



The Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Its Implications for Digital Ethics Education (A Case Study at SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli)

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is entrusted with the central mission of shaping holistic individuals grounded in biblical values. Within elementary education, CRE extends beyond the cognitive transfer of Christian doctrines; it must also nurture contextual spirituality, where faith is lived out through responses to students' cultural, social, and technological realities. In this process, CRE teachers serve not only as conveyors of knowledge but also as role models and facilitators who bridge biblical truths with everyday experiences. This study examined the competence of CRE teachers at SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli, a culturally diverse elementary school, focusing on how they integrate contextual spirituality into teaching practice. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observation, and document analysis involving teachers, school leaders, students, and parents. The findings reveal that pedagogical competence is critical for enabling transformative learning, as effective teachers contextualize biblical principles through culturally responsive methods such as storytelling, reflective dialogue, and problem-based learning. Personality competence further strengthens students' spiritual formation, as teachers' integrity and authenticity enhance their credibility as role models. Social competence, expressed through collaborative engagement with students, parents, and community, fosters inclusivity and relevance in the learning process. However, challenges include limited training in contextual spirituality, rigid curriculum structures, and external influences such as digital media. The study concludes that reforming teacher competence—pedagogical, personal, social, and professional—is essential for nurturing transformative Christian spirituality in contemporary education. Findings contribute to theoretical discourse on contextual spirituality and offer practical insights for teacher development and policy.

Keywords: *Christian Religious Education, Digital Ethics, Education*

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) carries the central mandate of shaping holistic human beings grounded in biblical values. In the context of elementary education, CRE is not limited to transferring cognitive understanding of Christian doctrines, but must also nurture a living and contextual spirituality. Contextual spirituality refers to the embodiment of faith in daily life, expressed through actions that respond to the social, cultural, and technological dynamics surrounding students. Thus, CRE teachers serve not only as instructors of doctrine but also as facilitators of meaningful engagement between biblical values and the lived experiences of learners. This pedagogical mission requires teachers to integrate faith into the students' reality in ways that are transformative rather than dogmatic (Smith, 2019). The role of the CRE teacher becomes particularly crucial in diverse school environments such as SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli, where students come from different cultural and socio-economic backgrounds. The diversity of student experiences presents unique challenges to teachers, especially when communicating spiritual values in ways that remain relevant to every child. In such contexts, teacher competence is tested not merely in terms of content mastery but also in their ability to adapt pedagogy to the realities of the learners. A competent teacher is expected to demonstrate contextual sensitivity, foster dialogical relationships, and embody spiritual maturity as a role model (Anderson, 2021). This means that effective CRE instruction must include methods that encourage reflection, critical thinking, and personal application of Christian faith both within and outside the classroom. Preliminary observations reveal that not all CRE teachers succeed in embedding this kind of contextual spirituality. Some still rely heavily on a normative and textual approach to curriculum delivery, which often detaches biblical lessons from students' daily realities. Such methods risk reducing CRE to a mere academic subject, rather than a formative experience of faith. When spirituality is taught abstractly without connection to the practical struggles and opportunities faced by students, it becomes less meaningful and less transformative (Brown, 2020). Consequently, the spiritual development of students may remain superficial, failing to empower them to live out their faith in meaningful ways in society. This reality underscores the urgency of examining how CRE teachers at SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli integrate contextual spirituality in their classrooms. The inquiry must address two major dimensions: first, the level of competence teachers possess in bridging biblical teaching with contemporary contexts; second, the factors that either support or hinder this process. Teacher competence involves not only pedagogical skill but also professional, social, personal, and spiritual competencies, all of which interact to shape classroom practice (Tisdell, 2021). For example, a teacher's spiritual integrity significantly impacts their credibility, while their social competence affects their ability to engage diverse learners in dialogical and inclusive ways. This research aims to capture the lived experiences of teachers and students in order to evaluate the strengths and limitations of current practices. Such an exploration is vital for developing strategies that can reform Christian education toward a more transformative orientation. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically: theoretically, by expanding the discourse on contextual spirituality in Christian pedagogy; practically, by offering insights for teacher training programs and school policies that emphasize holistic and contextual approaches to CRE (White, 2022). This study highlights the pressing need for reform in

