



## Christian Religious Education Teachers' Competence in Fostering Holiness (Exodus 28:43): Evidence from UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence in fostering holiness among elementary school students at UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya, South Nias, using Exodus 28:43 as a theological framework. In the context of increasing moral complexity and pluralistic educational environments, holiness is often perceived as an abstract or outdated concept, creating challenges for effective spiritual and character formation. This research aims to explore how CRE teachers understand, interpret, and implement the concept of holiness in their teaching practices and daily interactions with students. Employing a qualitative descriptive research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving three Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, as well as supporting student informants. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns related to theological understanding, pedagogical practice, and contextual influences on the fostering of holiness. The findings indicate that teachers primarily conceptualize holiness in practical and ethical terms, emphasizing moral modeling, discipline, honesty, respect, and relational integrity. Holiness is effectively integrated into daily classroom practices through teacher exemplarity and character-oriented instruction. However, the study also reveals a tendency to emphasize behavioral aspects of holiness more strongly than its deeper theological and relational dimensions rooted in accountable service before God, as emphasized in Exodus 28:43. The minority Christian context of the school intensifies the formative role of CRE teachers, highlighting the importance of relational mentoring and vocational faithfulness. This study concludes that fostering holiness requires an integrated model of teacher competence that combines theological depth, personal integrity, pedagogical effectiveness, and contextual sensitivity to support holistic spiritual formation in Christian Religious Education.*

**Keywords:** Competence, Christian Religious Education, Holiness

### INTRODUCTION

The increasing complexity of moral challenges in the digital era further intensifies the importance of teacher competence in character and spiritual formation. Students today

are exposed to diverse value systems, media influences, and social pressures that often conflict with biblical principles and Christian ethical norms. Research in Christian education has demonstrated that digital culture can contribute to moral relativism, weakening students' commitment to absolute moral standards and increasing vulnerability to ethical confusion (Sari & Bermuli, 2021; Teintang, 2023). In this context, holiness is at risk of being perceived as an abstract, outdated, or purely religious concept that is disconnected from students' lived realities. Consequently, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are required to possess not only theological literacy but also pedagogical sensitivity and contextual awareness in order to help students interpret holiness as a relevant and transformative value in daily life (Santoso & Gunanto, 2024). This includes guiding students to understand holiness as integrity in relationships, responsibility in behavior, respect for self and others, and faithfulness in everyday practices, all of which are essential dimensions of Christian character formation in the digital age (Tapilaha & Lawalata, 2023).

Exodus 28:43 provides a theological foundation for understanding holiness as a serious and accountable calling before God. Although the text directly addresses the priestly context of ancient Israel, its theological principle, that those who serve before God must live in accordance with His holiness, has been widely understood in Christian theology as having broader ethical and vocational implications. The doctrine of the priesthood of all believers affirms that every Christian is called to participate in a life of holiness as a response to God's grace (cf. 1 Peter 2:9), extending the call to holiness beyond ordained ministry to all areas of Christian vocation, including education. Within this framework, Christian educators can be understood as participating in an educational-priestly vocation, entrusted with the responsibility to embody and teach holiness through both instruction and personal example (Teintang, 2023; Santoso & Gunanto, 2024). This theological perspective reinforces the ethical and spiritual weight of the teacher's role in Christian education, where holiness is not merely taught as doctrine but modeled as a lived reality. This theological responsibility becomes particularly significant in public-school contexts where Christian students often constitute a minority. At UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya, South Nias, there are 17 Christian students and three Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. Such a demographic context presents both structural challenges and formative opportunities. On the one hand, minority status may result in limited institutional support and fewer peer-based Christian interactions, which can weaken collective spiritual reinforcement. On the other hand, a small Christian learning community allows for more personalized guidance, closer relational mentoring, and more intentional spiritual formation (Zebua & Sihombing, 2024). In such settings, the competence and personal integrity of CRE teachers become highly visible and influential, as their impact extends beyond classroom instruction to students' broader moral and spiritual development. Existing studies on teacher competence have predominantly emphasized pedagogical skills, classroom management, and academic achievement, while the spiritual and theological dimensions of teacher competence have received comparatively less systematic attention. However, recent scholarship in Christian education increasingly highlights that effective teacher competence must integrate professional, pedagogical, personal, and spiritual dimensions in a holistic manner (Sihombing & Sitio, 2024; Zega & Simamora, 2024). This gap in the literature indicates a

