



Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in the Perspective of Character Formation Based on Philippians 4:8: A Study at SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the relationship between the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and character formation based on Philippians 4:8 at SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola, South Nias. In a school community consisting of 115 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher, character education plays a strategic role in nurturing moral and spiritual development during formative elementary years. Using a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, data were collected through structured Likert-scale questionnaires measuring pedagogical competence, covering understanding of student characteristics, lesson planning aligned with biblical values, interactive instructional strategies, classroom management, use of instructional media, and reflective evaluation, and students' character formation, reflected in truthfulness, noble conduct, moral discernment, purity of thought, and appreciation of what is excellent and praiseworthy. The findings reveal a strong and statistically significant positive correlation between pedagogical competence and character formation ($r = 0.741$, $p < 0.001$). Regression analysis indicates that pedagogical competence accounts for 54.9% of the variance in students' character formation ($R^2 = 0.549$), demonstrating a substantial predictive contribution. The results suggest that character formation grounded in Philippians 4:8 is effectively cultivated when biblical principles are intentionally integrated into pedagogical practice. The study concludes that strengthening pedagogical competence is essential for holistic Christian education, as effective instructional design and reflective learning environments significantly shape students' moral orientation, disciplined thinking, and virtuous behavior.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Character Formation

INTRODUCTION

Character formation has become a central concern in contemporary education, particularly in contexts where moral degradation, digital influence, and global cultural

shifts challenge traditional value systems. In Christian education, character formation is not merely a complementary goal but an essential purpose grounded in biblical teaching. Christian Religious Education (CRE) seeks to shape students not only cognitively but also morally and spiritually. The Apostle Paul's exhortation in Philippians 4:8, "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things" provides a theological framework for holistic character development. This verse emphasizes cognitive orientation, moral discernment, and intentional reflection as pathways to virtuous living. Pedagogical competence plays a decisive role in translating biblical principles into effective classroom practice. Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's ability to understand learners' characteristics, design meaningful learning experiences, implement effective instructional strategies, and conduct reflective assessment. According to educational theory, effective pedagogy influences not only academic outcomes but also attitudes, values, and habits of mind. In Christian education, pedagogy must integrate faith and learning, ensuring that biblical truth informs both content and method. When teachers intentionally design learning activities that cultivate reflection on truth, goodness, and excellence, they contribute to students' moral imagination and ethical reasoning. At SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola, South Nias, there are 115 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher. This relatively cohesive faith community provides a meaningful context for examining how pedagogical competence contributes to character formation. In elementary education, formative years are particularly critical for internalizing moral values. Children at this developmental stage are highly responsive to modeling, structured guidance, and repetitive reinforcement. Therefore, the CRE teacher's pedagogical decisions, lesson planning, classroom management, instructional media, questioning techniques, and assessment methods, can significantly shape students' cognitive focus and behavioral patterns. Philippians 4:8 emphasizes disciplined thinking as a foundation for virtuous action. Cognitive psychology supports this biblical insight by highlighting the connection between thought patterns and behavior. When educators intentionally direct students' attention toward what is true and praiseworthy, they nurture moral habits. Character formation, therefore, is not accidental but cultivated through structured reflection, discussion, and experiential learning. Pedagogical competence enables teachers to transform scriptural teaching into interactive learning experiences rather than abstract moral instruction. Research in character education suggests that moral development is strengthened when values are integrated across curriculum and reinforced consistently through classroom culture. Teachers who employ dialogical methods, collaborative learning, contextual examples, and reflective evaluation create environments conducive to internalizing virtues. In Christian pedagogy, this integration requires theological depth and methodological skill. Without pedagogical competence, even sound theological content may fail to engage students meaningfully. Conversely, pedagogical excellence rooted in biblical worldview fosters intellectual and spiritual growth simultaneously. The cultural context of South Nias, which values communal harmony and respect, offers fertile ground for character-based education. However, modernization and digital exposure increasingly introduce competing value systems. Schools, therefore, function as strategic spaces for guiding moral discernment. CRE teachers equipped with strong pedagogical competence can contextualize Philippians 4:8 within students' daily experiences, helping them

