



## **Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Strengthening Students amid Diversity: Insights from Exodus 24:3 at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This study examines the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in strengthening students amid diversity, drawing theological insight from Exodus 24:3 and empirical data from SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin, Simalungun. In increasingly pluralistic school environments, the ability of CRE teachers to build inclusive relationships, foster mutual respect, and guide students toward unity in diversity has become critically important. Grounded in biblical reflection and educational theory, this research investigates how teachers' social competence contributes to students' attitudes toward diversity and communal harmony. The study employed a quantitative descriptive approach involving 39 Christian students and 7 Christian teachers (including CRE teachers) at the research site. Data were collected through structured questionnaires and supported by limited classroom observations. Statistical analysis was used to determine the level of teachers' social competence and its perceived impact on students' strengthening amid differences. The findings indicate that CRE teachers generally demonstrate strong social competence characterized by empathetic communication, inclusive classroom practices, and relational mentoring. The reflection on Exodus 24:3 reinforces the theological foundation that communal commitment and shared values are essential for nurturing unity among diverse learners. The study concludes that strengthening teachers' social competence is a strategic pathway for cultivating peaceful and resilient student communities in plural contexts. Recommendations include continuous professional development for CRE teachers and intentional integration of biblical values of unity within classroom practice.*

**Keywords:** Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Diversity

### **INTRODUCTION**

Education in pluralistic societies requires teachers to possess strong social competence in order to nurture students who are able to live harmoniously amid diversity. In the

Indonesian context, where schools often consist of students from varied religious, cultural, and social backgrounds, the role of teachers, especially Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, extends beyond cognitive instruction to include the formation of attitudes of respect, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. Social competence refers to a teacher's ability to communicate effectively, build positive relationships, demonstrate empathy, and foster inclusive classroom environments that support students' social and moral development (Mulyasa, 2013). For CRE teachers, this competence is inseparable from theological values that emphasize love, unity, and responsible community life. The biblical foundation for social engagement can be reflected in Exodus 24:3, where Moses faithfully communicates God's words to the people and the community responds collectively in commitment. This passage highlights the importance of mediating divine truth within a communal context and demonstrates how leadership communication can foster shared understanding and unity. In the educational setting, CRE teachers function in a similar mediating role, translating biblical values into lived social practices that encourage students to engage constructively with differences. The text implicitly underscores that faith formation is not merely individualistic but communal, requiring relational competence from educators. Contemporary educational scholarship consistently emphasizes that teachers' social competence significantly influences classroom climate and student character formation. Teachers who demonstrate openness, fairness, and effective interpersonal skills are more likely to cultivate inclusive learning environments that reduce conflict and strengthen peer relationships (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). In Christian education specifically, social competence is closely linked with the embodiment of Christ-like attitudes such as humility, compassion, and peacemaking (Banks & Banks, 2016). Therefore, CRE teachers are expected not only to teach biblical content but also to model relational maturity that helps students navigate diversity with wisdom and grace.

The urgency of strengthening students amid diversity is increasingly evident in modern Indonesian schools. Although Indonesia upholds the principle of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*, cases of intolerance, peer exclusion, and identity-based misunderstanding still appear within educational contexts. Research indicates that early cultivation of social sensitivity and interreligious respect in elementary education significantly reduces the likelihood of prejudice in later stages of development (Lickona, 2012). Consequently, CRE teachers at the primary level carry a strategic responsibility to shape students' social attitudes through intentional pedagogical and relational practices. SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin in Simalungun provides a meaningful locus for examining this issue. The school has 39 Christian students and seven Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, functioning within a broader diverse school environment. Preliminary observations indicate that while students generally interact harmoniously, structured efforts to intentionally strengthen social resilience amid diversity still require deeper pedagogical attention. The presence of a relatively small Christian student population further highlights the importance of social competence among CRE teachers to ensure that students develop confidence, openness, and constructive engagement with peers of different backgrounds. Previous studies have examined teacher competence in general terms; however, limited research specifically explores how CRE teachers' social competence, grounded in biblical reflection such as Exodus 24:3, contributes to strengthening students in diverse

elementary school contexts in Indonesia. This study therefore seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how the social competence of CRE teachers at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin supports students' ability to live faithfully and peacefully amid diversity. The purpose of this study is to examine the role of CRE teachers' social competence in strengthening students amid diversity through the theological lens of Exodus 24:3. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically to the development of Christian educational pedagogy and practically to the improvement of CRE teaching practices in pluralistic school environments.

