



The Gospel of Matthew as a Theological Framework for Developing Teachers' Social Competence: A Study at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the Gospel of Matthew as a theological framework for developing teachers' social competence at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat. Situated within a public junior high school context comprising 82 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher, the research explores how Matthean theology informs relational professionalism. Social competence, understood as the capacity for effective communication, collaboration, empathy, conflict resolution, and ethical interaction, is a core dimension of teacher professionalism. This study argues that the Gospel of Matthew provides a coherent ethical paradigm that deepens and strengthens these competencies. Using a qualitative case study design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers and selected students, non-participant classroom observations, and document analysis of instructional and institutional materials. Thematic analysis was employed to identify recurring patterns connecting biblical interpretation with professional practice. The findings reveal that key Matthean themes, servant leadership (Matt. 20:26-28), peacemaking (Matt. 5:9), mercy (Matt. 9:13), and integrity (Matt. 5:37), function as normative principles shaping teachers' interpersonal conduct. Teachers who consciously internalized these teachings demonstrated restorative approaches to discipline, empathetic communication, collaborative collegiality, and ethically consistent behavior. The study concludes that the Gospel of Matthew provides a robust theological architecture for cultivating socially competent educators. By integrating Christological ethics with professional standards, Christian Religious Education teachers can embody a relational pedagogy that is both contextually responsive and spiritually grounded. This research contributes to the discourse on faith-informed teacher professionalism within pluralistic educational settings.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Theological Framework

INTRODUCTION

Teacher quality remains one of the most significant in-school factors influencing student learning and school climate (Darling-Hammond, 2017; Hattie, 2009). Among the recognized dimensions of teacher professionalism in the Indonesian educational system is social competence, defined as the capacity of teachers to communicate and interact effectively with students, colleagues, parents, and the broader community (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 14 Tahun 2005 tentang Guru dan Dosen). Social competence encompasses empathy, ethical communication, conflict management, collaboration, and respect for diversity. In increasingly pluralistic and socially complex school environments, this competence is not peripheral but central to sustaining a constructive educational atmosphere. Social competence is not understood merely as interpersonal skill but as a theological expression of relational responsibility. Christian anthropology emphasizes that human beings are relational by design, reflecting the communal nature of God and called to live in love, justice, humility, and reconciliation (Wright, 2006). Consequently, teachers who identify with the Christian faith may draw from biblical narratives and teachings to shape their relational practices. One biblical text that offers a robust relational paradigm is the Gospel of Matthew. The Gospel of Matthew presents Jesus not only as teacher (*didaskalos*) but also as authoritative interpreter of the Law and embodiment of covenantal righteousness (France, 2007). Central teachings such as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7) articulate ethical norms governing interpersonal relationships: peacemaking, mercy, integrity of speech, reconciliation, love of enemies, and humility. These themes provide a comprehensive moral-ethical framework applicable to professional interactions. For example, Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers" frames reconciliation as a hallmark of divine sonship, while Matthew 7:12 articulates the Golden Rule as a summary of ethical responsibility. Scholars have consistently emphasized that Matthew's Gospel portrays righteousness not as ritual compliance but as relational fidelity expressed in everyday conduct (Luz, 2007; Nolland, 2005). When applied to the professional sphere, such Matthean principles offer conceptual grounding for social competence. Peacemaking informs conflict resolution; mercy and forgiveness shape restorative discipline; integrity of speech guides communication ethics; and servant leadership (Matthew 20:26-28) redefines authority as service. These theological motifs resonate with contemporary educational research highlighting the importance of teacher empathy, emotional regulation, and collaborative culture in promoting positive school climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Thus, the Gospel of Matthew provides not only spiritual inspiration but also a coherent ethical framework for professional relational practice.

The locus of this study is SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat, a public junior high school where 82 students identify as Christian and 11 teachers are Christians, including the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher. Although operating within a pluralistic public-school setting, the presence of a Christian community within the institution creates space for theological reflection among educators who seek to integrate faith and professional responsibility. In such a context, the development of teachers' social competence is not limited to regulatory standards but may be informed by biblical convictions that shape relational ethics. Social competence in public schools requires particular sensitivity.