evaluate media, peer interactions, and personal decisions through a biblical lens. This study aims to analyze the relationship between the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers and character formation among Christian students at SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola. By integrating theological reflection on Philippians 4:8 with empirical educational research, this investigation seeks to demonstrate that effective pedagogy significantly contributes to shaping students' moral orientation and virtuous thinking patterns. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insight and practical implications for strengthening Christian education in elementary school contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a quantitative descriptive-correlational research design to examine the relationship between the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and students' character formation based on Philippians 4:8 at SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola, South Nias. The research was conducted during the second semester of the 2025 academic year. The population consisted of 115 Christian students enrolled at the school. Because the population size was manageable and accessible, total sampling (census sampling) was applied, meaning all 115 students participated as respondents. Although there are 13 Christian teachers at the school, including the CRE teacher, student perceptions were used as the primary data source to measure pedagogical competence and its impact on character formation. The independent variable (X) was pedagogical competence of the CRE teacher. This variable was operationalized through measurable indicators: understanding student characteristics,) lesson planning aligned with biblical values, implementation of interactive and contextual learning strategies, classroom management that supports moral reflection, use of instructional media, and evaluation and feedback practices. The dependent variable (Y) was students' character formation based on Philippians 4:8, operationalized through indicators such as commitment to truthfulness, noble conduct, moral discernment, purity of thought, appreciation of positive values, and consistency in practicing praiseworthy behavior. Data were collected using a structured questionnaire consisting of 32 Likert-scale items (16 items per variable) with five response options ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The instrument was developed based on theoretical frameworks of pedagogical competence and biblical character formation. Content validity was evaluated by two experts in Christian education and educational methodology to ensure conceptual accuracy and theological relevance. Construct validity was tested using Pearson Product-Moment correlation, and reliability was assessed using Cronbach's Alpha, with coefficients above 0.70 indicating acceptable internal consistency. Data collection procedures included obtaining formal permission from the school principal and explaining the voluntary nature of participation to students. Questionnaires were administered in classrooms under supervision to ensure clarity and completeness of responses. Data analysis involved descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) to determine general trends, normality testing using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test, Pearson correlation analysis to examine the strength and direction of the relationship between variables, and simple linear regression analysis to determine predictive contribution (R^2). All statistical analyses were conducted using a 0.05 significance level.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate a strong and statistically significant relationship between the pedagogical competence of the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher and the character formation of students based on Philippians 4:8 at SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola, South Nias. Data were collected from 115 Christian students using validated Likert-scale instruments measuring two main variables: pedagogical competence (X) and character formation (Y). Descriptive statistical analysis indicates that students perceive the pedagogical competence of the CRE teacher at a high level, with an overall mean score of 4.36 (SD = 0.34) on a five-point scale. Similarly, the level of student character formation based on Philippians 4:8 was categorized as high, with an overall mean score of 4.29 (SD = 0.38). These descriptive findings suggest that the instructional practices implemented by the CRE teacher are positively aligned with the cultivation of virtuous thinking and moral behavior among students. Normality testing using the Kolmogorov–Smirnov test confirmed that both variables were normally distributed ($p > 0.05$), allowing for parametric statistical analysis. Pearson Product-Moment correlation analysis revealed a correlation coefficient of $r = 0.741$ ($p < 0.001$), indicating a strong, positive, and statistically significant relationship between pedagogical competence and character formation. This means that higher levels of pedagogical competence are associated with stronger internalization of virtues reflected in Philippians 4:8. Furthermore, simple linear regression analysis produced a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.549, indicating that approximately 54.9% of the variance in students' character formation can be explained by the pedagogical competence of the CRE teacher. This represents a substantial contribution within educational research, highlighting the strategic role of pedagogy in moral development. The remaining 45.1% of variance may be influenced by other factors such as family upbringing, peer relationships, church involvement, community culture, and media exposure. A deeper analysis of the pedagogical competence indicators reveals important dimensions contributing to character formation. The highest-rated indicator was understanding student characteristics ($M = 4.42$). Students reported that the CRE teacher recognizes individual differences, adapts teaching approaches to diverse learning needs, and demonstrates sensitivity to emotional and social dynamics. This personalized approach fosters a safe learning environment in which students feel valued. When learners feel respected and understood, they are more receptive to moral guidance. This relational attentiveness aligns with Philippians 4:8, which emphasizes focusing on what is noble and admirable; such focus is cultivated in environments marked by empathy and respect. The second highest indicator was the implementation of interactive and contextual learning strategies ($M = 4.39$). Students reported that lessons frequently include group discussions, storytelling, role-playing, and real-life applications of biblical values. These methods transform abstract scriptural concepts into lived experiences. For example, when discussing "whatever is true," the teacher encourages students to reflect on honesty in daily interactions and digital communication. When addressing "whatever is pure," classroom dialogue extends to responsible media consumption and respectful peer relationships. This pedagogical strategy bridges biblical text and contemporary reality, strengthening moral reasoning and practical application. Lesson planning aligned with biblical values ($M = 4.35$) also received strong evaluations. Students observed that

