



The Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Love and Forgiveness Based Education at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in implementing love- and forgiveness-based education, drawing on both a systematic literature review (SLR) and qualitative field insights from SDN 106803 Pematang Johar, Indonesia. In an era marked by moral fragmentation and spiritual fatigue, the study emphasizes that CRE must transcend cognitive transmission to become a transformative process of character formation grounded in the theology of divine love. The SLR, conducted following PRISMA guidelines, analyzed 35 peer-reviewed studies published between 2013 and 2024, focusing on teacher competence, affective-spiritual pedagogy, and relational learning. Complementing this, qualitative triangulation through interviews, observations, and document analysis provided contextual validation. The findings reveal that effective CRE pedagogy integrates theological depth, pedagogical creativity, and emotional intelligence. Teachers who embody Christ-like compassion and forgiveness create classrooms as “healing spaces,” where moral formation unfolds through dialogue, reflection, and reconciliation. The study also identifies a persistent gap between teachers’ theological understanding and their ability to design measurable affective learning outcomes. Reflective journaling, storytelling, and dramatization emerged as key strategies fostering moral awareness and empathy among students. Despite these strengths, systemic barriers-such as limited pastoral training and lack of institutional frameworks-hinder sustained implementation. The research concludes that love- and forgiveness-based education represents both a pedagogical innovation and a theological necessity, demanding professional formation that unites theology, psychology, and educational practice. When CRE teachers embody divine love in teaching, education becomes a sacred act of restoration-forming not merely informed minds but compassionate hearts attuned to grace.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Forgiveness

INTRODUCTION

Education in the twenty-first century faces not only technological and methodological challenges but also profound moral and spiritual crises. Children today grow up in an age saturated with information but impoverished in meaning-surrounded by endless noise yet deprived of authentic values. Within this paradoxical landscape, Christian Religious Education (CRE) emerges as an essential pillar for shaping character and nurturing holistic human development. CRE, or *Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK)*, transcends the boundaries of doctrinal instruction; it is fundamentally a transformative process aimed at forming the whole person in the image of Christ-who embodies love and forgiveness. Education, when grounded in the theology of divine love, ceases to be a mere intellectual exercise and becomes an act of spiritual restoration, guiding learners toward self-awareness, empathy, and reconciliation with others (Groome, 1998). In the midst of modernity's individualistic ethos, love has often been reduced to fleeting emotion or moral rhetoric, stripped of its sacrificial and relational essence. Similarly, forgiveness is frequently misunderstood as a passive tolerance rather than an active, restorative decision to release resentment and restore broken relationships. From a Christian perspective, both virtues are transformative acts that reflect divine grace in human relationships. As written in Luke 6:36-37, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful... Forgive, and you will be forgiven.*" Love and forgiveness thus function as dual dimensions of spiritual maturity-vertical in relation to God and horizontal in relation to fellow human beings. They form the ethical and theological foundation upon which Christian education must be built (Lewis, 2019). Within this framework, the Christian Religious Education teacher stands as both an educator and a spiritual shepherd. The competence of a CRE teacher cannot be measured solely by theological knowledge or pedagogical skill, but by the ability to embody and communicate these values authentically in classroom life. A competent teacher integrates the cognitive, affective, and behavioral domains of learning, cultivating not only students' understanding but also their attitudes and actions. As affirmed in Indonesia's Law No. 14 of 2005 on Teachers and Lecturers, teacher competence comprises four essential dimensions: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. Yet for CRE teachers, a fifth dimension-the spiritual-serves as the axis that gives coherence and purpose to all others (Arifianto, 2021). The spiritually competent teacher teaches not merely from theory, but from transformation; not from authority, but from authenticity.