Teachers must interact across religious, cultural, and social differences while maintaining professionalism and inclusivity. The Gospel of Matthew, written to a community negotiating identity within diversity (France, 2007), offers a compelling paradigm for navigating such realities. Its emphasis on humility, justice, mercy, and reconciliation provides principles adaptable to contemporary educational contexts without undermining pluralism. The Indonesian framework for teacher competence identifies social competence as integral to professional identity (Undang-Undang Republik Indonesia Nomor 14 Tahun 2005). Statutory definitions often remain descriptive rather than formative. Theological reflection can deepen this dimension by providing normative grounding. When teachers internalize ethical commitments derived from Scripture, relational behaviors become expressions of conviction rather than procedural compliance. Research on moral formation indicates that internalized belief systems significantly influence consistent prosocial behavior (Nucci, 2001). This study therefore seeks to explore how the Gospel of Matthew functions as a theological framework for developing teachers' social competence at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat. By examining the intersection of biblical theology and professional practice within a qualitative research design, the study aims to contribute to the broader discourse on faith-informed professionalism in public education. Specifically, it investigates how Matthean teachings, such as peacemaking, servant leadership, and ethical communication, inform teachers' relational interactions and support the cultivation of a constructive school climate. Through this exploration, the research advances the proposition that social competence is not merely a regulatory standard but a morally and theologically grounded dimension of teacher identity. In the context of a pluralistic public institution, such grounding may offer both stability and ethical coherence in navigating the complexities of contemporary educational life.

METHODS

A qualitative case study design was implemented to explore how the Gospel of Matthew functions as a theological framework for developing teachers' social competence at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to understand meaning, interpretation, and lived experience rather than to measure variables quantitatively (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Social competence and theological reflection are deeply contextual and relational phenomena; therefore, they require in-depth exploration within a bounded institutional setting (Yin, 2018). The research was grounded in an interpretivist paradigm, which assumes that reality is socially constructed and that professional practice is shaped by values, beliefs, and contextual interaction. This perspective is particularly relevant when examining how biblical texts, specifically teachings from the Gospel of Matthew, inform teachers' relational behavior. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat, a public junior high school with 82 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher. Although the school operates within a pluralistic framework, the presence of a Christian teacher community provides a meaningful context for examining faith-informed professional practice. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure relevance to the research focus (Patton, 2015). The participant group consisted of: the PAK teacher as the primary theological informant, five Christian subject teachers

representing different academic disciplines, and ten Christian students from Grades VIII and IX, selected to reflect diverse academic performance and participation levels. The inclusion of both teachers and students enabled triangulation of perspectives regarding how social competence is practiced and perceived. In-depth interviews were conducted with teachers and selected students. Teacher interviews explored: understanding of social competence within professional standards, familiarity with and interpretation of key Matthean teachings (e.g., Matthew 5-7; 20:26-28), application of biblical principles in interpersonal interactions, and experiences in conflict resolution and collaborative practice. Student interviews focused on perceptions of teacher communication style, fairness, empathy, and conflict management. Semi-structured interviews allowed thematic consistency while providing flexibility for deeper exploration (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Classroom and staff-interaction observations were conducted to examine: teacher-student communication patterns, conflict resolution practices, expressions of servant leadership and humility, and collaborative interactions among teachers. Field notes documented verbal communication, tone, non-verbal cues, and situational responses. Observation strengthened credibility by comparing reported beliefs with actual practice (Yin, 2018). Coding was conducted inductively while being conceptually informed by frameworks of teacher competence (Darling-Hammond, 2017) and Matthean theology (France, 2007; Luz, 2007). Emerging themes included: peacemaking as conflict management, servant leadership in professional authority, ethical communication and integrity, mercy and restorative discipline, and challenges in pluralistic engagement.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This study examined how the Gospel of Matthew functions as a theological framework for developing teachers' social competence at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat. Drawing from interviews with Christian teachers and students, classroom observations, and document analysis, the findings reveal that Matthean theology meaningfully shapes relational practices among teachers who consciously integrate faith with professional responsibility. The results are organized into five major themes: peacemaking as conflict management, servant leadership as redefinition of authority, ethical communication and integrity, mercy and restorative discipline, and relational inclusivity within a pluralistic context. Across these themes, social competence emerged not merely as regulatory compliance with professional standards but as a theologically informed relational ethic rooted in specific Matthean teachings. One of the strongest themes identified was the application of peacemaking principles derived from the Sermon on the Mount. Teachers frequently referenced Matthew 5:9, "Blessed are the peacemakers" as a guiding principle for resolving student conflicts. Rather than defaulting to punitive measures, participating teachers described conflict as an opportunity for relational restoration. Classroom observations confirmed this orientation. When disputes arose between students, teachers avoided immediate reprimand and instead facilitated structured dialogue. Students were encouraged to articulate their perspectives and listen to one another before arriving at a resolution. This approach mirrors the graduated reconciliation process described in Matthew 18:15-17, which emphasizes direct communication before escalation. Students interviewed consistently reported that teachers "listen first before

judging” and “help us talk it out.” These responses indicate that peacemaking practices were visible and perceptible. In professional competence terms, this reflects advanced emotional regulation and conflict mediation skills. Such practices align with research emphasizing the importance of teacher emotional competence in fostering positive classroom climate (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Theologically, however, the teachers framed their actions not only as pedagogical best practice but as obedience to Christ’s instruction. This dual grounding, professional and theological, strengthened consistency in application. The data suggest that peacemaking serves as both spiritual discipline and professional strategy. Teachers who internalize Matthew’s beatitudes demonstrate greater patience, reduced reactivity, and more intentional facilitation of reconciliation. Consequently, social competence is expressed as relational stewardship rather than disciplinary control.

