



## **Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Divine Grace: A Reflective Study of Exodus 34:6 at SD N 173342 Simatupang**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching divine grace through a reflective analysis of Exodus 34:6 at SD N 173342 Simatupang, North Tapanuli. Situated within a public elementary school context consisting of approximately 90 Christian students and 14 Christian teachers, the research explores how theological interpretation is translated into pedagogical practice. Employing a qualitative case study design, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews with CRE teachers, and analysis of instructional documents. The study investigates how teachers interpret the self-revelation of God in Exodus 34:6, “compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness” and how these theological attributes are communicated in developmentally appropriate ways. Findings reveal that pedagogical competence in this context encompasses four integrated dimensions: exegetical clarity, developmental sensitivity, relational modeling, and intentional curricular design. Teachers demonstrate the ability to contextualize divine grace within students’ everyday experiences, fostering moral reflection and character formation. Furthermore, the study identifies a pedagogical balance between mercy and accountability, preventing both moral permissiveness and rigid legalism in classroom practice. The embodiment of patience, compassion, and faithfulness by teachers significantly influences classroom climate and student relational behavior. The research concludes that effective teaching of divine grace requires not only theological understanding but also pedagogical content knowledge that bridges biblical doctrine and formative education. This study contributes to the discourse on Christian pedagogy by highlighting how doctrinal teaching, when supported by professional competence, shapes holistic character development in elementary education settings.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Divine Grace*

## INTRODUCTION

Pedagogical competence constitutes a foundational dimension of teacher professionalism, particularly within Christian Religious Education (CRE), where theological depth and instructional clarity must converge. In elementary education, teachers do not merely transmit information; they mediate meaning, shape moral imagination, and nurture spiritual formation. Within CRE, this responsibility becomes even more significant because biblical doctrines, such as divine grace, require both exegetical accuracy and pedagogical sensitivity to be meaningfully appropriated by young learners. Pedagogical competence, therefore, involves the integration of content knowledge, pedagogical content knowledge, and contextual responsiveness (Shulman, 1987). For CRE teachers, such competence includes the capacity to interpret Scripture faithfully and translate theological truths into age-appropriate, transformative learning experiences. The doctrine of divine grace occupies a central place in biblical theology. In Exodus 34:6, God proclaims His own character to Moses: "The LORD, the LORD, the compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6, NIV). This self-revelation occurs in the aftermath of Israel's idolatry with the golden calf, a context marked by covenantal rupture and moral failure. Theologically, Exodus 34:6 is widely recognized as a foundational Old Testament creedal formula describing Yahweh's covenant character (Brueggemann, 1994; Durham, 1987). Rather than emphasizing judgment alone, the text foregrounds divine compassion (*rahûm*) and graciousness (*ḥannûn*), underscoring that God's relationship with His people is sustained by mercy and steadfast love. This passage reverberates throughout the Old Testament canon and shapes Israel's understanding of divine-human relationship (Childs, 1974). Exodus 34:6 presents grace not as sentimental leniency but as covenantal faithfulness expressed within justice. Scholars note that the proclamation integrates mercy and accountability, revealing a theological tension that must be communicated carefully in educational contexts (Fretheim, 1991). For elementary students, the concept of grace can easily be reduced to simple forgiveness without recognizing its relational depth and transformative intent. Thus, pedagogical competence becomes crucial: teachers must interpret the text faithfully while framing it in ways accessible to children's cognitive and moral development. In the context of SD N 173342 Simatupang, North Tapanuli, this task assumes particular significance. The school includes approximately 90 Christian students and 14 Christian teachers, including CRE educators, functioning within a public educational environment. At the elementary level, students are in formative stages of moral reasoning and spiritual awareness. Their understanding of God is often shaped primarily through classroom instruction and teacher exemplarity. Consequently, how divine grace is taught, whether as abstract doctrine or relational reality, can influence students' perception of God, self, and others. Teachers who lack pedagogical depth may inadvertently present grace as permissiveness or moral indifference, whereas competent educators can communicate grace as restorative love that invites responsibility and gratitude.

