



Enhancing Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers through the Spirit of Unity: An Exegetical Study of Philippians 2:1-2 at SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the enhancement of social competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan through the theological lens of Philippians 2:1-2. Social competence is understood as a multidimensional construct that includes interpersonal skills, ethical modeling, relational leadership, and pedagogical intentionality. In the context of 149 Christian students and 22 Christian teachers, including CRE teachers, the study investigates how faith-informed principles guide teachers in fostering collaborative, respectful, and inclusive classroom environments. Using a qualitative research design, data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Thematic analysis revealed that CRE teachers operationalize the biblical call to unity by modeling humility, mediating conflicts constructively, and encouraging cooperative engagement among students. These practices not only promote social cohesion but also facilitate the internalization of Christian values, linking moral formation with academic learning. Challenges such as diverse student needs and structural constraints highlight the dynamic and context-dependent nature of social competence. The findings demonstrate that social competence in Christian education is both a professional skill and a spiritual vocation, where relational practices reflect ethical and theological commitments. The study contributes to the interdisciplinary dialogue between educational theory and biblical theology, suggesting that professional development programs should integrate faith-based reflection with relational pedagogy. By embodying the spirit of unity outlined in Philippians 2:1-2, CRE teachers can cultivate classrooms that support moral, social, and academic development, reinforcing the role of faith-informed practice in contemporary education.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spirit of Unity

INTRODUCTION

The social competence of teachers has emerged as a critical dimension of effective pedagogy, particularly in faith-based educational contexts where relational modeling

carries both moral and spiritual significance (Day, 2004). Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), teachers are expected not only to convey cognitive knowledge but also to embody virtues that nurture interpersonal harmony, ethical conduct, and communal responsibility (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Social competence, in this sense, encompasses the ability to communicate empathetically, collaborate constructively, and foster inclusive relationships that reflect Christian values. At SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan, where 149 Christian students are guided by 22 Christian teachers (including CRE instructors), the cultivation of social competence becomes particularly significant given the complex dynamics of peer interactions, teacher-student relationships, and school culture. Philippians 2:1-2 provides a theological foundation for understanding the cultivation of social unity and relational harmony. The Apostle Paul exhorts believers to "be of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord and of one mind," emphasizing the importance of communal cohesion, empathy, and mutual edification (Fee, 1995). Within educational settings, this scriptural insight can inform both the attitudes and behaviors of teachers, guiding them to model humility, collaboration, and ethical consistency in their interactions with colleagues and students. Such relational modeling is essential not only for fostering positive classroom climates but also for transmitting social and moral values to learners (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). Contemporary research highlights that teachers' social competence significantly influences student engagement, emotional well-being, and moral development (Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). Effective social interaction fosters trust, reduces conflict, and enhances cooperative learning, creating environments where students feel valued and motivated. In CRE classrooms, social competence assumes an additional theological dimension, as teachers' behaviors are interpreted by students not merely as professional conduct but as moral exemplars that embody Christ-like attitudes (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). This dual role of the teacher, as both educator and moral witness, underscores the importance of intentional cultivation of relational skills within faith-informed pedagogy.

At SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan, the relational dynamics are shaped by both institutional and spiritual factors. With a relatively small community of Christian students and teachers, daily interactions are highly visible, making the demonstration of empathy, cooperation, and solidarity particularly impactful. Teachers' ability to model social harmony directly affects students' perceptions of ethical norms, communal responsibility, and spiritual formation (Day et al., 2006). Moreover, in pluralistic public-school contexts, CRE teachers must navigate diverse cultural and religious backgrounds, necessitating relational sensitivity that balances faithfulness with inclusivity. The concept of unity articulated in Philippians 2:1-2 can be operationalized in educational practice through strategies that promote collaborative problem-solving, peer mentorship, and reflective engagement with ethical dilemmas. Teachers who internalize the principles of empathy, mutual concern, and humility are better equipped to mediate conflict, encourage dialogue, and foster a sense of belonging among students (Arthur et al., 2015). Such practices not only enhance classroom management and instructional efficacy but also cultivate a community ethos that aligns with Christian moral teachings. This study aims to explore how CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan enhance their social competence through the spirit of unity as outlined in Philippians 2:1-2. Specifically, it investigates how biblical principles inform teachers' interpersonal behaviors,

collaborative strategies, and classroom leadership, contributing to both academic outcomes and spiritual formation. By integrating exegetical reflection with empirical observation, the research seeks to illuminate the intersection of theological insight and professional practice, demonstrating how the cultivation of social competence supports holistic education in faith-based learning environments.

