



Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Justice (Exodus 21:1): Evidence from SD Negeri 071207 Laowi

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching the value of justice, drawing on Exodus 21:1 as a biblical foundation, at SD Negeri 071207 Laowi, South Nias, Indonesia. Justice is a central ethical theme in both biblical theology and contemporary character education, yet its effective transmission in school contexts depends significantly on teachers' interpersonal and social competencies. This research aims to analyze how CRE teachers interpret, model, and pedagogically implement the concept of justice within classroom and school interactions. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with six Christian teachers (including CRE teachers), classroom observations, and document analysis of lesson plans and school character education materials. The study involved a school context with approximately 100 Christian students, providing a relevant setting for examining justice education within a predominantly Christian learning environment. Data were analyzed thematically to identify recurring patterns related to teachers' understanding of justice, social interaction practices, and pedagogical strategies. The findings indicate that teachers conceptualize justice not merely as a legal or disciplinary principle, but as a relational and moral value rooted in biblical teachings. Social competence is expressed through empathetic communication, fair treatment of students, conflict mediation, and consistent modeling of just behavior. The findings suggest that professional development programs should integrate theological understanding with social and interpersonal skill development to enhance justice-oriented education.

Keywords: *Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Justice*

INTRODUCTION

Social competence is increasingly recognized as a critical dimension of teacher professionalism, particularly in educational contexts that emphasize values, relationships, and moral formation. In contemporary educational theory, social competence refers to teachers' ability to communicate effectively, build positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, manage social interactions, and model ethical and prosocial behavior in the school community (OECD, 2019). In Indonesia, social competence is formally identified as

one of the four core teacher competencies, alongside pedagogical, professional, and personal competence, highlighting the importance of teachers' roles as social models and facilitators of healthy interpersonal relationships (Republic of Indonesia, Law No. 14/2005 on Teachers and Lecturers). This competency is especially significant in Christian Religious Education (CRE), where moral values such as justice, respect, and care for others are not only taught but are also expected to be embodied by teachers in their daily interactions (Groome, 2011; Pazmiño, 2008). Justice is a foundational moral concept in both biblical theology and contemporary character education. In educational research, justice is often associated with fairness, respect for rights, empathy, and the promotion of equitable treatment within learning environments (Banks, 2015). Schools are widely recognized as key social institutions for cultivating students' understanding of justice, as classroom practices and teacher-student relationships shape students' perceptions of fairness, authority, and moral responsibility (Nucci, Narvaez, & Krettenauer, 2014). From a developmental perspective, elementary school students are in a crucial stage for forming moral reasoning and social norms, making teacher modeling and instruction particularly influential in shaping students' understanding of justice and fairness (Eisenberg, Spinrad, & Eggum, 2010). Justice is not merely a social or legal principle but a deeply theological and covenantal concept. The Old Testament consistently presents justice as an essential expression of God's character and as a moral obligation for God's people (Wright, 2004; Brueggemann, 1997). The legal materials in Exodus 21-23, often referred to as part of the Covenant Code, provide concrete examples of how justice is to be practiced in everyday social relations. Exodus 21:1 introduces a series of laws intended to regulate interpersonal conduct and to protect vulnerable members of society. Biblical scholars emphasize that these laws reflect a theological vision in which justice is grounded in God's redemptive acts and covenantal relationship with Israel (Childs, 1974; Durham, 1987). Childs (1974) argues that the legal traditions in Exodus should be interpreted not merely as ancient regulations but as theological expressions of God's concern for order, responsibility, and the protection of human dignity.

Exodus 21:1, which introduces these ordinances, thus serves as a significant theological entry point for discussing justice in Christian education. The text situates justice within a framework of divine instruction, emphasizing that ethical and social norms are rooted in God's will rather than in purely human convention. From a pedagogical perspective, this provides CRE teachers with a rich biblical foundation for teaching justice as a spiritual and moral value that has concrete implications for social relationships, conflict resolution, and respect for others. However, effectively translating this theological vision into age-appropriate and socially meaningful instruction requires a high level of social competence on the part of teachers. Research on teacher competence consistently demonstrates that teachers' social and relational skills are closely linked to classroom climate, student engagement, and the development of prosocial behavior (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Darling-Hammond, 2000). Teachers who demonstrate strong social competence are better able to model fairness, manage conflicts constructively, and create inclusive learning environments in which students feel respected and valued. In the context of moral and character education, teacher modeling is particularly influential, as students often learn values such as justice not only through explicit instruction but also through observing how teachers treat others and handle social situations (Nucci et al., 2014). The

