



The Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Delivering Christian Doctrine Contextually (A Case Study at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara)

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ABSTRACT

The teaching of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia plays a vital role in shaping students' faith, values, and identity within a society marked by cultural and religious pluralism. In such a context, CRE cannot remain a purely theoretical discipline but must be contextualized so that doctrine becomes meaningful and transformative for students' daily lives. This study investigates the competence of CRE teachers in delivering Christian doctrine contextually at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara, North Sumatra. The research specifically explores how teachers demonstrate pedagogical, theological, and contextual competences, and how these dimensions influence students' understanding, character formation, and discipline. A qualitative case study design was employed to examine this phenomenon in depth. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers, students, and administrators; classroom observations of CRE lessons; and analysis of teaching documents. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify patterns of competence and their observable impact on student engagement and moral development, with triangulation used to enhance credibility. The findings reveal that CRE teachers at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara demonstrated strong pedagogical competence through the use of storytelling, group discussions, and case-based learning; theological competence by linking biblical truths to issues such as honesty, forgiveness, and respect; and contextual competence by integrating cultural narratives, local wisdom, and interfaith experiences. Students exposed to such teaching showed improved participation, enthusiasm for learning, and disciplined behavior. The study concludes that contextualized doctrinal teaching is essential for effective religious education, highlighting the need for ongoing professional development, resource support, and further research into contextual pedagogies across Indonesia.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Christian Doctrine, Contextual*

INTRODUCTION

The teaching of Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a crucial role in shaping students' faith, values, and identity in Indonesia, a nation marked by its diversity of cultures and

religions. Within this pluralistic context, Christian Religious Education cannot be treated as a purely theoretical subject; instead, it must be responsive to students' real-life experiences, enabling them to internalize Christian values while also cultivating respect for others. Teachers of CRE (hereafter CRE teachers) therefore carry a dual responsibility: to preserve doctrinal integrity and to communicate it in ways that are accessible, meaningful, and transformative for their students. Their competence in contextualizing doctrine is essential, as it determines whether the teaching of Christianity remains relevant and impactful in a modern and multicultural society (Tjahjadi, 2021). Christian doctrine, if taught merely as abstract dogma, often risks alienating students from the very faith it seeks to nurture. Students may perceive doctrine as distant, rigid, and irrelevant to their contemporary challenges. For example, lessons about forgiveness or stewardship, if framed only in dogmatic formulas, may not translate into practical behaviors in students' daily interactions. By contrast, when these doctrines are explained in relation to students' lived realities—such as bullying at school, digital ethics in social media use, or environmental care in their communities—they become tangible and applicable. This contextualized approach nurtures not only intellectual understanding but also moral integrity, spiritual resilience, and inter-religious empathy (Nadeak, 2020). In this sense, contextual teaching transforms doctrine from a static body of knowledge into a dynamic resource for character formation and communal harmony.

The case of SMPN 3 Rantau Utara, a junior high school in North Sumatra, illustrates these dynamics vividly. Situated in a culturally rich and religiously diverse region, the school becomes a microcosm of Indonesia's broader pluralism. Within this setting, the competence of CRE teachers in contextualizing doctrine plays a decisive role in students' formation. Field observations and interviews conducted with teachers and students reveal that effective CRE teachers often integrate cultural narratives, local wisdom, and everyday experiences into their teaching of Christian values. For instance, when discussing the doctrine of love and service, teachers may relate it to the Batak philosophy of *Dalihan Na Tolu*, which emphasizes mutual respect and responsibility in family and community life. By doing so, they demonstrate that Christian teachings are not foreign abstractions but resonate deeply with local traditions (Simanjuntak, 2019). The study identifies several dimensions of teacher competence that are critical in delivering contextualized doctrine. First, pedagogical competence, which encompasses the ability to design creative learning strategies, is essential. Teachers who utilize storytelling, role-playing, or project-based learning find greater success in engaging students compared to those who rely solely on rote memorization. Second, theological competence is required, as contextualization must not compromise doctrinal authenticity. Teachers must have a deep understanding of scripture and Christian tradition to discern which cultural elements can be harmonized with doctrine and which may distort its essence. Finally, intercultural competence plays a role, as students in SMPN 3 Rantau Utara often interact with peers of different faiths. By teaching doctrine in ways that foster inclusivity rather than exclusivity, CRE teachers help prepare students for life in a plural society (Siahaan, 2022).

