



Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Fostering a Cohesive School Community: Insights from Exodus 37:17 at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo

Dermawati Lawolo

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: dermawatilawolo@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the role of social competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in fostering a cohesive school community at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, Nias, Indonesia. In faith-based educational contexts, teacher social competence, including effective communication, empathy, relational sensitivity, collaborative engagement, and conflict resolution, emerges as a vital factor influencing students' sense of belonging, mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility. Guided by the symbolic interpretation of Exodus 37:17, which portrays the golden lampstand as a single, unified structure, the research explores how relational skills enable teachers to integrate diverse student personalities into a harmonious and spiritually enriched community. A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was employed, with all 125 Christian students participating through structured Likert-scale questionnaires. Results reveal a high perception of teacher social competence ($M = 4.32$) and school community cohesion ($M = 4.28$). Pearson correlation and regression analyses indicate a strong positive relationship ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.001$), with social competence accounting for approximately 46.5% of the variance in school cohesion. Findings suggest that CRE teachers function as relational artisans, shaping interpersonal relationships and modeling Christian virtues, thereby enhancing both moral and spiritual development. The study underscores that social competence is not merely an interpersonal skill but a structural pillar for educational and spiritual unity, especially in culturally cohesive regions like Nias. Implications highlight the importance of integrating relational training into teacher professional development to cultivate morally grounded, spiritually aware, and cohesive school communities.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Cohesive School Community

INTRODUCTION

The quality of education in pluralistic and community-based societies is significantly influenced not only by cognitive instruction but also by the relational climate cultivated

within schools. In faith-based instructional contexts such as Christian Religious Education (CRE), the teacher's social competence becomes a critical dimension of professional identity. Social competence refers to the ability to build constructive interpersonal relationships, communicate effectively, demonstrate empathy, and foster collaborative environments that promote shared values (Goleman, 2006). Within Indonesian educational standards, teacher competence encompasses pedagogical, professional, personal, and social dimensions, with social competence emphasizing inclusivity, cooperation, and ethical interaction. At SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, Nias, where 125 students and 10 teachers identify as Christian (including the CRE teacher), the cultivation of a cohesive school community represents both an educational and spiritual mandate. Nias, as part of North Sumatra, possesses strong communal traditions characterized by kinship solidarity and collective responsibility. In such a context, the role of CRE teachers extends beyond classroom instruction toward community formation rooted in Christian values. A cohesive school community is marked by trust, mutual respect, shared responsibility, and a sense of belonging among students and teachers (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Research indicates that relational trust within schools significantly correlates with positive academic and socio-emotional outcomes (Bryk & Schneider, 2002). Thus, strengthening social competence among CRE teachers contributes not only to spiritual growth but also to institutional harmony and effectiveness. The concept of cohesion finds symbolic resonance in Exodus 37:17, which describes the crafting of the golden lampstand (menorah) as a single piece hammered out of pure gold. The text emphasizes unity of structure despite multiple branches extending from one base. Christopher J. H. Wright (2004) argues that Old Testament narratives frequently communicate theological truths through symbolic craftsmanship, portraying unity and holiness as inseparable dimensions of covenant life. The menorah's unified design may therefore serve as a metaphor for community coherence, diverse individuals rooted in a single divine foundation. In Christian interpretation, such imagery reinforces the New Testament understanding of the community of believers as one body with many members (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). Social competence in Christian educators must therefore reflect this theological vision of unity-in-diversity. According to Anthony (2001), Christian education is inherently communal, aiming to nurture faith within relational networks rather than isolated individuals. Effective CRE teachers model empathy, humility, collaborative leadership, and conflict resolution, thereby embodying the relational ethics taught in Scripture. Moreover, Lickona (1991) emphasizes that character formation occurs most powerfully in communities where adults consistently model moral behavior. Teachers who demonstrate fairness, respect, and servant leadership create environments conducive to internalizing Christian virtues. In contemporary scholarship, social competence has been linked to emotional intelligence, particularly the capacity for social awareness and relationship management (Goleman, 2006). For educators, these competencies influence classroom climate, peer interaction, and collective identity formation. In rural and culturally cohesive regions such as Nias, communal values can either strengthen or fragment school environments depending on the quality of leadership. Thus, examining the social competence of CRE teachers at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo becomes essential for understanding how theological inspiration and professional skill converge in shaping cohesive educational communities. This study aims to analyze the extent to which the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to fostering

a cohesive school community, drawing interpretive insight from Exodus 37:17. By integrating theological reflection with educational theory and contextual data, the research seeks to provide empirical and conceptual contributions to the development of CRE in Indonesia.