social competence of teachers takes on an added theological and ethical dimension. CRE teachers are not only transmitters of biblical knowledge but also moral exemplars whose interactions with students, colleagues, and the wider school community implicitly communicate Christian values. Groome (2011) emphasizes that Christian education is fundamentally relational and participatory, involving the integration of faith, life, and community. Similarly, Pazmiño (2008) highlights that Christian educators are called to embody the values they teach, including justice, compassion, and integrity. This implies that the effectiveness of justice education in CRE is closely tied to teachers' ability to model justice through socially competent behavior. Most existing research tends to address teacher competence in general terms or focuses on secular frameworks of character education, with less attention to how biblical interpretation and social competence intersect in CRE classrooms. This gap is particularly relevant for schools such as SD Negeri 071207 Laowi in South Nias, where Christian Religious Education is formally implemented and where CRE teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' moral and social development. This study aims to investigate the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in teaching justice based on Exodus 21:1 at SD Negeri 071207 Laowi. By focusing on this specific biblical text and examining how teachers' social competence relates to the teaching of justice, this study seeks to contribute to both educational and theological scholarship. The study is expected to provide empirical evidence on the importance of social competence in value-based instruction and to offer insights into how biblical concepts of justice can be effectively integrated into elementary-level Christian education through socially competent teaching practices.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive research design was implemented to explore how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is enacted in teaching the value of justice as inspired by Exodus 21:1. A qualitative approach was selected because the research aimed to gain an in-depth understanding of teachers' pedagogical practices, interpersonal interactions, and interpretive strategies in conveying biblical justice within a real educational context. Qualitative design is particularly appropriate for examining meanings, experiences, and social processes that cannot be adequately captured through numerical data alone. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 071207 Laowi, South Nias, Indonesia, a public elementary school with a Christian student population. The participants consisted of: 6 Christian teachers, including Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and other Christian subject teachers, and selected school stakeholders (such as homeroom teachers and school leaders) who were involved in supporting religious and character education. Contextual information was gathered regarding the learning environment of approximately 100 Christian students, particularly in relation to classroom interactions and character education practices. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their direct involvement in Christian Religious Education and their role in character and justice-oriented instruction. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers and selected Christian teachers to explore their understanding of social competence, their interpretation of justice based on Exodus 21:1, and their strategies for teaching justice values in classroom and school life. Interviews allowed participants to express their experiences, beliefs, and pedagogical

reflections in their own words. Non-participant observations were carried out in CRE classes and relevant school activities. The observations focused on teacher-student interactions, communication styles, conflict resolution practices, and the ways justice values were modeled and reinforced in daily learning processes. Field notes were systematically recorded to capture behavioral patterns and contextual dynamics. The analysis involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing to ensure systematic interpretation. Member checking was conducted by sharing summaries of interview interpretations with participants to confirm accuracy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings indicate that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 071207 Laowi generally understand justice as a value closely related to fairness, responsibility, and respect for human dignity, as reflected in their interpretation of Exodus 21:1. Teachers emphasized that this biblical text serves as a foundational reference for explaining justice not merely as legal compliance, but as a moral and relational principle grounded in God's concern for order and fairness in community life. Interview data reveal that teachers perceive Exodus 21:1 as a pedagogical entry point for discussing the importance of clear rules, mutual obligations, and accountability. This understanding aligns with theological interpretations that view biblical law not only as regulation but also as an expression of God's justice aimed at protecting vulnerable members of society and promoting social harmony. In this sense, teachers framed justice as a value that should shape students' attitudes toward peers, authority, and social relationships within the school environment. This finding supports previous studies emphasizing that biblical texts can function as moral frameworks for character education when interpreted contextually and applied to contemporary educational settings. Teachers' theological literacy and interpretive competence thus become a crucial dimension of their professional and social competence.

