral lesson. Through empathy, the CRE teacher taught that divine love is relational and restorative. The "face-to-face" aspect of Exodus 33:11 was thus reinterpreted pedagogically as the act of meeting students where they are-acknowledging their humanity and guiding them toward spiritual growth through understanding and care. Another significant theme emerging from the findings is the transformation of classroom culture into a community of faith. The CRE class at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o was observed to function less as a traditional instructional space and more as a learning fellowship. Students described the classroom as a place where they "could speak from the heart." This communal transformation was the fruit of consistent experiential practices such as shared reflection, group prayer, and mutual encouragement. The teacher's emphasis on Exodus 33:11 as a story of divine friendship inspired a relational ethos among students. During group reflections, they often referred to one another as "friends in faith," echoing the language of the biblical text.

The impact of this communal learning environment extended beyond classroom walls. Students reported behavioral changes at home and in peer interactions. One student

noted, "After learning that Moses talked to God like a friend, I tried to talk more kindly to my parents." Another said, "We learned that if God can be close to people, we can be close to each other too." These reflections demonstrate that the pedagogy of experiential faith not only transmits knowledge but also transforms social behavior—a manifestation of holistic education integrating cognitive, emotional, and spiritual dimensions. The teacher's professional reflection, recorded in their teaching journal, revealed a conscious effort to maintain balance between biblical authority and experiential freedom. The teacher wrote, "I must teach students the truth of Scripture, but I also want them to experience that truth personally. My task is to make faith real." This self-awareness demonstrates high pedagogical competence as described by Shulman (1987)—the ability to integrate content knowledge (Scripture), pedagogical skill (experiential design), and contextual awareness (students' lived reality). The CRE teacher did not treat Scripture as a static doctrine but as a dynamic story that invites participation. This aligns with Wright's (2006) vision of missional hermeneutics, where the biblical narrative is understood as God's ongoing mission to transform the world through human response. In this pedagogical model, teaching becomes a form of participation in God's redemptive dialogue—a continuation of the divine "face-to-face" encounter through education. The findings also expose certain challenges and tensions in implementing experiential faith pedagogy. The teacher acknowledged difficulties in maintaining student engagement during reflective activities, especially in a digital culture where instant gratification dominates attention spans. Some students initially found reflective writing or meditative silence "boring" compared to interactive media. The teacher overcame this by integrating short multimedia clips and collaborative storytelling to contextualize biblical lessons in contemporary forms. This adaptive strategy illustrates pedagogical flexibility—an essential component of professional competence that bridges the sacred text with modern learners' realities. Additionally, balancing faith-based reflection with inclusivity in a pluralistic school environment required discernment. The teacher ensured that lessons about encountering God emphasized universal values such as honesty, compassion, and gratitude, which could resonate with all students regardless of faith background. The theological reflection emerging from this study highlights that Exodus 33:11 serves not only as a metaphor for intimacy with God but also as a model for pedagogical presence. God's willingness to "speak face to face" reveals a divine pattern of relational teaching-communication rooted in love and mutual respect. The CRE teacher's emulation of this model underscores that pedagogical competence in Christian education involves more than mastery of methods; it requires spiritual formation. Teachers must first cultivate their own "face-to-face" relationship with God before facilitating such encounters for students. The teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o emphasized this in interviews: "Before I can teach students about meeting God, I must meet Him myself every day in prayer." This personal testimony confirms that spiritual authenticity is the foundation of effective pedagogy. Teaching, in this sense, becomes a spiritual act of mediation—where the teacher stands between divine revelation and human experience, guiding students toward faith through relational integrity.

The study's findings resonate with existing literature on experiential and relational pedagogy. Dewey (1938) emphasized that experience becomes educational when it is reflected upon, while Freire (1998) argued that authentic learning arises from dialogue

