



Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Managing Student Diversity: A Reflection on Philipians 1:27 at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of worship in strengthening students' spiritual competence in light of Matthew 28:17 within the context of Christian Religious Education at SMP Negeri 3 Satu Atap Lumut, Central Tapanuli. Worship is widely recognized in Christian pedagogy as a formative practice that integrates cognitive understanding, affective response, and behavioral expression of faith. However, empirical studies examining its measurable contribution to students' spiritual competence in Indonesian public schools remain limited. This research therefore aims to analyze the extent to which structured school worship contributes to students' spiritual development. The study employed a quantitative descriptive–correlational design with students as respondents. The population consisted of 122 Christian students, all of whom were included using total sampling. Data were collected through a validated Likert-scale questionnaire measuring two variables: quality of worship implementation and students' spiritual competence. Statistical analyses included descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. The findings indicate that both worship implementation and students' spiritual competence are in the high category. Inferential analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between the two variables, demonstrating that meaningful and well-facilitated worship contributes substantially to strengthening students' spiritual competence. The results support the theological insight of Matthew 28:17 that authentic worship nurtures deeper faith response and spiritual maturity. The study concludes that structured worship is an effective pedagogical strategy in Christian Religious Education, even in contexts with limited human resources. Strengthening the quality, intentionality, and student engagement in worship practices is therefore recommended to sustain holistic spiritual formation in schools.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Diversity

INTRODUCTION

Teachers are not only expected to deliver subject matter effectively but also to foster inclusive, respectful, and harmonious classroom environments. For Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, this responsibility carries an additional theological and moral dimension, as their role involves embodying and transmitting Christian values that affirm unity amid diversity. The ability to manage student diversity through strong social competence is therefore both a pedagogical necessity and a spiritual mandate. Teacher competence encompasses pedagogical, professional, social, and personal domains. Social competence specifically refers to the teacher's ability to communicate effectively, interact inclusively, and build constructive relationships with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader community (Mulyasa, 2013). Scholars emphasize that socially competent teachers are better positioned to create supportive learning climates, reduce conflict, and promote collaborative learning among students from varied backgrounds (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Within Christian education, social competence becomes even more significant because teachers function not merely as instructors but also as moral and spiritual exemplars. The biblical foundation for social competence in managing diversity can be meaningfully reflected through Philippians 1:27, where the Apostle Paul exhorts believers to "conduct yourselves in a manner worthy of the gospel of Christ... standing firm in one spirit, striving together as one." This passage highlights unity, shared purpose, and collective responsibility, values that resonate strongly with contemporary educational goals related to diversity management. Paul's emphasis on communal harmony provides a theological framework for CRE teachers to nurture classrooms characterized by mutual respect and cooperative learning. As Fee (1995) notes, Philippians consistently stresses the ethical implications of gospel-centered living within community life, making it highly relevant for educational reflection. Indonesia's multicultural and multireligious context further amplifies the urgency of strengthening teachers' social competence. Schools frequently bring together students from different ethnic, cultural, and denominational Christian backgrounds. Without adequate social sensitivity, diversity can become a source of misunderstanding or exclusion. Conversely, when guided by competent and empathetic teachers, diversity becomes a powerful resource for character formation and social learning. Banks (2015) argues that effective diversity management in education depends heavily on teachers' intercultural skills and their capacity to cultivate inclusive classroom norms. At SDN 091407 Sarimatondang, Simalungun, the presence of 93 Christian students and eight Christian teachers (including the CRE teacher) creates a unique micro-context for examining how social competence operates in practice. Although the students share the same broad religious identity, internal diversity, such as denominational differences, socio-cultural backgrounds, and varying levels of spiritual maturity, still requires intentional pedagogical management. In many Indonesian primary schools, CRE teachers often serve as key figures in shaping students' attitudes toward unity, cooperation, and respect. Their social competence therefore directly influences not only classroom climate but also students' developing Christian character. Previous studies have demonstrated that teacher social competence significantly correlates with student engagement, classroom harmony, and value internalization (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Empirical research specifically examining CRE teachers' social competence in managing student diversity, especially through a

biblical-theological lens, remains relatively limited in the Indonesian context. Most existing studies focus either on general teacher competence or on theological instruction without integrating both perspectives systematically. This gap indicates the need for context-based research that bridges educational theory, biblical reflection, and classroom reality. This study aims to analyze the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in managing student diversity, interpreted through the theological lens of Philippians 1:27, at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang, Simalungun. By combining educational and biblical perspectives, the study seeks to contribute to the development of more contextually grounded models of CRE teacher competence. The findings are expected to provide practical insights for strengthening inclusive Christian pedagogy in Indonesian primary schools while reinforcing the role of teachers as agents of unity in diverse learning communities.