learning objectives clearly integrate scriptural principles with academic content. Rather than isolating moral instruction into brief exhortations, the teacher intentionally designs thematic units that consistently return to the virtues listed in Philippians 4:8. Such coherence ensures reinforcement and repetition, two critical factors in character formation. Educational psychology emphasizes that values become internalized through sustained exposure and reflective practice. Therefore, systematic lesson planning contributes directly to shaping students' cognitive orientation toward truth and excellence.

Classroom management supporting moral reflection ($M = 4.33$) was another significant dimension. Students reported that disciplinary practices are restorative rather than punitive. When conflicts arise, the teacher guides students to evaluate their actions through the lens of biblical virtues: Was the behavior truthful? Was it noble? Was it praiseworthy? This reflective discipline model transforms mistakes into learning opportunities, reinforcing moral discernment rather than fear-based compliance. Such an approach is consistent with character education theory, which advocates constructive moral dialogue instead of authoritarian control. The use of instructional media ($M = 4.28$) and evaluation practices ($M = 4.26$) also contributed positively, though with slightly lower means. Students indicated that multimedia resources, biblical narratives, and visual aids help them understand moral concepts more concretely. Meanwhile, evaluation practices include reflective journals and behavioral observation in addition to written tests. This diversified assessment acknowledges that character formation involves affective and behavioral dimensions beyond cognitive recall. Turning to the dependent variable, students' character formation was measured across several indicators derived from Philippians 4:8. The highest mean score was observed in commitment to truthfulness ($M = 4.34$). Students reported greater awareness of honesty in communication and academic work. Instances of plagiarism or cheating were reportedly minimal, and students expressed personal responsibility in maintaining academic integrity. This suggests that pedagogical emphasis on "whatever is true" has practical behavioral outcomes.

Noble conduct ($M = 4.31$) and moral discernment ($M = 4.30$) also received high ratings. Students described increased sensitivity to distinguishing right from wrong in peer interactions. Empathy toward classmates, respectful speech, and willingness to apologize were frequently observed behaviors. The cultivation of moral discernment indicates cognitive engagement with ethical reasoning, not merely superficial compliance. Philippians 4:8 calls believers to deliberate reflection on excellence; the data suggest that such reflection is occurring within this educational context. Purity of thought and behavior ($M = 4.27$) and appreciation of admirable qualities ($M = 4.25$) likewise demonstrated positive trends. Students reported efforts to avoid harmful language, negative gossip, and inappropriate media influences. They also expressed admiration for positive role models, including teachers and peers who demonstrate kindness and responsibility. These attitudes reflect internalization of biblical virtues as standards for evaluating both self and others. The regression analysis confirmed that pedagogical competence significantly predicts character formation ($\beta = 0.741$, $t = 13.02$, $p < 0.001$). Practically, this finding implies that improvements in instructional design, classroom management, and reflective assessment are likely to produce measurable enhancements in student character

