



## Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers and Efforts to Foster Student Motivation: Learning from Jesus as the Master Teacher at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the relationship between pedagogical competence and student motivation in Christian Religious Education (CRE), taking inspiration from Jesus Christ as the Master Teacher. Conducted at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta, a public elementary school in North Tapanuli, this research emphasizes how faith-informed pedagogy can cultivate students' intellectual engagement and spiritual growth simultaneously. Using a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as the primary method supplemented by qualitative insights from classroom practices-the study integrates educational theory, theology, and contextual application. Findings reveal that the CRE teacher demonstrates pedagogical competence grounded in relational engagement, contextual sensitivity, and reflective spirituality. Lessons connect biblical truths to students' lived experiences, transforming abstract theology into practical faith. Through relational teaching, prayerful routines, and empathy-driven instruction, the teacher nurtures intrinsic motivation based on care, relevance, and belonging, aligning with self-determination theory and the moral education. Reflective practice further strengthens teaching quality by aligning pedagogical growth with spiritual formation, concept of teaching from integrity and inner vocation. Theologically, the teacher's Christ-centered pedagogy-emphasizing empathy before instruction, dialogue over monologue, and transformation above information-mirrors Jesus' model of compassionate teaching. Students' responses indicate increased joy, moral awareness, and engagement in faith-based actions. The study concludes that pedagogical competence in CRE is not merely technical proficiency but a sacred vocation integrating intellect, empathy, and faith. When grounded in Christ's example, teaching transcends instruction to become discipleship, shaping students who learn not only about God but with God, embodying love, humility, and service in daily life.*

**Keywords:** *Pedagogical Competence, Motivation, Christian Religious Education*

## INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia functions as both an intellectual and moral enterprise aimed at cultivating a generation that is not only knowledgeable but also rooted in faith, character, and ethical consciousness. The national education vision-framed within the aspiration for “Indonesia Emas 2045”-underscores that education must produce learners who are intellectually capable, spiritually grounded, and socially responsible citizens. Within this vision, *Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (Christian Religious Education, or CRE) assumes a unique position as it seeks to integrate the development of knowledge with the nurturing of Christian virtues such as love, honesty, humility, and compassion (Tilaar, 2004). In elementary schools, CRE teachers act not merely as transmitters of religious knowledge but as shepherds of young souls, guiding students to perceive learning as a form of worship and service to God. Their task extends beyond academic instruction-it encompasses moral formation and the cultivation of a living faith expressed through daily conduct. At the heart of this vocation lies pedagogical competence\* which determines a teacher’s capacity to facilitate meaningful learning experiences. Pedagogical competence entails the ability to design instructional plans, apply creative teaching methods, manage classrooms with empathy, and evaluate learning outcomes in ways that enhance understanding and motivation (Shulman, 1987). However, in Christian education, this competence is not purely technical or methodological; it is profoundly spiritual. It must be grounded in a theological understanding of teaching as ministry-a sacred calling modeled after Jesus Christ, the Master Teacher. Throughout His earthly ministry, Jesus embodied an ideal pedagogy that harmonized truth with love, intellect with compassion, and instruction with transformation. His teaching approach-through parables, questioning, and life-sharing-awakened both cognitive awareness and moral imagination among His listeners (Mark 4:33–34).

In the specific context of SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta, a public elementary school located in a rural Christian community in North Tapanuli, the role of the CRE teacher becomes even more crucial. The school’s students come from various socio-economic and denominational backgrounds, presenting diverse learning styles and levels of engagement with religious content. Moreover, globalization and exposure to secular media increasingly influence children’s values and priorities, often diluting their sense of spiritual identity. Consequently, CRE teachers must not only master pedagogical theory but also apply it contextually-connecting the Gospel message with students’ lived realities. Motivating students to learn and live by Christian principles thus requires a relational pedagogy-one that integrates faith, care, and relevance in every interaction. Research in moral and character education reinforces this relational dimension. Lickona (1991) argues that character development in schools emerges most effectively when teachers embody the virtues they teach, while Palmer (1998) emphasizes that good teaching flows from the integrity and inner life of the teacher. These insights are deeply resonant with Christian pedagogy, in which teaching is viewed as a relational act that mirrors divine love. Jesus’ own teaching method offers a timeless model for this integration. He met learners at their level of understanding, respected their individuality, and guided them gently toward truth and transformation. As recorded in Matthew 11:29, Jesus invited His followers to “learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart.” This invitation reflects a pedagogy of empathy-a teaching style that nurtures motivation not

