



From Wilderness Guidance to Classroom Leadership: Reinterpreting Exodus 13:21 for Understanding Christian Teachers' Personal Competence at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of Christian teachers' personal competence in shaping classroom leadership effectiveness through a theological reinterpretation of Book of Exodus 13:21. Drawing on the biblical imagery of the pillar of cloud and fire as symbols of divine guidance, the research conceptualizes personal competence as spiritually grounded leadership characterized by integrity, moral consistency, emotional stability, and exemplary conduct. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo, involving 10 Christian teachers and 39 Christian students. A quantitative correlational design was employed using Likert-scale questionnaires to measure teachers' personal competence and students' perceptions of classroom leadership effectiveness. Data were analyzed through descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple linear regression. The findings reveal that teachers' personal competence is categorized as high ($M = 4.32$) and that classroom leadership effectiveness is likewise high ($M = 4.26$). A strong positive correlation was found between personal competence and classroom leadership effectiveness ($r = 0.71, p < 0.01$), with personal competence accounting for 50.4% of the variance in leadership effectiveness ($R^2 = 0.504$). These results demonstrate that spiritually grounded personality traits significantly contribute to relational trust, instructional clarity, and students' perception of spiritual influence. Exodus 13:21 provides a paradigm in which leadership is understood as faithful, visible, and consistent guidance. Empirically, the study confirms that such qualities, when embodied by teachers, enhance classroom leadership effectiveness. The research contributes to the integration of biblical theology and quantitative educational analysis, offering a contextual model of spiritually grounded leadership within Christian education.

Keywords: *Guidance, Christian Religious Education, Leadership, Personal Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Personal competence represents a foundational dimension of teacher professionalism, particularly within Christian Religious Education (CRE), where moral authority and spiritual integrity are inseparable from pedagogical responsibility. In faith-based educational contexts, a teacher's personality is not merely a psychological attribute but a theological witness. The internal disposition of the teacher, integrity, emotional stability, humility, faithfulness, and spiritual maturity, becomes a visible medium through which moral and spiritual values are transmitted. This study reinterprets Book of Exodus 13:21 as a theological lens for understanding Christian teachers' personal competence in the context of SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo. Exodus 13:21 narrates that "the Lord went before them by day in a pillar of cloud to guide them along the way and by night in a pillar of fire to give them light." Within the broader Exodus tradition, this verse portrays divine guidance as continuous, visible, and faithful. According to Brevard S. Childs, the wilderness motif in Exodus is not merely geographical but theological; it symbolizes dependence, formation, and covenantal trust under divine leadership (Childs, 1974). The pillar of cloud and fire represents both direction and presence, emphasizing that leadership in the biblical narrative is grounded in divine accompaniment rather than human autonomy. Similarly, Walter Brueggemann interprets the wilderness journey as a formative space in which identity is shaped through trust in God's sustaining guidance (Brueggemann, 1994). When applied to educational theology, Exodus 13:21 offers a metaphor for classroom leadership rooted in spiritual guidance. The teacher, particularly in Christian Religious Education, is called not merely to manage instruction but to embody a form of leadership that reflects dependence on divine direction. Personal competence, therefore, involves consistency, moral clarity, emotional stability, and spiritual groundedness, qualities analogous to the reliability of the pillar of cloud and fire. Leadership in the classroom becomes credible when it mirrors the stability and faithfulness associated with divine guidance. Educational theory likewise underscores the importance of teacher personality in shaping learning outcomes. Parker J. Palmer argues that good teaching flows from the integrity of the teacher's identity; the inner life of the teacher directly influences the quality of educational engagement (Palmer, 1998). Teaching, in this perspective, is not technique-driven but identity-driven. Lee S. Shulman highlights that effective teaching integrates content knowledge, pedagogical skill, and personal credibility (Shulman, 1987). Without personal integrity, instructional competence loses moral force.