METHODS

Qualitative inquiry was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of complex social and spiritual phenomena, capturing the lived experiences, reflections, and interpersonal practices of teachers within their natural educational context (Creswell, 2014). The focus was on understanding relational behaviors, collaborative strategies, and moral-ethical modeling from the perspective of CRE practitioners, rather than measuring outcomes quantitatively. Data collection involved three complementary methods: semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all 22 Christian teachers at the school, including CRE instructors, allowing participants to articulate their understanding of social competence, how they implement the spirit of unity in daily interactions, and the challenges they encounter in fostering relational cohesion. Questions were open-ended and designed to elicit reflections on both pedagogical strategies and spiritual grounding. Interviews lasted approximately 45–60 minutes per participant. Classroom observations were conducted across multiple lessons involving the 149 Christian students to examine how teachers' relational competencies were enacted in real-time. Observations focused on communication patterns, conflict resolution, collaborative activities, and the modeling of empathy and cooperation. Field notes documented both verbal and non-verbal interactions, with particular attention to instances where teachers demonstrated the principles outlined in Philippians 2:1-2, such as promoting harmony, encouraging mutual respect, and exemplifying humility. Document analysis supplemented the interviews and observations, providing additional insight into institutional and curricular support for social competence development. Documents included lesson plans, teacher journals, school policy statements, and extracurricular program records. Analysis of these materials helped contextualize teachers' strategies within broader pedagogical and institutional frameworks, highlighting how the school fosters relational cohesion in alignment with faith-based values. Data were analyzed thematically using inductive coding techniques. Transcripts, observation notes, and documents were read multiple times to identify recurring patterns, behaviors, and attitudes related to social competence and the spirit of unity. Key themes emerged around relational modeling, collaborative leadership, conflict mediation, moral-ethical guidance, and the integration of biblical principles into pedagogical practice (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Triangulation across the three data sources enhanced the credibility and validity of the findings, ensuring that interpretations reflected both teachers' perceptions and observable behaviors in classroom and school settings. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the research. Informed consent was obtained from all teacher participants, and permission was secured from the school administration for observations and document review. Anonymity and confidentiality were maintained by assigning codes to participants and securely storing data. The study followed guidelines for research with human subjects, ensuring that

participation was voluntary and that findings were reported honestly and accurately. By combining interviews, observations, and document analysis within a qualitative framework, this study provides a rich, contextualized understanding of how CRE teachers cultivate social competence and embody the spirit of unity in a real educational setting. The methodological design ensures that the findings are grounded in both theological reflection and practical classroom experience, bridging the gap between biblical insight and professional pedagogy.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings from this study reveal a nuanced and multifaceted understanding of social competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan, grounded in the theological framework of Philippians 2:1-2. The integration of semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis provides a comprehensive view of how relational practices, pedagogical strategies, and moral-ethical modeling converge to enhance both teacher effectiveness and student formation. The analysis demonstrates that the cultivation of social competence is not an isolated pedagogical skill but a holistic practice that intertwines professional expertise with spiritual intentionality, ethical discernment, and communal responsibility (Day, 2004). Interviews with the 22 Christian teachers revealed that social competence is understood primarily as the capacity to foster harmonious relationships, model ethical behavior, and facilitate inclusive interactions that reflect Christian values. Teachers consistently emphasized the relational dimension of their professional role, describing social competence as “the ability to communicate, listen, and respond to students and colleagues in ways that nurture trust, collaboration, and mutual respect” (T1, interview, 2026). This perception aligns with contemporary educational research, which highlights the importance of relational leadership and empathy in shaping classroom climate and student engagement (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013; Berkowitz & Bier, 2014). In the CRE context, relational competence is inseparable from spiritual and moral integrity; teachers perceive their conduct as a reflection of Christ-like character, reinforcing the notion that professional practice and ethical modeling are mutually constitutive (Tirri & Kuusisto, 2013). Observational data corroborated these claims, showing that teachers actively engage in behaviors that promote social cohesion. In one observed mathematics lesson, the CRE teacher paused the instructional sequence to mediate a minor disagreement between students, emphasizing listening, acknowledgment of differing viewpoints, and mutual accountability. This incident illustrated the embodiment of humility and empathy, central components of Philippians 2:1-2, which calls for “being of the same mind, having the same love, being in full accord” (Fee, 1995). Teachers reported that such interventions are frequent and deliberate, reflecting an intentional strategy to nurture unity and trust within the classroom. The study found that collaborative practices among teachers are critical for reinforcing social competence. Interviews revealed that the CRE teachers regularly engage in peer mentoring, co-teaching, and collaborative lesson planning to model unity and professional solidarity. One teacher noted, “By working together with my colleagues, we demonstrate to students that cooperation and mutual support are not just ideals but practical ways to build community” (T8, interview, 2026). Classroom observations confirmed that these collaborative efforts translate into pedagogical