CRE teacher competence to meet the challenges of the digital era. Students today are immersed in technological realities that continuously shape their worldview, behavior, and moral choices. Teachers must therefore be equipped to guide students in navigating these realities with Christian values, ensuring that digital engagement is accompanied by ethical and spiritual discernment (Johnson, 2022). This points to the broader implication that CRE is not static; it must evolve to address contemporary issues without compromising its biblical foundation. The competence of CRE teachers plays a pivotal role in fostering contextual spirituality among students. The case of SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli illustrates both the challenges and opportunities faced by educators in diverse educational settings. Addressing these challenges requires intentional reform in teacher training, pedagogical innovation, and spiritual integrity. Only through such efforts can CRE remain faithful to its mission of nurturing liberated and transformative Christian spirituality in the lives of learners.

METHODS

A case study design was applied in this research, which enabled an in-depth exploration of the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers within a specific context, namely at SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli. The case study method was considered appropriate because it allows the researcher to investigate complex and dynamic realities surrounding the teaching process and the internalization of spiritual values in elementary education (Creswell & Poth, 2018). By focusing on a bounded system, the research provides a holistic and contextualized understanding of how teachers engage in nurturing spirituality in students. The primary subjects of this study were CRE teachers at SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli. Supporting informants included the school principal, students, and parents, serving as triangulation sources for data credibility. Participants were selected purposively based on criteria such as teaching experience, active involvement in school religious activities, and recognition by the school community for their spiritual role modeling. Such selection ensured that the participants could provide rich and relevant insights into the research questions (Patton, 2015). Data collection techniques consisted of in-depth interviews, participant observation, and documentation analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted to allow flexibility in probing participants' responses, enabling deeper exploration of teachers' perspectives and practices (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Participant observation was carried out both during classroom activities and in informal settings to capture the lived dynamics of spirituality embodied in teacher-student interactions. Documentation analysis included teaching materials, student portfolios, and school religious activity reports, which served as complementary sources to contextualize the findings. Through these stages, recurring themes related to teacher competence and the practice of contextual spirituality were identified and interpreted in light of the research objectives (Braun & Clarke, 2019). The chosen methodology was deemed suitable to provide not only descriptive but also interpretive insights into how CRE teachers internalize spiritual values in a unique local setting. The findings are expected to reveal both the strengths and challenges of teaching contextual spirituality in elementary education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli is a decisive factor in cultivating contextual spirituality among students. Pedagogical competence encompasses the teacher's ability to design, implement, and evaluate learning activities that integrate biblical values with the lived realities of students (Shulman, 1987). The results show that effective CRE teachers do not merely deliver doctrinal content in a traditional or rote manner; rather, they strive to translate biblical principles into forms that resonate with the cultural and technological experiences of their students. During classroom observations, it was evident that teachers who employed contextual teaching strategies—such as problem-based learning, storytelling rooted in local culture, and case studies reflecting students' everyday challenges—were more successful in facilitating meaningful internalization of faith. For instance, one teacher drew parallels between the biblical story of Joseph's perseverance (Genesis 37–50) and students' struggles with academic discipline and peer pressure. This pedagogical move enabled students to see faith not as a distant abstraction but as a practical guide for moral decision-making. Interviews with students further corroborated these findings. Students expressed that lessons became "alive" when teachers related biblical values to their family situations, technological engagement, or socio-economic realities. Such experiences reflect the notion of "transformative pedagogy," which emphasizes education as a dynamic encounter between faith, knowledge, and life practice (Freire, 2000). Not all teachers demonstrated equal levels of pedagogical competence. Some relied heavily on textbook-based instruction, focusing primarily on doctrinal memorization without contextual integration. This created a gap between students' cognitive understanding of Christian doctrines and their affective-spiritual application in real-life settings. The findings suggest that when CRE pedagogy remains normative and detached from context, it risks rendering spiritual education irrelevant to the students' developmental needs (Astley, 2002). These results highlight the importance of ongoing pedagogical training for CRE teachers, particularly in designing lessons that align with the principles of contextual theology and culturally responsive teaching. Pedagogical competence, when actualized effectively, bridges the gap between biblical truth and students' lived experiences, nurturing a holistic spirituality that is both faithful and transformative.