The context of SD Negeri 106803 Pematang Johar, a public elementary school situated within a socially and culturally plural environment, underscores the urgency of this spiritual-ethical pedagogy. The school community reflects a microcosm of Indonesia's diversity, where students come from varied family backgrounds, moral frameworks, and behavioral patterns. In such a setting, the CRE teacher becomes a bridge of reconciliation-called to mediate differences, model compassion, and foster a classroom culture rooted in mutual respect and empathy. Love-based and forgiveness-centered education is not only relevant but essential for nurturing peace, tolerance, and moral resilience among students in early formative years (Nash, 2014). Empirical studies examining how CRE teachers design and implement love- and forgiveness-based pedagogy in state elementary schools remain scarce. Most existing research on religious education focuses on doctrinal transmission or moral instruction, often neglecting the transformative

potential of relational and affective dimensions (Astuti & Sihombing, 2022). This study seeks to fill that gap by exploring the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers in developing and implementing instructional strategies that cultivate love and forgiveness among students at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar. Specifically, it investigates how teachers conceptualize these values, integrate them into lesson planning and classroom interaction, and evaluate their impact on students' moral and spiritual development. By examining concrete teaching practices and lived experiences, this research aims to contribute to the ongoing discourse on humanistic and transformative Christian pedagogy. It posits that when love and forgiveness become the foundation of classroom instruction, education transcends cognitive transfer and becomes a sacred encounter—where hearts are healed, relationships restored, and faith embodied in everyday actions. Such an approach aligns with Palmer's (1998) vision of teaching as an act of integrity, where the teacher's inner life resonates with their educational mission. Thus, this study not only enriches pedagogical discourse but also reaffirms that the ultimate goal of Christian education is not merely to produce knowledgeable students, but to form compassionate disciples who live out the message of Christ in a fragmented world.

METHODS

This study employed a systematic literature review (SLR) complemented by a qualitative descriptive approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence in implementing love and forgiveness-based education at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar. The SLR approach was chosen for its methodological rigor in synthesizing existing scholarly works, identifying theoretical gaps, and mapping empirical findings related to pedagogical competence, Christian values integration, and affective-spiritual education (Snyder, 2019). Through systematic review, this study situates local classroom practices within the broader global discourse on moral and theological pedagogy, ensuring both contextual depth and academic validity. The review process followed the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) framework (Moher et al., 2009), which consists of four main stages: (1) identification, (2) screening, (3) eligibility, and (4) inclusion. In the identification stage, databases such as Scopus, ERIC, SpringerLink, and Google Scholar were searched using keywords including Christian Religious Education, teacher competence, love-based education, forgiveness pedagogy, and spiritual character formation. Articles published between 2013 and 2024 were selected to ensure relevance to current educational and theological developments. During the screening stage, duplicates and non-research papers (such as editorials or opinion essays) were excluded. The eligibility stage involved a critical reading of abstracts and methodologies to confirm that studies explicitly addressed pedagogical or moral-spiritual competence within Christian or religious education contexts. Finally, 35 peer-reviewed articles met the inclusion criteria and were subjected to thematic synthesis. Thematic analysis was carried out using the Miles and Huberman (2014) interactive model—comprising data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data reduction involved coding major themes emerging from the reviewed literature, such as pedagogical competence, affective formation, relational teaching, and Christ-centered pedagogy. Data were displayed through synthesized matrices that mapped the relationships between theoretical constructs, teaching strategies, and outcomes in moral and spiritual education. The final stage, conclusion