outcomes. In a school context with 115 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, the CRE teacher's pedagogical influence interacts with a broader supportive environment. However, the substantial R^2 value underscores that intentional pedagogy remains a primary driver. These findings affirm that Philippians 4:8 functions as both cognitive directive and pedagogical principle. Paul's emphasis on disciplined thinking corresponds with educational strategies that cultivate reflective judgment. When teachers design learning experiences encouraging students to evaluate ideas and behaviors according to standards of truth and excellence, they operationalize biblical instruction. Pedagogy becomes an instrument of spiritual formation. South Nias emphasizes communal respect and social harmony. The integration of biblical virtues within this cultural framework strengthens moral continuity while addressing contemporary challenges such as digital exposure and peer pressure. The study suggests that pedagogical competence enables contextualization without compromising theological integrity. By connecting scripture to local experiences, the CRE teacher reinforces both faith identity and cultural values.

These findings also resonate with social learning theory and constructivist perspectives. Students do not passively absorb values; they construct meaning through interaction and reflection. Interactive strategies reported in this study, dialogue, collaborative tasks, contextual case studies, facilitate this construction process. Moreover, when pedagogical competence includes modeling virtues through consistent teacher behavior, students observe coherence between instruction and practice, reinforcing credibility. The reliance on self-reported questionnaires introduces potential social desirability bias. Additionally, the study's cross-sectional design prevents long-term causal inference. Future research could incorporate longitudinal tracking to examine sustained character development or comparative analysis across multiple schools to enhance generalizability. The evidence strongly supports the central thesis: pedagogical competence significantly contributes to character formation grounded in Philippians 4:8. The integration of structured lesson planning, contextual learning strategies, restorative discipline, and reflective evaluation creates a comprehensive framework for moral education. The high explanatory power (54.9%) demonstrates that educational method is not neutral; it shapes moral orientation and behavioral patterns. The results and discussion reveal that effective pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education serves as a powerful catalyst for character formation. At SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola, the intentional integration of biblical virtues within instructional practice has fostered students' commitment to truth, noble conduct, moral discernment, and appreciation of excellence. Philippians 4:8 thus becomes more than a scriptural exhortation, it becomes a lived educational paradigm guiding cognitive focus, relational ethics, and personal responsibility among elementary students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers significantly influences character formation among students at SDN 075104 Sifaoroasi Mola, South Nias, as grounded in Philippians 4:8. The statistical findings demonstrate a strong and positive correlation between pedagogical competence and students' internalization of virtues such as truthfulness, noble conduct, moral discernment, purity of thought, and appreciation of what is excellent and praiseworthy.

With more than half of the variance in character formation explained by pedagogical competence, the results confirm that instructional quality is a decisive factor in shaping students' moral orientation. The study highlights that character formation is not achieved merely through doctrinal explanation but through intentional pedagogical design. Understanding student characteristics, implementing contextual and interactive learning strategies, practicing restorative classroom management, and integrating reflective evaluation collectively create a learning environment that nurtures disciplined thinking in accordance with Philippians 4:8. When biblical principles are embedded in lesson planning and consistently reinforced through classroom culture, students develop habits of reflection and ethical decision-making that extend beyond academic settings. In the context of an elementary school community with 115 Christian students and 13 Christian teachers, the influence of pedagogical competence becomes especially significant. The formative stage of child development amplifies the impact of structured guidance and consistent moral reinforcement. Therefore, strengthening pedagogical competence through continuous professional development, reflective practice, and theological integration is essential for sustaining holistic Christian education. This research affirms that effective pedagogy rooted in biblical truth transforms Philippians 4:8 from a scriptural mandate into an educational reality, shaping students' cognitive focus, moral behavior, and character identity in enduring ways.

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