



## Cultivating a Spirit of Forgiveness: Exploring the Personal Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers through Genesis 50:17 at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers cultivate a spirit of forgiveness among primary school students by embodying personal competence grounded in the theological insights of Genesis 50:17. Conducted at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua, the research employs a qualitative design combining a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews involving three CRE teachers and six students. The SLR synthesizes contemporary scholarship on teacher personal competence, spirituality, and character formation, while the interviews provide contextualized insights into how teachers integrate emotional maturity, ethical consistency, relational sensitivity, and theological reflection into daily classroom interactions. Genesis 50:17-highlighting Joseph's act of forgiving his brothers-serves as a foundational exegetical lens, emphasizing forgiveness as a redemptive, God-enabled moral act rather than a mere emotional concession. The findings indicate that students learn forgiveness most effectively when teachers consistently model it through patient communication, transparent acknowledgment of mistakes, and proactive facilitation of reconciliation. Teacher behavior serves as the primary mechanism through which biblical forgiveness becomes pedagogically meaningful, confirming theories that moral development in children is shaped more by observed behavior than by verbal instruction alone. The study also highlights the role of teacher spirituality as an internal resource that sustains ethical practice in challenging relational contexts. Overall, the research concludes that integrating theological grounding, personal competence, and relational modeling forms a powerful triad for fostering a culture of forgiveness in Christian primary education.*

**Keywords:** Spirit of Forgiveness, Christian Religious Education, Personal Competence

### INTRODUCTION

The cultivation of forgiveness stands at the heart of Christian moral formation and remains a crucial dimension of character education within the Indonesian school context, especially in public schools where multireligious and multicultural dynamics shape

learners' moral development. Within Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen/PAK*), the teacher is not merely a transmitter of doctrinal content but also a moral exemplar whose personal competence shapes students' attitudes, dispositions, and relational ethics. Personal competence—defined as the teacher's maturity, integrity, emotional stability, and embodiment of Christian virtues—has been consistently identified as a decisive factor in the formation of students' moral character (Lickona, 2004; Banks, 2020). Among these virtues, forgiveness occupies a central role because it fosters emotional healing, reduces hostility, and nurtures reconciliation within school communities (Worthington, 2019). For this reason, exploring how PAK teachers embody and teach forgiveness becomes an urgent pedagogical and theological concern, particularly in elementary school settings such as SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua. The biblical foundation of this study emerges from Genesis 50:17, a climactic moment in the Joseph narrative, where forgiveness triumphs over betrayal, power imbalance, and emotional injury. Joseph's brothers implore, *"Please forgive the transgression of your brothers and their sin"* (Gen. 50:17), to which Joseph responds with compassionate assurance rather than revenge. Scholars widely interpret this verse as a paradigm of covenantal reconciliation, emphasizing Joseph's deep spiritual maturity, emotional regulation, and recognition of God's sovereignty in human suffering (Brueggemann, 1982; Hamilton, 1995). From an exegetical standpoint, Joseph's forgiveness is not merely a moral act but an expression of a transformed character rooted in divine providence (Fretheim, 1996). His emotional posture demonstrates what contemporary psychology refers to as "empathetic reprocessing," where victims reinterpret harmful events through compassion and transcendence (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015). Thus, Genesis 50:17 provides a profound theological framework for understanding personal competence in educators—particularly the ability to model forgiveness in interpersonal dynamics. When applied to the PAK teacher's vocation, Joseph's stance invites educators to embody humility, emotional balance, and spiritual resilience as they guide students toward compassionate relational behavior. In the Indonesian educational landscape, forgiveness is increasingly relevant due to rising incidents of bullying, peer conflict, and emotional stress among primary school students (Hadjam, 2021). Schools such as SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua, located in a rural district with close-knit social structures, face unique relational challenges where conflicts often emerge from familial proximity, community interaction, and peer competition. In this context, the personal competence of the PAK teacher becomes crucial, as students tend to observe and internalize the teacher's responses in moments of tension, disappointment, or misunderstanding. Research on teacher influence shows that students are more likely to adopt prosocial behaviors—including forgiveness—when they witness consistent moral modeling from trusted educators (Evertson & Weinstein, 2013). Therefore, the PAK teacher's personality and spiritual depth play a pivotal role in shaping students' willingness to forgive others. This study draws on: theological interpretation of forgiveness as relational restoration rooted in divine-human interaction (McCullough, 2001), personality competence in teaching, which includes self-awareness, emotional maturity, moral stability, and consistency in ethical behavior (Zhang & Wong, 2021), and character education frameworks emphasizing experiential learning and virtue modeling (Nucci, 2017). Integrating these domains provides a holistic lens for examining how PAK teachers at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua internalize and demonstrate forgiveness as part of their personal competence. Empirical

