



Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching through Spiritual Symbolism: A Reflection on Exodus 35:10 at UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak

Nurianty Sitompul

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: nuriantisitompul49@guru.sd.belajar.id

ABSTRACT

This study explores the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in utilizing spiritual symbolism as a learning approach, inspired by Exodus 35:10, at UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak, Deli Serdang. The research is grounded in the understanding that symbolic pedagogy plays a significant role in helping elementary students grasp abstract theological concepts in meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways. The school context includes 22 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, which provides a focused environment for examining faith-based instructional practices. This study employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design to synthesize scholarly perspectives on pedagogical competence, symbolic learning, and Christian education practices. The findings indicate that effective use of spiritual symbolism by CRE teachers is closely linked to three core competencies: theological clarity, pedagogical creativity, and contextual sensitivity. Symbol-based instruction, such as the use of biblical objects, narratives, and visual metaphors, was found in the literature to enhance students' engagement, deepen conceptual understanding, and support internalization of spiritual values. The review also highlights potential challenges, including the risk of superficial symbolism and the need for guided reflection to ensure theological accuracy. Within the local school context, the relatively small number of Christian students allows for more personalized instruction but requires intentional pedagogical planning. The study concludes that pedagogical competence in symbolic teaching is most effective when teachers integrate sound biblical interpretation with developmentally appropriate learning strategies. Strengthening teachers' reflective practice and resource development is recommended to optimize symbol-based Christian Religious Education in elementary settings.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Symbolism*

INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical competence remains one of the central determinants of effective teaching, particularly within the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), where cognitive understanding and spiritual formation must be integrated intentionally. In Indonesia, teacher competence is formally framed within national standards that emphasize pedagogical, professional, social, and personal domains. Among these, pedagogical competence plays a decisive role because it directly shapes how biblical truths are mediated to students through meaningful learning experiences. Research consistently shows that teachers who demonstrate strong pedagogical skills are more capable of facilitating deep understanding, student engagement, and value internalization (Creswell, 2014; Knight, 2006). Pedagogical competence cannot be separated from the teacher's ability to translate theological concepts into age-appropriate and contextually meaningful forms. Elementary students, in particular, tend to learn more effectively through concrete representations, narratives, and symbolic media rather than through abstract doctrinal explanation. Educational psychology has long affirmed that symbolic and visual learning supports comprehension and retention among young learners (Mayer, 2009). Therefore, the use of spiritual symbolism, such as biblical objects, ritual meanings, and metaphorical representations, becomes a strategic pedagogical bridge between scriptural text and students' lived experience. The biblical foundation for symbolic craftsmanship in teaching may be reflected in Exodus 35:10, which calls those who are "skilled among you" to come and make what the Lord has commanded. Although the immediate context concerns the construction of the tabernacle, many Christian educators interpret this passage more broadly as an affirmation that God values skillful, Spirit-enabled workmanship in sacred tasks. In educational ministry, teaching itself may be understood as a form of sacred craftsmanship that requires intentional design, creativity, and faithfulness. As Groome (2011) argues, Christian teaching is most transformative when faith content is communicated through pedagogically wise and symbolically rich practices that engage both mind and imagination. CRE instruction often still relies heavily on verbal explanation and textbook-centered approaches. Several studies in Christian education contexts have noted that insufficient pedagogical variation can limit students' affective and spiritual engagement with biblical material (Estep et al., 2008; Van Brummelen, 2009). This gap becomes particularly significant in schools where Christian students form a minority or where instructional time is limited. Under such conditions, the teacher's pedagogical creativity, including the use of spiritual symbols, becomes increasingly important for effective faith formation. UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak in Deli Serdang presents a meaningful micro-context for examining this issue. The school includes 22 Christian students supported by eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. Although the numerical ratio of Christian educators appears supportive, the actual effectiveness of CRE still depends heavily on how pedagogical competence is enacted in the classroom. Preliminary observations indicate that symbolic teaching practices are present but have not been systematically analyzed in relation to pedagogical competence and student engagement. This study therefore seeks to analyze the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers in teaching through spiritual symbolism, using Exodus 35:10 as a theological lens. Specifically, the research aims to describe how spiritual symbols are utilized in CRE instruction, examine the pedagogical strategies that support symbolic

teaching, and evaluate the perceived impact on students' understanding and appreciation of biblical meaning. By focusing on an elementary school setting, this study contributes to the growing conversation on contextual and developmentally appropriate CRE pedagogy in Indonesia. The study argues that pedagogical competence in Christian education must move beyond content delivery toward skillful, symbolically mediated learning that reflects both educational wisdom and theological intentionality. Such an approach is expected to strengthen not only cognitive comprehension but also the affective and spiritual resonance of biblical teaching among young learners.