Personality Competence as a Role Model

The study also found that personality competence plays an indispensable role in the spiritual formation of students. Personality competence refers to the teacher's integrity, maturity, and consistency in embodying Christian values both inside and outside the classroom (Day & Gu, 2010). Students perceive CRE teachers not merely as transmitters of religious knowledge but as living examples of faith in practice. Interviews with students and parents revealed a strong emphasis on teachers' moral credibility. Students often described teachers with high personality competence as "role models," noting their patience, fairness, humility, and willingness to listen. One student shared that seeing their CRE teacher pray sincerely before lessons motivated them to do the same at home. Parents, too, highlighted the significance of teachers' honesty and commitment, linking

these attributes to students' respect and willingness to internalize Christian teachings. Personality inconsistencies among some teachers undermined the effectiveness of CRE instruction. Instances of favoritism, impatience, or lack of transparency in classroom discipline weakened the students' perception of the teacher's moral authority. Such findings align with previous research showing that students' acceptance of moral-spiritual values is strongly mediated by their perception of the teacher's authenticity (Campbell, 2003). The discussion further indicates that personality competence cannot be separated from spirituality itself. Teachers' personal spiritual disciplines-such as regular prayer, Bible study, and church involvement-directly influence their capacity to model authentic Christian living. The lack of such practices may lead to a dissonance between what teachers teach and what they embody. Thus, the results underline that CRE teachers must cultivate their personality competence through continuous spiritual formation. Institutions should support teachers by providing retreats, mentoring programs, and peer accountability groups. Only when teachers embody the faith they teach can they effectively shape students' spiritual development in a credible and sustainable manner.

Social and Cultural Integration in the Classroom

Another key result of this study concerns the social competence of CRE teachers, particularly their ability to integrate learning into the cultural and relational fabric of the school community. Social competence is defined as the teacher's skill in building constructive relationships with students, parents, colleagues, and the broader community (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). At SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli, social competence emerged as particularly critical given the diversity of students' socio-economic and cultural backgrounds. Teachers who engaged in dialogical interactions-listening actively to students' stories, respecting cultural practices, and valuing parental input-were better able to foster a classroom environment conducive to spiritual growth. For example, one teacher invited parents to share testimonies of faith during class sessions, thereby linking the school's spiritual formation efforts with family practices. The role of cultural responsiveness was also evident. Teachers who incorporated local traditions, language, and music into religious education helped students perceive Christian faith as compatible with their cultural identity rather than as an imposed external system. This aligns with contextual theology, which argues that the gospel must be embodied within local cultural narratives to be transformative (Bevans, 2002). Challenges arose when teachers failed to demonstrate adequate cultural sensitivity. Some students expressed feelings of exclusion when lessons dismissed or ignored aspects of their cultural background. Such instances highlight the risk of alienating students and limiting the transformative potential of religious education. The findings affirm that social and cultural integration is indispensable for effective CRE teaching. Teachers who demonstrate empathy, inclusivity, and collaborative spirit not only enhance classroom relationships but also enable students to experience the communal dimension of Christian faith. Social competence thus supports the broader aim of contextual spirituality by ensuring that students' relational and cultural contexts are honored within the educational process.