studies focusing on how PAK teachers embody this virtue remain scarce. Existing Indonesian research tends to emphasize pedagogical or social competence rather than personal-spiritual dimensions. The intersection between biblical exegesis and teacher competence has not been extensively explored. This study addresses these gaps by examining how Genesis 50:17 informs teachers' understanding and practice of forgiveness, and how this shapes their personal competence within the classroom setting. Ultimately, this research seeks to contribute to the development of a biblically informed and psychologically grounded model of teacher professionalism in Christian education.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews to investigate how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua cultivate a spirit of forgiveness in alignment with the personal competence framework and the theological insights of Genesis 50:17. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables researchers to uncover meanings embedded within lived experiences, interpret subjective perspectives, and explore the complex interplay between biblical interpretation and teacher professionalism (Creswell & Poth, 2018). In particular, the integration of SLR and semi-structured interviews allowed for a robust methodological triangulation, ensuring that the emerging themes were grounded both in empirical field narratives and interdisciplinary scholarly discourse (Gray, 2014). The Systematic Literature Review component followed a structured procedure of identifying, screening, and synthesizing academic sources related to forgiveness, personal competence in teaching, biblical exegesis of Genesis 50:17, and character education. Databases were searched using keyword combinations. The selection criteria emphasized peer-reviewed publications from 2000 onward, although foundational theological works were included when they offered indispensable exegetical insights (e.g., Brueggemann, Hamilton). Studies were excluded if they lacked conceptual relevance or methodological rigor. The final corpus consisted of 40 scholarly sources spanning biblical studies, educational psychology, Christian pedagogy, and moral development theory. The SLR served as a theoretical scaffold that enriched the interpretation of teacher narratives gathered during fieldwork, enabling the researcher to situate local findings within broader academic conversations (Snyder, 2019). The empirical component consisted of semi-structured interviews conducted with six participants selected through purposive sampling: two CRE teachers, one school principal, one senior teacher representative, and two parents whose children were enrolled at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua. Purposive sampling ensured that participants possessed firsthand knowledge of the teacher's character formation practices and relational dynamics within the school (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). Interviews were conducted in an informal yet focused conversational style, allowing participants to articulate their experiences, perceptions, and reflections freely while maintaining alignment with the study's core themes. Guiding questions revolved around teachers' understanding of forgiveness, their interpretation of Genesis 50:17, the manner in which they model forgiveness in daily school interactions, and the perceived impact of their personal competence on student moral behavior. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted either in person at the school or in a

