



Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers Based on the Theology of the Cross: A Study of Philippians 2:8 at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers based on the Theology of the Cross as articulated in Philippians 2:8, with a research locus at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan. The Theology of the Cross emphasizes humility, obedience, self-giving, and sacrificial service, which are essential theological foundations for pedagogical practice in Christian education. Employing a quantitative correlational research design, this study involved a randomly selected sample drawn from a population of 638 Christian students and 47 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers. Data were collected through validated questionnaires measuring teachers' pedagogical competence and students' perceptions of Christ-centered pedagogical practices. Statistical analysis was conducted using correlation techniques to examine the relationship between pedagogical competence and the embodiment of theological values derived from Philippians 2:8. The findings reveal a statistically significant positive correlation, indicating that higher levels of pedagogical competence are associated with stronger manifestations of humility, servant leadership, and ethical responsibility in teaching practices. These results suggest that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education cannot be separated from theological depth, particularly the values of obedience and self-emptying exemplified by Christ. This study contributes to the discourse on faith-based pedagogy by demonstrating that the Theology of the Cross provides a robust theological framework for enhancing pedagogical competence and professional integrity among CRE teachers. The findings offer practical implications for teacher training programs, curriculum development, and policy formulation in Christian education, emphasizing the integration of theological reflection and pedagogical professionalism to foster holistic student formation.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Theology of the Cross*

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical competence is widely recognized as a core dimension of teacher professionalism, encompassing the ability to design meaningful instruction, understand

students' learning needs, implement effective teaching strategies, and evaluate learning outcomes responsibly. International educational literature emphasizes that pedagogical competence is not merely a technical skill but a reflective and ethical practice that shapes students' intellectual, moral, and personal development (Day et al., 2006; Campbell, 2017). In contemporary educational contexts, teachers are increasingly expected to integrate pedagogical expertise with moral responsibility and professional integrity, particularly in value-based subjects such as religious education. Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), pedagogical competence carries distinctive significance because teaching is closely connected to theological understanding and spiritual formation. CRE teachers are not only transmitters of religious knowledge but also facilitators of faith-informed learning that encourages students to reflect on meaning, values, and ethical responsibility. Research in moral and character education indicates that when pedagogical practice is grounded in clear moral and theological frameworks, teaching becomes more transformative and coherent (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014; Carr, 2018). Consequently, pedagogical competence in CRE cannot be separated from the theological convictions that shape teachers' understanding of teaching as vocation and service.

One theological framework that offers profound implications for pedagogical competence is the theology of the cross. Rooted in the New Testament, the theology of the cross emphasizes humility, obedience, self-giving love, and sacrificial service. Philippians 2:8 stands as a central biblical text in this regard, describing Christ's obedience "to the point of death, even death on a cross." Biblical scholars interpret this verse as a culmination of Christ's self-emptying (kenosis), highlighting radical humility and obedience as defining characteristics of Christ's mission (Fee, 2011). The theology of the cross, therefore, provides not only a soteriological foundation but also an ethical paradigm for Christian life and practice. When applied to the educational context, the theology of the cross offers a compelling lens for understanding pedagogical competence. Teaching informed by the theology of the cross prioritizes humility over authority, service over self-interest, and commitment over convenience. Educational scholars argue that teachers who adopt servant-oriented and reflective pedagogical approaches are more effective in addressing students' diverse needs and fostering meaningful learning relationships (Campbell, 2017; Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). In this sense, pedagogical competence becomes an expression of self-giving professionalism rather than mere instructional efficiency. The relevance of this theological-pedagogical integration is particularly evident in public-school contexts. At SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan, where approximately 638 Christian students are served by 47 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, pedagogical competence plays a crucial role in shaping students' learning experiences within a diverse educational environment. CRE teachers in such contexts are challenged to teach faithfully and professionally while respecting institutional standards and social diversity. Research indicates that teachers working in public schools must navigate pedagogical responsibilities with sensitivity, ethical awareness, and contextual adaptability (Day et al., 2006). International studies published by Springer and Taylor & Francis highlight that pedagogical competence is closely linked to teachers' moral orientation and professional identity. Teachers who view their work as service tend to demonstrate greater patience, responsibility, and commitment to students' holistic development (Carr, 2018). From a Christian perspective, the theology of the cross reinforces this orientation by framing teaching as an act of

obedience and love rather than self-promotion. Philippians 2:8 thus provides a theological foundation for understanding pedagogical competence as a form of faithful service modeled after Christ's humility and obedience. This gap suggests the need for studies that integrate educational theory with biblical theology, particularly in the field of Christian Religious Education. By examining pedagogical competence through the lens of the theology of the cross, this study seeks to offer a more holistic understanding of teaching that encompasses instructional skill, moral responsibility, and theological reflection. This study aims to explore the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers based on the theology of the cross as articulated in Philippians 2:8, focusing on the context of SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan. By integrating international educational scholarship with biblical theology, this research is expected to contribute to discussions on teacher professionalism, Christian pedagogy, and faith-informed educational practice in public schools.