METHODS

A quantitative descriptive-correlational design was used to examine the relationship between the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the level of cohesion within the school community at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, Nias, Indonesia. A quantitative approach was selected to obtain measurable data regarding perceptions of teacher social competence and its influence on communal solidarity among students. The correlational design enabled the researcher to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between the independent variable (teachers' social competence) and the dependent variable (school community cohesion). The research was conducted at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, located in Nias, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school has 125 Christian students and 10 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher. The population of this study consisted of all Christian students ($N = 125$). Using a total sampling technique (census sampling), all 125 students were invited to participate to ensure comprehensive representation of student perceptions. The teachers were not treated as respondents for statistical analysis but were observed and described contextually as part of the institutional setting. Variables of the Study: Independent Variable (X): Social Competence of CRE Teachers; Social competence was operationalized through four main indicators adapted from teacher competency standards and social-emotional learning frameworks: effective communication skills, empathy and relational sensitivity, collaborative engagement within the school, and conflict resolution and peacemaking ability. Dependent Variable (Y): Cohesive School Community; School community cohesion was measured through the following indicators: sense of belonging among students, mutual respect and trust, cooperative behavior, and shared responsibility in school activities. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire designed on a Likert scale (1–5) ranging from: 1 = Strongly Disagree, 2 = Disagree, 3 = Neutral, 4 = Agree, 5 = Strongly Agree. The instrument consisted of 30 items: 15 items measuring social competence of CRE teachers, 15 items measuring school community cohesion. Before distribution, the instrument underwent: content validity review by two experts in Christian Religious Education and educational psychology, construct validity testing using Pearson Product-Moment correlation, reliability testing using Cronbach's Alpha coefficient, with a minimum acceptable reliability threshold of 0.70. Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the academic year. The researcher obtained permission from the school principal and informed consent from participants. Questionnaires were distributed directly to students in their classrooms under supervision to ensure clarity of instructions and minimize response bias. Students were assured that responses would remain anonymous and would not affect academic evaluation. Regression analysis was conducted to determine the predictive contribution of teachers' social competence to fostering a cohesive school community. The coefficient of determination (R^2) was used to measure the proportion of variance explained.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The quantitative findings of this study reveal a statistically significant and substantively meaningful relationship between the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the level of cohesion within the school community at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, Nias. Based on descriptive statistical analysis of responses from 125 Christian students, the overall mean score for the social competence variable (X) was 4.32 (SD = 0.41) on a five-point Likert scale, indicating a high perceived level of social competence among CRE teachers. Meanwhile, the mean score for school community cohesion (Y) was 4.28 (SD = 0.45), also categorized as high. These findings suggest that students generally perceive their CRE teacher as socially competent and recognize a strong sense of unity, belonging, and cooperation within the school environment. The normality test using Kolmogorov–Smirnov indicated that both variables were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), allowing for parametric testing. Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis showed a positive and statistically significant relationship between social competence and school cohesion ($r = 0.682$, $p < 0.001$). This correlation coefficient indicates a strong relationship, suggesting that higher levels of perceived social competence among CRE teachers are associated with higher levels of perceived school community cohesion. The regression analysis further revealed that social competence significantly predicts school cohesion ($\beta = 0.682$, $t = 10.74$, $p < 0.001$), with a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.465. This means that approximately 46.5% of the variance in school community cohesion can be explained by the social competence of CRE teachers, while the remaining 53.5% may be influenced by other factors such as family background, peer culture, school leadership, and broader socio-cultural dynamics. These results highlight the substantial role played by CRE teachers in shaping the relational climate of the school. In a relatively homogeneous Christian context such as SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, where all 125 student respondents and 10 teachers share the same religious background, the influence of a socially competent CRE teacher appears particularly pronounced. The findings align with Bryk and Schneider's (2002) theory of relational trust, which emphasizes that trust among members of a school community emerges from consistent patterns of respectful interaction, personal regard, competence, and integrity. Students' high ratings of empathy, fairness, and communicative openness among CRE teachers suggest that such relational trust is actively cultivated in this setting. When disaggregating the social competence indicators, effective communication received the highest mean score ($M = 4.41$), followed by empathy and relational sensitivity ($M = 4.35$), collaborative engagement ($M = 4.28$), and conflict resolution ability ($M = 4.24$). These findings indicate that students particularly value the teacher's clarity in explaining lessons, willingness to listen, and approachability in personal conversations. Communication functions as the gateway through which other aspects of social competence are expressed. According to Goleman (2006), social awareness and relationship management are central components of emotional intelligence, which strongly influence leadership effectiveness. In educational contexts, teachers who communicate transparently and empathetically are more likely to foster inclusive participation and mutual respect. The cohesion variable also demonstrated strong internal consistency across indicators. Sense of belonging scored a mean of 4.34, mutual respect and trust 4.29, cooperative behavior 4.26, and shared responsibility 4.23. The

