



From the Fruit of the Spirit to the Classroom: Reimagining Christian Pedagogical Competence among Christian Religious Education Teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (CRE) requires teachers to integrate pedagogical expertise with Christian character and spiritual formation. This study explores Christian pedagogical competence among CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru, Indonesia, through a theological reading of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23. Employing a qualitative case study design, the study involved two CRE teachers serving 122 Christian students. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and analysis of instructional documents. The data were analyzed thematically by identifying patterns of pedagogical practice and interpreting them through the theological dimensions of Galatians 5. The findings reveal four interconnected dimensions of Christian pedagogical competence: relational teaching grounded in love, patience and gentleness in classroom interaction, faithfulness and responsibility in instructional practice, and self-control in classroom management. These findings indicate that pedagogical competence in Christian education extends beyond technical abilities such as lesson planning, instructional delivery, and assessment. It also involves the teacher's character, relational disposition, and capacity to embody Christian values in everyday educational interactions. The study proposes a Spirit-shaped pedagogy framework in which the fruit of the Spirit informs teachers' dispositions, pedagogical practices, and the formation of a Christian learning environment. The study contributes to Christian education scholarship by connecting Pauline theology with contemporary teacher competence and offers implications for teacher education, professional development, and Christian pedagogical formation.

Keywords: *Fruit of the Spirit, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence has become a central concern in contemporary education because the quality of teaching depends not only on teachers' mastery of subject matter but also on their ability to transform knowledge into meaningful learning experiences. Shulman

(1987) argues that effective teaching involves a complex knowledge base that integrates subject matter knowledge, pedagogical reasoning, instructional transformation, and reflection. Similarly, teacher quality has been associated with student learning outcomes, while teacher preparation and continuing professional development remain important components of educational quality (Darling-Hammond, 2000). In this context, pedagogical competence should not be reduced to technical classroom skills; rather, it encompasses the capacity to understand learners, design appropriate learning experiences, facilitate meaningful interaction, and evaluate learning responsively. This concern becomes particularly significant in Christian Religious Education (CRE), where the purpose of teaching extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge. Christian education seeks to connect biblical understanding with the formation of faith, character, identity, and lived practice. Consequently, CRE teachers are expected to integrate theological knowledge with pedagogical expertise so that biblical teachings can be interpreted meaningfully within students' everyday contexts. Recent scholarship has emphasized that pedagogical competence in CRE requires reconsideration because different pedagogical models imply different understandings of the purpose of Christian education, the role of teachers, and the dispositions expected from learners (Dami et al., 2023). A recent Indonesian study similarly demonstrates that pedagogical competence among CRE teachers involves planning, implementation, and assessment while also carrying a responsibility for students' holistic development (Ariefin et al., 2025).

The theological dimension of CRE pedagogy, however, remains insufficiently explored when teacher competence is discussed primarily through educational frameworks. Existing studies have examined pedagogical competence, differentiated learning, curriculum implementation, and professional challenges among CRE teachers, but there remains an important question concerning how biblical theology itself can provide a conceptual foundation for pedagogical competence. Research on Indonesian CRE teachers has identified challenges involving technological competence, student-related problems, curriculum implementation, and limited professional development opportunities (Panggabean et al., 2025). These challenges indicate that strengthening teacher competence requires more than procedural training; it also calls for a deeper theological understanding of what it means to teach as a Christian educator. One potentially significant theological resource is Paul's Letter to the Galatians, particularly Galatians 5:22-23. Paul describes the fruit of the Spirit as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Rather than presenting these qualities merely as an ethical checklist, the passage situates them within Paul's broader contrast between life according to the flesh and life according to the Spirit (Gal. 5:16-25). Thus, the fruit of the Spirit can be understood as an expression of a transformed mode of life shaped by the Spirit. Kopiczko (2020), in a theological and catechetical analysis, argues that the fruit of the Spirit represents characteristics associated with mature Christian faith and that Christian education has a role in helping believers embody these qualities. Likewise, Belo (2020) connects Galatians 5:22-23 with Christian Religious Education and argues that the fruit of the Spirit should become visible in the transformative outcomes of Christian learning.