METHODS

The qualitative descriptive design was selected because it enables researchers to obtain rich, contextualized understandings of educational practices as they naturally occur in school settings. Unlike experimental or purely quantitative approaches, qualitative descriptive research emphasizes the accurate portrayal of participants' experiences, interactions, and meanings within their real-life environment (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This approach is particularly appropriate for studies that seek to connect pedagogical practice with biblical reflection. The research design focused on naturalistic inquiry, allowing the researcher to observe and interpret how social competence is manifested in everyday instructional and relational practices. The study was framed by a biblical-theological reflection on Philippians 1:27, which emphasizes unity, cooperation, and worthy conduct within community life. This theological lens functioned as an interpretive framework rather than as a variable to be statistically tested. The descriptive orientation ensured that findings remained grounded in field realities rather than abstract generalization. The research was conducted at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang, Simalungun. The school context includes 93 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher who served as the primary focus of the study. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those involved possessed direct experience relevant to the research focus. The participants consisted of: the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher as the key informant, selected classroom teachers for triangulation of professional interaction, and a representative group of Christian students to capture learner perspectives. The inclusion of multiple participant groups was intended to strengthen data credibility through triangulation. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher and selected teachers. The interview protocol explored dimensions of social competence, including communication style, inclusivity practices, conflict management, and collaboration. Interviews with students focused on their perceptions of the teacher's fairness, openness, and ability to foster unity. Classroom observations were carried out during CRE learning sessions and selected school interactions. The researcher observed teacher–student communication patterns, classroom climate, responsiveness to diversity, and expressions of Christian values related to unity. Field notes were recorded systematically to capture both verbal and nonverbal behaviors. Data analysis followed the interactive model of qualitative analysis consisting

of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles, Huberman, & Saldaña, 2014). The analysis was iterative, meaning the researcher moved back and forth between data and interpretation to ensure depth and accuracy. Through this qualitative descriptive methodology, the study seeks to present an in-depth and contextually grounded understanding of how CRE teachers' social competence contributes to managing student diversity in light of the unity-oriented message of Philippians 1:27.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative descriptive investigation conducted at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang, Simalungun, reveals a nuanced portrait of the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in managing student diversity. Grounded in field observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, the findings demonstrate that the CRE teacher's social competence is not merely expressed through interpersonal skills but is deeply intertwined with theological conviction, pedagogical intentionality, and contextual sensitivity. In a school environment consisting of 93 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, the CRE teacher plays a strategic role in modeling unity, cooperation, and respectful engagement in line with the ethical thrust of Philippians 1:27. The results are organized into several interconnected themes: inclusive communication, relational modeling, conflict mediation, collaborative culture-building, and theological integration. The data indicate that inclusive communication constitutes the most visible manifestation of the CRE teacher's social competence. Classroom observations consistently showed that the teacher employed language that was affirming, dialogical, and non-dominative. Rather than relying on one-way instruction, the teacher frequently invited student participation through open-ended questions and reflective prompts. Students reported feeling "didengar" (heard) and "dihargai" (valued), which aligns with the notion that effective teachers foster psychologically safe learning environments (Wentzel, 2012). From a theoretical standpoint, such communication practices reflect the social dimension of teacher competence described by Hargreaves (2000), who emphasizes emotional understanding and relational sensitivity as core elements of effective teaching. In light of Philippians 1:27, which calls believers to stand firm "in one spirit," the CRE teacher's communication style functioned as a practical enactment of communal unity. The teacher's consistent use of inclusive pronouns such as "kita" (we) rather than "kalian" (you students) subtly reinforced collective identity and reduced hierarchical distance. Relational modeling emerged as a central theme. Beyond verbal interaction, the CRE teacher demonstrated social competence through everyday relational behaviors such as greeting students by name, maintaining eye contact, and showing attentiveness to students' emotional states. Field notes documented several instances where the teacher paused instruction to address students who appeared disengaged or distressed. This finding supports the argument of Pianta, Hamre, and Allen (2012) that teacher-student relationships significantly influence classroom climate and student engagement. Importantly, the CRE teacher's relational posture reflected what students described as "*sikap seperti teladan Kristen*," indicating that personality and social competence were perceived as integrated rather than separate domains. This resonates strongly with the ethical appeal of Philippians 1:27, which links worthy conduct with communal witness. The teacher's daily interactions functioned as lived pedagogy, demonstrating that social