mutually convenient community setting. Data analysis followed the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña consisting of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). The researcher organized transcripts into thematic categories such as “biblical interpretation,” “teacher emotional maturity,” “forgiveness practices,” and “student behavioral response.” Patterns emerging from interviews were compared against the SLR findings to ensure theoretical coherence and analytic depth. To enhance credibility, member checking was conducted by sharing preliminary interpretations with participants for validation (Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a rich and multidimensional portrayal of how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua cultivate a spirit of forgiveness among students through their personal competence, theological understanding, and daily relational interactions. Through an integration of semi-structured interview data and insights derived from the systematic literature review, several thematic layers emerge: the theological grounding of forgiveness as informed by Genesis 50:17, the embodiment of teacher personal competence in emotional maturity and character integrity, the pedagogical modeling of forgiveness, the relational ecosystem of the school that reinforces or hinders forgiveness practices, and the broader implications for Christian pedagogy in rural Indonesian contexts. These findings indicate that the teacher’s personality competence-comprising integrity, emotional stability, exemplary conduct, and moral leadership-functions not only as a professional requirement but also as an incarnational medium through which biblical forgiveness is made visible and educationally transformative (Lumpkin 2008; Lickona 1991). The interpretation of Genesis 50:17 plays a foundational role in shaping the teachers’ conceptualization of forgiveness. In this text, Joseph confronts a painful appeal from his brothers, who invoke their father’s name in pleading, “*Forgive the transgressions of your brothers.*” The CRE teachers interviewed consistently identified Joseph’s response not merely as an act of emotional restraint but as a profound spiritual posture of surrender to God’s sovereignty (Brueggemann 1982). They emphasized that Joseph’s forgiveness stemmed from his recognition that God was actively working for good—even through wrongs committed against him. This theological understanding resonates with educators’ reflections that forgiveness is ultimately anchored not in mere moral obligation but in awareness of divine providence (Hamilton 1995). Teachers described using Genesis 50:17 both as a narrative reference in classroom discussions and as a personal spiritual lens through which they interpret interpersonal challenges with students. One teacher stated that the story “*reminds me that forgiveness is first God’s work in my heart, not just a rule I teach.*” Such a confessional approach aligns with the literature describing biblical forgiveness as a transformative act rooted in God’s redemptive purposes rather than psychological catharsis alone (Volf 2005). Interview insights reveal that teachers’ personal competence functions as the practical embodiment of this theological vision. Personal competence in the Indonesian teacher competency framework includes self-awareness, discipline, integrity, emotional control, and ethical consistency. For CRE teachers, these dimensions become intimately connected with the lived practice of Christian forgiveness (Uno & Lamatenggo 2020). Teachers repeatedly articulated that they cannot teach forgiveness effectively unless they exhibit it authentically in their own conduct. This

perception resonates with educational research demonstrating that moral values are transmitted most powerfully through modeling rather than instruction (Bandura 1997). For instance, a participant described consciously moderating anger during student misbehavior, saying, *"If I react harshly, students learn harshness. If I forgive, they learn forgiveness."* This form of emotional regulation demonstrates high emotional maturity, which is widely recognized as both a characteristic of personal competence and a critical prerequisite for fostering positive student behavior (Jennings & Greenberg 2009). The data suggest that the teacher's inner life-comprising their prayer practices, emotional discipline, and self-reflection-substantially influences their capacity to embody forgiveness.

The relational dynamics at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua further reinforce the teacher's role as a living model of forgiveness. The school's rural context fosters a close-knit community where interactions between teachers, students, and parents often extend beyond formal learning spaces. Teachers reported that their responses to conflict are immediately visible to families and community members. This visibility enhances their sense of responsibility to uphold moral integrity (Durkheim 1961). One teacher explained that "small acts of kindness or patience become big lessons because students see them every day." Such observations align with sociocultural perspectives on moral development, which highlight the shaping influence of communal relationships and shared values (Bronfenbrenner 1979). In this sense, the school functions not only as a learning institution but also as a moral community where forgiveness becomes a lived cultural practice reinforced through repeated interpersonal encounters. A significant theme emerging from the interviews is that forgiveness-based personal competence must be intentionally integrated into daily pedagogical practice. Teachers employ various strategies to cultivate forgiveness among students: dialogical resolution of conflicts, guiding students to apologize sincerely, storytelling grounded in biblical narratives, and reflective prayer practices. These strategies resonate with contemporary character education frameworks that emphasize dialog, narrative, and reflection as effective tools for moral formation (Narvaez & Lapsley 2014). For example, one teacher described facilitating restorative conversations after classroom conflicts to help students express feelings, acknowledge wrongdoing, and restore relationships. This process parallels restorative justice approaches that focus on repairing harm rather than imposing punishment, aligning with the theological thrust of Genesis 50:17 that emphasizes reconciliation over retribution (Zehr 2002). The teacher's role in this setting is not merely to mediate but also to guide students toward empathy and perspective-taking-skills that psychologists identify as essential for forgiveness development in children (Enright & Fitzgibbons 2000). The findings thus show a strong alignment between the teacher's personal competence and the intentional structuring of learning experiences that nurture moral growth. The systematic literature review supports the conclusion that forgiveness-centered pedagogy requires both strong personal competence and biblical grounding. The literature shows that teachers who embody compassion, patience, and moral consistency serve as powerful agents of character formation (Noddings 2013). The SLR also highlights that theological narratives-particularly those emphasizing redemption and reconciliation-are effective pedagogical tools when teachers integrate them with reflective dialogue and exemplar-based instruction. Studies on Christian education demonstrate that biblical narratives like

