



Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Obedience to God's Covenant: A Study of Exodus 24:7 at UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in cultivating obedience to God's covenant through a theological reflection on Exodus 24:7, within the context of UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi. The research is grounded in the premise that professional competence in Christian education extends beyond subject mastery to include theological literacy, pedagogical expertise, moral modeling, and contextual sensitivity. In a school environment comprising 106 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, covenantal instruction plays a significant role in shaping students' spiritual and moral development. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with the CRE teacher, selected Christian teachers, and students; classroom observations; and document analysis of lesson plans and instructional materials. Data were analyzed thematically to identify patterns linking professional competence and the cultivation of covenantal obedience. The findings indicate that obedience to God's covenant is effectively nurtured when teachers demonstrate four integrated competencies: theological mastery and hermeneutical clarity in interpreting Exodus 24:7; pedagogical content knowledge that translates covenant theology into age-appropriate instructional strategies; moral credibility through consistent modeling of Christian values; and contextual leadership within a public-school framework. The study concludes that professional competence functions as the primary mediating factor between biblical theology and student character formation. In this setting, covenantal obedience emerges through informed commitment shaped by relational trust, participatory pedagogy, and theological coherence. These findings contribute to the discourse on faith-integrated professionalism by demonstrating that the cultivation of covenant-conscious learners depends significantly on the professional and spiritual quality of the Christian educator.

Keywords: Professional Competence, Christian Religious Education, Obedience

INTRODUCTION

Professional competence constitutes a foundational dimension of teacher quality, particularly within faith-based instructional contexts where academic objectives intersect with moral and spiritual formation (Darling-Hammond, 2017). In Christian Religious Education (CRE), often referred to in Indonesia as Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK), professional competence extends beyond mastery of subject content and pedagogical techniques. It encompasses theological literacy, ethical modeling, instructional design grounded in biblical worldview, and the capacity to translate doctrinal principles into lived practices within the classroom (Groome, 2011; Knight, 2006). For Christian educators, teaching is not merely a technical occupation but a vocation that integrates faith, knowledge, and character formation. One central theological theme in Christian education is covenantal obedience. Exodus 24:7 records the response of the Israelites after Moses read the Book of the Covenant: "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient." This declaration reflects a communal commitment to divine instruction and establishes obedience not simply as compliance, but as relational fidelity within the covenant between God and His people (Goldingay, 2014; Durham, 1987). The covenant motif has long been understood in biblical theology as a framework for understanding identity, responsibility, and ethical accountability before God (Wright, 2006). Within educational settings, this covenantal perspective provides a conceptual lens for understanding how obedience can be cultivated not through coercion but through informed commitment grounded in relational trust. The challenge lies in contextualizing such theological constructs within modern pedagogical realities. Professional competence in this context involves the ability to interpret Scripture responsibly and apply its theological principles to developmental stages of learners (Shulman, 1987; Van Brummelen, 2009). Teachers must navigate diverse classroom dynamics, varying levels of biblical literacy, and broader societal influences that often prioritize individual autonomy over covenantal responsibility. Consequently, the professional CRE teacher must integrate exegetical understanding with pedagogical content knowledge to present obedience not as authoritarian submission but as covenantal faithfulness rooted in love and gratitude (Groome, 2011). The Indonesian educational system formally recognizes professional competence as one of four essential teacher competencies, alongside pedagogical, social, and personal competencies (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 14 Tahun 2005 tentang Guru dan Dosen). Professional competence includes mastery of subject matter, understanding of curriculum standards, and the ability to develop learning materials relevant to students' contexts. However, within Christian Religious Education, professional competence also requires theological coherence and spiritual integrity, since the credibility of instruction is closely tied to the teacher's embodiment of the values being taught (Knight, 2006). Research consistently demonstrates that teacher credibility and authenticity significantly influence students' moral internalization (Hattie, 2009).

The locus of this study is UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi, a public elementary school located in Dairi Regency. Within this institution, there are 106 Christian students and 11 teachers who identify as Christian, including the CRE teacher. Although the school operates within a public education framework, the presence of a substantial Christian