competence in CRE contexts must be embodied rather than merely taught. The study found that the teacher exhibited moderate but developing competence in conflict mediation. Interviews with students revealed that minor interpersonal conflicts occasionally occurred among learners, particularly related to group work dynamics and peer teasing. Observations showed that the CRE teacher typically responded to such situations with calm verbal redirection and brief moral reminders. Deeper restorative dialogue processes were not consistently implemented. This suggests that while the teacher possesses foundational social sensitivity, structured conflict resolution strategies could be strengthened. Educational literature emphasizes that culturally responsive and socially competent teachers employ proactive conflict mediation techniques that promote empathy and perspective-taking (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In the present context, the teacher's approach aligns partially with these principles but remains largely reactive rather than systematically restorative. From a biblical reflection perspective, Philippians 1:27 calls for believers to strive together with one mind, implying not only harmony but also intentional reconciliation practices. Thus, this finding points to an area for professional development. Collaborative culture-building within the school environment appears to be a significant strength. Interviews with fellow teachers indicated that the CRE teacher actively participates in informal professional conversations and demonstrates openness to interdisciplinary cooperation. Colleagues described the teacher as "*mudah diajak bekerja sama*" and "*tidak eksklusif*," suggesting high collegial social competence. This aligns with the broader conception of teacher professionalism that includes collaboration and community engagement (Day & Gu, 2010). Document analysis of lesson plans further revealed occasional integration of cross-subject values, indicating an awareness that character and unity formation are whole-school responsibilities. In the framework of Philippians 1:27, which emphasizes standing firm together, such collegial cooperation represents an institutional embodiment of the text's communal ethos. The CRE teacher's social competence thus extends beyond classroom interaction into the wider professional community. The findings highlight the strategic role of theological integration in shaping social competence. The CRE teacher intentionally connected biblical teachings with everyday relational behavior. During observed lessons, references to unity, mutual care, and Christian witness were consistently linked to practical classroom expectations such as respectful listening and cooperative group work. Students demonstrated a clear ability to articulate these connections during interviews. This supports the argument of Palmer (1998) that good teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher, not merely from technique. The CRE teacher's theological framing appears to function as a motivational anchor that legitimizes social expectations within a faith-based moral framework. Importantly, however, the data also suggest that the integration remains largely implicit rather than systematically scaffolded through structured reflective activities. Future pedagogical refinement could involve more explicit metacognitive reflection to deepen students' internalization.

Student perceptions strongly affirm the positive impact of the teacher's social competence. Most interviewed students described the CRE classroom atmosphere as "*nyaman*," "*terbuka*," and "*tidak menakutkan*." Such descriptors are consistent with research showing that emotionally supportive classrooms enhance both academic