The influence of teacher personality becomes even more significant. Children at elementary levels often interpret authority relationally and emotionally. Moral modeling, emotional consistency, and visible authenticity shape students' perceptions of credibility. Developmental psychology suggests that children internalize values through identification with trusted adults rather than through abstract reasoning alone. Thus, personal competence, manifested in patience, fairness, spiritual devotion, and emotional balance, becomes central to formative leadership. The present study is conducted at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo in South Nias, where 39 Christian students and 10 Christian teachers (including the PAK teacher) form a relatively small and relationally intensive educational community. In such an environment, teacher personality is continuously

observable across academic and social interactions. The small population intensifies relational visibility, meaning that inconsistencies between professed belief and lived character can significantly influence student perception. Conversely, consistent spiritual integrity can reinforce trust and moral internalization. Much of the existing literature treats spiritual leadership either theologically or psychologically, but rarely through a combined exegetical and empirical framework. This study seeks to address that gap by reinterpreting Exodus 13:21 as a theological paradigm for classroom leadership while employing quantitative analysis to examine the measurable influence of personal competence within the specific context of SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo. By integrating biblical theology, educational theory, and empirical investigation, this research aims to determine how Christian teachers' personal competence, understood as living under divine guidance, contributes to effective classroom leadership and spiritual influence. In doing so, it proposes that wilderness guidance in Exodus provides not only a historical narrative but also a conceptual model for understanding personal competence as spiritually grounded leadership in Christian education.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative correlational design to examine the relationship between Christian teachers' personal competence and classroom leadership effectiveness, interpreted through the theological framework of Book of Exodus 13:21. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo, a primary school community consisting of 39 Christian students and 10 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher. Given the relatively small population, this research applied a saturated sampling (total sampling) technique, in which all Christian teachers ($N = 10$) were involved as primary respondents, and all 39 Christian students participated as evaluative respondents in assessing perceived classroom leadership and character modeling. This approach ensured comprehensive data representation within the institutional context. Data were collected using two structured Likert-scale questionnaires developed based on theoretical and theological constructs. The first instrument measured teachers' personal competence, operationalized through four dimensions: spiritual integrity (consistency between faith confession and behavior), emotional stability (self-regulation, patience, resilience), moral consistency (fairness, honesty, responsibility), and exemplary leadership (role modeling and relational credibility). These dimensions were derived from teacher personality competence standards in Indonesian educational regulation and synthesized with theological reflection on divine guidance in Exodus 13:21, where stability, constancy, and visible presence function as leadership metaphors. The second instrument measured classroom leadership effectiveness as perceived by students, including indicators of trust, instructional clarity, emotional safety, and spiritual influence. Instrument validity was examined through content validity using expert judgment from two Christian education scholars and one biblical studies lecturer to ensure theological coherence and pedagogical accuracy. Construct validity was analyzed using Pearson product-moment correlation for each item, with a significance level of 0.05. Reliability testing employed Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with $\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable for internal consistency. Prior to hypothesis testing, classical assumption tests were conducted, including normality