The next finding concerns authority. Teachers repeatedly cited Matthew 20:26-28, where Jesus redefines greatness as servanthood, as foundational for their leadership posture. This theological orientation reshaped traditional hierarchical assumptions about teacher authority. Rather than exercising dominance, teachers described their role as guiding, mentoring, and supporting. Observations revealed that teachers frequently positioned themselves physically among students rather than at a distance. They invited questions, admitted mistakes, and modeled humility. Students affirmed this perception, describing Christian teachers as “not arrogant” and “willing to help even outside class hours.” Such relational accessibility fosters trust, a critical dimension of social competence. Servant leadership correlates with transformational leadership models that prioritize influence through inspiration rather than coercion (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Theologically, however, this posture is rooted in imitation of Christ’s self-giving example. The integration of these perspectives produced a distinctive leadership ethic within the school context. Servant leadership did not diminish classroom order. Instead, it enhanced voluntary cooperation. Students reported greater willingness to comply with instructions when they perceived fairness and humility in teachers. This dynamic reflects the relational authority implicit in Matthew’s Gospel, where Jesus’ authority is linked to moral credibility rather than institutional position (France, 2007). Servant leadership functioned as both theological conviction and practical strategy for strengthening social competence.

Communication practices emerged as the next theme. Teachers emphasized Matthew 5:37, “Let your ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes,’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’” as guidance for clarity and consistency in speech. They articulated a commitment to transparent expectations and avoidance of ambiguous directives. Observation confirmed that teachers provided explicit instructions and maintained consistent consequences. Students indicated that such clarity reduced confusion and perceptions of favoritism. One student remarked that teachers “don’t change rules suddenly.” Integrity of speech also influenced feedback practices. Teachers avoided sarcasm or humiliating remarks, consistent with Matthew 12:36-37’s warning regarding careless words. Instead, corrective feedback was framed constructively. From a professional standpoint, clear communication enhances instructional effectiveness and classroom stability (Hattie, 2009). Theologically, however, communication integrity is framed as moral accountability before God. Teachers perceived verbal discipline as a spiritual responsibility. The integration of these perspectives produced a communication

culture characterized by respect, predictability, and fairness. Social competence in this dimension was expressed through tone, word choice, and consistency between promise and action.

Restorative discipline practices were strongly influenced by Matthean teachings on mercy and forgiveness. Teachers referenced Matthew 9:13, "I desire mercy, not sacrifice" as shaping their approach to student mistakes. Rather than focusing solely on rule enforcement, they sought to understand underlying causes of misbehavior. When students violated rules, teachers often combined corrective action with conversation. Repeat offenses were addressed firmly but not vindictively. Students reported feeling "corrected but not hated." The Parable of the Unforgiving Servant (Matthew 18:21-35) was cited in interviews as emphasizing the importance of extending forgiveness proportionally to grace received. Teachers interpreted this as discouraging grudges and encouraging relational repair. Restorative practices are associated with improved school climate and reduced disciplinary disparities (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Mercy reflects participation in divine compassion. The data indicate that mercy-informed discipline enhances relational trust. Students expressed greater openness to admitting mistakes when they anticipated fair treatment. Thus, social competence in discipline is strengthened by theological internalization of forgiveness.

Given the public and religiously diverse nature of SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat, relational inclusivity was essential. Teachers emphasized the Golden Rule (Matthew 7:12) as a universal ethical principle guiding interaction across differences. They reported deliberate avoidance of exclusivist language in mixed settings and demonstrated sensitivity to non-Christian students. Observations confirmed respectful cross-religious interaction. Students described Christian teachers as "respectful to all religions." This perception reinforces professional standards requiring inclusive engagement. Matthew's Great Commission (28:19-20) was interpreted not as coercive proselytism but as embodying Christlike character in all relationships. Teachers articulated that their witness is expressed primarily through conduct. This balance between conviction and inclusivity illustrates mature social competence. Teachers navigated pluralism without compromising faith identity, demonstrating contextual intelligence and ethical restraint.