clear need for research that intentionally integrates biblical theology, spiritual formation, and educational practice in analyzing how teachers contribute to the cultivation of holiness among students. This study is designed to investigate Christian Religious Education teachers' competence in fostering holiness at UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya, South Nias, using Exodus 28:43 as a theological framework. By examining how teachers understand, interpret, and implement the concept of holiness in their teaching practices and daily interactions with students, this research seeks to provide both empirical and theological insights into the relationship between teacher competence and students' spiritual formation. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more holistic models of Christian Religious Education that integrate theological depth, pedagogical effectiveness, and character formation, particularly within minority and context-specific educational settings.

## **METHODS**

A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand participants' perspectives, meanings, and lived experiences related to the interpretation and implementation of holiness in educational practice. Qualitative research is particularly suitable for investigating complex social and spiritual phenomena that cannot be adequately captured through numerical measurement, as it allows for in-depth exploration of context, values, and subjective understanding (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The descriptive qualitative design was selected to provide a detailed and systematic account of how CRE teachers conceptualize holiness and how this concept is translated into teaching practices, relational interactions, and school-based spiritual formation activities. In theological and religious education research, qualitative descriptive approaches are widely used to bridge biblical-theological concepts with empirical educational realities, enabling researchers to analyze how theological meanings are constructed and enacted in specific contexts (Osmer, 2008; Swinton & Mowat, 2016). The research was conducted at UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya, located in South Nias, Indonesia. This public elementary school was selected through purposive sampling because it represents a minority Christian educational context in which Christian Religious Education plays a strategic role in students' spiritual and moral formation. At the time of the study, the school had 17 Christian students and three Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. This context is significant because minority settings often require CRE teachers to function not only as instructors but also as spiritual mentors and moral exemplars. Previous studies have indicated that in minority Christian contexts, the teacher's personal integrity, relational closeness, and consistency between belief and practice become central to effective spiritual formation (Zebua & Sihombing, 2024; Santoso & Gunanto, 2024). Therefore, this site provided a relevant and meaningful setting for examining how teacher competence in fostering holiness is understood and practiced in a real-life educational environment. The participants in this study consisted of three Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, who were directly involved in the spiritual and moral education of Christian students at the school. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on their active roles in teaching and mentoring Christian students. Purposive sampling is commonly used in qualitative research to ensure that participants have rich, relevant, and experiential knowledge related to the

phenomenon under investigation (Patton, 2015). Several Christian students were included as supporting informants to provide complementary perspectives on how holiness was experienced and perceived in classroom interactions and school life. Including multiple perspectives enabled data triangulation and enhanced the depth and credibility of the findings (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Creswell & Poth, 2018). Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, and classroom observations. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the three Christian teachers to explore their theological understanding of holiness, their interpretation of Exodus 28:43, and their strategies for fostering holiness in teaching and daily interactions with students. Semi-structured interviews allow for flexibility while maintaining focus on key research themes, enabling participants to articulate their experiences in their own words (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2015). Classroom observations were carried out during CRE lessons and selected school activities involving Christian students. Observations focused on teaching methods, teacher-student interactions, modeling of moral and spiritual values, and the practical enactment of holiness-related principles. Observation is a critical qualitative technique for capturing naturally occurring behaviors and contextual dynamics that may not be fully articulated in interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016).