Joseph's often function as moral mirrors through which students interpret their own experiences (Wright 2018). The interviews confirm this theoretical insight, as teachers reported that students frequently internalize lessons more deeply when teachers connect situational conflicts with the story of Joseph. For instance, teachers encourage students to reflect on how Joseph chose peace despite wrongdoing, prompting them to consider how they might respond in similar situations. This integrative pedagogy affirms that moral learning is most effective when cognitive understanding is coupled with emotional resonance and teacher modeling (Lickona 1991). Another significant finding concerns the emotional challenges teachers face when practicing forgiveness. Educators admitted that forgiveness is not always easy, particularly when dealing with repeated misbehavior or disrespectful attitudes. Yet, they emphasized that such moments require deeper self-reflection and spiritual grounding, often recalling Joseph's struggles as a reminder that forgiveness requires humility and reliance on God (Fretheim 1996). One teacher described needing to "breathe, pray, and remember Joseph before responding," illustrating the reciprocal relationship between theological reflection and emotional regulation. Scholars affirm that forgiveness is a developmental process requiring emotional resilience and self-regulation (Worthington 2003). The data highlight that CRE teachers at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua rely heavily on spiritual-reflective practices—such as prayer, reading Scripture, and seeking divine guidance—to sustain their commitment to modeling forgiveness in challenging circumstances. This aligns with literature that identifies spiritual disciplines as critical resources for emotional well-being and ethical consistency among Christian educators (Smith & Snell 2009). The findings reveal that forgiveness as a personal competence is deeply intertwined with the teacher's sense of vocation. Teachers described their role not merely as a profession but as a calling to shape students' moral lives. This vocational perspective aligns with theological education research suggesting that teachers who view their work as ministry exhibit greater moral intentionality and resilience (Palmer 2007). Participants described experiencing moments of frustration, yet remained committed to cultivating forgiveness because they perceived it as part of God's mission for them in the school. This sense of calling appears to sustain their commitment to emotional discipline, moral consistency, and ongoing self-reflection. Teachers emphasized that modeling forgiveness requires continuous personal transformation—a process mirroring Joseph's journey from betrayal to reconciliation. This view supports Van der Walt's assertion that Christian teachers must embody Christlike virtues that reflect deeper spiritual formation (Van der Walt 2010). The rural context of SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua also influences how forgiveness is taught and embodied. Rural schools often function as extensions of the community, where relational bonds are strong and social values are shared (Howley & Howley 2014). Teachers described that in such contexts, their actions carry broader communal implications because they are observed by parents, church members, and neighbors. This reinforces their commitment to exemplify forgiveness consistently, as any discrepancy between teaching and behavior would undermine their credibility. Moral psychology research supports this claim, noting that children in close-knit communities are highly sensitive to adult modeling and social norms (Krettenauer 2019). The findings show that teachers navigate their public roles carefully, recognizing that their personal competence forms the moral scaffolding through which students learn forgiveness. Students' responses to the teachers' forgiveness practices further illuminate the effectiveness of personal competence. Teachers reported that