Educational research consistently affirms that teacher competence significantly affects student engagement and character formation (Hattie, 2009). Within Christian education, the integration of theological reflection and pedagogical strategy is particularly vital

because spiritual truths are mediated relationally and contextually (Groome, 2011). In communities such as North Tapanuli, where faith traditions are deeply interwoven with local identity, CRE teachers carry both educational and cultural influence. Their social and pedagogical capacities shape not only classroom outcomes but also communal faith narratives. Existing discussions often address curriculum implementation or teacher professionalism in general terms, without closely examining how particular biblical texts are exegetically mediated in classroom practice. There remains a need for reflective studies that bridge biblical scholarship and empirical educational inquiry. This study investigates the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in teaching divine grace, grounded in a reflective engagement with Exodus 34:6 and situated within SD N 173342 Simatupang, North Tapanuli. By employing a qualitative approach, the research seeks to examine how teachers interpret the theological depth of divine grace and translate it into pedagogically meaningful instruction for elementary students. Through this integration of exegesis and educational analysis, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of competent Christian pedagogy in local Indonesian contexts.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design to explore the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching divine grace based on Exodus 34:6 at SD N 173342 Simatupang, North Tapanuli. A qualitative approach was selected because the research sought to understand interpretive processes, instructional practices, and lived pedagogical experiences within a natural school setting rather than to measure variables statistically (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study was framed as a descriptive case study, allowing in-depth examination of a bounded educational context, namely, the CRE instructional environment within a public elementary school (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The research was conducted at SD N 173342 Simatupang, a public elementary school in North Tapanuli with approximately 90 Christian students and 14 Christian teachers, including teachers responsible for Christian Religious Education. This setting was selected purposively because it represents a local faith-informed learning community within a broader public educational framework. The relatively concentrated Christian student population provides a meaningful context for examining how the doctrine of divine grace is pedagogically mediated in elementary education. Participants were selected using purposive sampling (Patton, 2015), focusing on CRE teachers directly responsible for teaching biblical content related to divine grace. Additional Christian teachers were included as supporting informants to enrich contextual understanding of pedagogical culture and school climate. Participation was voluntary, and ethical standards were upheld through informed consent, confidentiality assurances, and anonymization of interview data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Non-participant classroom observations were conducted during CRE instructional sessions that addressed themes related to Exodus 34:6 and divine grace. Observations focused on instructional strategies, teacher–student interaction patterns, use of biblical narratives, questioning techniques, and classroom climate. Particular attention was given to how teachers explained the theological concepts of compassion, graciousness, patience, and steadfast love in age-appropriate language. Detailed field notes were recorded systematically to capture both verbal

explanations and non-verbal pedagogical dynamics. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers to explore their exegetical understanding of Exodus 34:6, their conceptualization of divine grace, and their pedagogical strategies for teaching this doctrine to elementary students. The interview protocol included open-ended questions designed to elicit reflective responses regarding theological interpretation, instructional challenges, and contextual adaptation (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). Follow-up questions were used to clarify how teachers balance doctrinal fidelity with developmental appropriateness. Data analysis followed a thematic analysis procedure. Interview transcripts and observation notes were coded inductively to identify recurring patterns related to pedagogical competence, theological interpretation, instructional adaptation, and character formation outcomes. Codes were then grouped into broader thematic categories reflecting dimensions of pedagogical content knowledge, contextual responsiveness, and relational modeling. The analysis integrated educational theory, particularly the concept of pedagogical content knowledge (Shulman, 1987), with exegetical insights from Exodus 34:6 to ensure coherence between theological reflection and pedagogical practice. Trustworthiness was ensured through data triangulation, member checking with selected participants, and maintenance of an audit trail documenting coding decisions and analytical steps (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability were addressed systematically to maintain qualitative rigor. Through this methodological framework, the study sought to generate an in-depth and contextually grounded understanding of how pedagogical competence enables CRE teachers to communicate divine grace faithfully and effectively within elementary Christian education.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this qualitative study reveal that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD N 173342 Simatupang, North Tapanuli, plays a decisive role in shaping how students understand and internalize the doctrine of divine grace as articulated in Exodus 34:6. Within a school community comprising approximately 90 Christian students and supported by 14 Christian teachers, including CRE educators, the teaching of grace is not confined to doctrinal explanation but unfolds as a holistic formative process. The data indicate that pedagogical competence manifests in the integration of exegetical clarity, developmental sensitivity, relational modeling, and contextual adaptation. Through this integration, divine grace is translated from theological abstraction into lived moral consciousness for elementary learners. Classroom observations demonstrate that teachers approach Exodus 34:6 as a foundational self-revelation of God's character rather than as an isolated biblical verse. Teachers consistently situate the passage within its narrative context, the aftermath of the golden calf incident, explaining that God's proclamation of compassion and graciousness occurs after Israel's failure. This narrative framing is pedagogically significant. By presenting grace within the tension of human disobedience and divine mercy, teachers avoid reducing grace to mere permissiveness. Instead, students are guided to perceive grace as restorative covenantal love. The teachers' ability to contextualize the verse reflects strong pedagogical content knowledge: they transform exegetical insight into age-appropriate storytelling without distorting theological meaning. Interview data reveal that CRE