(Kolmogorov–Smirnov test) and linearity analysis to confirm the appropriateness of parametric statistical procedures. Data analysis utilized descriptive statistics to determine mean scores and standard deviations for each dimension of personal competence and classroom leadership. Inferential analysis was conducted using Pearson correlation to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables. To determine the predictive contribution of personal competence to classroom leadership effectiveness, simple linear regression analysis was performed. Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS version 25. Ethical considerations were upheld by obtaining institutional permission from the school principal, ensuring voluntary participation, and maintaining respondent confidentiality. All participants were informed that the study aimed at academic development and institutional improvement rather than individual evaluation. Through this methodological framework, the study integrates theological interpretation of divine guidance in Exodus 13:21 with empirical educational analysis, enabling a measurable assessment of how spiritually grounded personal competence contributes to effective classroom leadership within the specific context of SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The statistical analysis revealed that Christian teachers' personal competence at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo is generally categorized as high. Descriptive results indicate that the overall mean score for personal competence reached 4.32 (SD = 0.41) on a five-point Likert scale. Among its four dimensions, spiritual integrity obtained the highest mean (M = 4.45), followed by moral consistency (M = 4.36), exemplary leadership (M = 4.28), and emotional stability (M = 4.19). These findings suggest that teachers perceive themselves, and are perceived by students, as consistently demonstrating faith-aligned behavior, fairness, and responsible conduct. Emotional stability, while still high, showed relatively greater variance, indicating situational pressures that may affect emotional regulation in classroom dynamics. Student-perceived classroom leadership effectiveness also showed strong results, with an overall mean of 4.26 (SD = 0.44). Indicators of trust and emotional safety scored highest (M = 4.38), followed by instructional clarity (M = 4.22) and perceived spiritual influence (M = 4.18). These data suggest that students not only respect their teachers but also experience the classroom as a secure relational environment. Given the relatively small Christian educational community, 39 students and 10 Christian teachers, relational proximity likely intensifies character visibility. In such a setting, teacher personality is continuously observed across academic and informal interactions, reinforcing the significance of consistency between belief and behavior. Inferential analysis confirmed a statistically significant positive correlation between teachers' personal competence and classroom leadership effectiveness ($r = 0.71$, $p < 0.01$). This coefficient indicates a strong relationship according to conventional correlation benchmarks. The regression analysis further demonstrated that personal competence accounts for 50.4% ($R^2 = 0.504$) of the variance in classroom leadership effectiveness. In other words, half of the observed effectiveness in classroom leadership can be explained by variations in personal competence. The regression equation ($Y = 12.87 + 0.68X$) indicates that each unit increase in personal competence score corresponds to a 0.68 increase in classroom leadership effectiveness. These findings

empirically support the conceptual premise that personality-based attributes significantly influence pedagogical authority and relational trust. From a theological perspective, these results resonate strongly with the leadership paradigm embedded in Book of Exodus 13:21. The pillar of cloud by day and fire by night symbolizes consistency, visibility, and reliability in divine guidance. In the wilderness narrative, leadership is not authoritarian control but faithful presence. The data from SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo suggest that students respond positively when teachers embody similar constancy. Spiritual integrity, which scored highest among competence dimensions, parallels the theological motif of unwavering divine accompaniment. Just as the Israelites' trust was sustained by the visible manifestation of guidance, students' trust appears strengthened by teachers whose faith and conduct align.

Scholarly interpretation reinforces this theological reading. Brevard S. Childs argues that the wilderness tradition in Exodus reflects a pedagogy of dependence in which divine presence forms communal identity. The wilderness is a formative arena where trust replaces fear and covenant loyalty shapes character. When translated into classroom leadership, this suggests that students develop moral and spiritual stability when guided by teachers who demonstrate dependable character. Similarly, Walter Brueggemann interprets the wilderness motif as a transformative space where identity is shaped through sustained divine faithfulness. The empirical findings of this study demonstrate a comparable formative process within the microcosm of the classroom. The findings corroborate identity-based teaching models. Parker J. Palmer asserts that authentic teaching emerges from the integrity of the teacher's inner life. The strong correlation ($r = 0.71$) observed in this study statistically substantiates that proposition: students perceive leadership effectiveness not merely through instructional technique but through character authenticity. Likewise, Lee S. Shulman emphasizes that professional teaching competence integrates knowledge, pedagogy, and personal credibility. The regression result ($R^2 = 0.504$) quantitatively confirms that credibility, operationalized here as personal competence, is a major explanatory factor in leadership effectiveness. The relatively lower mean in emotional stability invites critical reflection. Although categorized as high, its comparative position suggests that contextual pressures, administrative demands, limited resources, or workload distribution among 10 Christian teachers, may influence emotional resilience. In wilderness imagery, the pillar of fire provided light specifically during the uncertainty of night. By analogy, emotional stability becomes most crucial during moments of tension or crisis. Thus, professional development programs at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo might focus on strengthening teachers' emotional regulation strategies and reflective spiritual practices to reinforce resilience.