that transforms both teacher and student. In the Christian context, this dialogue becomes sacred, for it involves not only human conversation but divine participation. The teacher's classroom practice reflected this triadic relationship-God, teacher, and students-as co-participants in the learning process. The experience of God's presence, mediated through Scripture and relationship, became the center of educational meaning. This study points toward a renewed understanding of pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education as inherently spiritual, relational, and transformative. The CRE teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o exemplified a model of teaching where faith formation and pedagogy are inseparable. Through experiential methods grounded in biblical reflection, the teacher bridged the gap between theological truth and lived experience. The result was not only increased student understanding of Scripture but also observable changes in attitudes, empathy, and moral behavior. Students learned to perceive God not as a distant concept but as a relational presence woven into daily life. This transformation suggests that when teaching mirrors the divine pedagogy of Exodus 33:11-characterized by dialogue, trust, and relational authenticity-education becomes a sacred encounter. Pedagogical competence, therefore, is not merely technical proficiency in delivering lessons; it is the spiritual wisdom to create spaces where students can meet God "face to face." Such competence requires continuous reflection, prayer, and empathy, rooted in the teacher's own spiritual life. In a world increasingly shaped by digital isolation and moral fragmentation, this model of experiential faith education offers a prophetic vision for Christian pedagogy-one that restores the human dimension of learning and reconnects education with divine purpose. The results demonstrate that the pedagogy of experiential faith formation, inspired by Exodus 33:11, enables teachers to move beyond cognitive instruction toward transformative relationship. The CRE teacher's competence lies not only in the mastery of teaching methods but in the embodiment of relational spirituality. Through reflective dialogue, participatory learning, and humble presence, the teacher becomes a living channel of divine grace-guiding students to encounter God, to see His image in others, and to experience faith as an ongoing dialogue of love. The classroom thus becomes a modern tent of meeting-a sacred place where, like Moses, teacher and students learn to see God "face to face" and are forever changed by the encounter.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education is fundamentally spiritual and relational, rooted in the teacher's capacity to facilitate transformative experiences of faith. Drawing from Exodus 33:11, which portrays God speaking to Moses "face to face, as one speaks to a friend," the research found that effective Christian pedagogy is not limited to transmitting biblical knowledge-it is an act of relational ministry that cultivates personal encounters with God through dialogue, reflection, and lived experience. The CRE teacher at SMP Negeri 4 Moro'o exemplified this approach by integrating experiential learning, empathetic communication, and theological reflection into daily classroom practice. Through these methods, the teacher created an environment where students could internalize faith as a personal, relational, and dynamic reality. The findings demonstrate that the "face-to-face" model of teaching provides a powerful metaphor for Christian pedagogy. Just as God's communication with

Moses reflected intimacy and trust, the teacher's relational approach embodied openness, humility, and attentiveness. Pedagogical competence was expressed not through authority or control but through presence—the ability to listen deeply, guide gently, and respond compassionately. Students perceived the classroom as a safe space for spiritual exploration, where questions of faith were not silenced but welcomed as part of their growth. This atmosphere of trust and respect transformed the learning process into what Palmer (1998) describes as “teaching from the heart,” in which the teacher's authenticity becomes a living testimony of God's love. This study underscores that experiential faith formation is essential for developing students' moral and spiritual maturity. Through reflective dialogue, storytelling, dramatization, and community service, students learned to connect Scripture with personal and social realities. These activities transformed theological content into lived experience, demonstrating that learning faith must engage the whole person—mind, heart, and action. The teacher's emphasis on reflection helped students discern God's presence in daily life, reinforcing that spiritual formation is not confined to religious rituals but found in every act of kindness, forgiveness, and cooperation. At a deeper level, the research affirms that pedagogical competence in CRE is inseparable from the teacher's own spiritual integrity. The teacher's daily prayer life, humility, and consistency between belief and behavior served as the foundation for effective faith instruction. Students did not simply learn about God—they experienced divine love through the teacher's character and relational style. This reflects the incarnational nature of Christian pedagogy, where teaching becomes a ministry of presence, and the classroom becomes a sacred space of encounter. In practical terms, the study highlights the need for Christian educators to integrate biblical exegesis and experiential pedagogy in order to bridge the gap between theology and lived faith. Schools should support teachers in developing reflective and spiritual competencies through professional formation, mentorship, and theological grounding. When teachers learn to teach “face to face”—engaging students personally, spiritually, and intellectually—education transcends academic boundaries and becomes a form of discipleship. In conclusion, the pedagogy modeled after Exodus 33:11 calls Christian teachers to become mediators of divine presence in education. Through relational dialogue, experiential learning, and humble authenticity, the teacher's vocation reflects God's own way of teaching—by coming close, by speaking as a friend, and by transforming hearts through encounter. Thus, pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education is not merely about instruction but incarnation: the embodiment of faith in teaching, where every lesson becomes a meeting place between God and His people, and every classroom becomes a living sanctuary of grace.

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