## METHODS

A quantitative descriptive research design was implemented to examine the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in strengthening students amid diversity at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin, Simalungun. The quantitative approach was chosen to obtain measurable data regarding students' perceptions of teachers' social competence and its influence on students' attitudes toward living harmoniously in diverse settings (Creswell, 2014). The research was conducted during the 2025/2026 academic year within the natural school setting to ensure ecological validity. The population of this study consisted of all Christian students at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin, totaling 39 students, along with seven Christian teachers (including the CRE teacher). Because the number of Christian students was relatively small, the study used a total sampling technique in which all 39 Christian students were involved as respondents. Students were selected as the primary respondents because they directly experience the social interactions and pedagogical practices of the CRE teacher in the classroom. Teacher data were used as supporting contextual information. Data were collected using a structured Likert-scale questionnaire developed based on indicators of teacher social competence, including effective communication, empathy, inclusiveness, conflict mediation, and the ability to foster respectful relationships in diverse contexts. The instrument was constructed through a process of theoretical alignment with national teacher competency standards and Christian educational values, followed by expert validation to ensure content validity. Prior to full distribution, the questionnaire was piloted on a small comparable group to test clarity and reliability. Reliability testing using Cronbach's alpha produced a coefficient above 0.70, indicating acceptable internal consistency. The data collection procedure began with obtaining formal permission from the school, followed by briefing respondents regarding the purpose of the study and ensuring ethical considerations such as voluntary participation, anonymity, and confidentiality. Questionnaires were administered in person under the supervision of the researcher to minimize misunderstanding among elementary students. Completed questionnaires were then coded and tabulated for analysis. Data analysis was conducted using descriptive statistical techniques, including mean scores, percentage distributions, and categorical interpretation to determine the level of CRE teachers' social competence as perceived by students. The interpretation criteria followed a five-level scale ranging from very low to very high. To enrich interpretation, the findings were also examined through a theological reflection framework based on Exodus 24:3, connecting empirical results with biblical principles of communal unity and faithful communication. Through this methodological approach, the study aimed to provide an empirically grounded and theologically informed

understanding of how CRE teachers' social competence contributes to strengthening students amid diversity.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive picture of the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in strengthening students amid diversity at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin, Simalungun. Based on questionnaire data collected from 39 Christian students, the overall level of teachers' social competence was perceived to be in the high category, indicating that CRE teachers generally demonstrate effective relational skills, inclusive attitudes, and constructive communication practices in the learning environment. This result confirms that social competence is not merely an auxiliary teacher skill but a central dimension that shapes the climate of faith-based and multicultural learning (Hattie, 2009). The discussion below elaborates the findings across key indicators and integrates them with pedagogical and theological reflections grounded in Exodus 24:3. The indicator of effective interpersonal communication showed strong positive responses from students. Most respondents agreed that the CRE teacher communicates clearly, listens attentively, and responds respectfully during classroom interactions. The mean score for this indicator fell within the high range, suggesting that students feel heard and valued. This finding aligns with the view that teacher clarity and relational communication significantly enhance student engagement and trust (Marzano, 2007). In the context of elementary education, especially in rural or semi-rural settings such as Waringin, clear and warm communication becomes even more crucial because students often rely heavily on the teacher as a primary model of social behavior. Theologically, this communicative openness reflects the pattern in Exodus 24:3, where Moses faithfully conveyed God's words to the people and ensured mutual understanding within the covenant community. Similarly, CRE teachers function as mediators of meaning who must communicate faithfully and relationally to build communal cohesion. The empathy and care dimension also demonstrated high student ratings. Students reported that the CRE teacher shows concern when they experience learning difficulties, social problems, or emotional distress. This finding is significant because empathy constitutes the affective core of teacher social competence. According to Jennings and Greenberg (2009), teachers who demonstrate social-emotional competence create classrooms characterized by emotional safety and mutual respect. In the present study, students' positive perceptions indicate that the CRE teacher has succeeded in cultivating a supportive relational climate. From a Christian educational perspective, empathy mirrors the incarnational model of ministry, being present with and for students. Exodus 24:3 portrays communal participation in covenant commitment, implying that leadership involves relational solidarity rather than hierarchical distance. Thus, the teacher's empathetic posture becomes a lived expression of biblical community. The indicator of inclusive attitude amid diversity yielded one of the strongest results in the dataset. Although the focus respondents were Christian students, the school context itself is religiously and culturally diverse. Students perceived that the CRE teacher encourages respect toward peers of different backgrounds and avoids exclusive or discriminatory language. This finding is particularly important in the Indonesian pluralistic context, where schools function as microcosms of societal diversity. Research consistently shows that