teachers intentionally emphasize the Hebrew descriptors embedded in Exodus 34:6, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness, though translated into language accessible to children. Rather than using technical terminology, teachers employ relational metaphors drawn from family life, such as parental patience, forgiveness among siblings, and enduring loyalty within friendship. This contextual adaptation demonstrates pedagogical competence in aligning theological depth with cognitive development. Elementary students, operating largely within concrete operational thinking, require tangible analogies to grasp abstract attributes. Teachers thus bridge doctrinal complexity with experiential familiarity.

A recurring theme emerging from the data is that grace is taught as relational transformation rather than emotional sentiment. Observational records indicate that teachers consistently link divine grace with ethical response. After discussing God's compassion toward Israel, students are invited to reflect on how they respond when classmates make mistakes. Teachers frequently ask, "If God is slow to anger, how should we treat our friends?" Such dialogical questioning encourages moral reasoning grounded in theological identity. The classroom becomes a space where doctrinal affirmation leads directly to ethical reflection. This pedagogical strategy prevents theological compartmentalization and fosters integrative learning. The relational climate of the classroom further reinforces this teaching. Observations show that teachers model patience and measured responses during moments of classroom disruption. When minor behavioral infractions occur, teachers often respond with corrective instruction combined with affirmation rather than immediate reprimand. Students witness enacted grace. This consistency between doctrinal teaching and teacher behavior strengthens credibility. Interview participants acknowledge that students are perceptive observers; if teachers preach grace but practice harshness, theological instruction loses authenticity. Therefore, pedagogical competence extends beyond instructional planning into embodied character modeling. Another significant finding concerns the gradual internalization of grace among students. Through reflective assignments and group discussions, students demonstrate increasing ability to articulate grace as both gift and responsibility. Early classroom responses often equated grace simply with forgiveness. However, as lessons progressed, students began describing grace as "loving someone even when they are wrong" or "being patient like God." This conceptual expansion indicates that pedagogical repetition, narrative reinforcement, and dialogical reflection contribute cumulatively to theological understanding. Competent pedagogy thus appears to function longitudinally rather than instantaneously. Document analysis of lesson plans reveals intentional structuring of learning objectives. Teachers design units that move from biblical exposition to personal application. Activities include dramatization of the Sinai narrative, collaborative storytelling, and drawing exercises depicting compassionate action. These varied modalities address diverse learning styles within the classroom. Such diversity of strategy reflects adaptive competence, recognizing that elementary learners assimilate theological concepts through multiple sensory and interactive channels. The deliberate sequencing from narrative comprehension to ethical enactment demonstrates curricular coherence. The discussion of findings highlights the importance of exegetical integrity in pedagogical practice. Teachers consistently maintain the tension inherent in Exodus 34:6: God's compassion coexists with moral accountability. Students are taught that grace does not

eliminate consequences but transforms relationship. For instance, teachers clarify that although Israel sinned, God did not abandon the covenant. This balanced portrayal guards against moral relativism while affirming divine steadfastness. Theologically responsible pedagogy ensures that grace is neither trivialized nor distorted. The study indicates that the local cultural context of North Tapanuli subtly shapes pedagogical expression. Community values emphasizing kinship, respect for elders, and collective identity resonate with themes of covenantal loyalty in Exodus 34:6. Teachers draw implicit parallels between biblical steadfast love and communal solidarity. This contextual resonance enhances comprehension, as students perceive divine grace not as foreign abstraction but as consonant with lived relational patterns. Pedagogical competence here involves cultural discernment, the ability to connect biblical theology with local moral imagination without conflating the two. An additional dimension emerging from interviews is teacher awareness of potential misconceptions. Some educators express concern that emphasizing grace might encourage complacency among students. Consequently, lessons intentionally pair grace with gratitude and responsibility. Teachers articulate that experiencing grace should inspire obedience rather than entitlement. This pedagogical vigilance reflects theological maturity and anticipatory guidance. Competence includes recognizing interpretive risks and proactively addressing them through balanced instruction. Observational evidence also underscores the role of communal reinforcement. Grace is framed not solely as an individual spiritual experience but as a communal ethos. Teachers facilitate group projects requiring cooperation and mutual encouragement. When conflicts arise, references to Exodus 34:6 occasionally surface organically within classroom dialogue. Students remind peers of patience or kindness, indicating internalization of narrative themes. Such spontaneous application suggests that grace has begun to shape classroom culture. The integration of formative assessment further strengthens pedagogical impact. Teachers employ reflective journaling and oral recitation not as rote memorization but as interpretive engagement. Students paraphrase Exodus 34:6 in their own words, demonstrating comprehension beyond literal repetition. Teachers provide feedback emphasizing depth of understanding rather than merely accuracy of recall. This assessment approach aligns with constructivist pedagogy, affirming that theological knowledge is constructed through interaction and reflection.