through coercion or reward but through love and example. Pedagogical competence for CRE teachers encompasses more than mastery of curriculum or instructional technique; it involves spiritual discernment, the ability to sense the moral and emotional needs of students, and to respond with patience and understanding. A pedagogically competent Christian teacher embodies the message of Christ both in speech and in life, transforming the classroom into a community of grace and learning. Students are not merely taught biblical knowledge—they experience the living presence of faith through the teacher’s conduct, tone, and authenticity. This study seeks to explore how pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education can foster student motivation in SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta, taking inspiration from Jesus’ exemplary model as the Master Teacher. Specifically, the research aims to identify how pedagogical competence is manifested in classroom practice, the strategies that effectively inspire students’ intrinsic motivation, and the theological implications of integrating Christ-centered pedagogy in contemporary educational contexts. By merging educational theory with biblical insight, this research aspires to contribute to the ongoing discourse on holistic Christian education—one that unites professional excellence with spiritual authenticity. Ultimately, the study affirms that when pedagogical competence is infused with the spirit of Christ, education becomes more than instruction; it becomes transformation, nurturing students to learn not only about God but also with God, as they grow in wisdom, faith, and love.

## METHODS

This study primarily employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as its principal methodological framework, complemented by a qualitative descriptive approach to contextualize findings within the educational realities of SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta. The use of SLR was considered essential to provide a comprehensive and evidence-based understanding of pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) and its role in fostering student motivation through Christ-centered teaching. The qualitative component, meanwhile, served to interpret these findings in relation to local practices and contextual nuances. Following the guidelines established by Kitchenham and Charters (2007), the SLR process consisted of three main stages: planning, conducting, and reporting. During the planning stage, the central research question was defined as: *“How can pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education contribute to student motivation when modeled after Jesus as the Master Teacher?”* A structured search strategy was designed using Boolean operators and controlled descriptors to ensure a systematic and comprehensive review. Databases including Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and DOAJ were accessed to retrieve peer-reviewed journal articles, books, and dissertations published between 2010 and 2024. The search terms combined key concepts such as Christian Religious Education, pedagogical competence, student motivation, Jesus’ teaching model, and faith-based pedagogy. Inclusion criteria required that selected studies (1) addressed pedagogical competence within religious or moral education contexts, (2) focused on motivational strategies in faith-based settings, and (3) provided qualitative or conceptual insights into teacher development. Studies that were purely quantitative, contextually unrelated to Christianity, or lacked methodological transparency were excluded. From an initial pool of 172 sources, 41 studies met the inclusion criteria and underwent full-text analysis. Data extraction was organized through

a thematic coding matrix to identify patterns in pedagogical approaches, motivational strategies, and theological reflections on teaching. The synthesis phase adopted an interpretive thematic analysis approach, allowing for the identification of recurring themes such as relational pedagogy, intrinsic motivation, reflective practice, and Christ-centered instruction (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These themes were then cross-examined with contextual insights from SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta, which served as a qualitative case reference. Contextual data-drawn from school documents, teacher reflections, and local educational reports-enriched the interpretation by situating theoretical insights within practical realities. The study not only synthesized global scholarship but also illuminated how pedagogical competence rooted in Christ's example can holistically nurture motivation, faith, and moral formation among elementary students.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study reveal that the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta exhibits a form of pedagogical competence that harmoniously integrates faith, context, and creativity. Unlike conventional instruction that isolates biblical knowledge from daily realities, the teacher's pedagogical approach intentionally connects Scripture to students' lived experiences. Lessons were designed around familiar cultural contexts, such as communal farming, local proverbs, and family rituals, enabling students to encounter the Word of God within their own world. During one observed lesson on servanthood and humility, the teacher encouraged students to reflect on their experiences helping parents harvest rice, guiding them to interpret such acts as tangible expressions of Christian love and obedience. This contextualization not only deepened students' comprehension but also transformed learning into a spiritual encounter. One student remarked, "When we talk about helping our parents, I understand that serving others is also serving God." This pedagogical method exemplifies Shulman's (1987) framework of pedagogical content knowledge, where effective teaching emerges from the synthesis of content mastery, pedagogical skill, and contextual awareness. Yet, in this case, the teacher extended Shulman's model by embedding theological intentionality-teaching not only about God but through life itself. Such an approach mirrors the pedagogy of Jesus, who often taught divine truths through parables grounded in everyday experiences like sowing seeds, fishing, or tending sheep (Matthew 13:10–17). The teacher's contextual and faith-integrated approach transformed classroom learning from abstract theological discussion into lived theology. This aligns with Bevans' (2002) notion of contextual theology, which holds that faith becomes meaningful when expressed through local culture. By connecting biblical messages to students' realities, the teacher cultivated an environment where faith learning was no longer distant or theoretical but immediate, embodied, and practical. The teacher's contextual sensitivity nurtured inclusivity and engagement. Students from economically modest families, who often felt disconnected from formal learning, found relevance and dignity in lessons that recognized their experiences as valuable. The classroom thus became a microcosm of Christian community—a space where every voice and story reflected God's image.