drawing and verification, identified recurring insights on how CRE teachers can integrate love and forgiveness in their instructional design and classroom management. To enhance the interpretive richness of the SLR, the researcher incorporated qualitative triangulation through limited field engagement at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar. This included in-depth interviews with one CRE teacher who teaches grades IV–VI, the school principal, and a small group of students, serving as contextual informants to validate findings derived from the literature. Observations of classroom practices and analysis of lesson plans (RPP), student portfolios, and teacher reflection notes provided supporting evidence of how theoretical concepts manifest in real educational settings. The combined use of systematic literature review and qualitative description allowed the study to bridge theory and practice effectively. The SLR component ensured that findings were grounded in established academic knowledge, while the qualitative insights captured the lived realities and moral nuances of classroom life. The researcher maintained reflexivity, recognizing personal theological and pedagogical perspectives that might influence interpretation (Creswell & Poth, 2018). This methodological design enabled a multidimensional understanding of CRE teachers' competence in fostering love and forgiveness in a pluralistic educational context. By integrating systematic review with contextual qualitative inquiry, the study not only synthesizes existing knowledge but also situates it within the authentic lived experience of faith-based education in Indonesia's public school setting.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The systematic literature review (SLR) revealed that teacher competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly in designing love- and forgiveness-based pedagogy, is characterized by the integration of theological insight, pedagogical creativity, and emotional intelligence. The data obtained from both literature synthesis and field observations at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar confirm that the CRE teacher demonstrates a theologically grounded understanding of love and forgiveness as central themes of Christian education. This aligns with the global discourse emphasizing that authentic Christian pedagogy must move beyond doctrinal transmission toward moral and affective transformation (Groome, 1998; Tisdell, 2017). The teacher's comprehension of love as "the supreme law of Christ" and forgiveness as "the heart of the Gospel" echoes key theological insights found in works such as Lewis (1960) and Nouwen (2006), who define forgiveness as the path toward inner freedom and relational healing. This understanding arises from the teacher's spiritual formation, regular engagement with Scripture, and participation in church-based training programs. However, the SLR indicates that similar patterns are observed globally-where teachers possess rich theological convictions but struggle to translate them into pedagogical frameworks (Watson & Thompson, 2020). Document analysis of lesson plans (RPP) showed that while biblical concepts of love and forgiveness are frequently mentioned as moral ideals, they are seldom articulated as explicit learning objectives or measurable competencies. Learning indicators primarily address cognitive outcomes, such as recalling biblical narratives or explaining moral commands, rather than affective or behavioral transformation. This mirrors findings from educational research indicating that moral and spiritual goals are often marginalized in formal curricula, which tend to prioritize knowledge-based assessment (Hay & Nye, 2006;

Miller, 2019). The gap between theological understanding and pedagogical design highlights the need for a more integrated approach to curriculum planning, where affective-spiritual goals are intentionally embedded into learning outcomes and assessment criteria. According to the TPACK framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006), pedagogical competence in religious education should encompass not only content and pedagogy but also spiritual sensitivity and contextual adaptability. At SDN 106803 Pematang Johar, this integration remains partial, suggesting that teacher competence development must involve both theological deepening and instructional design training.

Classroom observations demonstrated that the CRE teacher actively sought to embody Christian love and forgiveness in her daily interactions with students. Lessons typically began with prayer and devotional readings centered on compassion, humility, and reconciliation. This aligns with findings from the reviewed literature, where embodied teaching-the teacher's moral presence and relational empathy-was identified as a critical factor in shaping students' affective learning (Palmer, 1998; Sockett, 2012). When conflicts arose among students, the teacher employed a restorative rather than punitive approach. Instead of imposing sanctions, she guided students through dialogue and reconciliation, encouraging mutual understanding and joint prayer. Such practices correspond with the restorative pedagogy model found in studies by Zehr (2015) and Tutu (2000), which view forgiveness as a form of moral reconstruction that fosters communal harmony. Students responded positively to this relational approach. Observational data and teacher reflections indicate that the atmosphere of the classroom became more inclusive and peaceful over time. Students who initially displayed resistance or aggression began to exhibit empathy and cooperation. This corroborates previous findings suggesting that classrooms grounded in compassion foster stronger social-emotional learning outcomes (Schonert-Reichl & Roeser, 2016). The teacher expressed challenges in maintaining consistency when confronted with recurring disciplinary issues. The tension between maintaining authority and extending unconditional love is a recurring theme in Christian pedagogy (Van der Walt, 2019). The literature supports this observation, emphasizing that teachers often struggle to balance justice and mercy in classroom management. Hence, the teacher's reflection underscores a pedagogical paradox-that effective moral education requires firmness anchored in grace.