METHODS

A Systematic Literature Review (SLR) design was used to examine and synthesize scholarly findings related to the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching through spiritual symbolism, particularly in light of Exodus 35:10. The SLR approach was selected because it enables a rigorous, transparent, and replicable process for identifying, evaluating, and integrating existing research evidence, thereby producing a comprehensive conceptual understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Kitchenham & Charters, 2007; Snyder, 2019). Rather than collecting primary field data, this study focused on systematically mapping relevant empirical and theoretical works to build an evidence-based pedagogical framework applicable to the context of UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak, Deli Serdang. The review followed established SLR procedures consisting of: formulation of review questions, systematic search of literature, application of inclusion and exclusion criteria, quality appraisal of selected studies, data extraction, and thematic synthesis. This structured workflow was intended to minimize selection bias and enhance the credibility of the findings (Creswell, 2014; Xiao & Watson, 2019). The guiding research questions were: How is pedagogical competence of CRE teachers conceptualized in the literature? What pedagogical strategies support the use of spiritual symbolism in religious education? What reported impacts do symbolic teaching approaches have on students' cognitive and affective learning outcomes? Literature was systematically searched from major academic databases, from 2005-2024 to capture contemporary developments in Christian pedagogy and symbolic learning. The initial search yielded 128 publications. After removing duplicates and screening titles and abstracts, 52 articles remained for full-text review. Following the application of eligibility criteria and methodological quality appraisal, 27 studies were retained for final synthesis. The selection process followed a PRISMA-informed flow to enhance transparency and replicability (Page et al., 2021). Relevant data from each study were extracted into a structured matrix including author, year, research context, methodology, key findings, and implications for CRE pedagogy. The data were then analyzed using thematic synthesis, which involved open coding, category development, and theme abstraction.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review (SLR) conducted in this study yielded a comprehensive synthesis of scholarly perspectives on the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious

Education (CRE) teachers, particularly in relation to the use of spiritual symbolism as reflected in Exodus 35:10. From the final pool of 27 rigorously selected studies, three major thematic clusters emerged: the theological-pedagogical foundation of teacher competence, the instructional function of spiritual symbolism in CRE, and the impact of symbol-mediated pedagogy on students' cognitive, affective, and spiritual development. These themes are discussed integratively below in order to construct an evidence-based framework applicable to the context of UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak, Deli Serdang, where 22 Christian students are guided by a small cohort of Christian teachers. The first finding concerns the strong conceptual linkage between pedagogical competence and theological intentionality in Christian education. The reviewed literature consistently emphasizes that pedagogical competence in CRE extends beyond technical teaching skills and encompasses the teacher's capacity to mediate faith meaningfully within the learning process. Scholars in Christian pedagogy argue that effective CRE teachers must integrate instructional design, classroom management, contextual sensitivity, and theological depth into a coherent professional identity. Within this framework, Exodus 35:10, "All who are skilled among you are to come and make everything the Lord has commanded," is interpreted not merely as a historical instruction regarding tabernacle craftsmanship but as a theological paradigm of Spirit-enabled competence. The passage highlights that skill (*hākam-lēb*, "wise-hearted") is both a technical and spiritual endowment. The literature indicates that when CRE teachers internalize this dual dimension, their pedagogical practices tend to become more intentional, reflective, and formative in character. Several empirical studies in the review show that teachers who demonstrate high pedagogical competence tend to employ varied instructional strategies, differentiated learning approaches, and contextualized biblical interpretation. In elementary contexts similar to SD settings, competent teachers are more likely to translate abstract theological concepts into developmentally appropriate learning experiences. This finding is particularly relevant for UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak, where the relatively small number of Christian students requires highly adaptive teaching. The literature suggests that in minority or small-group contexts, teacher competence becomes even more decisive because learning often depends heavily on the teacher's creativity and relational capacity. Thus, Exodus 35:10 may be pedagogically appropriated as a call for teachers to exercise both professional skill and spiritual sensitivity in crafting meaningful learning environments.