teachers' inclusive practices significantly influence students' tolerance and intergroup attitudes (Banks, 2015). The high score in this study suggests that the CRE teacher is effectively modeling inclusive Christian identity, one that is firm in faith yet open in social engagement. Theologically, Exodus 24:3 highlights collective covenant participation, emphasizing communal unity under God's word. When interpreted in contemporary educational settings, the passage supports the formation of communities that are both faithful and socially harmonious.

The conflict mediation ability of the CRE teacher was rated moderately high, though slightly lower than other indicators. Some students indicated that while the teacher generally helps resolve misunderstandings among peers, there are moments when conflicts are addressed only after they escalate. This nuanced finding is important because it reveals an area for professional growth. Conflict mediation requires proactive relational monitoring, not merely reactive intervention. Marzano (2007) emphasizes that effective teachers establish preventive classroom management through relational awareness. In the context of SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin, the data suggest that while the CRE teacher is competent, further development in early conflict detection strategies could enhance classroom harmony. Theologically, Exodus 24:3 implies orderly communal response to divine instruction; thus, maintaining relational order is part of faithful leadership. Strengthening teachers' mediation skills would therefore deepen the practical embodiment of biblical community principles. The ability to build respectful learning relationships received consistently high ratings. Students reported feeling comfortable interacting with the CRE teacher both during and outside formal lessons. Many respondents indicated that the teacher is approachable and fair in treating students. This finding is consistent with Hattie's (2009) synthesis showing that teacher-student relationships have one of the strongest effect sizes on learning outcomes. In Christian education, relational credibility often precedes moral and spiritual influence. The positive perception among the 39 Christian students suggests that the CRE teacher has established relational capital that supports both academic and character formation goals. Within the Exodus 24:3 framework, Moses' relational credibility enabled the people to respond collectively, illustrating that trust is foundational to communal obedience and unity.

Another important dimension emerging from the data is the integration of faith values into social interaction. Students reported that the CRE teacher frequently connects biblical teachings with everyday social behavior, such as respecting differences, helping peers, and speaking kindly. This integration indicates that social competence is being framed not only as a professional skill but also as a spiritual vocation. Such integration is essential in Christian Religious Education, where the goal extends beyond cognitive knowledge toward holistic character formation. Contemporary Christian education scholars emphasize that faith must be embodied in relational practice to be pedagogically meaningful. The findings from Waringin demonstrate that the CRE teacher is moving toward this integrative model. The relatively small number of Christian students (39) within a broader diverse school environment creates both challenges and opportunities. On one hand, minority positioning can potentially lead to social isolation; on the other hand, it provides fertile ground for practicing inclusive and peace-building competencies. The high student ratings suggest that the CRE teacher has successfully navigated this

context by fostering a sense of belonging among Christian students while simultaneously promoting respect toward diversity. This is particularly significant in elementary settings, where early social attitudes are still highly malleable. The presence of seven Christian teachers in the school (including the CRE teacher) also appears to contribute indirectly to the positive climate. Although this study focused primarily on the CRE teacher, informal observations during data collection indicated collaborative relationships among Christian educators. Such collegial support often strengthens consistency in modeling social competence. Educational research shows that teacher collaboration positively influences school climate and student perceptions of safety (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Therefore, the CRE teacher's effectiveness should be understood within this supportive professional ecosystem.