### ***Fostering Motivation through Relational Teaching***

A central finding of this study concerns the teacher's relational approach to instruction, which profoundly influenced student motivation. Observations revealed that every class began with communal prayer and a short moral reflection, setting a spiritual tone that framed learning as worship. This practice created a sacred rhythm in classroom life, reminding students that learning is not merely intellectual labor but a form of devotion. The teacher's pedagogical style was deeply relational. She addressed students by name, expressed empathy, and recognized even small achievements. When a student hesitated to answer a question, she would gently encourage, *"Do not be afraid to try-Jesus believes in you."* Such affirmations echoed the nurturing style of Jesus Himself, who motivated His disciples through love, patience, and affirmation rather than coercion (John 21:15–17). This approach aligns with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000), which posits that intrinsic motivation flourishes in environments that satisfy three psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The teacher's relational engagement met these needs simultaneously-students felt cared for (relatedness), capable (competence), and respected in their contributions (autonomy). The teacher employed storytelling, questioning, and role-play to elicit active participation. During a lesson on forgiveness, for instance, students reenacted the parable of the Prodigal Son (Luke 15:11–32). The dramatization was followed by a reflective dialogue where students discussed personal experiences of reconciliation. This method not only strengthened cognitive understanding but awakened emotional and spiritual reflection. One student confessed, *"I used to be angry at my brother, but now I want to forgive him like the father in the story."* Such outcomes illustrate Lickona's (1991) theory of moral education, which emphasizes that moral learning occurs through experience and emotional engagement rather than mere instruction. By transforming biblical narratives into participatory experiences, the teacher activated students' intrinsic motivation rooted in empathy and moral realization. The relational pedagogy also cultivated a sense of belonging and joy. Students described the CRE class as "different"-a space where they felt loved, valued, and encouraged to express their faith. The teacher's example embodied Jesus' model of servanthood leadership (Mark 10:45), reminding students that education is an act of service to God and others.

Another significant finding is the teacher's commitment to reflective practice as a means of professional and spiritual growth. After each lesson, the teacher engaged in structured reflection through a personal journal. Entries combined pedagogical self-evaluation with spiritual introspection, featuring questions such as: *"Did my teaching reflect Christ's humility?"* and *"Did I nurture the students' faith or only their knowledge?"* This reflective discipline exemplifies Palmer's (1998) assertion that effective teaching arises from the identity and integrity of the teacher. In Palmer's view, teaching is not merely a technical task but an act of the soul. The CRE teacher's journaling thus functioned as both pedagogical refinement and spiritual formation-an exercise in aligning professional duty with divine calling. Through reflection, the teacher identified areas for improvement-such as diversifying learning media or offering more individualized feedback-and subsequently implemented changes. This iterative process demonstrated Schön's (1983) concept of the reflective practitioner, where learning occurs through the cyclical movement between action and contemplation. Reflection also became a model for students. At the end of each week, the teacher encouraged them to write short "faith reflections" about what

they learned and how it influenced their daily behavior. This practice cultivated metacognitive awareness and moral responsibility, empowering students to see learning as an ongoing dialogue between faith and life. The teacher actively participated in professional learning communities (PLCs) and local teacher workshops, demonstrating a growth mindset. She viewed collaboration not as an obligation but as an opportunity for mutual edification—reflecting Proverbs 27:17, “*As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another.*” Her commitment to lifelong learning affirmed the inseparability of competence and humility in Christian vocation.