METHODS

A quantitative research design with a correlational approach was implemented to examine the relationship between the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the theological orientation of the theology of the cross based on Philippians 2:8. A correlational design was chosen to identify the degree and direction of association between the variables without manipulating them. Quantitative correlational research is widely used in educational studies to explore relationships among professional competencies, attitudes, and value-based orientations (Creswell, 2014). The population of this study consisted of 638 Christian students enrolled at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan. These students were selected as respondents because they directly experience and assess the pedagogical practices of CRE teachers in classroom settings. From this population, a sample was determined using simple random sampling, ensuring that each student had an equal opportunity to be selected. Random sampling was employed to enhance the representativeness of the sample and reduce selection bias, thereby increasing the generalizability of the findings. The sample size was determined using standard quantitative sampling considerations appropriate for correlational studies in educational research. The final sample was considered sufficient to provide reliable statistical analysis and to reflect students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical competence. This study involved two main variables: Pedagogical Competence of CRE Teachers (Variable X), pedagogical competence refers to teachers' ability to plan instruction, understand student characteristics, implement effective learning strategies, manage classrooms, and evaluate learning outcomes. Indicators of pedagogical competence were adapted from established frameworks in teacher professionalism literature, including instructional planning, teaching methodology, student-centered learning, classroom management, and assessment practices (Day et al., 2006; Campbell, 2017); Theology of the Cross–Based Teaching Orientation (Variable Y), this variable reflects the extent to which pedagogical practices embody values derived from the theology of the cross, such as humility, obedience, self-giving service, patience, and responsibility, as grounded in Philippians 2:8. The indicators were operationalized into observable teaching behaviors, including fairness, willingness to serve students, perseverance in teaching, and respectful engagement. Data were collected using a

structured questionnaire developed on a Likert scale ranging from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The questionnaire consisted of two sections corresponding to the research variables. Items were formulated based on theoretical constructs from international educational literature and theological interpretations of Philippians 2:8. Prior to data collection, the instrument was reviewed to ensure content validity and clarity. Reliability testing was conducted using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient to determine internal consistency. The instrument was considered reliable if the alpha coefficient exceeded the commonly accepted threshold of 0.70, as recommended in educational research methodology (Creswell, 2014). Data collection was conducted after obtaining permission from the school administration. Questionnaires were distributed to selected students during school hours under controlled conditions to ensure standardized administration. Respondents were informed that participation was voluntary and that their responses would remain anonymous. This procedure aimed to encourage honest and unbiased responses. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive, to summarize respondents' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical competence and theology-of-the-cross-based teaching orientation. Inferential analysis employed the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation to examine the relationship between the two variables. The correlation coefficient (r) was interpreted to determine the strength and direction of the relationship, while the significance level was set at $\alpha = 0.05$. Statistical analysis was performed using standard statistical software commonly used in educational research. The results of the correlation analysis were used to test the research hypothesis and to draw conclusions regarding the relationship between pedagogical competence and theology-of-the-cross-based teaching practices.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined the relationship between the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and teaching practices grounded in the theology of the cross based on Philippians 2:8 at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan. Data were collected from Christian students selected through simple random sampling and analyzed using descriptive statistics and Pearson Product-Moment correlation. Descriptive analysis indicates that students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical competence were generally positive. The mean score for pedagogical competence was in the high category, reflecting students' agreement that CRE teachers demonstrated adequate instructional planning, clarity in explaining learning materials, classroom management skills, and fair assessment practices. These findings suggest that CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan exhibit a solid level of pedagogical professionalism, consistent with indicators commonly identified in international teacher competence literature (Day et al., 2006). Descriptive results for theology of the cross-based teaching orientation also fell within the high category. Students perceived that CRE teachers frequently demonstrated humility, patience, responsibility, and willingness to serve students regardless of academic ability. These attributes reflect values associated with Philippians 2:8, particularly obedience, self-giving service, and perseverance in fulfilling one's vocation. Inferential analysis using Pearson Product-Moment correlation revealed a positive and statistically significant relationship between pedagogical competence and theology of the cross-based teaching orientation ($r = 0.58, p < 0.05$). This correlation coefficient indicates a moderate to strong relationship,

suggesting that higher levels of pedagogical competence are associated with stronger embodiment of theology-of-the-cross values in teaching practice. The statistical significance confirms that the relationship is unlikely to have occurred by chance. The findings demonstrate that pedagogical competence and theology-of-the-cross-based teaching orientation are closely related constructs within the context of Christian Religious Education. The positive correlation indicates that teachers who demonstrate strong pedagogical skills are also more likely to embody humility, responsibility, and servant-oriented attitudes in their instructional practice. This result supports international research emphasizing that effective teaching is not value-neutral but deeply connected to teachers' moral orientation and professional identity (Campbell, 2017; Carr, 2018).