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The first major theme emerging from the interviews concerns teachers' theological understanding of holiness. All three Christian teachers demonstrated a basic awareness that holiness is central to Christian faith and is closely related to obedience, moral purity, and a life that pleases God. However, the depth and articulation of this understanding varied among participants. The CRE teacher articulated holiness primarily as "living according to God's Word and avoiding sinful behavior," emphasizing moral discipline and obedience to biblical commandments. This understanding reflects a traditional moral-theological framework commonly found in Christian Religious Education, where holiness is associated with moral boundaries and ethical conduct. While this perspective aligns with biblical teaching, it tended to emphasize external behavior more than internal spiritual transformation. The two other Christian teachers described holiness more relationally, defining it as "walking closely with God," "living differently from the world," and "being a good example for students." Their responses suggest a practical and relational interpretation of holiness that integrates faith with everyday conduct and interpersonal relationships. This indicates that holiness is not only understood as moral purity but also as relational faithfulness and integrity in daily life. These findings suggest that while teachers share a general theological agreement about the importance of holiness, there is variation in theological depth and conceptual clarity. This is consistent with previous research indicating that many Christian educators possess a functional rather than systematic theological understanding, which shapes how spiritual concepts are translated into classroom practice (Santoso & Gunanto, 2024; Teintang, 2023). Exodus 28:43 emphasizes holiness as a serious and accountable calling before God, particularly in relation to those who serve in sacred roles. Although the original context addresses priests, the teachers' interpretations reflect an implicit extension of this principle to their educational vocation. However, the results indicate that this extension is more intuitive than explicitly articulated in theological terms. Teachers generally did not explicitly

connect their role to the broader doctrine of vocation or the priesthood of all believers, suggesting a potential area for theological and professional development.

### ***Holiness as Moral Modeling and Teacher Exemplarity***

All participants emphasized that students learn holiness not only through instruction but also through observing teachers' attitudes, speech, and behavior. Teachers repeatedly stated that "students imitate what they see" and that "example is more important than words." Classroom observations supported this claim. The CRE teacher consistently modeled respectful communication, patience, and gentle correction when students made mistakes. In observed lessons, the teacher frequently linked biblical teachings to everyday situations, such as honesty in completing assignments, respect for classmates, and obedience to school rules. These practices demonstrate an implicit pedagogy of modeling, where holiness is communicated through lived example. This finding aligns with Christian education literature that emphasizes the formative power of teacher exemplarity. Character and spiritual formation are deeply influenced by relational and observational learning, particularly in elementary education contexts (Tapilaha & Lawalata, 2023; Sihombing & Sitio, 2024). In minority Christian settings, where formal Christian community structures may be limited, the teacher's personal witness becomes even more central to students' spiritual formation (Zebua & Sihombing, 2024). This emphasis on modeling resonates with the biblical concept that those who serve before God are called to embody holiness in visible ways. Exodus 28:43 underscores the seriousness of priestly conduct before God and the community. When applied to Christian educators, this principle reinforces the idea that teachers are not merely transmitters of religious knowledge but living witnesses to the holiness they teach. The results indicate that teachers intuitively recognize this responsibility, even if they do not explicitly frame it in priestly or vocational-theological terms. Rather than being treated as an abstract theological concept, holiness was integrated into practical behaviors such as discipline, responsibility, respect, and interpersonal conduct. Teachers frequently linked holiness to "being disciplined," "telling the truth," "helping friends," and "respecting teachers and parents." Observational data revealed that CRE lessons often included short devotional moments, prayer, and brief biblical reflections connected to students' daily experiences. For example, one lesson focused on honesty, where the teacher connected biblical teaching to students' responsibility to complete homework without cheating. In another observation, the teacher addressed conflict between students by emphasizing forgiveness and reconciliation as expressions of Christian character. These practices suggest that holiness is primarily taught through moral and character-oriented applications. This approach is consistent with research showing that in many Christian education contexts, holiness is translated into practical virtues and ethical behaviors that are accessible to students (Sari & Bermuli, 2021; Tapilaha & Lawalata, 2023). While this pragmatic approach is effective for elementary-level students, it may risk reducing holiness to moralism if not accompanied by deeper theological reflection on grace, identity in Christ, and spiritual transformation. Exodus 28:43 emphasizes holiness not merely as moral correctness but as a condition for standing before God. This dimension of holiness as relational accountability before God was less explicitly articulated in classroom practice. The results suggest that teachers focus more on horizontal (ethical

and relational) dimensions of holiness than on vertical (God-centered and covenantal) dimensions. This imbalance may limit students' understanding of holiness as fundamentally rooted in relationship with God rather than solely in ethical behavior.