Another emergent theme involved collaboration among the 11 Christian teachers. Participants described informal discussions regarding biblical principles applied to classroom challenges. This collegial reflection fostered coherence in relational practices. Consistency across classrooms strengthened students' perception of fairness. Professional learning communities are widely recognized as enhancing instructional quality (Darling-Hammond, 2017). Theological reflection served as a catalyst for such collaboration. Teachers acknowledged that consistent application of Matthean principles requires spiritual discipline and ongoing professional development. The data suggest that theological conviction alone is insufficient without structured support systems. Across all themes, the Gospel of Matthew functioned as a normative framework shaping teachers' interpretation of professional standards. Rather than viewing social competence as externally imposed regulation, participants internalized it as spiritual vocation. Peacemaking structured conflict management; servant leadership reshaped authority;

communication integrity enhanced clarity; mercy informed discipline; and inclusivity guided pluralistic interaction. These dimensions collectively produced a relational climate characterized by trust, fairness, and cooperation. The findings demonstrate that theological reflection can deepen professional competence by providing coherent moral grounding. At SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat, Matthean ethics were not abstract doctrine but operational principles enacted through daily interaction. The Gospel of Matthew offers a comprehensive relational ethic that aligns closely with contemporary models of teacher social competence. When internalized and contextually applied, it strengthens both professional identity and school climate.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the Gospel of Matthew functions as a theological framework for developing teachers' social competence at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat. Through a qualitative case study involving Christian teachers and students, the findings demonstrate that Matthean theology provides not merely inspirational language but a substantive ethical and relational paradigm that shapes professional conduct, interpersonal communication, and communal engagement within the school environment. First, the study confirms that social competence among Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers is deeply informed by theological conviction. Participants consistently interpreted key Matthean themes, such as servant leadership (Matt. 20:26-28), peacemaking (Matt. 5:9), mercy (Matt. 9:13), and integrity (Matt. 5:37), as normative principles for professional behavior. These teachings were not confined to doctrinal instruction but were translated into concrete practices: respectful dialogue with students, restorative conflict resolution, collaborative collegiality, and ethical consistency between words and actions. In this sense, the Gospel of Matthew functioned as a moral-ecclesial grammar shaping teachers' relational ethos. Second, the data reveal that social competence is most visible in situations of tension, disciplinary challenges, inter-student conflict, and inter-teacher disagreement. In these contexts, teachers who consciously internalized Matthean principles tended to adopt restorative rather than punitive approaches. Peacemaking was enacted through dialogue, mediation, and empathy rather than coercion. Authority was exercised through service rather than domination. Such patterns suggest that biblical theology, when internalized, recalibrates professional authority into relational stewardship. Third, the study indicates that theological reflection contributes to a distinctive integration of professional standards and spiritual formation. Indonesian teacher competency frameworks emphasize communication skills, collaboration, and social sensitivity. The findings suggest that for Christian teachers, these competencies gain deeper coherence when grounded in Christological ethics. The Gospel of Matthew does not replace professional standards; rather, it intensifies and enriches them by providing transcendent motivation and moral orientation. Social competence thus emerges as both pedagogical skill and spiritual discipline. Fourth, the pluralistic context of a public school introduces both opportunity and tension. While the school hosts 82 Christian students and 11 Christian teachers, it operates within a broader national framework characterized by religious diversity. Teachers reported the necessity of practicing inclusive sensitivity while maintaining theological integrity. The Matthean emphasis on mercy and humility proved particularly relevant in this environment,

enabling Christian educators to embody faith convictions without fostering exclusivism. Social competence, therefore, becomes a bridge between confessional identity and civic responsibility. Fifth, student testimonies confirm that theological virtues are pedagogically perceptible. Students described socially competent teachers as patient, approachable, fair, and willing to listen. These qualities correspond directly to Matthean ethical emphases. This alignment indicates that theological reflection is not abstract but observable in classroom culture. When teachers embody mercy, integrity, and servant leadership, students experience relational safety and moral clarity. Consequently, theological formation contributes indirectly to improved classroom climate and participatory engagement. The study also identifies limitations. Not all teachers demonstrated consistent integration between theological ideals and professional practice. External pressures, administrative workload, curriculum demands, and time constraints, sometimes hindered reflective application of biblical principles. Moreover, theological literacy varied among teachers, affecting the depth of engagement with the Gospel text. These findings suggest that intentional professional development integrating biblical reflection and pedagogical training would strengthen coherence between conviction and practice. This research contributes to the discourse on faith-informed professional competence by demonstrating that biblical theology can function as a normative framework for social ethics in educational settings. It encourages Christian educators to move beyond cognitive instruction toward embodied pedagogy. Institutionally, it invites school leaders to recognize spiritual formation as a legitimate dimension of teacher development, particularly in contexts where religious identity remains significant. The Gospel of Matthew provides a robust theological architecture for cultivating teachers' social competence at SMP Negeri 1 Simpang Empat. By framing authority as service, conflict resolution as peacemaking, discipline as mercy, and communication as truthfulness, Matthean theology shapes a relational pedagogy that is ethically grounded and contextually responsive. When internalized and practiced consistently, this framework enables Christian Religious Education teachers to function not only as transmitters of knowledge but as embodied witnesses to a socially transformative ethic rooted in the teachings of Christ.

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