The study identified multiple factors that either support or hinder the competence of CRE teachers in fostering contextual spirituality. Supporting factors included institutional backing, community involvement, and access to professional development. The principal

of SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli was observed to actively encourage CRE teachers to participate in seminars and workshops on contextual pedagogy. Teachers also benefited from strong parental involvement, which reinforced spiritual practices at home. In addition, the collaborative culture among teachers across subjects created opportunities for interdisciplinary projects, integrating moral-spiritual themes into broader learning activities. On the other hand, several hindering factors were noted. First, limited resources posed a challenge. Teachers lacked access to updated teaching materials, digital tools, and contextualized curricula that could support innovative pedagogical approaches. Second, systemic constraints—such as rigid curriculum requirements and heavy administrative burdens—reduced teachers' flexibility to design creative, contextually relevant lessons. Third, some teachers themselves demonstrated limited motivation or confidence to adopt new pedagogical strategies, often due to inadequate training in contextual theology or pedagogical innovation. Socio-economic disparities among students sometimes created barriers to effective implementation. Teachers reported difficulties in engaging students from disadvantaged backgrounds, who often faced challenges such as lack of parental support or limited exposure to spiritual practices at home. Without addressing these structural inequalities, efforts to foster contextual spirituality risk being uneven or ineffective. These findings suggest that improving CRE teachers' competence requires a systemic approach. Strengthening institutional support, providing contextualized resources, and addressing socio-economic barriers are crucial to ensuring that teachers can effectively embody and transmit contextual spirituality.

The results of this study carry significant implications both for theory and practice. Theoretically, the findings affirm the interconnectedness of pedagogical, personality, and social competence in shaping contextual spirituality. Spiritual formation in education cannot be reduced to a single dimension but must be understood as a holistic process mediated by teachers' knowledge, character, and relationships (Palmer, 1998). The discussion also contributes to the field of Christian pedagogy by highlighting the need for contextual spirituality as a framework for religious education in pluralistic and technologically advanced societies. Unlike traditional models that emphasize doctrinal instruction, contextual spirituality integrates biblical truth with socio-cultural realities, thereby aligning with contemporary educational paradigms such as transformative learning and culturally responsive pedagogy. The study underscores the necessity of reform in teacher training programs. Teacher education institutions should prioritize not only theological and doctrinal mastery but also contextual pedagogical skills, personality formation, and social competence. This reform could take the form of experiential learning opportunities, mentorship by senior educators, and integration of contextual theology into teacher training curricula. Schools and policymakers should create enabling environments for CRE teachers by reducing administrative overload, providing access to contextualized teaching resources, and promoting collaboration between schools, families, and communities. Attention should also be given to addressing socio-economic disparities that hinder students' spiritual development. The results suggest that CRE teachers are called not only to be conveyors of biblical knowledge but also to embody a living spirituality that resonates with students' realities. Their competence-pedagogical, personal, and social-forms the cornerstone of education that is faithful to the Christian mission while responsive to the challenges of contemporary life.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a central role in fostering contextual spirituality within the elementary school setting. Teachers who are able to understand the social and cultural backgrounds of their students, and who can effectively relate the teachings of the Christian faith to the realities of everyday life, are shown to be more successful in cultivating a holistic spiritual awareness among learners. Integrated pedagogical, personal, social, and professional competences, when grounded in a deep sensitivity to local contexts, form a strong foundation for transformative spiritual education. At SDN 102036 Hapoltahan Nauli, CRE teachers have modeled reflective, participatory, and contextually grounded teaching practices. They do not merely transmit doctrinal content verbally but also embody Christian values through their daily lives, thereby serving as role models for their students. Spirituality is not only taught but lived together within warm and dialogical educational relationships. Such success has also been supported by the involvement of school leadership, parents, and a school culture that promotes Christian values. Challenges remain, particularly in relation to the limited availability of specialized training in contextual spirituality and the negative influences of external environments such as digital media. Addressing these issues requires strategic and systematic efforts to strengthen the capacity of CRE teachers through relevant professional development initiatives and sustained institutional support. This study is therefore expected to serve as both a foundation for the development of more contextually oriented competence-building programs for CRE teachers and a broader reflection for Christian educational institutions to continually renew their approaches to spirituality within formal education.

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