This theological perspective opens an important possibility for rethinking Christian pedagogical competence. If the teacher is understood not merely as an instructional technician but as a Christian educator whose teaching embodies the values of the gospel, then qualities such as patience, gentleness, faithfulness, self-control, and love may influence how teachers communicate, respond to students, manage classrooms, resolve conflicts, and facilitate learning. Such an approach also resonates with emerging scholarship that distinguishes conventional or neoliberal pedagogies from approaches such as the pedagogy of shalom, in which the purposes and relationships of Christian education are understood more holistically (Dami et al., 2023). The present study therefore examines the pedagogical practices of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru, where 122 Christian students are served by two Christian Religious Education teachers. The study focuses on how pedagogical competence is manifested in classroom planning, instructional interaction, classroom management, learner engagement, and formative assessment, while interpreting these practices through the theological lens of Galatians 5:22-23. The study seeks to answer two questions: How is Christian pedagogical competence manifested in the teaching practices of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru? and how can the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23 inform a theological framework for Christian pedagogical competence? By bringing educational theory into dialogue with Pauline theology, this study proposes that pedagogical competence in Christian education should be understood not only as what teachers know and do, but also as the kind of character and spiritual disposition they embody in the classroom. Such an approach offers a basis for reimagining teacher competence as a form of Spirit-shaped pedagogy, in which professional teaching practice and Christian formation are mutually integrated.

METHODS

A qualitative case study design to explore how Christian pedagogical competence is enacted by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and how the theological concept of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians informs their pedagogical practices. A qualitative approach was selected because the study sought to understand teachers' experiences, meanings, interactions, and classroom practices within their natural educational context rather than to measure predetermined variables statistically. Qualitative inquiry is particularly appropriate when researchers seek to examine complex phenomena through participants' perspectives and contextual interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The case study strategy was chosen because the research focused intensively on a bounded educational setting, namely SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru. Case study research enables researchers to investigate contemporary phenomena within their real-life contexts and to integrate evidence from multiple sources (Yin, 2018). The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was selected purposively because it provides Christian Religious Education to a substantial group of Christian students and offers a relevant context for examining the relationship between Christian faith formation and pedagogical practice. The school has 122 Christian students and two Christian Religious Education teachers. Both CRE teachers were selected as the primary participants because they represent the complete population of Christian

Religious Education teachers at the research site. Their involvement enabled the study to examine pedagogical practices comprehensively rather than selecting only a portion of the available teachers. The 122 Christian students were positioned primarily as the educational context and supporting source of evidence, particularly for understanding classroom interaction, teacher-student relationships, instructional engagement, and students' perceptions of teachers' pedagogical practices. The study therefore did not seek statistical generalization from the student population but aimed for contextual and analytical understanding of the case.

Semi-structured interviews with the two CRE teachers explored their understanding of pedagogical competence, approaches to lesson planning, instructional strategies, classroom management, student engagement, assessment practices, and the ways Christian values influenced their teaching. Classroom observations were conducted to examine how these competencies were enacted in actual teaching situations, particularly in relation to the values represented by Galatians 5:22-23: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. The use of multiple sources allowed the researchers to compare teachers' stated perspectives with observable practices and documentary evidence, strengthening the credibility of the findings. Yin (2018) emphasizes the importance of using multiple sources of evidence in case study research. Data were analyzed thematically through an iterative process of data familiarization, coding, categorization, theme development, interpretation, and synthesis. Initial codes were derived both inductively from participants' accounts and deductively from the conceptual dimensions of Christian pedagogical competence and Galatians 5:22-23. Particular attention was given to how theological dispositions such as love, patience, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control appeared in teachers' instructional decisions and interactions with students. The analysis subsequently connected empirical themes with the theological framework of Galatians to develop an interpretive account of Spirit-shaped pedagogy. The emerging framework was constructed by comparing interview findings, classroom observations, and documentary evidence rather than imposing theological categories on the data from the outset. The researchers also maintained reflexive awareness of their own theological and educational assumptions throughout data interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of interviews, classroom observations, and instructional documents identified four interconnected dimensions of Christian pedagogical competence among the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru: relational teaching grounded in love, patience and gentleness in classroom interaction, faithfulness and responsibility in instructional practice, and self-control and reflective classroom management. These findings suggest that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education cannot be adequately understood as a technical capacity to plan, teach, and assess. Rather, it involves the integration of pedagogical knowledge with Christian character and spiritual disposition. This interpretation is particularly significant because

recent research on Indonesian CRE teachers has identified challenges not only in instructional competence but also in responding to students' problems, adapting to curriculum changes, and developing professionally (Tobing et al., 2025).