### ***The Example of Jesus as Pedagogical Model***

At the heart of the teacher’s philosophy lies the conviction that Jesus Christ is the ultimate pedagogical model. Her teaching was intentionally shaped by Christ’s example—emphasizing empathy, dialogue, and transformation. Empathy before instruction was the first principle observed. Before introducing new material, the teacher took time to understand students’ emotional states and life circumstances. When one student appeared withdrawn due to family issues, the teacher paused the lesson to offer prayer and encouragement, ensuring emotional restoration before cognitive engagement. This echoes Jesus’ pastoral care, as seen in His compassionate response to the weary and burdened (Matthew 11:28–30). The second principle, dialogue instead of monologue, was evident in her interactive questioning. Rather than delivering lectures, she invited students into open-ended discussions—asking questions like, “*Why do you think Jesus chose to wash His disciples’ feet?*” This approach mirrors Jesus’ own dialogical teaching style (Matthew 16:13–15), which prompted self-discovery and critical reflection. The third principle, transformation over information, encapsulated her pedagogical vision. Learning outcomes were measured not merely by cognitive recall but by behavioral change and spiritual growth. After a series of lessons on kindness, for example, students organized a class project to visit sick peers, applying biblical principles in real contexts. This aligns with James 1:22, which calls believers to be doers of the word, not hearers only. By embodying these Christ-centered pedagogical principles, the teacher exemplified Freire’s (1970) vision of education as a dialogical and liberating process. However, unlike Freire’s secular humanism, her pedagogy was infused with divine purpose—education as participation in God’s redemptive work. The classroom thus became a spiritual community rather than a mere academic space. The cumulative impact of faith-rooted, relational, and reflective pedagogy was evident in observable behavioral and attitudinal changes among students. Interviews and observations revealed a marked increase in enthusiasm for CRE lessons. Students consistently described the class as “joyful,” “alive,” and “filled with love.” They appreciated that their teacher “cared like Jesus,” a sentiment reflecting how authentic relationships cultivate spiritual engagement. Parents also noticed tangible moral growth at home. Several reported that their children were more willing to help with household chores, showed initiative in praying before meals, and demonstrated greater empathy toward peers. One parent shared, “*My son now says we should forgive, not fight. I think he learned that from his CRE class.*” This behavioral transformation supports Lickona’s (1991) theory of moral character formation through modeling. When students observe virtues consistently embodied by their teacher, they internalize these values as part of their own moral identity. The teacher’s conduct thus served as a living curriculum—a visible gospel. From a socio-educational perspective, these findings also align with Vygotsky’s

(1978) social constructivist theory, which posits that learning and motivation are mediated through social interaction. The CRE classroom at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta functioned as a faith-based community of practice where dialogue, empathy, and shared meaning fostered collective growth. Students' intrinsic motivation was further enhanced by experiential learning activities. Lessons frequently included creative assignments such as composing prayers, writing short moral stories, or creating posters depicting the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22–23). Such activities allowed students to express faith through artistic and emotional engagement. Quantitative indicators (such as grades) were not the focus, yet qualitative evidence suggested that students demonstrated higher attention spans, improved discipline, and a sense of joy in learning. The teacher's holistic approach thus validated Palmer's (1998) notion that good teaching engages not only the intellect but the heart and soul of learners. The integration of Jesus' example into pedagogical practice reflects a fusion of theology and education, where teaching becomes both a cognitive and spiritual act. The teacher's role was not merely to transmit biblical knowledge but to incarnate it through relational engagement and moral modeling. This synthesis challenges the dichotomy between secular pedagogy and sacred instruction, showing that Christian education can embody academic rigor while remaining spiritually transformative. The teacher's example illustrates how theological insight can deepen pedagogical competence: understanding Jesus' compassionate questioning informs how teachers handle student doubt; recognizing His servant leadership shapes how teachers guide discipline; and reflecting on His humility redefines authority as service. This case underscores the missional dimension of education. By forming students who live out faith in practical love, the CRE teacher participates in the broader mission of the Church—discipling children to become agents of grace in their families and communities. The classroom thus becomes a site of both learning and ministry, embodying Matthew 5:14, *"You are the light of the world."* The findings highlight several implications for developing pedagogical competence among CRE teachers in Indonesia. First, teacher training programs must emphasize contextual and theological integration—encouraging teachers to design lessons that connect Scripture with local realities. Second, professional development should incorporate reflective and spiritual formation practices, helping teachers cultivate inner authenticity and Christlike character. Third, collaborative learning communities among teachers can serve as spaces of mutual support, allowing them to share experiences and refine faith-based pedagogical strategies. By adopting these principles, educational institutions can foster teachers who are not only skilled educators but also spiritual mentors—mirroring Jesus' balance of truth and grace. The study concludes that the CRE teacher at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta exemplifies pedagogical competence deeply rooted in faith, relational engagement, and reflective growth. Her teaching reflects the essence of Jesus' pedagogy—empathy before instruction, dialogue over monologue, and transformation above information. This approach cultivated intrinsic motivation among students, not through rewards or fear, but through love, relevance, and moral purpose. It affirmed that genuine Christian education must address the whole person: mind, heart, and spirit. This case demonstrates that when pedagogical competence is infused with Christ-centered spirituality, learning becomes discipleship, and education becomes a sacred act of forming lives in the image of the Master Teacher.