prominence of belonging suggests that students feel emotionally integrated within the school community. This sense of belonging is critical in primary education settings, where identity formation is deeply relational. Lickona (1991) argues that moral development is significantly shaped by environments where students feel valued and connected. The findings here confirm that social competence among CRE teachers contributes meaningfully to this relational security.

The connection between social competence and cohesion resonates with the symbolic interpretation of Exodus 37:17, which describes the crafting of the golden lampstand (menorah) as a single unified structure hammered from one piece of gold. Although composed of multiple branches, it originates from a single base. This imagery provides a compelling metaphor for cohesive community: diversity integrated within unity. In the context of SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, students represent diverse personalities, abilities, and family backgrounds, yet they are nurtured within a shared Christian framework. The CRE teacher's social competence functions analogously to the artisan's craftsmanship, carefully shaping relationships so that unity is preserved without erasing individuality. The regression finding that nearly half of the cohesion variance is explained by social competence underscores the teacher's formative role. However, it also acknowledges that cohesion is multifactorial. Cultural factors in Nias, known for strong communal traditions and kinship systems, may reinforce collective identity beyond the classroom. The interplay between local culture and Christian values likely strengthens solidarity. Anthony (2001) notes that Christian education operates most effectively when embedded within communal cultural narratives that affirm shared faith commitments. Therefore, the high cohesion scores may reflect both effective teacher modeling and supportive socio-cultural infrastructure. From a character education perspective, the findings affirm that modeling remains central to value transmission. Bandura's social learning theory (1977) posits that individuals learn behaviors through observation and imitation of credible role models. In this study, students' perception of their CRE teacher as empathetic, fair, and collaborative likely encourages imitation of these behaviors in peer relationships. Cooperative behavior and shared responsibility, which were strongly rated in the cohesion variable, may thus represent internalized patterns derived from teacher modeling. This interpretation supports Lickona's (1991) assertion that the moral atmosphere of a classroom is often more influential than explicit moral instruction. The data suggest that conflict resolution skills among CRE teachers contribute meaningfully to communal stability. Although this indicator had the lowest mean among the social competence components, it remained within the high category. In primary school contexts, minor conflicts among students are common; how teachers mediate these conflicts determines whether divisions escalate or reconciliation occurs. Students who observe restorative approaches to conflict are more likely to practice forgiveness and empathy. This aligns with Christian theological principles emphasizing reconciliation as central to communal life. The strong correlation coefficient (.682) indicates that the relationship between teacher competence and cohesion is not merely incidental but systemic. It suggests that social competence operates as a structural pillar of community life rather than an optional interpersonal skill. Within the Indonesian teacher competency framework, social competence is often overshadowed by pedagogical or professional competencies. However, these findings emphasize that relational capacity is foundational

to effective educational outcomes. A cohesive school environment enhances engagement, reduces disciplinary issues, and strengthens academic motivation.