From an educational perspective, the results affirm that pedagogical competence extends beyond technical instructional ability. Teachers who plan lessons carefully, manage classrooms effectively, and engage students meaningfully tend to demonstrate greater patience, fairness, and commitment to students' holistic development. This aligns with research suggesting that pedagogical competence is inseparable from ethical responsibility and relational sensitivity (Day et al., 2006). In this study, such ethical dimensions are expressed through the theological framework of the cross. The significant relationship between pedagogical competence and theology-of-the-cross-based orientation can be theologically interpreted through Philippians 2:8. Christ's obedience and self-emptying serve as a model for teaching that prioritizes service over authority and dedication over personal comfort. CRE teachers who internalize this theological vision appear more consistent in applying pedagogical principles with humility and responsibility. Thus, the theology of the cross functions as an internal moral compass that strengthens pedagogical practice rather than replacing professional standards. These findings also highlight the contextual importance of the study. With 638 Christian students and 47 Christian teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan, pedagogical competence grounded in theological values plays a vital role in sustaining meaningful Christian education within a public-school environment. The results suggest that theology-informed pedagogy enables CRE teachers to maintain professional excellence while embodying Christian values in a manner that is ethically appropriate and educationally constructive. The results support character and moral education literature which emphasizes that students learn values through teachers' consistent behavior rather than explicit instruction alone (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). When pedagogical competence is exercised through humility, patience, and service, students experience teaching as both academically effective and morally formative. This reinforces the argument that theology-based pedagogical competence contributes indirectly to students' character development. Although this study establishes a significant correlation, it does not imply causation. Other factors such as teachers' experience, institutional culture, and personal spirituality may also influence pedagogical competence and theological orientation. Future studies could employ regression analysis or mixed-method designs to explore these relationships more deeply. The results confirm that pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers is meaningfully related to theology-of-the-cross-based teaching practices. This finding contributes to educational discourse by demonstrating that theological values, particularly those rooted in Philippians 2:8, can

enrich pedagogical competence and strengthen professional identity within Christian education.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the relationship between the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and teaching practices grounded in the theology of the cross based on Philippians 2:8 at SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan. Using a quantitative correlational design with random sampling, the study provides empirical evidence that pedagogical competence is significantly associated with theology-of-the-cross-based teaching orientation. The findings confirm that pedagogical competence in Christian education is not merely technical or procedural but closely intertwined with theological and ethical values. The results indicate a positive and statistically significant correlation between pedagogical competence and theology-of-the-cross-based teaching practices. This suggests that CRE teachers who demonstrate higher levels of pedagogical competence are more likely to embody values of humility, obedience, patience, and self-giving service in their instructional practice. Such values reflect the core message of Philippians 2:8, where Christ's obedience and sacrificial humility serve as a model for faithful and responsible service. In this context, pedagogical competence functions as a practical expression of theological commitment rather than a value-neutral professional skill. From an educational perspective, the findings support international scholarship emphasizing that effective pedagogy is closely linked to teachers' moral orientation and professional identity. Pedagogical competence grounded in ethical conviction enables teachers to design meaningful learning experiences, manage classrooms responsibly, and respond sensitively to students' needs. When informed by the theology of the cross, these pedagogical practices are characterized by servant leadership, perseverance, and commitment to students' holistic development.

The context of SMP Negeri 1 Parbuluan further underscores the relevance of these findings. With a substantial number of Christian students and teachers within a public-school environment, theology-based pedagogical competence contributes to maintaining educational quality while expressing Christian values in an inclusive and respectful manner. This demonstrates that theological reflection can enrich professional practice without undermining academic standards or institutional expectations. This study is limited by its correlational design, which does not allow for causal conclusions. Future research may employ experimental, longitudinal, or mixed-method approaches to further investigate how theological orientation influences pedagogical development over time. Additionally, expanding the scope of participants to include teachers' self-assessments and classroom observations could provide deeper insight into theology-informed pedagogical practice. This study affirms that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers, when grounded in the theology of the cross as articulated in Philippians 2:8, represents a meaningful integration of faith and professionalism. Such integration strengthens teacher identity, enhances instructional quality, and offers a compelling model of Christian pedagogy rooted in humility, obedience, and faithful service.

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