### ***Minority Context and Its Influence on Teacher Competence***

The minority Christian context of UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya emerged as a significant factor shaping teacher competence and practice. Teachers reported that being part of a small Christian community within a public school environment requires them to be more intentional in nurturing students' spiritual identity. They expressed concern that students are exposed to diverse religious and moral influences, which can create confusion and weaken Christian identity if not carefully guided. Teachers described their role as extending beyond formal instruction to include mentoring, informal conversations, and personal encouragement. One teacher noted that because the number of Christian students is small, it is easier to provide individualized attention and to build close relationships with students and their families. This relational closeness was perceived as a strength that supports more intentional spiritual formation. These findings are consistent with previous studies indicating that minority Christian contexts often intensify the formative role of teachers, as they become primary spiritual reference figures for students (Zebua & Sihombing, 2024). At the same time, teachers acknowledged challenges, including limited institutional support for Christian programs and fewer opportunities for collective Christian activities. This context highlights the vocational dimension of Christian teaching as a form of faithful witness. In light of Exodus 28:43, the seriousness of serving before God takes on added significance when Christian identity must be maintained and nurtured in a pluralistic environment. The results suggest that teachers are aware of this responsibility but may benefit from further theological and pedagogical support to strengthen their competence in this area. While teachers demonstrated strong commitment and moral integrity, they acknowledged limitations in formal theological training and professional development related to spiritual formation. Teachers reported relying primarily on personal faith, church teaching, and practical experience rather than structured theological or pedagogical frameworks for fostering holiness. This finding points to a gap between theological ideals and practical implementation. While teachers effectively promote moral behavior and positive character traits, they may lack resources and training to articulate and integrate a more robust theology of holiness into their teaching. This is consistent with broader literature indicating that many CRE teachers face challenges in integrating theology, pedagogy, and contextual realities in a systematic manner (Santoso & Gunanto, 2024; Sihombing & Sitio, 2024).

The findings of this study highlight the need to understand holiness not only as a moral category but as a vocational and relational calling. Exodus 28:43 situates holiness within the context of service before God, emphasizing accountability, obedience, and reverence. When applied to Christian education, this text provides a theological foundation for understanding teaching as a form of sacred vocation. The results indicate that teachers intuitively recognize the moral and spiritual weight of their role but do not consistently articulate this in vocational-theological terms. Integrating a clearer theology of vocation

could strengthen teachers' understanding of their work as participation in God's holy purposes. This aligns with Christian theological perspectives that emphasize the priesthood of all believers and the sanctification of daily work as a response to God's calling (cf. 1 Peter 2:9). By framing teaching as a form of educational-priestly ministry, CRE teachers can more intentionally integrate holiness into both personal conduct and pedagogical practice. This perspective can also help teachers move beyond a primarily moralistic understanding of holiness toward a more relational and grace-centered theology that emphasizes identity in Christ and transformation through the Holy Spirit.

The strong emphasis on teacher exemplarity confirms the central role of relational and observational learning in spiritual formation. This finding supports existing literature that views teachers as key spiritual role models whose character and integrity significantly shape students' moral and spiritual development (Tapilaha & Lawalata, 2023; Sihombing & Sitio, 2024). This aligns with the biblical principle that God's servants are called to embody the holiness they proclaim. In Exodus 28:43, the priest's conduct is directly linked to the holiness of God's presence. Applied to education, this suggests that the teacher's life becomes part of the curriculum of holiness. This underscores the need for ongoing spiritual formation and support for teachers, not only professional training. While the practical integration of holiness into daily behavior is a strength of current practice, the results indicate a potential risk of reducing holiness to moralism. The focus on discipline, honesty, and respect is valuable and developmentally appropriate for elementary students. However, without deeper theological grounding, students may come to understand holiness primarily as rule-following rather than as participation in God's redemptive and sanctifying work. Holiness in Scripture is rooted in God's character and covenant relationship with His people. Exodus 28:43 emphasizes holiness as a condition for standing before God, highlighting the vertical dimension of holiness. Integrating this dimension more explicitly into CRE teaching could help students understand that ethical behavior flows from relationship with God, not merely from external expectations. This suggests the need for curricular and pedagogical development that integrates biblical theology, spiritual practices, and character education in a more holistic way. Such integration is consistent with calls in Christian education literature for holistic models that combine theological depth, pedagogical effectiveness, and spiritual formation (Santoso & Gunanto, 2024; Zega & Simamora, 2024).