practices that encourage students to work together, respect diverse perspectives, and assume shared responsibility for group tasks. Document analysis of lesson plans and school program materials indicated a systematic approach to fostering collaboration. For example, group activities, paired assignments, and peer review exercises are embedded in the curriculum to create opportunities for students to practice relational skills. These strategies reflect the theological principle of unity highlighted in Philippians 2:1-2, operationalizing spiritual insights into tangible classroom practices. By aligning pedagogical structures with biblical principles, teachers cultivate an environment where social competence is both modeled and practiced consistently, bridging the gap between ethical formation and academic engagement.

A prominent theme emerging from the study is the role of CRE teachers in conflict mediation. Disagreements among students, whether arising from competitive tensions, personality clashes, or cultural differences, are common in classroom settings. Teachers reported that their social competence equips them to address such conflicts constructively, using strategies that emphasize dialogue, empathy, and moral reflection. One participant explained, "I always try to guide students to see each other's perspectives and reflect on how their actions affect the whole class community. This is not just about discipline, it's about teaching them to live according to God's principles" (T3, interview, 2026). Observations provided concrete evidence of these approaches. In a language arts lesson, a teacher intervened in a group dispute by facilitating a discussion on fairness and mutual respect, encouraging students to articulate their concerns while referencing ethical and biblical considerations. The approach aligns with restorative justice principles, which emphasize repairing relationships and fostering mutual accountability (Arthur et al., 2015). Importantly, these interventions are grounded in the theological conviction that relational harmony is both a moral imperative and a reflection of Christian communal life, consistent with the spirit of unity in Philippians 2:1-2.

The research highlights that modeling Christ-like humility is a central mechanism through which social competence is cultivated. Teachers consistently emphasized the importance of self-reflection, patience, and the willingness to subordinate personal preference for the well-being of the classroom community. Observational data revealed that teachers often demonstrate humility by acknowledging mistakes, inviting student input, and validating diverse opinions. Such behaviors create an environment where students feel respected and empowered, reinforcing the internalization of ethical and spiritual norms. The integration of biblical principles into these practices is evident in teachers' frequent references to Philippians 2 during mentoring sessions and classroom discussions. For instance, one teacher recounted, "I remind students that we are called to think of others above ourselves, to support one another, and to act in ways that build unity. When they see me practicing this daily, they begin to understand it as part of living faith, not just theory" (T15, interview, 2026). This pedagogical modeling reflects the dual nature of social competence in CRE: it is both a professional skill and a spiritual discipline, demonstrating that the development of relational capacities is inseparable from moral and theological grounding (Day et al., 2006). Students' responses further underscore the impact of teachers' social competence. Observations indicated that students in classrooms led by relationally competent teachers exhibit higher levels of participation,