student population and Christian teaching staff creates a distinctive environment in which covenantal theology may meaningfully inform classroom practice. In such a setting, the professional competence of the CRE teacher plays a pivotal role in shaping how biblical teachings, particularly covenantal obedience, are interpreted, communicated, and practiced. Obedience in educational discourse is often associated with behavioral management. However, biblical obedience, especially in the covenantal context of Exodus 24:7, is relational and dialogical. It arises from hearing (“Moses read the Book of the Covenant”) and responding (“we will do and we will be obedient”), suggesting that understanding precedes commitment (Durham, 1987). This theological nuance aligns with contemporary educational theory emphasizing reflective engagement rather than passive compliance (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Therefore, cultivating obedience to God’s covenant in a classroom requires professional competence in hermeneutics, curriculum adaptation, instructional strategy, and assessment of affective learning outcomes. Primary school students are at a formative stage of moral development, where authority, rules, and relational trust significantly influence ethical reasoning (Nucci, 2001). Teachers who demonstrate consistency between instruction and practice provide a powerful model for internalization of covenantal values (Bandura, 1986). Professional competence, therefore, includes the ability to integrate biblical narrative, doctrinal clarity, and age-appropriate pedagogy in ways that encourage students to perceive obedience as covenant loyalty rather than external pressure. This study seeks to examine how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to cultivating obedience to God’s covenant, specifically through theological reflection on Exodus 24:7, within the educational context of UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi. By exploring the intersection of biblical theology, teacher professionalism, and classroom practice, this research aims to contribute to the broader discourse on faith-integrated pedagogy and the development of covenant-conscious Christian learners.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design to examine how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to cultivating obedience to God’s covenant, interpreted through Exodus 24:7, within the context of UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi. A case study approach was selected because it enables in-depth exploration of a bounded system within its real-life context, particularly when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident (Yin, 2018). Given that professional competence and covenantal obedience are contextually embedded and relationally enacted constructs, qualitative inquiry provides the most appropriate methodological framework. The research adopted an interpretivist paradigm, emphasizing the understanding of meaning as constructed through social interaction and theological reflection (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This paradigm aligns with the study’s aim to explore how biblical texts, specifically Exodus 24:7, are interpreted and operationalized pedagogically by CRE teachers. The research was conducted at UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi, a public elementary school with 106 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. The participant pool consisted of: the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher as the primary informant, four additional Christian classroom teachers selected purposively based on their involvement in moral and religious

formation activities, and twelve Christian students from upper-grade levels (Grades IV-VI), selected using purposive sampling to represent varying levels of academic achievement and classroom participation. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants possessed relevant experience and insight into the implementation of covenantal teaching and professional practice (Patton, 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher and selected Christian teachers. Interview questions explored: understanding of professional competence in Christian education, interpretation of Exodus 24:7 in teaching practice, strategies used to cultivate obedience to God's covenant, and perceived challenges in implementing covenant-based instruction. Student interviews focused on their understanding of obedience, covenant, and how classroom teaching influenced their attitudes and behaviors. Semi-structured formats allowed flexibility while maintaining thematic consistency (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Non-participant classroom observations were conducted during CRE lessons and selected character-formation activities. Observation focused on: instructional strategies used to teach Exodus 24:7, teacher-student interaction patterns, modeling of covenantal obedience, student responses and participation. Field notes were recorded systematically to capture verbal and non-verbal interaction patterns. Observation strengthens qualitative rigor by triangulating interview data (Yin, 2018).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the professional competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi plays a significant role in cultivating students' understanding and practice of obedience to God's covenant as articulated in Exodus 24:7. Data derived from interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis indicate that covenantal obedience is nurtured through four interrelated dimensions of professional competence: theological mastery, pedagogical content knowledge, moral modeling, and contextual instructional leadership. The CRE teacher demonstrated a clear theological understanding of Exodus 24:7, interpreting obedience not merely as behavioral compliance but as covenantal commitment rooted in relational fidelity. In interviews, the teacher emphasized that the Israelites' declaration, "we will do and we will be obedient" reflects conscious agreement following the public reading of the covenant. This interpretive approach aligns with covenant theology, which frames obedience as a response to divine initiative rather than coercion (Wright, 2006; Goldingay, 2014). Classroom observations confirmed that biblical instruction was not delivered in isolation from its theological context. The teacher explained the historical setting of Sinai, the communal nature of the covenant, and its relevance for contemporary Christian life. This reflects Shulman's (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge, where subject mastery is integrated with methods that make content comprehensible to learners. Rather than presenting Exodus 24:7 as a moral slogan, the teacher guided students to understand its narrative and theological foundations. Students interviewed expressed that obedience to God was connected to "keeping promises to God" and "doing what God says because He loves us." These responses suggest internalization beyond rule-based compliance. Such findings correspond with moral internalization theory, which highlights the role of meaningful explanation in shaping durable ethical commitment (Nucci, 2001).

The next finding concerns instructional strategies used to cultivate covenantal obedience. Document analysis of lesson plans revealed that Exodus 24:7 was integrated into broader thematic units on commitment, responsibility, and faithfulness. Learning objectives included not only cognitive comprehension but also affective outcomes, such as demonstrating responsibility in daily tasks. Observed classroom practices included: guided discussion linking biblical covenant with classroom agreements, reflective journaling on personal commitments to God, group activities in which students formulated "class covenant statements. These strategies reflect constructivist pedagogy, encouraging students to actively engage with biblical concepts (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Rather than imposing obedience externally, the teacher facilitated reflective participation. Hattie (2009) identifies clarity of learning intention and student engagement as high-impact factors in educational effectiveness, both of which were evident in observed lessons. The formulation of a classroom covenant was particularly significant. Students collectively articulated behavioral commitments grounded in Christian values. This practice mirrors the communal dimension of Exodus 24:7, where obedience was declared corporately. The pedagogical parallel reinforces theological coherence between biblical narrative and classroom application. A consistent theme across interviews was the importance of teacher modeling. Students frequently described the CRE teacher as "consistent," "fair," and "patient." Observations confirmed that the teacher maintained respectful communication even when correcting misconduct. Bandura's (1986) social learning theory posits that modeling significantly influences behavioral adoption. Within Christian education, modeling acquires theological depth: teachers embody the values they proclaim (Knight, 2006). Professional competence, therefore, extends beyond technical instruction to moral credibility. Other Christian teachers interviewed corroborated this finding, noting that students often imitate the tone and attitudes demonstrated during CRE lessons. The congruence between teaching and behavior strengthened students' perception of obedience as authentic rather than rhetorical. This supports research indicating that teacher credibility enhances student trust and moral internalization (Hattie, 2009).