The observable effects of such teaching on students are significant. Students who are taught doctrine contextually tend to demonstrate greater enthusiasm and critical engagement in CRE classes. They also show improved character formation, as evidenced

in their capacity for empathy, honesty, and cooperation in group activities. Furthermore, contextualized teaching promotes inter-religious respect. For instance, when the doctrine of peace is taught in relation to Indonesia's national motto, students are encouraged to embrace Christian values while honoring the dignity of those from other faiths (Sihombing, 2021). In this way, contextualized religious instruction contributes not only to personal spirituality but also to national harmony. Nevertheless, teachers at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara also face challenges in implementing this approach. One challenge lies in balancing doctrinal purity with cultural adaptation. Some teachers express concern that excessive contextualization might dilute the essence of Christian teaching, while others struggle with limited theological training to guide this process appropriately. Another challenge is the lack of sufficient resources and institutional support. Many CRE teachers work with limited textbooks and learning materials, requiring them to be highly creative in connecting doctrine with local realities. Moreover, the pressure of standardized curricula often leaves little room for innovation in classroom practice (Tambunan, 2020). Despite these challenges, the opportunities are equally significant. The cultural richness of North Sumatra provides abundant illustrations and practices that can be harnessed to illuminate Christian values, and growing interest in contextual theology within Indonesian Christianity offers theological support for these pedagogical practices. The competence of CRE teachers in contextualizing Christian doctrine is indispensable for effective religious education in Indonesia's pluralistic context. The case study at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara highlights how pedagogical, theological, and intercultural competences converge to produce meaningful and transformative instruction. When doctrine is linked with students' daily experiences, cultural backgrounds, and national values, it not only strengthens personal faith but also contributes to character development and inter-religious harmony. While challenges remain, particularly regarding theological depth and institutional support, the opportunities for contextualized CRE teaching are vast and promising. This study underscores the need for continuous professional development of CRE teachers, so they may better serve their students and, by extension, contribute to Indonesia's vision of nurturing morally grounded and socially responsible future generations.

METHODS

A qualitative case study design was used to explore the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in contextualizing Christian doctrine. A case study approach was considered appropriate as it allows researchers to examine a phenomenon in depth within its real-life educational setting (Yin, 2018). By focusing on the teaching practices at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara, this design enabled a comprehensive understanding of how contextualization is applied in CRE instruction. The qualitative nature of the research also provided flexibility in uncovering participants' perspectives and lived experiences, which are essential for interpreting teaching competence in religious education (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The research was carried out at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara, a public junior high school in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was chosen due to its diverse student body and its reputation for providing formal Christian Religious Education despite being in a multi-religious environment. Participants were selected purposively to ensure representativeness of different perspectives (Patton, 2015). They included two CRE