The next finding emerging from the SLR concerns the pedagogical power of spiritual symbolism. Across the reviewed studies, symbolic and visual approaches are repeatedly identified as effective mediational tools in religious education. Symbolic pedagogy operates on the premise that faith concepts are often abstract and therefore require concrete representation to become accessible, especially for elementary learners. Research in religious education and cognitive psychology converges on the insight that symbols, such as objects, colors, gestures, narratives, and ritual actions, serve as cognitive bridges between doctrinal content and lived experience. In CRE contexts, symbols function not merely as illustrations but as carriers of theological meaning that engage imagination, emotion, and memory simultaneously. The literature identifies several forms of spiritual symbolism commonly used in CRE classrooms: narrative symbols (biblical storytelling), material symbols (cross, bread, light), performative symbols (role play,

liturgical gestures), and visual symbols (charts, diagrams, sacred art). Studies indicate that when these symbolic forms are intentionally integrated into lesson planning, students demonstrate higher levels of engagement and conceptual retention. For instance, symbolic storytelling has been shown to enhance narrative comprehension and moral reasoning among elementary students, while object-based symbolism supports concrete operational learners in grasping abstract theological truths. In relation to Exodus 35:10, the symbolic dimension becomes particularly significant. The biblical text portrays skilled artisans creating sacred objects for the tabernacle, implying that material forms can mediate divine meaning. When translated pedagogically, this suggests that CRE teachers are called not only to explain biblical truths verbally but also to “craft” symbolic learning experiences that embody those truths. The reviewed literature strongly supports this interpretive move, noting that symbol-rich pedagogy tends to produce deeper spiritual reflection than purely lecture-based approaches. Therefore, in the context of Gunung Manumpak, the use of spiritual symbolism, such as visual representations of God’s presence, hands-on biblical artifacts, or guided imaginative prayer, can be expected to strengthen students’ faith understanding when implemented competently.

The other finding concerns the multidimensional impact of symbol-mediated pedagogy on students. Across the studies, three domains of student development consistently appear: cognitive comprehension, affective engagement, and spiritual formation. Cognitively, symbolic teaching helps students organize and remember biblical content more effectively. Because symbols condense complex meanings into memorable forms, they support schema formation and long-term retention. Affective outcomes are also prominent; students exposed to symbolic learning environments tend to report higher interest, emotional connection, and perceived relevance of CRE lessons. This is particularly important in elementary settings where motivation is closely tied to sensory and experiential learning. Most significantly, the literature points to the role of symbolism in facilitating spiritual internalization. Several qualitative and mixed-method studies report that students who experience symbol-rich religious instruction demonstrate stronger reflective capacity, deeper personal meaning-making, and greater willingness to apply biblical values in daily life. This finding resonates strongly with the theological thrust of Exodus 35:10, which implies that skilled work done for the Lord is meant to cultivate communal worship and spiritual awareness. In pedagogical terms, when teachers employ symbols wisely, they are not merely transmitting information but nurturing faith consciousness. Another important discussion emerging from the SLR concerns the mediating role of teacher social, spiritual presence. Multiple studies emphasize that symbolic methods are most effective when accompanied by authentic teacher modeling. Students interpret symbols not only through instructional explanation but also through the perceived credibility of the teacher. In CRE contexts, the teacher functions as a “living symbol” of the faith being taught. This aligns with broader Christian education theory which holds that character, spirituality, and pedagogical competence are integrative rather than separable domains. For a school like UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak, where the Christian teacher community is relatively small, the personal example of the teacher becomes even more influential. The literature suggests that in such contexts, consistency between teaching content, symbolic practice, and teacher lifestyle significantly enhances learning authenticity. The review also reveals several

