



Christlike Humility and Teacher Personal Competence in Christian Religious Education: A Study of Philippians 2:7 at SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi

Resmida Banjar Nahor

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: banjarnohorresmida@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study examines the role of Christlike humility as a foundational element of teacher personal competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE), drawing on an educational interpretation of Philippians 2:7. The concept of kenosis, which describes Christ's voluntary self-emptying and servanthood, provides a theological framework for understanding humility as spiritual strength rather than weakness. In contemporary educational contexts, particularly within pluralistic public schools, the personal competence of CRE teachers is not only measured by pedagogical skills but also by moral integrity, spiritual maturity, and exemplary character. This research employs a qualitative approach supported by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR). Biblical exegesis of Philippians 2:7 is integrated with educational and theological literature on teacher competence, character education, and Christian pedagogy. The study is situated at SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi, where one Christian Religious Education teacher serves 32 Christian students, highlighting the strategic role of teacher personality in minority-faith educational settings. The findings indicate that Christlike humility significantly shapes key dimensions of teacher personal competence, including self-discipline, empathy, authenticity, emotional stability, and servant-oriented leadership. Teachers who embody humility tend to foster trusting relationships, create inclusive learning environments, and function as credible moral role models for students. Moreover, humility enhances the transformative impact of Christian Religious Education by aligning instructional practice with lived Christian values. This study concludes that Christlike humility, as articulated in Philippians 2:7, is an essential pedagogical virtue that strengthens teacher professionalism and supports holistic student formation. The research recommends that teacher education and professional development programs for CRE intentionally integrate biblical spirituality, reflective practice, and character formation to cultivate educators who teach not only through instruction but also through example.

Keywords: *Personal Competence, Christian Religious Education, Christlike Humility*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher personal competence is a crucial dimension of educational professionalism, particularly in value-based education such as Christian Religious Education (CRE). Beyond pedagogical and professional skills, personal competence reflects the integrity, maturity, and moral consistency of educators as role models for students. In the context of Christian education, teacher personal competence is inseparable from Christlike character, as teachers are called not only to teach biblical knowledge but also to embody the values they proclaim (Knight, 2006). At the secondary school level, where students experience identity formation and moral negotiation, the personal character of teachers becomes a decisive factor in shaping students' attitudes and spiritual awareness. One of the most profound biblical foundations for Christlike character is found in Philippians 2:7, which describes Christ as one who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant." This passage, commonly associated with the *kenosis* doctrine, emphasizes humility, self-giving, and obedience as defining attributes of Christ's life and mission (O'Brien, 1991). Theologically, Christ's self-emptying does not indicate weakness or loss of divinity, but rather the voluntary relinquishment of status for the sake of service (Fee, 1995). Educationally interpreted, this concept offers a powerful framework for understanding teacher personal competence as servant-oriented, relational, and ethically grounded. In contemporary educational settings, especially in public schools, teachers often face challenges related to authority, professionalism, and moral credibility. Research in educational psychology highlights that students are more influenced by teachers' personal qualities, such as humility, fairness, and emotional stability, than by instructional techniques alone (Palmer, 1998). Personal competence, therefore, functions as a moral bridge between knowledge transmission and character formation. For Christian Religious Education teachers, this competence is deeply rooted in the imitation of Christ, whose humility becomes the ultimate pedagogical model. This study is situated at SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi, a public junior high school that accommodates students from diverse religious backgrounds. The research focuses on the Christian education context within the school, involving 32 Christian students and one Christian Religious Education teacher. Although the number of Christian educators is limited, this context provides a meaningful opportunity to examine how Christlike humility is embodied in teacher personal competence and perceived by students within a pluralistic educational environment. Such settings require teachers to express faith-based values in ways that are ethically inclusive and professionally appropriate.