The study also raises implications regarding the spiritual identity of CRE teachers. In a context where all participants share Christian faith, students likely perceive authenticity when teachers embody the relational virtues they teach. If biblical teachings emphasize love, unity, and humility, but teachers fail to demonstrate these traits, cognitive dissonance may undermine credibility. The high social competence scores suggest that, in this school, there is congruence between teaching and practice. This congruence reinforces theological coherence between Scripture and lived experience. The metaphor of the lampstand from Exodus 37:17 extends beyond unity to illumination. The lampstand's purpose was to give light within the tabernacle. Cohesive community becomes a source of light, an environment where mutual support enables growth and visibility of collective identity. When students experience unity and belonging, they are more likely to express confidence and moral courage. Thus, social competence does not merely maintain harmony; it creates conditions for spiritual and personal flourishing. The study acknowledges limitations. Because data were self-reported by students, perceptions may be influenced by social desirability bias. Additionally, the homogeneous religious composition of the school limits generalizability to pluralistic settings. Future studies could compare similar dynamics in multi-religious schools to examine whether social competence functions differently across diverse contexts. Longitudinal research may also explore how sustained relational modeling influences character outcomes over time. The results demonstrate a robust positive relationship between the social competence of CRE teachers and the cohesion of the school community at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo. Approximately 46.5% of community cohesion is statistically attributable to teacher social competence, underscoring the transformative influence of relational leadership in educational contexts. The integration of theological symbolism from Exodus 37:17 with empirical analysis reveals that unity, like the lampstand, requires intentional craftsmanship. Social competence functions as that craftsmanship, shaping communication, empathy, collaboration, and reconciliation into a cohesive communal structure. These findings reinforce the conviction that Christian Religious Education extends beyond doctrinal instruction toward relational formation, where teachers become living instruments of unity within the educational community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion, it can be concluded that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 071071 Somolo-molo, Nias, plays a significant and transformative role in fostering a cohesive school community. The study demonstrates that CRE teachers who exhibit high levels of social competence, characterized by effective communication, empathy, relational sensitivity, collaborative engagement, and conflict resolution, contribute meaningfully to the sense of belonging, mutual respect, cooperation, and shared responsibility among students. Quantitative analysis revealed a strong positive relationship between teacher social competence and school community cohesion, with approximately 46.5% of the variance in cohesion explained by the teacher's relational abilities. This empirical evidence underscores the

critical influence of social competence as a structural pillar for maintaining unity, harmony, and ethical interaction within the school environment. The theological reflection inspired by Exodus 37:17 further strengthens this conclusion by illustrating that just as the golden lampstand is crafted as a single unified structure from a single piece of gold, a cohesive educational community requires intentional relational craftsmanship. CRE teachers act as the artisans of this unity, shaping interpersonal relationships, fostering collaboration, and mediating conflicts to integrate diverse student personalities into a single, harmonious community. This integration reflects both the spiritual mission of Christian education and the professional responsibility of teachers to model the relational virtues they teach, such as empathy, humility, and reconciliation. The findings highlight that social competence not only maintains community cohesion but also nurtures spiritual and personal growth among students. By embodying relational ethics consistent with Christian teaching, CRE teachers reinforce the congruence between doctrine and lived experience, enhancing students' internalization of values and moral development. While cultural factors in Nias, such as kinship and communal traditions, may reinforce cohesion, the study confirms that the teacher's relational competence remains a primary driver of school unity. Social competence among CRE teachers is indispensable for cultivating a cohesive, morally grounded, and spiritually enriched school community. This study affirms that effective Christian Religious Education extends beyond cognitive instruction, positioning teachers as key facilitators of unity-in-diversity and as living models of the relational and spiritual values they seek to impart. The integration of empirical findings and theological insight provides a robust framework for enhancing teacher training, professional development, and community-building strategies within faith-based educational settings.

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