engagement and moral development (Roorda et al., 2011). Notably, students did not merely comment on the teacher's friendliness but specifically linked the teacher's behavior to Christian values such as love, patience, and unity. This indicates that the teacher's social competence is being interpreted through a theological lens by learners, which is particularly significant in CRE contexts. However, a minority of students expressed a desire for more varied collaborative activities, suggesting that while the relational climate is positive, pedagogical diversity could be improved to sustain engagement. Document analysis revealed partial alignment between planning documents and observed practice. Lesson plans (RPP) contained general statements about fostering cooperation and respect, but explicit indicators of diversity management were limited. This gap between written planning and lived practice is not uncommon in school settings (Fullan, 2007). The CRE teacher appears to rely more on intuitive relational competence than on formally articulated diversity strategies. While this intuitive strength is valuable, professional standards increasingly call for deliberate and assessable social competence indicators. In relation to Philippians 1:27, intentionality matters because unity in the Pauline sense is not accidental but disciplined and purposeful. Therefore, strengthening the explicit planning dimension could enhance pedagogical coherence. The broader school culture provides a generally supportive environment but also presents contextual challenges. Although the majority of students in the CRE classroom are Christian, diversity still manifests in terms of academic ability, personality differences, and socio-emotional backgrounds. The CRE teacher demonstrated awareness of these internal diversities but has not yet fully implemented differentiated social strategies. For example, group work was typically organized randomly rather than strategically to promote cross-ability collaboration. Contemporary educational research emphasizes that socially competent teachers intentionally structure interaction patterns to maximize inclusion (Tomlinson, 2014). Thus, the teacher's current practice reflects good relational instincts but still has room for more sophisticated differentiation. The findings affirm that social competence in CRE cannot be reduced to generic interpersonal skill. Rather, it is best understood as spiritually informed relational professionalism. The CRE teacher's practice illustrates what might be termed "embodied Philippians pedagogy," where unity, cooperation, and worthy conduct are enacted through everyday classroom life. This supports broader scholarship arguing that faith-based education requires the integration of theological vision with pedagogical competence (Groome, 2011). Nevertheless, the study also highlights the importance of continuous professional development so that spiritual motivation is matched by pedagogical precision. The overall pattern of findings suggests that the CRE teacher at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang demonstrates strong foundational social competence characterized by warmth, inclusivity, and collegial openness. The classroom climate is generally positive, and students perceive the teacher as a credible Christian role model. The data also point to three strategic areas for enhancement: more systematic conflict mediation practices, clearer integration of diversity management in lesson planning, and more intentional structuring of collaborative learning experiences. Addressing these areas would move the teacher's practice from relationally effective to pedagogically exemplary. The study confirms that the social competence of CRE teachers plays a decisive role in translating the ethical vision of Philippians 1:27 into lived educational practice. At SDN 091407 Sarimatondang, this competence is already visible and impactful, but its future development will depend on sustained reflective practice,

targeted professional learning, and stronger alignment between theological intention and pedagogical design.

CONCLUSION

This qualitative descriptive study set out to examine the social competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher in managing student diversity at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang, Simalungun, through the theological lens of Philippians 1:27. The findings demonstrate that the CRE teacher possesses a strong foundational level of social competence that is visibly expressed through inclusive communication, relational warmth, collegial collaboration, and the integration of Christian values into everyday classroom interaction. Within a learning environment consisting of 93 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, the CRE teacher functions not only as an instructor but also as a relational bridge-builder who cultivates unity, respect, and cooperative learning culture. The study confirms that the teacher's use of affirming language, dialogical teaching patterns, and attentive interpersonal engagement contributes significantly to the creation of a psychologically safe and spiritually meaningful classroom climate. Students generally perceive the CRE teacher as approachable, caring, and consistent with Christian ethical values. This perception is crucial because social competence in CRE contexts is most effective when it is embodied and observable rather than merely conceptual. The teacher's practice reflects the spirit of Philippians 1:27, particularly in fostering togetherness and mutual support among learners. At the same time, the research identifies several areas requiring further professional strengthening. Although the teacher demonstrates sensitivity in addressing interpersonal tensions, conflict mediation practices remain largely reactive and informal. More structured restorative approaches would enhance the teacher's capacity to transform conflicts into formative learning moments. Additionally, lesson planning documents show only partial explicitness regarding diversity management strategies. The teacher's intuitive relational strength would benefit from being supported by more systematic and measurable planning indicators. Furthermore, collaborative learning structures, while present, could be more intentionally designed to maximize inclusive participation and cross-ability interaction among students. This study underscores that social competence in Christian Religious Education is best understood as spiritually grounded relational professionalism. The CRE teacher's effectiveness emerges from the integration of biblical values, particularly the Pauline call to unity in Philippians 1:27, with everyday pedagogical practice. However, sustaining and deepening this competence requires ongoing reflective practice, targeted professional development, and institutional support. The CRE teacher at SDN 091407 Sarimatondang demonstrates commendable social competence that positively shapes classroom climate and student experience. Strengthening structured diversity strategies, restorative conflict practices, and intentional collaborative design will further elevate the teacher's role as an agent of unity and Christian witness in an increasingly complex educational context.

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