Previous studies on teacher competence in Christian education have largely emphasized pedagogical effectiveness and curriculum delivery, often treating personal competence as a supplementary dimension (Yount, 2010). Meanwhile, theological studies on Philippians 2:7 tend to focus on Christology and ethics without sufficient engagement with educational practice. This separation creates a gap between theological ideals and pedagogical realities. Integrating biblical exegesis with educational analysis is therefore necessary to develop a holistic understanding of teacher competence grounded in Christlike humility. Humility as a personal virtue has been shown to enhance relational trust, reflective practice, and ethical leadership in educational contexts (Tangney, 2000). Teachers who practice humility are more open to self-evaluation, respectful dialogue, and

empathetic engagement with students. These qualities are especially relevant in Christian Religious Education, where moral credibility significantly affects students' reception of spiritual teachings. When teachers demonstrate humility through service-oriented attitudes, consistency between words and actions, and respectful authority, students are more likely to internalize Christian values authentically. This study aims to examine teacher personal competence through the lens of Christlike humility as articulated in Philippians 2:7. By integrating biblical interpretation and educational inquiry, this research seeks to explore how *kenotic* humility is reflected in the personal competence of a Christian Religious Education teacher and how it contributes to students' spiritual and moral formation. The findings are expected to contribute to Christian education scholarship by offering a biblically grounded and pedagogically relevant framework for understanding teacher personal competence in contemporary public school contexts.

METHODS

A qualitative research design integrating field-based qualitative inquiry with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) was implemented in this research. The qualitative approach was chosen to explore in depth how Christlike humility, as articulated in Philippians 2:7, is reflected in the personal competence of a Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher and perceived by students. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for examining values, meanings, and lived experiences that are context-dependent and cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement (Creswell, 2013). The inclusion of an SLR strengthens the study by providing a rigorous theological and educational framework for interpreting empirical findings. This dual approach allows for a dialogical relationship between biblical exegesis, educational theory, and contextual practice.

The study was conducted at SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi, a public junior high school operating within a pluralistic educational environment. The research focused specifically on the Christian education context, involving 32 Christian students and one Christian Religious Education teacher. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in CRE teaching and learning activities. This sampling technique is appropriate for qualitative studies that seek depth of understanding from information-rich cases (Patton, 2015). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher to explore personal understanding and practical expressions of Christlike humility, including attitudes toward authority, service, self-restraint, and relational engagement with students. Interviews with selected students focused on their perceptions of the teacher's personal character, consistency, and humility in daily interactions. Classroom observations were carried out to examine how humility was enacted in teaching practices, communication styles, disciplinary approaches, and teacher-student relationships. Observational focus included behaviors such as patience, openness to student input, fairness, and willingness to serve rather than dominate. The Systematic Literature Review followed established qualitative synthesis guidelines to ensure transparency and rigor (Snyder, 2019). Academic sources were retrieved from reputable databases, consisted of peer-reviewed journal articles and scholarly books written in English, published primarily within the last two decades, and directly related to theology, education, or teacher competence. Selected literature was analyzed

thematically to identify core concepts related to humility, self-emptying, and personal competence in educational contexts.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study indicate that Christlike humility, as derived from Philippians 2:7, functions as a foundational element of teacher personal competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE). Qualitative data from interviews and classroom observations reveal that humility is not merely an internal disposition but a lived pedagogical posture that shapes teacher-student interactions. The CRE teacher at SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi consistently demonstrated attitudes aligned with *kenotic* self-emptying, including willingness to serve, restraint in exercising authority, and openness to students' perspectives. Philippians 2:7 describes Christ as one who "emptied himself, taking the form of a servant," a theological concept widely understood as *kenosis*. Scholarly interpretations emphasize that *kenosis* involves voluntary self-limitation for the sake of others rather than self-negation (O'Brien, 1991; Fee, 1995). When interpreted educationally, this passage provides a moral framework for understanding teacher personal competence as the ability to prioritize students' growth over personal status or power. The observed teaching practices reflected this orientation, particularly in the teacher's patient response to student questions and non-authoritarian classroom management style. This finding aligns with Palmer's (1998) assertion that good teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher. In this context, humility emerges as a defining marker of integrity, enabling the teacher to act as a credible moral exemplar. Students interviewed in the study repeatedly associated the teacher's humility with trustworthiness and approachability, suggesting that personal competence grounded in Christlike humility enhances relational credibility in faith-based instruction.