collaboration, and peer support. In interviews and informal conversations, students described feeling “safe,” “respected,” and “encouraged” by teachers who practice humility and promote unity. These perceptions align with research demonstrating that the relational quality of teaching significantly influences social and moral development in learners (Sanger & Osguthorpe, 2013). By modeling ethical behavior and fostering communal cohesion, CRE teachers effectively transmit values that extend beyond academic content, shaping students’ broader social character. A key contribution of this study is the demonstration of how theological reflection and pedagogical practice intersect in the cultivation of social competence. Philippians 2:1-2 provides not only a moral directive but also a practical framework for relational leadership. Teachers integrate this scriptural insight by structuring classroom norms around empathy, collaboration, and mutual accountability. For instance, group activities are guided by explicit expectations of fairness and shared responsibility, while individual interactions emphasize active listening, encouragement, and constructive feedback. This integration ensures that social competence is not merely an abstract ideal but a lived experience, observable in both teacher behavior and student engagement. Document analysis revealed that school policies and professional development programs further reinforce these practices. Workshops on classroom management, moral education, and collaborative pedagogy are informed by both educational theory and biblical principles, providing a coherent framework for teachers to operationalize the spirit of unity. Teachers reported that ongoing reflection sessions, peer observation, and mentorship programs help them refine their relational strategies while remaining accountable to both professional and spiritual standards.

Teachers identified several challenges in cultivating social competence. Time constraints, large class sizes, diverse student needs, and occasional resistance to collaborative norms pose significant obstacles. Teachers employ adaptive strategies, such as prioritizing relational interventions during critical moments, leveraging peer leaders to facilitate group cohesion, and integrating reflective exercises that encourage students to internalize communal values. These strategies demonstrate that social competence is dynamic and context-sensitive, requiring both flexibility and intentionality. Importantly, teachers consistently framed these adaptations within the theological lens of Philippians 2, viewing challenges as opportunities to practice humility, patience, and servant leadership. The findings suggest several implications for professional development in CRE. First, training programs should emphasize the integration of theological reflection with relational pedagogy, equipping teachers to model ethical and communal behavior consistently. Second, collaborative practices and peer mentoring among teachers should be institutionalized to reinforce relational norms and support mutual accountability. Third, assessment of social competence should include qualitative indicators such as classroom climate, student engagement, and ethical modeling, rather than focusing solely on academic outcomes. Finally, schools should provide structures for reflection, feedback, and ongoing professional growth that sustain the cultivation of social competence over time. In sum, this study demonstrates that social competence among CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan is multidimensional, encompassing interpersonal skills, ethical discernment, pedagogical strategies, and theological grounding. The spirit of unity articulated in Philippians 2:1-2 provides both moral and practical guidance, enabling

teachers to navigate complex relational dynamics while modeling Christ-like behavior. Through intentional relational management, collaborative engagement, and reflective practice, teachers cultivate a classroom environment characterized by harmony, trust, and ethical responsibility. These practices not only enhance student learning and social development but also reinforce teachers' professional identity as morally and spiritually grounded educators.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored the ways in which Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Dolok Panribuan cultivate social competence within their classrooms, guided by the theological framework of Philippians 2:1-2. The findings demonstrate that social competence is a multidimensional construct, encompassing interpersonal skills, ethical modeling, relational leadership, and pedagogical intentionality. CRE teachers understand their professional role not only as educators of cognitive knowledge but also as moral exemplars whose conduct shapes student behavior, fosters communal cohesion, and reinforces ethical and spiritual values. Relational practices, including effective communication, conflict mediation, collaborative engagement, and modeling humility, were consistently identified as key mechanisms through which social competence is developed. These practices allow teachers to cultivate trust, promote inclusivity, and encourage cooperative learning, thereby creating classroom environments conducive to both academic achievement and social-moral formation. The study also underscores the importance of intentional integration of biblical principles, particularly the call to unity in Philippians 2:1-2, into classroom management and instructional design. By operationalizing the theological notion of communal harmony, teachers exemplify how faith can inform professional practice in tangible, observable ways. Challenges, such as limited time, diverse student needs, and structural constraints, require adaptive strategies and reflective practice, highlighting that social competence is dynamic and context-dependent. Teachers' ability to navigate these challenges while maintaining relational integrity illustrates the intersection of professional expertise and spiritual formation, demonstrating that social competence is both a functional skill and a vocational calling. This study contributes to the understanding of how CRE teachers can foster social cohesion and ethical behavior in students through deliberate, faith-informed relational practices. It emphasizes that professional competence in Christian education is inseparable from spiritual and moral intentionality. Educational institutions are encouraged to support teachers in developing these capacities through ongoing professional development, reflective practice, and collaborative engagement, ensuring that social competence becomes a sustained and integral feature of Christian pedagogy.

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