The socio-cultural dynamics of SDN 106803 Pematang Johar significantly influence the implementation of love- and forgiveness-based education. The school serves a socioeconomically diverse population, including students from broken families and low-income households. Many students experience emotional instability, resulting in defensive or aggressive behaviors. Literature on moral-spiritual education in similar contexts (Kaur, 2020; Rossiter, 2011) emphasizes that such environments require the teacher to assume a dual role-as both instructor and pastoral caregiver. The CRE teacher, aware of this need, transformed the classroom into a healing space, where storytelling, reflection, and emotional expression were encouraged. She initiated small-group discussions where students could share personal experiences of hurt or forgiveness. This mirrors the pastoral pedagogy model proposed by Astley (2002), where teaching becomes an act of spiritual accompaniment rather than mere instruction. Students reported feeling "heard" and "understood," suggesting that the classroom had become a safe relational space. This resonates with Noddings' (2013) ethics of care, which argues that genuine

moral education begins with the teacher's capacity to listen empathetically. The teacher's practice thus reflects a form of incarnational pedagogy, where love is not abstract but embodied through presence and compassion. The teacher acknowledged her limitations, particularly in handling emotionally complex cases. She identified a lack of formal training in child psychology and pastoral counseling. The SLR corroborates this concern, showing that many CRE teachers globally experience similar gaps between spiritual calling and psychological expertise (Francis & Penny, 2014). Consequently, this study recommends interdisciplinary collaboration between schools, churches, and mental health professionals to create holistic support systems for students.

To nurture students' internalization of love and forgiveness, the teacher employed reflective and narrative-based methods, a practice widely supported in contemporary Christian pedagogy (Killen & de Beer, 2021). Students were asked to maintain reflective journals, documenting moments when they practiced kindness or forgiveness during the week. Analysis of these journals revealed increasing moral awareness and self-regulation among students. This aligns with Piaget's (1972) theory of moral development, which emphasizes reflection as a means of internalizing ethical principles. The use of multimedia and role-play further enriched learning experiences. Films depicting compassion, dramatizations of biblical stories such as "The Prodigal Son," and creative writing exercises encouraged students to embody values through imagination and action. Such experiential methods correspond with Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory and Mayer's (2020) multimedia learning principles, both of which highlight the importance of multisensory engagement for deeper learning. The dramatization of The Prodigal Son was reported to evoke emotional responses among students, prompting discussions on parental love, repentance, and reconciliation. This approach demonstrates the transformative potential of narrative theology in education, as advocated by Bevans (2002), who asserts that faith formation occurs when learners encounter divine truths through story. The SLR reinforces these findings, revealing that storytelling and reflection are among the most effective strategies for teaching moral-spiritual values in diverse educational settings (Hyde, 2010; Tisdell, 2017). These practices foster empathy, moral imagination, and relational sensitivity—all essential attributes in character formation.

From a theological perspective, love and forgiveness are not peripheral virtues but foundational dimensions of Christian anthropology. According to Luke 6:36-37, "*Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful... forgive, and you will be forgiven.*" The teacher's interpretation of these verses as educational principles reflects a sound hermeneutical understanding—linking divine attributes to human pedagogy. This view aligns with the theological educational model proposed by Fowler (1981), who argues that faith development in children requires experiences of grace mediated through relationships. Educationally, the practice of love and forgiveness shapes both moral character and emotional resilience. Research within the reviewed literature indicates that forgiveness-based education enhances empathy, reduces aggression, and promotes psychological well-being (Enright & Fitzgibbons, 2015; Worthington, 2019). The classroom thus becomes a microcosm of Christian community, where students learn not only about faith but to live it relationally. At SDN 106803 Pematang Johar, the CRE teacher's consistent emphasis on empathy and reconciliation contributes to a culture of peace within the

school. This mirrors global findings showing that Christian educators who model grace-oriented relationships influence broader school ethos and student well-being (Thayer, 2018). However, the lack of formal institutional frameworks supporting these values remains a limitation. The integration of spiritual values depends largely on individual teacher initiative rather than systemic policy. To address this, literature suggests the establishment of whole-school approaches to moral education (Arthur, 2019), where love and forgiveness become part of the school's mission statement, policies, and community practices. Collaboration among teachers, parents, and church communities can further reinforce these virtues, ensuring continuity between home, school, and faith formation.