The minority Christian context of the research site intensifies the formative role of CRE teachers. In such settings, teachers often become primary agents of Christian identity formation, especially when institutional and peer support is limited. The results indicate that this context enhances relational closeness and individualized mentoring, which can be a significant strength for spiritual formation. Minority contexts can increase pressure on teachers and expose gaps in institutional support. From a theological perspective, this context can be understood as a setting in which faithful witness and vocational faithfulness become particularly significant. Exodus 28:43 underscores the seriousness of serving before God in contexts where holiness must be visibly embodied and maintained. These findings suggest that educational institutions and church bodies should provide additional support and professional development for CRE teachers in minority settings. Such support could include theological enrichment, mentoring, and contextualized

pedagogical training to strengthen teachers' competence in fostering holiness. The findings of this study suggest that CRE teachers' competence in fostering holiness is shaped by a combination of theological understanding, moral integrity, relational practice, and contextual awareness. Teachers demonstrate strong commitment and practical effectiveness but may benefit from deeper theological formation and more structured pedagogical frameworks for spiritual formation. This study contributes to the literature by empirically demonstrating how holiness is understood and practiced in a real-life minority Christian educational context. It also highlights the need for more integrated models of teacher competence that explicitly include theological, spiritual, and vocational dimensions alongside pedagogical and professional skills (Sihombing & Sitio, 2024; Zega & Simamora, 2024). The findings suggest that teacher education and professional development programs for CRE teachers should place greater emphasis on theology of vocation, spiritual formation, and the integration of biblical theology with classroom practice. Such initiatives could help teachers more intentionally and theologically foster holiness as a lived, relational, and transformative reality for students.

## CONCLUSION

This study has examined Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence in fostering holiness at UPTD SD Negeri 075106 Amandraya, South Nias, using Exodus 28:43 as a theological framework. The findings demonstrate that holiness is understood and practiced primarily through moral modeling, relational mentoring, and the integration of Christian values into daily classroom activities. CRE teachers play a central role not only as instructors of biblical content but also as visible exemplars of Christian character whose personal integrity significantly shapes students' moral and spiritual development. The study reveals that teachers generally conceptualize holiness in practical and ethical terms, such as discipline, honesty, respect, and responsibility. While this pragmatic orientation is developmentally appropriate and effective in shaping observable behavior, it also highlights the need for deeper theological integration. Holiness, as presented in Exodus 28:43, is fundamentally rooted in accountable service before God and in a covenantal relationship that calls God's people to reflect His character. This theological dimension suggests that holiness should not be reduced to moral conformity but understood as a relational and vocational calling grounded in identity in Christ and sustained by God's grace. The minority Christian context of the research site further intensifies the formative responsibility of CRE teachers. With a limited number of Christian students and teachers, the influence of each teacher becomes highly visible and significant. This context provides opportunities for close relational mentoring and personalized spiritual guidance, but it also underscores the need for institutional and professional support. CRE teachers in such settings are required to function simultaneously as educators, spiritual mentors, and witnesses of Christian faith, which places substantial theological and ethical demands on their professional practice.

This study contributes to Christian education scholarship by highlighting the importance of integrating theological depth, vocational understanding, and pedagogical competence in fostering holiness among students. The findings suggest that teacher education and professional development programs should intentionally incorporate theology of

vocation, spiritual formation, and biblical-theological reflection alongside pedagogical training. Such an integrated approach can strengthen teachers' capacity to foster holiness not merely as a set of moral behaviors, but as a lived, relational, and transformative reality rooted in faithful service before God. This research affirms that CRE teachers' competence in fostering holiness is a multidimensional construct that encompasses theological understanding, personal integrity, relational practice, and contextual sensitivity. By grounding educational practice in a robust theology of holiness and vocation, Christian Religious Education can more effectively contribute to the holistic formation of students, enabling them to live faithfully and distinctively as reflections of God's holy character within diverse and pluralistic educational contexts.

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