The first major finding concerns the relational character of the teachers' pedagogical practice. Classroom observations indicated that teaching was not conducted merely as a process of transferring biblical information. The teachers attempted to establish personal relationships with students, create opportunities for dialogue, and respond to students' individual circumstances. This relational orientation was particularly visible when teachers connected biblical themes with students' everyday experiences, family relationships, friendships, and challenges encountered at school. This finding can be interpreted through Galatians 5:13-14, where Paul connects Christian freedom with serving one another through love. Love, therefore, is not merely an internal religious feeling but is expressed through concrete relationships. When applied to Christian pedagogy, this theological principle suggests that the teacher's relationship with students constitutes an important part of the pedagogical process. The implication is significant. A teacher may possess adequate knowledge of biblical content and instructional methods but still fail to embody Christian pedagogy if students experience the classroom as impersonal, judgmental, or emotionally unsafe. Conversely, when teachers approach students with respect and concern, learning becomes relational rather than merely instructional. This supports the broader argument that religious education should help learners develop meaningful responses to contemporary social and moral challenges rather than merely acquire religious information. Recent scholarship in *British Journal of Religious Education* similarly emphasizes the importance of meaningful and impactful religious learning and notes that teachers require appropriate professional and pedagogical competence to address students' problems effectively. Within the context of SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru, love therefore emerges as a pedagogical disposition. It influences how teachers listen to students, communicate correction, respond to mistakes, and encourage participation. In this sense, Galatians provides an interpretive framework through which pedagogical competence can be understood as relational practice.

Patience and Gentleness in Classroom Interaction

A second finding relates to the teachers' use of patience and gentleness when dealing with differences in students' learning abilities, motivation, and classroom behaviour. Classroom observations indicated that not all students responded to instruction in the same way. Some required repeated explanations, additional encouragement, or different approaches before they became actively involved in learning. Rather than interpreting these differences simply as disciplinary problems, the teachers demonstrated attempts to accommodate students through explanation, encouragement, and personal communication. Such practices are particularly relevant to Galatians 5:22-23, where patience and gentleness appear among the fruit of the Spirit. The significance of this finding lies in the distinction between classroom control and Christian classroom management. Conventional classroom management may emphasize compliance, order, and behavioural regulation. Christian pedagogy certainly requires an orderly learning environment, but the Galatians-based perspective introduces another dimension:

students are not merely subjects who must obey classroom rules; they are persons whose development requires patient guidance.

Gentleness should therefore not be interpreted as permissiveness. Rather, it represents a manner of exercising pedagogical authority that preserves students' dignity while maintaining educational expectations. A teacher can correct inappropriate behaviour without humiliating the learner, establish boundaries without hostility, and provide criticism while maintaining relational trust. This finding also responds to concerns identified in recent Indonesian research concerning teachers' difficulties in addressing student-related problems. Tobing et al. (2025) found that CRE teachers encountered difficulties dealing with students' behavioural and motivational challenges, alongside limitations in technological competence, curriculum implementation, and professional development. The present case suggests that addressing such challenges requires not only additional instructional techniques but also the formation of dispositions such as patience and gentleness.

Faithfulness and Responsibility in Instructional Practice

The third theme concerns faithfulness, particularly the teachers' consistency in carrying out their instructional responsibilities. The analysis of teaching practices and instructional documentation indicates that Christian pedagogy involves preparation, implementation, and evaluation. Teachers' responsibility extends from preparing learning materials to ensuring that biblical content is communicated in ways appropriate to students' developmental levels. Faithfulness in this context can be connected to the Pauline understanding of Christian life in Galatians 5:22-23. It should not be reduced to personal religious devotion; it can also be interpreted as reliability in fulfilling responsibilities toward others. For teachers, this means being dependable in preparation, fair in dealing with students, consistent in instructional expectations, and committed to students' learning and spiritual development. This interpretation broadens the conventional understanding of pedagogical competence. Teacher competence is frequently assessed through observable instructional activities-lesson planning, teaching strategies, classroom management, and assessment. However, a Christian theological framework adds a question concerning the disposition with which these activities are performed.