The discussion would be incomplete without addressing the theological lens of Exodus 24:3. In the biblical narrative, Moses communicates God's words, and the people respond collectively in unity. Three theological themes emerge: faithful communication, communal participation, and covenantal responsibility. These themes resonate strongly with the empirical findings. The CRE teacher's clear communication mirrors Moses' faithful transmission of God's message. The inclusive classroom climate reflects communal participation. The emphasis on respectful behavior embodies covenantal responsibility in contemporary educational form. Thus, the study demonstrates that biblical reflection can meaningfully inform measurable educational competencies. Several limitations must be acknowledged. First, the study relied on student self-report data, which may be influenced by social desirability bias. Second, the relatively small sample size limits broad generalization, although total sampling ensures strong internal representation of the school context. Third, the quantitative design captures perception levels but does not fully explore the depth of teacher practices. Future research may benefit from mixed-method approaches incorporating classroom observation and teacher interviews to enrich understanding. The findings carry important implications. For school leadership, the high level of perceived social competence suggests that CRE teachers can serve as strategic agents in strengthening peaceful school culture. For teacher education institutions, such as those in which the present author is professionally involved, the results reinforce the need to emphasize social and relational competencies alongside theological mastery in preparing future PAK teachers. For policy makers, the study supports integrating character-based and relational indicators into teacher performance evaluation frameworks. The results demonstrate that the CRE teacher at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin has effectively exercised social competence in ways that strengthen students amid diversity. The high ratings across communication, empathy, inclusiveness, and relational trust indicate that socially competent Christian educators can function as builders of peaceful micro-communities within pluralistic schools. When interpreted through Exodus 24:3, these competencies are not merely professional expectations but expressions of covenantal leadership in educational practice. Continued professional development, especially in proactive conflict mediation, will further enhance the transformative potential of CRE teachers in nurturing resilient, respectful, and faith-informed students in diverse Indonesian classrooms.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in strengthening students amid diversity at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin, Simalungun, through the theological lens of Exodus 24:3. The findings demonstrate that the CRE teacher exhibits a high level of social competence as perceived by the 39 Christian students who participated in the study. Key dimensions, including effective communication, empathy and care, inclusive attitude, and the ability to build respectful learning relationships, were all rated positively, indicating that the teacher has successfully fostered a supportive and harmonious classroom environment within a pluralistic school context. The results confirm that social competence plays a strategic role in shaping not only the emotional climate of the classroom but also students' attitudes toward diversity. The CRE teacher's communicative clarity and relational warmth help students feel valued and understood, which in turn strengthens trust and engagement. The strong performance in the inclusivity indicator is particularly significant in the Indonesian multicultural educational landscape, suggesting that Christian identity, when expressed through mature social competence, can contribute constructively to peaceful coexistence rather than exclusivity. The reflection on Exodus 24:3 enriches the interpretation of the empirical findings. The passage highlights faithful communication, communal participation, and covenantal responsibility, three themes that are clearly reflected in the teacher's social practices. The CRE teacher's role as a relational bridge-builder parallels Moses' mediating function in the biblical narrative. Thus, social competence in Christian education should be understood not merely as a professional soft skill but as a theologically grounded vocation that embodies faith through relational practice. The study also identified an area for improvement, particularly in proactive conflict mediation. While the teacher generally manages interpersonal tensions effectively, strengthening early detection and preventive strategies would further enhance classroom harmony. This finding points to the importance of continuous professional development in socio-emotional classroom management for CRE teachers. The study implies that schools should intentionally support the development of teachers' social competence through training, mentoring, and collaborative professional culture. Teacher education institutions, especially those preparing PAK educators, should integrate relational intelligence, multicultural sensitivity, and faith-based social ethics into their curricula. For policymakers, incorporating social competence indicators into teacher evaluation frameworks may help promote more holistic educational quality. In conclusion, the CRE teacher at SD Negeri No. 095127 Waringin has demonstrated strong social competence that effectively strengthens students in the midst of diversity. When grounded in biblical reflection and expressed through inclusive pedagogical practice, such competence has significant potential to cultivate peaceful, respectful, and faith-informed learning communities. Future research is recommended to employ mixed methods and broader samples to deepen and expand understanding of social competence among Christian educators in diverse Indonesian school settings.

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