Another significant implication concerns spiritual influence as perceived by students ($M = 4.18$). While positive, it scored slightly lower than relational trust. This may indicate that while teachers are seen as morally credible, explicit spiritual mentoring could be further strengthened. The Exodus narrative portrays divine guidance as both directional and revelatory; it not only led but also communicated covenant identity. Translating this into Christian education implies that teachers must intentionally articulate theological meaning alongside modeling behavior. Personal competence, therefore, must be

accompanied by explicit pedagogical integration of faith narratives. The study also demonstrates the importance of contextual theology in educational research. By reinterpreting Exodus 13:21 within a contemporary Indonesian primary school, the research bridges ancient narrative and modern pedagogy. Wilderness guidance becomes a metaphor for classroom leadership characterized by constancy, moral clarity, and spiritual illumination. The strong statistical association confirms that this theological metaphor has measurable pedagogical significance. 49.6% of classroom leadership effectiveness remains unexplained by personal competence alone. This suggests that other factors, such as instructional strategy, institutional culture, parental involvement, and peer dynamics, also contribute significantly. Future research may incorporate multivariate regression models to examine these additional predictors. Longitudinal studies could further explore whether sustained growth in personal competence leads to measurable improvements in student spiritual development over time. The findings substantiate the central thesis: reinterpretation of Exodus 13:21 provides not merely symbolic inspiration but an empirically supported framework for understanding Christian teachers' personal competence. At SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo, leadership effectiveness is strongly associated with spiritual integrity, moral consistency, and emotional stability, qualities that mirror the reliability of divine guidance in the wilderness. Classroom leadership, therefore, is most effective when rooted in spiritually grounded personality competence that embodies faithful presence, ethical coherence, and relational trust.

CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that Christian teachers' personal competence significantly influences classroom leadership effectiveness at SD Negeri 078546 Fadoro Ewo. The quantitative findings confirm a strong positive correlation between personal competence and classroom leadership ($r = 0.71$), with personal competence contributing 50.4% of the variance in leadership effectiveness. These results empirically validate the central thesis that spiritually grounded personality traits, spiritual integrity, moral consistency, emotional stability, and exemplary conduct, function as decisive determinants of pedagogical authority and relational trust within the classroom. The reinterpretation of Book of Exodus 13:21 provides a robust theological framework for understanding teacher leadership as guided presence rather than positional authority. The imagery of the pillar of cloud and fire symbolizes constancy, reliability, and illumination amid uncertainty. In the educational context examined, these qualities are mirrored in teachers who demonstrate coherence between faith confession and daily conduct. Students' perceptions indicate that leadership becomes credible when teachers embody stability and visible integrity, reinforcing the idea that personality competence is not peripheral but foundational to Christian educational practice. Wilderness guidance functions as a metaphor for formative leadership. Just as divine presence shaped Israel's identity in transition, teachers' consistent character shapes students' moral and spiritual development. Pedagogically, the findings align with identity-based teaching theory, confirming that effective instruction is inseparable from the teacher's inner life. In a relatively small educational community of 39 Christian students and 10 Christian teachers, relational proximity amplifies the impact of personal character. Leadership, therefore, is

continuously enacted through lived example. However, the unexplained variance (49.6%) indicates that classroom leadership effectiveness is multidimensional. While personal competence is a major predictor, other structural and pedagogical variables contribute to overall effectiveness. Future studies may expand the analytical model to include instructional competence, organizational culture, and family engagement to produce a more comprehensive explanatory framework. In conclusion, this research affirms that “from wilderness guidance to classroom leadership” is not merely a metaphorical transition but an operational paradigm. Christian teachers who live under divine guidance, manifested in integrity, emotional resilience, and moral coherence, exercise leadership that is both spiritually authentic and educationally effective. The pillar of cloud and fire thus becomes a contemporary model for understanding personal competence as faithful, visible, and transformative leadership within Christian education.

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