Although UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi is a public institution, the presence of 106 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers creates a supportive environment for covenant-centered instruction. However, findings indicate that professional competence is essential for maintaining theological depth without compromising institutional inclusivity. The CRE teacher demonstrated sensitivity by framing covenant obedience in ways that emphasize personal faith commitment rather than institutional enforcement. This reflects professional understanding of contextual boundaries and ethical responsibility within public education frameworks. Teachers reported that cultivating obedience requires collaboration among Christian staff members to ensure consistency across learning environments. Such collegial coherence reinforces communal covenant awareness. The collaborative dynamic aligns with Wright's (2006) emphasis on covenant as a corporate identity-forming structure. The CRE teacher addressed these challenges through differentiated explanation and practical illustration. For example, obedience was connected to everyday responsibilities such as completing assignments honestly and

respecting peers. This contextualization aligns with Van Brummelen's (2009) principle that Christian worldview integration must connect doctrine with lived experience. The study also indicates that professional competence must be continually developed. Teachers acknowledged the need for further theological enrichment and pedagogical innovation to sustain covenant-based formation. It becomes evident that professional competence functions as the mediating instrument between biblical theology and student character formation. Exodus 24:7 provides a covenantal paradigm where obedience arises from hearing, understanding, and communal commitment. In the observed context, this paradigm was translated into: clear theological explanation, participatory instructional design, consistent moral modeling, context-sensitive implementation. The results affirm that obedience to God's covenant cannot be reduced to behavioral conformity. Instead, it emerges through informed commitment shaped by relational trust and pedagogical intentionality. Professional competence, therefore, is not limited to content mastery but encompasses theological fidelity, ethical embodiment, and instructional effectiveness. For UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi, these findings demonstrate that even within a public school setting, covenant theology can meaningfully inform character formation when mediated by professionally competent Christian educators. The study contributes to the broader discourse on faith-integrated professionalism by demonstrating that teacher competence and covenantal theology are mutually reinforcing realities.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to cultivating obedience to God's covenant, interpreted through Exodus 24:7, within the context of UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi. The findings demonstrate that professional competence operates as the critical mediating factor between biblical theology and students' moral formation. Obedience, as articulated in Exodus 24:7, "we will do and we will be obedient" is not transmitted through directive authority alone, but through structured theological explanation, participatory pedagogy, and consistent moral modeling. The study confirms that theological mastery and hermeneutical clarity are indispensable components of professional competence in CRE. The teacher's ability to interpret covenantal obedience within its biblical-historical framework enabled students to perceive obedience as relational fidelity rather than mere rule compliance. This theological depth ensured that instruction moved beyond superficial moralism toward covenant-conscious understanding. Pedagogical content knowledge significantly shaped how covenantal concepts were internalized. By integrating discussion, reflective writing, and collaborative formulation of classroom commitments, the teacher translated Exodus 24:7 into age-appropriate, experiential learning. Such strategies facilitated cognitive comprehension alongside affective engagement, strengthening students' awareness that obedience involves intentional and communal commitment. Moral credibility emerged as a decisive factor. The consistency between instruction and teacher conduct reinforced authenticity, enhancing students' trust and willingness to internalize covenant values. Professional competence, therefore, includes ethical embodiment; theological content gains persuasive power when demonstrated through relational integrity. Contextual sensitivity within a public-school

environment proved essential. Although operating within a state educational framework, the presence of a significant Christian student population created space for meaningful covenant instruction. The teacher's professional discernment ensured that biblical teaching remained faithful while respecting institutional boundaries. The study concludes that professional competence in Christian Religious Education is multidimensional, encompassing theological literacy, pedagogical expertise, moral modeling, and contextual leadership. When these dimensions converge, covenantal obedience can be cultivated as informed commitment rather than external conformity. For UPT SDN 030332 Sumbul-Dairi, the implications are both practical and developmental. Strengthening professional formation through ongoing theological training and pedagogical refinement will further enhance the integration of faith and learning. More broadly, this research affirms that the cultivation of obedience to God's covenant within primary education is not incidental but intentionally shaped by the professional quality of the teacher. In this sense, professional competence is not merely a regulatory requirement but a theological responsibility that shapes the spiritual and communal identity of Christian learners.

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