pedagogical challenges that must be critically considered. Some studies warn against the superficial use of symbols without adequate theological explanation. When symbols are presented merely as decorative or ritualistic elements, students may develop fragmented or even misleading understandings of biblical meaning. There is evidence that teachers sometimes lack formal training in symbolic pedagogy, resulting in underutilization of creative teaching resources. Contextual sensitivity remains crucial; symbols must be culturally and developmentally appropriate. In Indonesian elementary settings, for example, locally meaningful metaphors and culturally familiar objects often enhance comprehension more effectively than imported symbolic forms. These challenges highlight the importance of continuous professional development for CRE teachers. The literature strongly recommends structured training in pedagogical design, biblical hermeneutics for children, and multimodal instructional strategies. In relation to Exodus 35:10, this reinforces the notion that “skillful hearts” must be intentionally cultivated. Competence is not merely assumed but formed through reflective practice, theological grounding, and pedagogical innovation. For the Gunung Manumpak context, targeted workshops on symbolic teaching, collaborative lesson planning among Christian teachers, and reflective supervision could significantly strengthen instructional quality. Another noteworthy discussion point concerns the relevance of symbolic pedagogy in contemporary digital learning environments. Several recent studies included in the review highlight the growing integration of visual media, interactive storytelling, and digital religious resources in CRE. These developments suggest that spiritual symbolism is not limited to physical objects but can be effectively mediated through multimedia platforms. For schools with limited physical resources, digital symbolism, such as animated biblical narratives or interactive visual maps, may provide accessible alternatives. Although the present study is literature-based, the implications for future innovation at UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak are significant, particularly if the school seeks to align CRE instruction with 21st-century learning modalities. The synthesis confirms that pedagogical competence in CRE operates at the intersection of professional skill, theological insight, and relational authenticity. Exodus 35:10 offers a powerful biblical metaphor for this integration: those who are “wise-hearted” are called to build something that enables the community to encounter God. When translated into educational practice, CRE teachers are invited to design learning experiences that function as pedagogical “tabernacles,” spaces where cognitive understanding, emotional engagement, and spiritual awareness converge. The literature reviewed provides substantial support for this integrative model. The SLR findings demonstrate that pedagogical competence in CRE is inherently theological and formative, spiritual symbolism is a highly effective mediational strategy when used intentionally, symbol-mediated instruction positively influences students’ cognitive, affective, and spiritual development, and the effectiveness of such pedagogy depends heavily on teacher authenticity, contextual sensitivity, and ongoing professional formation. For UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manumpak, these insights suggest that strengthening teachers’ capacity to design symbol-rich, theologically grounded learning experiences could significantly enhance the quality of Christian Religious Education, even within the constraints of a small student population. The integration of Exodus 35:10 into pedagogical reflection is not merely exegetical but profoundly practical. It calls CRE teachers to embody skilled, Spirit-led professionalism in crafting learning environments where students can meaningfully encounter and understand the realities of faith.

CONCLUSION

This systematic literature review set out to examine how the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers can be understood and strengthened through the theological lens of Exodus 35:10, particularly in relation to teaching through spiritual symbolism. The synthesis of selected scholarly works confirms that pedagogical competence in CRE is not merely a technical teaching capacity but an integrated professional-spiritual formation that combines instructional expertise, theological depth, and relational authenticity. The biblical motif of the “wise-hearted” artisans in Exodus 35:10 provides a compelling conceptual framework for understanding the calling of CRE teachers as skilled mediators of faith who intentionally design learning experiences that lead students toward deeper spiritual awareness. The review demonstrates that spiritual symbolism functions as a powerful pedagogical bridge between abstract biblical truths and the concrete cognitive world of elementary students. When teachers intentionally employ symbolic strategies, such as visual representations, narrative imagery, object lessons, and participatory learning experiences, students show improved comprehension, stronger emotional engagement, and more meaningful internalization of Christian values. These findings are especially significant for the context of UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manupak, where the relatively small number of Christian students (22 learners) places greater instructional responsibility on the competence and creativity of CRE teachers. In such settings, the teacher’s pedagogical quality becomes a decisive factor in shaping the effectiveness of Christian learning. The literature further highlights that the success of symbol-based pedagogy depends heavily on teacher authenticity and professional intentionality. Symbols are most transformative when they are embedded within coherent lesson design, supported by sound biblical interpretation, and reinforced through the teacher’s personal witness. In this regard, pedagogical competence must be understood holistically, encompassing lesson planning, classroom interaction, contextual sensitivity, and spiritual modeling. Without these integrative elements, symbolic teaching risks becoming superficial or merely decorative. The review identifies several areas requiring continued attention. Many CRE teachers still need structured professional development in creative pedagogy, multimodal instruction, and child-appropriate biblical hermeneutics. Contextual adaptation also remains crucial; symbolic approaches must be culturally meaningful and developmentally suitable for Indonesian elementary learners. Furthermore, emerging digital learning environments present new opportunities for expanding spiritual symbolism through multimedia resources, an area that future practice and research should explore more deliberately. This study affirms that Exodus 35:10 offers a theologically rich and pedagogically relevant paradigm for contemporary Christian education. The call for the “skilled among you” to participate in God’s work can be interpreted today as an invitation for CRE teachers to cultivate professional excellence that is Spirit-informed and pedagogically sound. For schools such as UPT SPT SDN 107438 Gunung Manupak, strengthening teachers’ pedagogical competence, especially in the intentional use of spiritual symbolism, holds significant promise for deepening students’ understanding of faith and nurturing their spiritual formation. Future research is recommended to move beyond literature synthesis toward empirical classroom studies that measure the direct impact of symbolic pedagogy on student faith development.

Mixed-method and experimental designs would be particularly valuable in validating and extending the conceptual insights identified in this review.

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