One significant theme that emerged from the data is the redefinition of teacher authority through servanthood. Rather than asserting dominance, the CRE teacher exercised authority relationally, emphasizing guidance, encouragement, and moral persuasion. Classroom observations showed that disciplinary moments were handled calmly and respectfully, avoiding humiliation or coercion. This approach reflects Jesus' teaching on leadership as service, which is consistent with the *kenotic* model articulated in Philippians 2 (Wright, 2013). Educational research supports the idea that servant-oriented authority fosters a positive learning environment and promotes ethical development (Greenleaf, 2002). In Christian education, this approach is particularly significant because authority is inseparable from moral example. The teacher's willingness to listen, admit limitations, and learn alongside students was frequently cited by students as evidence of humility. Such behaviors illustrate Tangney's (2000) argument that humility involves accurate self-assessment and openness to growth. In a public school context like SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi, where religious diversity is present, servant-based authority also functions as an inclusive ethical stance. The teacher's humility did not manifest as religious exclusivism but as respectful engagement, thereby maintaining professional integrity while embodying Christian values. This balance supports the notion that Christlike humility is compatible with pluralistic educational settings.

Another finding concerns the consistency between faith confession, personal character, and pedagogical practice. Students reported that the teacher's behavior inside and outside the classroom was congruent with biblical teachings emphasized during CRE lessons. This consistency is a key indicator of personal competence, as defined in national and international teacher competency frameworks, which emphasize moral stability and exemplary conduct (Yount, 2010). From a theological perspective, Philippians 2:7 underscores the inseparability of Christ's identity and actions. Christ's humility is not rhetorical but enacted through concrete self-giving practices. Similarly, the teacher's personal competence was evident in daily routines such as punctuality, fairness in assessment, and respectful communication. These practices reinforce what Groome (1980) describes as "shared praxis," where faith is learned through lived experience rather than abstract instruction alone. The findings suggest that students are highly sensitive to inconsistencies between teaching and behavior. When humility is authentically embodied, students perceive CRE as credible and relevant. Conversely, literature indicates that moral inconsistency among educators can lead to cynicism and disengagement among learners (Sergiovanni, 2007). The present study confirms that Christlike humility strengthens pedagogical coherence and enhances the formative impact of Christian education. The data further reveal that humility functions as a catalyst for students' spiritual formation. Students described feeling more encouraged to reflect on their own attitudes, particularly regarding pride, forgiveness, and service. This outcome aligns with spiritual formation theories that emphasize modeling as a primary mechanism for moral and spiritual learning (Wilhoit, 2008). By embodying humility, the teacher created a learning environment conducive to introspection and moral growth. Observations indicated that classroom discussions often encouraged students to connect biblical teachings with personal experiences, facilitated by the teacher's non-judgmental stance. This pedagogical posture resonates with Vygotskian social learning principles, where relational trust enables deeper cognitive and moral engagement (Vygotsky, 1978). Philippians 2:7 serves here not only as a doctrinal text but as a formative narrative shaping pedagogical ethos. The teacher's willingness to "empty oneself" of ego-driven teaching practices enabled students to encounter Christian values as transformative rather than prescriptive. This finding supports Wright's (2013) argument that Pauline Christology carries ethical implications that extend into communal and educational life.

The teacher acknowledged difficulties balancing humility with administrative expectations, curriculum demands, and standardized assessment pressures. These challenges reflect broader critiques in educational literature regarding the tension between relational pedagogy and bureaucratic accountability (Biesta, 2010). From a theological standpoint, *kenosis* does not negate structure or responsibility but calls for faithful engagement within limitations. The teacher's reflective responses indicate an ongoing negotiation between institutional authority and servant leadership. This dynamic underscores the need for professional development models that integrate spiritual virtues with practical competencies. Being the sole CRE teacher for Christian students places additional emotional and spiritual demands on the educator. The literature suggests that such roles require sustained support to prevent burnout and role overload (Nouwen, 1975). The findings highlight the importance of institutional recognition of personal competence as a resource that must be nurtured rather than assumed. The