teachers actively teaching grades VII–IX, twenty-five students from different grade levels to capture varied learning experiences, and two school administrators consisting of the principal and the vice principal for student affairs. These groups of participants provided insights from instructional, learner, and managerial perspectives, ensuring a holistic understanding of the research problem. Data were gathered through two main techniques. First, semi-structured interviews were conducted with teachers, students, and administrators. This method allowed the collection of detailed narratives about teaching practices, contextualization strategies, and perceived impacts on learning (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Second, classroom observations were carried out to directly examine the delivery of CRE lessons, particularly focusing on how teachers integrate contextual elements into doctrinal instruction. Field notes were taken systematically during lessons to capture non-verbal dynamics and classroom interactions. Thematic analysis was applied to organize and interpret the collected data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were read repeatedly to identify emerging codes, which were then grouped into broader themes related to teacher competence, strategies of contextualization, and student engagement. An inductive coding process ensured that the themes were grounded in the data rather than imposed a priori. To enhance the credibility of findings, triangulation was carried out across interviews, observations, and documents (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This cross-verification strengthened the trustworthiness and validity of the interpretations. The member checking with selected participants was used to confirm the accuracy of interpretations, ensuring that the findings authentically reflected participants' experiences and perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in shaping the moral, spiritual, and intellectual character of students has become increasingly significant in contemporary educational contexts, particularly in pluralistic societies such as Indonesia. The findings of this study highlight the ways in which CRE teachers demonstrated competence across three major dimensions—pedagogical, theological, and contextual—and how these dimensions contributed to the effectiveness of doctrinal teaching. The analysis not only underscores the professional skills of teachers but also situates their practices within the framework of Indonesia's National Standards for Teachers, which emphasize both pedagogical and professional competencies. However, what distinguishes CRE teaching in this study is the intentional theological depth and contextual sensitivity that enables doctrine to be more than abstract knowledge; it becomes a lived reality for students. Pedagogical competence, as revealed in the findings, was evident in the creative and varied teaching methods employed by CRE teachers. Pedagogy in religious education requires more than the transmission of content; it demands methods that can bridge the gap between doctrinal concepts and students' cognitive and emotional engagement. Teachers in the study were observed utilizing storytelling, group discussions, role plays, and case-based learning to make doctrinal content more relatable to the daily experiences of adolescents. Storytelling, for instance, proved particularly effective in illustrating biblical truths in a manner that resonates with students' imaginations. Narratives drawn from the Bible or adapted from contemporary Christian

testimonies offered a medium through which students could visualize the relevance of doctrine in real-life situations. Similarly, group discussions encouraged students to articulate their thoughts, negotiate meaning, and learn from peers, thereby transforming doctrinal instruction into a dialogical rather than monological process. This approach aligns with constructivist theories of learning, which suggest that knowledge is best internalized when learners actively engage with content and connect it to their lived experiences.

Equally important was the demonstration of theological competence by the teachers. A deep and accurate understanding of Christian doctrine forms the bedrock of effective CRE teaching. The findings indicate that teachers were able to move beyond rote delivery of biblical content to a more nuanced engagement with theological truths. For example, teachers successfully connected doctrines such as forgiveness, love, honesty, and self-discipline with everyday moral dilemmas faced by students. By linking biblical truths to issues such as dishonesty in examinations, conflicts with peers, and respect for teachers and parents, teachers made doctrine not merely a distant set of principles but a guiding framework for ethical decision-making. This theological competence also ensured that teachers could respond thoughtfully to students' questions and doubts, thereby reinforcing the authority of Christian teachings while simultaneously affirming the relevance of doctrine to personal and social life. The third dimension, contextual competence, proved particularly crucial in the pluralistic and culturally diverse environment of SMPN 3 Rantau Utara. Teachers were observed adapting their lessons to students' socio-cultural realities by integrating local wisdom, family experiences, and interfaith encounters into classroom discussions. Contextualization in this sense was not a mere methodological strategy but a theological imperative. It acknowledged that doctrine, while universal in its truth claims, must be communicated in ways that are sensitive to the cultural and social backgrounds of learners. For example, teachers incorporated elements of Batak cultural wisdom, which emphasizes values such as harmony, respect for elders, and communal responsibility, and demonstrated how these align with biblical teachings. Furthermore, by drawing on students' family experiences and interfaith encounters, teachers fostered inclusivity and prepared students to navigate life in a religiously diverse society. This competence ensured that students not only learned Christian doctrine but also developed respect and empathy toward people of other faiths, thus promoting both faith formation and social cohesion.