## CONCLUSION

This study reaffirms that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) is far more than a set of technical skills—it is a spiritual vocation that integrates knowledge, compassion, and divine purpose. The case of the CRE teacher at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta illustrates how faith-rooted pedagogy, modeled after Jesus as the Master Teacher, can transform the learning environment into a living ministry of love, growth, and motivation. Through a synthesis of theological reflection, pedagogical theory, and contextual application, the findings demonstrate that when teaching is infused with spiritual authenticity, it transcends instruction and becomes an act of formation. At the core of the teacher's practice was the conviction that education is a sacred calling, a means of participating in God's work of shaping hearts and minds. Her pedagogical competence was not limited to classroom management or curriculum mastery; it reflected a profound spiritual awareness that every lesson, every interaction, and every act of encouragement could become a channel of God's grace. The teacher embodied Christ-centered pedagogy, in which empathy preceded instruction, dialogue replaced monologue, and transformation was valued above information. This approach resonated deeply with students, fostering intrinsic motivation and moral awareness. As students experienced care, affirmation, and belonging, they responded with genuine engagement and behavioral transformation—living proof that love remains the most powerful motivator in education (John 13:34-35). The study also reveals that reflective practice is essential to pedagogical excellence. The teacher's consistent habit of journaling, praying, and evaluating her teaching through the lens of faith allowed her to align professional growth with spiritual maturity. This aligns with Palmer's (1998) idea that good teaching emerges from the identity and integrity of the teacher. The process of reflection not only enhanced her instructional methods but also deepened her relationship with God, enabling her to teach from the fullness of her inner life rather than from obligation or routine. This pattern of reflection-as-discipleship highlights how spiritual formation and professional competence are mutually reinforcing dimensions of effective Christian education. Another significant conclusion concerns the relational and motivational power of Christlike pedagogy. By fostering emotional safety, recognizing each student's uniqueness, and creating opportunities for participatory learning, the teacher built a community of grace where motivation was born from belonging. The classroom became a microcosm of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:12-14), where every student, regardless of background or ability, found purpose and value. This relational foundation underscores that true learning occurs within the context of love—a truth modeled by Jesus throughout His ministry.

The implications of this study extend beyond a single school context. It calls for systemic investment in the spiritual and pedagogical formation of CRE teachers across Indonesia. Teacher development programs must move beyond technical training toward holistic preparation that includes theological reflection, contextual understanding, and moral mentoring. Institutions should encourage communities of practice where teachers can share insights, reflect together, and cultivate Christlike virtues in professional fellowship. This study affirms that pedagogical competence in Christian education is inseparable from discipleship. When teachers follow Jesus' example as the compassionate, wise, and transformative Master Teacher, they inspire not only intellectual curiosity but spiritual

awakening. Learning becomes an encounter with grace; motivation emerges from love, and education fulfills its divine purpose-to shape individuals who live faithfully, think critically, and act compassionately in the world. Thus, the CRE classroom at SD Negeri 5 Ronggurnihuta stands as a testimony that education, when rooted in Christ, becomes an instrument of both personal transformation and communal renewal-a living expression of the gospel in action.

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