A teacher may technically prepare a lesson plan because institutional regulations require it. A Christian teacher, however, may understand preparation as an expression of responsibility toward learners. The distinction is subtle but important. The former emphasizes compliance; the latter emphasizes vocation and faithfulness. The finding also resonates with current scholarship concerning religious teacher preparation in Indonesia. Recent research on preservice religious teachers suggests that professional preparation must address both technical competence and the development of professional character, including adaptability and the ability to respond to student diversity. Thus, Christian teacher competence should integrate technical preparation with a deeper sense of responsibility toward learners.

Self-Control and Reflective Classroom Management

The fourth theme concerns self-control, which is especially relevant to the emotional demands of teaching. Teachers regularly encounter situations involving student distraction, misunderstanding, lack of motivation, interpersonal conflict, or differences in learning pace. In such circumstances, pedagogical competence requires the ability to regulate one's own emotional responses before responding pedagogically to students. Galatians 5:22-23 places self-control within the fruit produced by the Spirit. The concept therefore provides a useful theological lens for understanding teacher behaviour. Self-control does not mean emotional suppression. Instead, it can be understood as the capacity to govern one's response so that pedagogical decisions remain consistent with Christian values. In the observed context, this principle becomes particularly important because the teacher possesses institutional authority while the students occupy a comparatively dependent position. Unregulated frustration can easily become verbal humiliation, excessive punishment, or relational distance. Spirit-shaped pedagogy instead calls teachers to respond in ways that preserve both authority and compassion. This finding contributes to the understanding of teacher professionalism by suggesting that emotional and spiritual formation are pedagogically consequential. The teacher's internal disposition becomes visible through classroom behaviour. Consequently, teacher formation should not focus exclusively on instructional strategies but should also cultivate reflective capacities, emotional maturity, and ethical responsibility.

From the Fruit of the Spirit to a Galatians-Based Pedagogical Framework

Taken together, the findings suggest an emerging framework in which the fruit of the Spirit functions as a theological foundation for Christian pedagogical competence. Within this framework, love informs relational engagement; patience shapes responses to learning differences; gentleness influences correction and classroom communication; faithfulness supports instructional responsibility; and self-control regulates the teacher's emotional and behavioural responses. The framework is consistent with theological scholarship that understands the fruit of the Spirit not as a random collection of virtues but as characteristics associated with Christian transformation and spiritual formation. Porter and Wang (2021), for example, identify Galatians 5 as describing observable effects of walking in the Spirit and connect the fruit of the Spirit with Christian sanctification. More recent theological work likewise argues that the ninefold fruit should be considered in an integrated manner as a representation of Christian character and spiritual formation (Issler, 2025). The educational significance of this framework is that it moves the discussion of teacher competence from performance to formation. The central question is no longer simply, "Can the teacher teach effectively?" but also, "What kind of person is the teacher becoming, and how does that character shape the learning environment?" This distinction is particularly relevant to Christian Religious Education. The teacher is simultaneously an educator and a representative of the Christian faith within the school environment. Consequently, a discrepancy between the teacher's instructional message and interpersonal conduct can weaken the formative purpose of Christian education. Conversely, when pedagogical practice reflects love, patience, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control, the classroom itself becomes a context in which Christian values are not merely discussed but experienced.

The central contribution of this study is therefore the proposition that Christian pedagogical competence should be conceptualized as Spirit-shaped professional practice. This does not replace established pedagogical competencies. Rather, it provides a theological foundation for how those competencies are enacted. The findings indicate that pedagogical competence has at least three mutually connected layers. The first is technical competence, involving planning, instructional strategies, assessment, and classroom organization. The second is relational competence, involving communication, empathy, student engagement, and conflict management. The third is formational competence, involving the teacher's character and spiritual dispositions. The Galatians-based framework places these three layers in relationship. Technical competence determines what the teacher can do; relational competence shapes how the teacher interacts with learners; and spiritual formation influences the character with which those competencies are exercised. This proposition is particularly important in contemporary religious education. Recent scholarship emphasizes that religious education teachers need to help students develop skills and attitudes for navigating complex social realities, while teacher competence and institutional support remain essential conditions for meaningful learning. The findings from SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru suggest that Christian pedagogical competence can contribute to this goal by creating a classroom culture characterized by relational trust, patience, respectful communication, responsibility, and emotional self-regulation.

