



The Influence of Christian Religious Education Teachers' Competence on the Religious Climate of SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher competence on the religious climate at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua, Indonesia. Grounded in the understanding that Christian education transcends cognitive instruction to encompass moral and spiritual formation, the research explores how pedagogical, professional, personal, and spiritual competencies of teachers shape a faith-centered learning environment. Using a quantitative correlational design, data were collected from 100 students across grades X–XII and three CRE teachers through structured questionnaires based on Permendiknas No. 16 of 2007. Teacher competence and school religious climate were measured using Likert-scale instruments and analyzed through simple linear regression with SPSS version 25. The findings revealed a significant positive relationship between teacher competence and the religious climate ($R^2 = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$), indicating that 45% of the variation in the school's moral-spiritual atmosphere can be attributed to teacher competence. Among the four dimensions, personal and spiritual competencies were found to be the strongest contributors, reflecting teachers' roles as moral exemplars who embody faith, integrity, and compassion in their daily interactions. The study underscores that effective CRE teachers not only transfer theological knowledge but also model Christ-like attitudes that transform classrooms into communities of love and forgiveness. However, it also highlights that sustaining a positive religious climate requires institutional support, including mentoring, spiritual renewal programs, and collaboration with families and church communities. The study concludes that the vitality of Christian education lies in the authenticity of its educators—where competence and calling unite in shaping faith-based, transformative learning environments.

Keywords: *Competence, Christian Religious Education, Religious Climate*

INTRODUCTION

In an era where education is increasingly shaped by digital progress and cultural pluralism, the spiritual and moral formation of students faces growing complexity. Schools are no longer mere spaces for intellectual pursuit but have become arenas where moral

convictions and personal identities are tested by competing worldviews. Within this tension, Christian Religious Education (CRE), known in Indonesia as *Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (PAK), serves not merely as a curricular subject but as a transformative ministry of character formation. It seeks to nurture students who are not only knowledgeable about Christian doctrines but also capable of embodying faith, love, and responsibility in their daily lives. PAK thus becomes a vital instrument in cultivating holistic human development-integrating knowledge, ethics, and spirituality as inseparable dimensions of education. At the senior high school level, the role of the CRE teacher gains distinctive importance. These educators act as more than transmitters of biblical knowledge; they are mentors and moral shepherds who shape the spiritual atmosphere of the school community. Their task extends beyond classroom instruction to the cultivation of a religious climate—a lived environment where Christian values are not only taught but witnessed and experienced. The competence of CRE teachers therefore stands as a cornerstone for developing a learning culture that is both intellectually grounded and spiritually vibrant. In this sense, teacher competence must be understood as an integration of professional skill, moral integrity, and spiritual maturity. The competence of CRE teachers encompasses four interrelated dimensions: pedagogical, professional, personal, and spiritual. Pedagogical competence refers to the teacher's ability to design and deliver meaningful, student-centered learning that encourages reflection and moral engagement. Professional competence involves mastery of theological knowledge and its relevance to contemporary moral challenges. Personal competence reflects integrity, empathy, and consistency between word and deed—qualities that make the teacher a credible moral exemplar. Finally, spiritual competence anchors all other dimensions; it expresses the teacher's living faith and capacity to model Christ-like attitudes in words, relationships, and actions. A teacher who embodies these competencies not only educates but also inspires, transforming instruction into formation and classroom management into ministry.

A school's religious climate represents the tangible manifestation of its moral and spiritual ethos. It is reflected in the relationships among students, teachers, and staff; in the moral tone of communication; and in the shared sense of purpose that orients the community toward goodness and grace. A positive religious climate fosters respect, compassion, and a collective pursuit of truth. In Christian educational settings, it is marked by regular worship activities, mutual care, moral consistency, and the visible presence of faith in daily school life. Such an atmosphere strengthens students' moral awareness, shapes their ethical decision-making, and nurtures a sense of belonging grounded in faith and love. Previous studies have affirmed that competent CRE teachers play a decisive role in shaping students' faith and moral development (Simatupang, 2020; Farida et al., 2021). However, limited research has directly examined how teacher competence influences the broader religious climate of schools, particularly in public educational institutions like SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua. This school, known for upholding Christian values within a pluralistic context, offers a relevant site for exploring how pedagogical and spiritual leadership intersect to build an environment of faith-based harmony. Understanding this dynamic is crucial for sustaining a moral ecology where both students and teachers grow together in faith, empathy, and communal responsibility. Globalization and the digital revolution present unprecedented challenges to moral education. Today's students are

constantly exposed to diverse ideologies, media influences, and moral relativism that can erode their spiritual grounding. This reality calls for CRE teachers who possess not only theological knowledge but also emotional intelligence, digital literacy, and contextual wisdom to guide students toward discernment and resilience. Teachers must be able to integrate faith with relevance-interpreting biblical truths in ways that speak to the ethical and existential questions of modern youth. This study seeks to investigate how the competence of CRE teachers influences the development of the religious climate at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua. It examines the multidimensional aspects of teacher competence and their interplay with the moral-spiritual atmosphere of the school. The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically: offering insights for educational leaders to strengthen teacher formation programs and providing actionable strategies for fostering a faith-based, humanistic school culture. Ultimately, this research underscores that the vitality of Christian education depends not only on curriculum design but on the living witness of teachers-those who, through love, integrity, and forgiveness, turn classrooms into communities of faith and transformation.