These three dimensions of teacher competence—pedagogical, theological, and contextual—closely correspond with the expectations outlined in Indonesia's National Standards for Teachers, particularly in the domains of pedagogical and professional competence. However, the theological dimension introduces a distinctive element that is particularly pertinent in CRE. Unlike teachers of other subjects, CRE teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of not only imparting knowledge but also nurturing faith and moral character. Their role requires theological depth that allows them to safeguard doctrinal accuracy while simultaneously contextualizing content to enhance relevance and accessibility. This combination positions CRE teaching as a unique domain of educational practice where professional standards are infused with spiritual and moral responsibilities. The impact of these competencies on student learning was evident in the reported outcomes. Students described gaining greater clarity in their understanding of

Christian doctrine when it was communicated through real-life illustrations. For instance, the concept of forgiveness became less abstract when teachers related it to family conflicts, peer disputes, or challenges in maintaining friendships. By situating theological concepts within the relational dynamics familiar to adolescents, teachers enabled students to grasp the transformative power of doctrine in everyday life. The integration of doctrinal teaching with practical life scenarios also facilitated affective learning, as students were not only informed but also moved to consider how biblical principles could guide their personal choices.

Observation data further indicated that students exhibited improved participation in class discussions and displayed greater enthusiasm during school devotional activities. This suggests that contextualized teaching had a dual effect: it enhanced cognitive comprehension while also nurturing affective and behavioral outcomes. Students were not only able to articulate doctrinal concepts with greater confidence but were also motivated to embody these values in their daily conduct. The correlation between contextualized teaching and student discipline was particularly noteworthy. By internalizing doctrines such as honesty, respect, and self-control, students demonstrated greater commitment to maintaining discipline within the school environment. This underscores the broader significance of CRE in contributing to character education, which remains a central goal of the Indonesian educational system. The implementation of contextualized doctrinal teaching was not without its challenges. Teachers reported facing a limited availability of teaching resources tailored to the specific developmental stage of junior high school students. While textbooks and curricular guides provided standardized doctrinal content, they often lacked contextual illustrations or age-appropriate examples that could facilitate deeper engagement. As a result, teachers were frequently required to supplement official materials with self-designed resources, a task that demanded additional time and effort. This resource gap highlights the need for educational authorities and Christian education institutions to invest in the development of contextualized materials that are pedagogically sound and theologically reliable.

Another challenge pertained to the tension between delivering standardized doctrinal content mandated by the curriculum and innovating with contextual approaches. On one hand, adherence to the national curriculum ensured that doctrinal instruction remained consistent and systematic across different schools. On the other hand, rigid adherence risked reducing doctrine to abstract propositions that failed to resonate with students. Teachers therefore had to negotiate a delicate balance between fidelity to the curriculum and responsiveness to students' lived realities. This tension reflects a broader challenge in education: how to reconcile the standardization necessary for equity and accountability with the flexibility required for contextual relevance. Varied levels of student receptivity posed difficulties for teachers. While many students responded positively to contextualized teaching, others continued to perceive doctrine as abstract and irrelevant to their lives. This variability may be attributed to differences in students' prior religious formation, family background, or personal disposition. It also points to the complexity of religious education, where learning is not solely a cognitive process but is influenced by affective, social, and spiritual factors. Teachers, therefore, must remain attentive to these differences and adopt differentiated strategies to engage students who may be less