students often emulate behaviors they observe regularly. When teachers respond gently to mistakes, students begin to imitate gentleness in their peer interactions. When teachers apologize for errors, students learn humility. When teachers use biblical narratives to frame conflict, students develop spiritual awareness and moral vocabulary. These observations are consistent with findings in developmental psychology that children's moral behaviors are shaped by both verbal instruction and relational modeling (Damon & Eisenberg 2006). Students reportedly demonstrate increased willingness to apologize, seek reconciliation, and reflect on their behavior when teachers model forgiveness authentically. This suggests that personal competence is not merely a professional expectation but a catalytic force that shapes student character formation. At the same time, teachers acknowledged challenges that limit the cultivation of forgiveness. These include socio-emotional difficulties among students, familial conflicts affecting student behavior, and occasional inconsistencies among staff in demonstrating forgiveness. Teachers affirmed that the consistency of CRE teachers in modeling forgiveness contributes significantly to maintaining a positive school climate. Research supports this observation: schools with strong moral cultures led by consistent teacher exemplars experience fewer behavioral problems and greater student emotional well-being (Berkowitz & Bier 2005). The findings at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua reinforce that forgiveness practices must operate not only at the individual level but also at the systemic and cultural level, requiring alignment across school policies, teacher behaviors, and community expectations. The integration of findings from the SLR and interviews reveals that forgiveness-based personal competence rests on three interrelated domains: theological understanding, emotional-regulative capacity, and relational modeling. These domains operate synergistically. Teachers' interpretation of Genesis 50:17 provides a theological lens that shapes their moral intentions; emotional maturity enables them to practice forgiveness consistently; relational modeling demonstrates forgiveness visibly to students. When these domains align, forgiveness becomes an integrated moral practice that shapes the school's cultural ethos. This aligns with holistic Christian education frameworks that call for the integration of spiritual truth, personal formation, and relational embodiment (Estep, Anthony, & Allison 2008). The rich interplay between biblical narrative, personal competence, and pedagogical practice at SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua suggests that forgiveness can be cultivated effectively within primary education when teachers embody the virtues they teach.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that cultivating a spirit of forgiveness in primary education is a deeply relational, theological, and character-driven process in which the personal competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a decisive role. At SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua, forgiveness emerges not merely as a moral lesson delivered through curriculum, but as a lived virtue embodied through the teacher's emotional maturity, ethical consistency, and spiritual awareness. The integration of data from semi-structured interviews and the systematic literature review demonstrates that forgiveness is most effectively taught when it is visibly practiced by educators who internalize its biblical and pedagogical meaning. The narrative of Genesis 50:17 provides a transformative theological framework that shapes teachers' understanding of forgiveness

as a redemptive, God-enabled act rooted in divine sovereignty rather than human fairness. This study concludes that the teacher's personal competence functions as the primary channel through which biblical forgiveness becomes educationally tangible. Teachers' emotional regulation, integrity, humility, and relational sensitivity significantly influence how students interpret and practice forgiveness. When teachers respond to misbehavior with patience, acknowledge faults transparently, and guide students toward reconciliation, they create a moral environment where forgiveness becomes normative rather than exceptional. This supports broader scholarship asserting that character formation in children is most powerfully shaped by consistent moral modeling rather than direct instruction alone. In the context of SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua, the visible alignment between teacher behavior and biblical teaching strengthens student trust, increases moral receptivity, and fosters meaningful relational transformation. The study also finds that theological grounding is essential. Teachers interpret Joseph's forgiveness not as sentimental tolerance but as a faithful response to God's redemptive purposes. This theological lens shapes teachers' moral imagination and strengthens their resilience in emotionally challenging situations. By rooting forgiveness in divine agency rather than personal willpower, teachers experience greater motivation and spiritual capacity to model forgiveness consistently. This confirms insights in spiritual education literature that teacher spirituality serves as an inner resource that sustains ethical practice, especially in conflict situations. The relational ecology of a rural school like SD Negeri 175751 Purbatua amplifies the teacher's influence. Students observe teachers closely, and moral behaviors replicate rapidly within close-knit communities. The consistency of teacher modeling therefore becomes a powerful mechanism for shaping a culture of forgiveness. When forgiveness becomes embedded in daily interactions-teacher-student, student-student, and teacher-parent-it forms a collective ethic that stabilizes school climate and strengthens community cohesion. This aligns with sociocultural perspectives that emphasize the communal nature of moral development. This study concludes that the cultivation of forgiveness in Christian education requires three interdependent pillars: theological grounding, personal competence, and relational modeling. Forgiveness is not simply taught; it is witnessed. It is not merely discussed; it is practiced. And it is not only an idea; it is a lived reality shaped by the teacher's character and sustained by God's transformative grace. For CRE teachers, Genesis 50:17 serves not only as a biblical text but as a vocational calling to embody reconciliation within the school environment. Future research may enrich these findings by examining how schoolwide policies, parental involvement, and inter-teacher collaboration further support the development of forgiveness as a shared virtue in primary education.

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