The synthesis of 35 peer-reviewed studies reveals several recurring themes that contextualize the findings from SDN 106803 Pematang Johar: Many educators worldwide recognize the need to bridge the gap between theological conviction and pedagogical method. Studies from the UK, the Philippines, and South Korea indicate that teachers often understand love and forgiveness theologically but lack systematic tools to translate them into learning objectives (Astley & Francis, 2016; Kim, 2020); The literature emphasizes that teacher competence in moral-spiritual education stems from personal spiritual maturity. As Lovat (2010) notes, "one cannot teach love without being rooted in love." This insight affirms the experience of the teacher at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar, whose authenticity and pastoral sensitivity emerged as central to her effectiveness; Across contexts, narrative methods-such as dramatization, storytelling, and reflective writing-are proven effective in facilitating moral internalization (Tisdell, 2017; Hyde, 2010). The findings from this study corroborate these approaches, demonstrating their relevance even within a public-school setting; A consistent finding across the literature is the lack of institutional structures supporting teachers in spiritual-pedagogical innovation. Professional development programs focusing on theology-informed pedagogy and emotional literacy are strongly recommended (Francis & Penny, 2014); Emerging research calls for collaboration between Christian educators and child psychologists to address the holistic needs of learners (Rossiter, 2011; Kaur, 2020). This interdisciplinary approach echoes the teacher's expressed need for additional training in pastoral counseling and child development. By situating the field findings within these broader themes, it becomes evident that the experience of SDN 106803 Pematang Johar reflects global trends in faith-based education-where moral transformation, not academic achievement, is the ultimate goal.

Based on both literature synthesis and field evidence, a conceptual model of Love and Forgiveness-Based Education (LFBE) can be proposed. This model consists of four interrelated dimensions: Grounded in Scripture, emphasizing God's love as the source and forgiveness as the practice of divine-human relationship; Employing reflective, narrative, and experiential methods that encourage students to act upon moral insights; Creating a classroom culture of empathy, dialogue, and reconciliation. Ensuring professional development, counseling collaboration, and curriculum integration. Within this model, the teacher acts as both mediator of grace and facilitator of reflection, integrating cognitive instruction with affective experience. The ultimate goal is transformation-not merely of intellect but of heart and character. The results suggest that enhancing CRE teacher competence requires ongoing professional formation integrating theology, pedagogy, and emotional intelligence. Schools should organize workshops on faith-based