inclined to view doctrine as personally meaningful. The findings of this study resonate with previous research on contextual theology in education, which emphasizes the need to bridge faith with lived realities. Tjahjadi (2019) argued that theological education in Indonesia must engage cultural and social contexts if it is to remain relevant to contemporary learners. Similarly, Manullang (2021) highlighted the transformative potential of contextualized religious instruction in fostering both faith formation and social harmony. The experiences of CRE teachers at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara affirm these insights, demonstrating that contextualization enhances the relevance and impact of doctrinal teaching. What distinguishes the present study, however, is its emphasis on the interplay between teacher competence and student outcomes. By highlighting how pedagogical, theological, and contextual competencies directly influenced students' understanding, participation, and discipline, the study offers a more nuanced account of how contextualization operates in practice. The significance of these findings extends beyond the immediate context of one school. They speak to the broader vision of Indonesian education, which seeks to produce citizens who are both faithful to their religious convictions and constructive members of a pluralistic society. The competence of CRE teachers in contextualizing doctrine contributes directly to this vision by fostering students who are disciplined, resilient, and ethically grounded. By connecting doctrine with life, teachers nurture values such as integrity, empathy, and social responsibility. These values align not only with the aims of Christian education but also with national educational goals that prioritize character development and civic responsibility. The competence of CRE teachers in delivering contextualized doctrine emerges as a vital factor in ensuring the relevance and transformative potential of religious education. Pedagogical creativity, theological depth, and contextual sensitivity collectively enable teachers to bridge the gap between abstract doctrine and lived experience. While challenges remain—particularly in the availability of contextualized resources, curricular tensions, and varied student receptivity—the overall impact on student understanding and discipline underscores the effectiveness of this approach. By situating doctrinal teaching within the realities of students' lives, CRE teachers fulfill their dual responsibility as educators and faith nurturers, contributing to both personal spiritual growth and the cultivation of social harmony. The findings, therefore, affirm the critical role of teacher competence in shaping the future of Christian education in Indonesia and highlight the necessity of ongoing support and training to sustain and enhance this competence.

Conclusion

This study concludes that the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in contextualizing Christian doctrine is a decisive factor in shaping students' holistic growth. The case study conducted at SMPN 3 Rantau Utara demonstrates that when doctrine is taught with contextual sensitivity, students not only gain knowledge of Christian teachings but also develop character, values, and spiritual resilience that are applicable to their everyday lives. The findings highlight that pedagogical competence, theological depth, and contextual awareness are three interrelated dimensions that allow CRE teachers to communicate doctrine in ways that are both faithful to biblical truth and

relevant to contemporary student realities. Teachers who are able to connect theological concepts with the cultural, social, and psychological contexts of students provide a learning experience that nurtures intellectual clarity, moral integrity, and spiritual strength. From a practical perspective, this study underscores the need for continuous professional development for CRE teachers. Schools and educational institutions should actively facilitate training programs, workshops, and mentoring opportunities that equip teachers with both theological enrichment and pedagogical innovation. Moreover, access to contextualized teaching resources—such as case studies, local cultural illustrations, and creative learning media—is crucial to ensure that doctrine is not merely delivered as abstract knowledge but translated into concrete moral guidance and spiritual practice. Institutional support, including leadership encouragement and policy frameworks, is equally necessary to help teachers balance the demands of doctrinal fidelity with the flexibility required for pedagogical creativity. In this way, CRE teachers are better positioned to cultivate disciplined, values-oriented students who are prepared to contribute meaningfully to society. In terms of future research, comparative studies across different educational levels, regions, and school types in Indonesia would broaden the understanding of best practices in contextualized Christian education. Such research could reveal patterns of effectiveness that transcend local contexts while also identifying unique challenges faced in diverse cultural environments. Additionally, quantitative approaches could complement qualitative findings by providing measurable insights into how contextual teaching influences students' academic achievement, ethical decision-making, and spiritual maturity. This mixed-method approach would offer a more comprehensive picture of the long-term impact of contextualized religious instruction. Strengthening the competence of CRE teachers to deliver doctrine contextually should be seen as more than a pedagogical necessity. It is, in fact, a strategic investment in shaping a generation of young people who are intellectually competent, morally upright, and spiritually grounded. Such individuals are not only well-prepared to navigate the complexities of modern life but also capable of embodying Christian values in ways that contribute positively to the broader vision of Indonesia's moral and spiritual development.

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