The results show that teachers' social competence is manifested through several observable dimensions, including effective communication, empathy, social sensitivity, and collaborative interaction. Classroom observations indicate that teachers frequently used dialogical approaches to engage students in discussions about fairness, conflict, and mutual respect. Rather than relying solely on lecturing, teachers encouraged students to share experiences related to unfair treatment, disputes, and cooperation. Teachers demonstrated empathy by listening attentively to students' concerns and validating their feelings before guiding them toward justice-oriented solutions. This practice reflects a socially competent teaching style in which relational awareness is prioritized alongside cognitive instruction. Such findings are consistent with educational theories that emphasize the role of teachers' interpersonal skills in fostering moral development and positive classroom climates. Teachers were observed modeling just behavior through consistent and transparent classroom management practices. For example, rules were applied equally to all students, and disciplinary measures were explained in terms of fairness rather than punishment alone. This modeling function reinforces the idea that social competence is not only expressed through verbal instruction but also through daily practices that embody justice values.

The data indicate that teachers employed a variety of pedagogical strategies to teach justice., including role-playing, and contextual examples from students' daily lives. Teachers often connected Exodus 21:1 with concrete situations such as sharing learning materials, resolving conflicts during group work, and responding to bullying or exclusion. These strategies helped students translate abstract biblical concepts into practical moral actions. Observations suggest that students were more engaged when justice was taught through relatable scenarios rather than purely doctrinal explanations. This supports constructivist perspectives on moral education, which argue that students internalize values more effectively when they are actively involved in meaning-making processes. Document analysis of lesson plans shows that justice-related themes were integrated into broader character education objectives. Although explicit references to Exodus 21:1 were not always present in formal documents, teachers frequently incorporated justice principles implicitly through learning objectives related to discipline, cooperation, and respect. The findings also highlight the role of school culture in reinforcing justice education. Teachers reported that collaborative efforts among Christian teachers and school leadership contributed to a shared commitment to promoting fairness and mutual respect. Informal coordination among teachers allowed justice values to be reinforced across subjects and school activities, not only within CRE classes. This indicates that the effectiveness of justice education is not solely dependent on individual teacher competence, but also on the institutional environment that supports consistent value formation. A supportive school culture enhances the impact of teachers' social competence by creating a coherent moral framework within which students experience justice as a lived reality. The findings suggest that the social competence of CRE teachers plays a significant role in translating the theological concept of justice from Exodus 21:1 into meaningful educational practice. Teachers' ability to communicate empathetically, model fairness, and contextualize biblical teachings enables students to experience justice not merely as a concept, but as a relational and practical value. This integration of theology and pedagogy reflects a holistic approach to Christian Religious Education, in which biblical texts inform not only curriculum content but also teacher-student relationships and school culture. The results support broader scholarship in Christian education that emphasizes the inseparability of theological understanding, moral formation, and social competence in effective character education.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 071207 Laowi plays a vital role in effectively teaching the value of justice as inspired by Exodus 21:1. The findings demonstrate that teachers' understanding of biblical justice extends beyond legalistic interpretations and is translated into relational and ethical practices that emphasize fairness, responsibility, and respect for human dignity. The results further indicate that social competence is expressed through empathetic communication, consistent modeling of fair behavior, and the use of participatory pedagogical strategies. These practices enable students to engage actively with justice concepts and to internalize them as part of their daily interactions within the school environment. Justice is thus not only taught as a theological principle, but also experienced as a lived value within classroom relationships and school culture. The study

highlights the importance of a supportive institutional context in reinforcing justice education. Collaboration among teachers and alignment with school-wide character education initiatives strengthen the integration of justice values across subjects and activities. This suggests that justice education in Christian Religious Education is most effective when individual teacher competence is supported by a coherent and value-oriented school culture. The study contributes to the field of Christian education by demonstrating the close relationship between biblical interpretation, teacher social competence, and character formation. It underscores the need for continuous professional development that integrates theological literacy with interpersonal and social skills. Future research is recommended to expand the scope of investigation to include students' perspectives and to explore comparative contexts in other schools, in order to further enrich understanding of justice education within Christian Religious Education.

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