The findings confirm that pedagogical competence in teaching divine grace is multidimensional. It includes exegetical literacy, developmental psychology awareness, relational modeling, curricular design, and cultural sensitivity. These dimensions interact dynamically rather than functioning independently. For example, without exegetical clarity, contextual adaptation might distort meaning; without relational modeling, doctrinal instruction might appear hollow; without developmental awareness, theological depth might overwhelm cognitive capacity. The public-school context requires professional balance. Although the majority of students in CRE classes are Christian, the institution operates within national educational standards. Teachers navigate this framework by presenting grace as both theological truth and moral value. The emphasis on compassion, patience, and faithfulness aligns with broader character education objectives, demonstrating that faith-informed pedagogy can contribute constructively to public education goals. Such integrative positioning reflects professional discernment.

The cumulative discussion suggests that divine grace, when taught competently, functions as transformative pedagogy rather than abstract theology. Students exposed to coherent narrative framing, ethical application, and consistent modeling begin to interpret interpersonal relationships through the lens of mercy and faithfulness. Over time, classroom interactions reflect increased patience and collaborative spirit. While the study does not quantify behavioral change, qualitative indicators strongly suggest attitudinal shifts. It becomes evident that the teaching of Exodus 34:6 at SD N 173342 Simatupang exemplifies reflective pedagogy grounded in theological conviction. Teachers engage Scripture not as static content but as living narrative shaping communal identity. Their competence lies in mediating this narrative faithfully and contextually. The doctrine of divine grace becomes educationally operative, forming moral imagination, guiding relational conduct, and nurturing gratitude toward God. The results affirm that pedagogical competence is indispensable for doctrinal fidelity and formative effectiveness. In the absence of thoughtful mediation, grace risks trivialization; in the presence of competent instruction, grace becomes a transformative lens through which students interpret both divine character and human relationship. The interplay between theological exegesis and pedagogical intentionality observed in this study demonstrates the potential of Christian Religious Education to shape not only cognitive understanding but also relational disposition within elementary school communities.

## CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD N 173342 Simatupang, North Tapanuli, plays a central role in shaping students' understanding of divine grace as revealed in Exodus 34:6. Within a school context consisting of approximately 90 Christian students and supported by 14 Christian teachers, the teaching of grace extends beyond doctrinal explanation into formative moral education. The findings demonstrate that competent pedagogy enables teachers to translate the theological depth of God's self-revelation, compassionate, gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love, into age-appropriate, relationally meaningful instruction for elementary learners. The study affirms that pedagogical competence in this context is multidimensional. It involves exegetical integrity, ensuring that Exodus 34:6 is interpreted within its covenantal narrative framework; developmental sensitivity, adapting theological concepts to children's cognitive and moral stages; relational modeling, embodying patience and compassion within classroom interactions; and intentional curricular design, structuring lessons that move from biblical exposition to ethical application. These dimensions operate synergistically, allowing divine grace to be communicated not as abstract doctrine but as transformative relational reality. The research highlights that teaching divine grace requires theological balance. Teachers at SD N 173342 Simatupang consistently present grace as restorative love that does not negate moral responsibility. By maintaining the tension between mercy and accountability embedded in Exodus 34:6, they prevent both moral permissiveness and rigid legalism. This balance is essential in forming students who understand grace as a gift that invites gratitude, obedience, and compassionate treatment of others. The findings also suggest that effective CRE pedagogy contributes positively to broader character formation within a public-school setting. The emphasis on patience, faithfulness, and

compassion aligns with universal educational values while remaining rooted in biblical theology. As students internalize these attributes, classroom culture increasingly reflects cooperative and empathetic interactions. This study underscores that pedagogical competence is indispensable for the faithful and effective teaching of divine grace. When teachers integrate theological clarity, contextual awareness, and relational authenticity, Exodus 34:6 becomes more than a memorized verse, it becomes a formative lens through which students perceive God's character and shape their own relational conduct.

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