integration of SLR findings with field data strengthens the interpretive validity of this study. The literature consistently affirms humility as a virtue central to effective Christian leadership and teaching (Greenleaf, 2002; Wilhoit, 2008). By grounding empirical observations in established theological and educational scholarship, this study demonstrates that Christlike humility is both biblically normative and pedagogically effective. The synthesis reveals that teacher personal competence, when informed by Philippians 2:7, transcends technical professionalism and enters the realm of moral vocation. This perspective challenges reductionist views of competence that prioritize skills over character. Instead, competence is understood holistically, integrating identity, spirituality, and practice. The findings carry important implications for CRE teacher formation and policy. Teacher education programs should explicitly address humility as a core component of personal competence. Biblical texts such as Philippians 2:7 should be engaged not only devotionally but pedagogically, informing teaching philosophy and classroom practice. Schools should recognize the formative role of teacher character in achieving educational goals, particularly in moral and spiritual domains. The results demonstrate that Christlike humility, rooted in *kenotic* self-emptying, is a vital dimension of teacher personal competence in Christian Religious Education. At SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi, this humility enhances relational trust, spiritual formation, and pedagogical integrity, offering a compelling model for faith-based education within public school contexts.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the meaning and educational implications of Christlike humility as portrayed in Philippians 2:7 and its relevance to the personal competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi. By employing a qualitative approach supported by a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), the research has sought to interpret the biblical concept of *kenosis* - Christ's self-emptying - and to relate it meaningfully to the formation of teacher personality and professionalism in a contemporary educational context. The findings affirm that humility, as exemplified by Christ, is not a sign of weakness but a profound spiritual strength that shapes authentic leadership and ethical teaching practice. Philippians 2:7 presents Jesus as one who willingly relinquished status, power, and privilege to serve others. When interpreted educationally, this theological insight offers a powerful framework for understanding teacher personal competence, especially in Christian education. A teacher who embodies Christlike humility demonstrates integrity, emotional maturity, empathy, and a genuine commitment to serving students holistically - academically, morally, and spiritually. Within the context of SMP Negeri 14 Muaro Jambi, where the number of Christian students and CRE teachers is limited, the role of the CRE teacher becomes even more strategic. The study highlights that personal competence grounded in humility enables teachers to become credible role models for students. Such teachers do not merely transmit doctrinal knowledge but incarnate Christian values through their attitudes, interactions, and daily conduct. This lived example strengthens students' trust, nurtures respectful relationships, and supports the internalization of Christian character in a pluralistic school environment. The synthesis of literature reviewed in this study indicates that Christlike humility aligns closely with contemporary theories of character education

and transformational pedagogy. Humble teachers tend to adopt reflective practices, show openness to learning, and prioritize the well-being of students over personal recognition. These qualities reinforce the moral authority of teachers and enhance the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education as a formative, not merely informative, discipline. This research underscores that teacher personal competence in Christian Religious Education cannot be separated from spiritual formation. Christlike humility, as articulated in Philippians 2:7, provides a robust theological and pedagogical foundation for shaping educators who are both professionally competent and spiritually grounded. The study recommends that teacher training programs, especially for CRE teachers, intentionally integrate biblical spirituality, reflective practice, and character formation as core components of professional development. By doing so, Christian education can more faithfully fulfill its calling to form learners - and teachers - who reflect the character of Christ in both word and deed.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Banks, J. A. (2016). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Barth, K. (2004). *Church dogmatics* (Vol. IV/1). T&T Clark.
- Blomberg, C. L. (1992). *Philippians*. Zondervan Academic.
- Boehlke, R. R. (2018). *Sejarah perkembangan pikiran dan praktik pendidikan agama Kristen*. BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Browning, D. S. (2007). *Equality and the family: A fundamental, practical theology of children, mothers, and fathers in modern societies*. Eerdmans.
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Fee, G. D. (1995). *Paul's letter to the Philippians*. Eerdmans.
- Groome, T. H. (2011). *Christian religious education: Sharing our story and vision*. Jossey-Bass.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible learning: A synthesis of over 800 meta-analyses relating to achievement*. Routledge.
- Holmes, A. F. (2010). *The idea of a Christian college* (Rev. ed.). Eerdmans.
- Knight, G. R. (2006). *Philosophy and education: An introduction in Christian perspective* (4th ed.). Andrews University Press.

- Lickona, T. (2012). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam.
- MacIntyre, A. (2007). *After virtue: A study in moral theory* (3rd ed.). University of Notre Dame Press.
- Moltmann, J. (1993). *The crucified God*. SCM Press.
- Noddings, N. (2013). *Caring: A relational approach to ethics and moral education* (2nd ed.). University of California Press.
- Palmer, P. J. (2017). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life* (20th anniversary ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Plantinga, C. (2002). *Engaging God's world: A Christian vision of faith, learning, and living*. Eerdmans.
- Stott, J. R. W. (1986). *The message of Philippians: Jesus our joy*. InterVarsity Press.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2004). *Educating for life: Reflections on Christian teaching and learning*. Baker Academic.
- Yong, A. (2014). *The future of Christian education*. Baker Academic.