emotional education, collaborative counseling, and reflective teaching. Moreover, policymakers should recognize love and forgiveness as measurable educational outcomes within national curriculum frameworks, emphasizing character over cognition. For future research, longitudinal studies are recommended to evaluate the long-term impact of forgiveness-based learning on student well-being and interpersonal behavior. Comparative studies across regions and religious backgrounds could also illuminate how universal moral principles can foster intercultural harmony in pluralistic societies. This study reaffirms that love and forgiveness are not abstract theological ideals but living pedagogical forces. When teachers embody these values, classrooms become spaces of healing and transformation. As the Apostle Paul reminds, *"Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up"* (1 Corinthians 8:1). Thus, the competence of CRE teachers lies not merely in mastery of doctrine, but in their capacity to make divine love tangible within the lived experience of their students-forming not just minds, but hearts attuned to grace.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Christian Religious Education (CRE) grounded in love and forgiveness represents a transformative paradigm that transcends cognitive instruction and reshapes the moral and spiritual landscape of learning. The systematic literature review and qualitative insights from SDN 106803 Pematang Johar reveal that teacher competence in this domain must be understood as both a professional skill and a spiritual vocation. The findings affirm that when love and forgiveness become the pedagogical core, education evolves into a sacred process-one that nurtures empathy, reconciliation, and holistic human formation. The CRE teacher at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar exemplifies this transformative role through her theological understanding, moral authenticity, and relational approach to instruction. Her capacity to integrate doctrinal truths with lived compassion embodies the essence of Christian pedagogy: teaching not merely about Christ, but in the spirit of Christ. The research underscores that true pedagogical competence in CRE cannot be confined to technical expertise or mastery of curriculum design. Rather, it requires the embodiment of spiritual values that animate the learning process with meaning and grace. Love, as the teacher demonstrated, is not a sentimental abstraction but a lived ethic that shapes classroom culture through empathy, respect, and restorative dialogue. Forgiveness, similarly, emerges not as passive tolerance but as an active practice of reconciliation-a moral bridge that restores relationships and models divine grace. In this sense, the classroom becomes a microcosm of the Christian community, where teaching transforms into ministry and learning becomes participation in God's redemptive work. From a methodological standpoint, the integration of systematic literature review and qualitative observation offers both breadth and depth in understanding the complexities of teacher competence in moral-spiritual education. The SLR situates local practice within global pedagogical trends, revealing that the challenges faced by the teacher at SDN 106803 Pematang Johar-such as the gap between theological conviction and instructional implementation-are shared across contexts. Teachers worldwide, though deeply committed to the ideals of love and forgiveness, often lack formal frameworks and institutional support to operationalize these virtues within curriculum design and assessment. This calls for an urgent reorientation of teacher training programs to emphasize theological reflection, emotional intelligence, and

affective pedagogy alongside traditional instructional competencies. The study's findings also highlight the indispensable role of relational pedagogy and narrative methods in fostering value internalization among students. Storytelling, reflection, and dramatization enable learners to encounter moral truths not as abstract doctrines but as embodied experiences. When students write forgiveness journals, enact biblical parables, or discuss their emotional struggles in a safe and caring environment, they are not merely learning about virtue—they are practicing discipleship. Such pedagogical strategies echo the life of Jesus, the Master Teacher, who taught through parables, encounters, and lived example. Therefore, a pedagogy of love and forgiveness is inherently Christocentric, shaping not only what is taught but how it is taught and experienced. The study identifies structural and professional gaps that hinder sustained implementation. The absence of institutionalized frameworks, limited access to digital and emotional literacy training, and insufficient pastoral counseling skills constrain teachers' capacity to consistently integrate love and forgiveness based education. Consequently, systemic support from schools, churches, and educational policymakers is imperative. Professional development programs must include interdisciplinary collaboration, bringing together theological educators, psychologists, and practitioners to design holistic models of Christian pedagogy. Furthermore, whole-school approaches that embed love and forgiveness into the mission, culture, and evaluation systems of educational institutions are essential to ensure sustainability and collective transformation. In theological reflection, this study reaffirms that love and forgiveness are not optional virtues but the foundation of Christian anthropology and pedagogy. They embody the divine-human relationship and mirror the redemptive nature of education itself. As Luke 6:36-37 reminds, mercy and forgiveness are both divine imperatives and human responsibilities. When teachers internalize these principles, they become living witnesses of God's compassion, shaping not only moral behavior but spiritual identity. Thus, pedagogical competence in CRE is inseparable from spiritual maturity—it is the harmony between faith and praxis, conviction and compassion. This study asserts that love- and forgiveness-based education is both a pedagogical innovation and a theological necessity for the 21st century. Amid the noise of digital modernity and moral fragmentation, such education restores meaning by re-centering learning on relationship, empathy, and grace. The case of SDN 106803 Pematang Johar demonstrates that even within a public and pluralistic context, Christian teachers can cultivate transformative spaces of peace and healing. When educators teach with love, discipline with mercy, and forgive with sincerity, they participate in God's ongoing work of renewal in the world. Ultimately, the success of Christian Religious Education lies not in producing knowledgeable students, but compassionate disciples—young hearts that learn not only to know Christ but to live out His love in a broken world.

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