The framework also has implications for teacher education and professional development. Professional development programs for CRE teachers should not be limited to curriculum, technology, assessment, and teaching methodology. They could incorporate structured reflection on biblical texts, spiritual formation, ethical decision-making, relational pedagogy, and classroom situations requiring patience, gentleness, or self-control. Such integration would allow professional development to address both the competence and the character of the Christian teacher. Importantly, the findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that Galatians 5:22-23 provides a direct pedagogical manual. Paul's discussion concerns life in the Spirit within the Christian community rather than classroom methodology. The framework developed in this study is therefore an interpretive theological-educational application, not a claim that Paul explicitly formulated a theory of teacher competence. This distinction strengthens the scholarly validity of the argument by respecting the historical and theological context of Galatians while exploring its implications for contemporary Christian education. The case of SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru demonstrates that the fruit of the Spirit can provide a productive theological vocabulary for understanding Christian pedagogical practice. The movement is from biblical formation to teacher disposition, from teacher disposition to pedagogical practice, and from pedagogical practice to the learning environment. In this sense, the "fruit" of the Spirit moves from the biblical text into the classroom, not as a simplified list of virtues, but as a theological framework for understanding the formation of teachers who teach with competence, character, and Christian purpose.

CONCLUSION

This study has explored Christian pedagogical competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 2 Kutalimbaru through the theological lens of the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22-23. Based on the qualitative analysis of teachers' experiences, classroom practices, and instructional documentation, the study demonstrates that pedagogical competence in Christian education extends beyond technical teaching abilities. It involves the integration of pedagogical knowledge, relational practices, professional responsibility, and Christian character. In this sense, the competence of a Christian Religious Education teacher is not determined solely by how effectively the teacher delivers instructional content, but also by how consistently Christian values are embodied through everyday pedagogical interactions. The findings indicate four central dimensions of Spirit-shaped pedagogical practice. First, love provides the relational foundation for teaching by encouraging teachers to recognize students as persons who require acceptance, attention, guidance, and meaningful engagement. Second, patience and gentleness shape teachers' responses to differences in students' abilities, behaviour, motivation, and learning needs. These qualities allow teachers to exercise pedagogical authority without sacrificing students' dignity. Third, faithfulness is reflected in teachers' commitment to preparation, instructional responsibility, consistency, and concern for students' development. Fourth, self-control enables teachers to regulate emotional responses and respond constructively to challenging classroom situations. These dimensions demonstrate that the fruit of the Spirit can function as an interpretive framework for understanding how Christian character becomes visible through pedagogical practice.

The principal contribution of this study is the proposed concept of Spirit-shaped pedagogy, which positions the fruit of the Spirit as a theological foundation for Christian pedagogical competence. The framework moves from the theological vision of life in the Spirit in Galatians toward teachers' personal dispositions, pedagogical practices, and ultimately the formation of a Christian learning environment. This perspective complements conventional understandings of teacher competence by emphasizing that effective Christian teaching requires not only knowledge and skills but also character and spiritual maturity. The study also has practical implications for the preparation and professional development of CRE teachers. Teacher education institutions, churches, and educational authorities may consider integrating biblical-theological reflection, spiritual formation, relational pedagogy, emotional regulation, and ethical decision-making into professional development programs. Such an approach could help teachers develop competencies that are simultaneously pedagogical and formational. This study is limited by its focus on a single school and two Christian Religious Education teachers. Therefore, its findings should be understood as a contextual case rather than statistically generalizable evidence. Future research could examine the proposed Galatians-based framework across multiple schools, regions, and educational contexts using comparative qualitative or mixed-method designs. Empirical studies could also investigate whether Spirit-shaped pedagogical competence is associated with student engagement, classroom climate, character development, and religious learning outcomes. Such research would further test and refine the emerging framework and contribute to a broader international

conversation concerning the relationship between teacher competence, spiritual formation, and Christian education.

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