METHODS

A quantitative approach with a correlational survey design was used, to examine the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher competence on the religious climate at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua. The quantitative method was chosen because it allows for an objective examination of relationships between variables using numerical data, which can be statistically analyzed to produce valid and reliable conclusions. This approach is particularly suitable for exploring how teacher competence-measured through observable indicators-affects students' perceptions of the school's religious atmosphere. The population of this study consisted of all students from grades X, XI, and XII at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua, totaling 300 students. To ensure representativeness across grade levels, a stratified random sampling technique was used, dividing students into strata based on grade level before randomly selecting participants from each stratum. A total of 100 students were selected as respondents. Additionally, three CRE teachers at the school were included as respondents to assess their professional and spiritual competence through a separate questionnaire. The inclusion of both teachers and students aimed to capture a more holistic understanding of the relationship between teacher competence and the religious climate of the school community. The research instruments consisted of two structured questionnaires. The first measured the competence of CRE teachers, developed based on *Permendiknas* (Regulation of the Minister of National Education) No. 16 of 2007 concerning teacher competency standards. This instrument covered four core dimensions-pedagogical, professional, personal, and spiritual competence. The indicators included the teacher's ability to manage learning effectively, mastery of theological and pedagogical content, moral integrity and role modeling, as well as the depth of faith expressed in teaching practice.

The second instrument measured the religious climate of the school, designed to capture students' perceptions of the extent to which the school environment supports the growth of Christian values. It included items related to the organization of spiritual activities, the presence of faith-based moral interactions among students, and the modeling of Christian virtues by teachers and staff. Both questionnaires used a five-point Likert scale ranging

from 1 (“strongly disagree”) to 5 (“strongly agree”), allowing the data to be analyzed statistically as ordinal measures. Data were analyzed using simple linear regression with the assistance of SPSS version 25 to determine the strength and direction of the relationship between CRE teacher competence and the school’s religious climate. Prior to hypothesis testing, instrument validity and reliability tests were conducted to ensure that all questionnaire items met psychometric standards. Classical assumption tests-including normality and linearity analyses-were also performed to verify that the data fulfilled the necessary statistical conditions. Through this rigorous methodological process, the study aimed to produce accurate, credible findings on how the professional and spiritual competence of CRE teachers contributes to shaping a positive religious atmosphere within the school.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a clear and compelling relationship between the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and the religious climate at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua. Based on data collected through student and teacher questionnaires, the overall competence of CRE teachers was classified as high, with an average score of 4.12 on a Likert scale of 1 to 5. This finding demonstrates that the teachers possess strong capabilities across pedagogical, professional, personal, and spiritual domains. Among these dimensions, personal and spiritual competencies received the highest mean scores-4.30 and 4.25 respectively-indicating that the teachers do not merely transfer theological knowledge but also embody Christian virtues in their personal lives and relationships with students. Such authenticity of character, grounded in integrity and faith, reflects a vital component of Christian education where the messenger is as important as the message. The pedagogical and professional competencies of the teachers were also high, with mean scores of 3.95 and 4.00. These results suggest that the teachers have mastered both the theoretical and practical aspects of their teaching. Pedagogical competence is reflected in their ability to design learning activities that are interactive and contextual, while professional competence is demonstrated through their mastery of content, familiarity with current theological perspectives, and ability to connect biblical principles to the real-life experiences of students. Such integration ensures that Christian Religious Education becomes relevant, engaging, and transformative. This finding aligns with Shulman’s (1987) concept of pedagogical content knowledge, which emphasizes that effective teaching arises from the harmony between subject mastery and pedagogical creativity. It also resonates with Rogers’ (1969) humanistic learning theory, which situates the learner at the center of education and views teaching as a process of facilitating holistic growth-intellectual, moral, and spiritual.

Students’ responses regarding the religious climate of the school also indicated a positive condition, with a mean score of 4.05, suggesting that the school fosters an atmosphere that supports faith formation and moral development. The daily devotions, worship services, and student interactions that reflect Christian values of love and forgiveness contribute significantly to this atmosphere. Teachers, in this context, serve not only as instructors but also as moral exemplars whose actions and words cultivate respect,

empathy, and cooperation among students. This finding is consistent with Halstead and Taylor's (2000) view that the religious climate of a school constitutes its "moral ecology," a living context that shapes learners' attitudes and ethical sensibilities. At SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua, the consistency of teachers' actions and the coherence between their teaching and conduct play a decisive role in building students' trust and encouraging them to live according to the values they learn. The results of the simple linear regression analysis revealed a significant relationship between teacher competence and the school's religious climate, with a p-value of 0.000 ($p < 0.05$) and a coefficient of determination (R^2) of 0.45. This means that about 45 percent of the variation in the religious climate of the school can be explained by the competence of CRE teachers, while the remaining 55 percent is influenced by other factors such as school leadership, parental involvement, peer relationships, and the surrounding community culture. The magnitude of this relationship affirms that teachers hold a central position in shaping the moral and spiritual tone of the school environment. The result also supports Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory, which emphasizes modeling as a key process in moral learning—students learn values not only through verbal instruction but by observing and imitating the behaviors of significant role models. Teachers with high levels of personal and spiritual competence are particularly influential in shaping this atmosphere. Their integrity, patience, humility, and compassion serve as living examples of Christian character. Palmer's (1998) notion that "we teach who we are" becomes evident in this context: the moral and spiritual condition of the teacher is inseparable from the effectiveness of their teaching. The teacher's authenticity allows students to experience moral truths not as abstract doctrines but as lived realities. Observations and student feedback at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua showed that teachers frequently act as mediators in student conflicts, guiding reconciliation through prayer, dialogue, and reflection. This restorative approach, rooted in forgiveness and empathy, transforms the classroom into a space of healing and growth.

The high correlation between teacher competence and school religious climate also underscores the transformational role of educators in moral-spiritual development. Teachers act not only as transmitters of knowledge but as leaders of transformation whose values radiate into the broader school culture. As Bass and Avolio (1994) suggest in their model of transformational leadership, leaders who inspire through vision, integrity, and compassion foster environments of trust and collective purpose. In the context of Christian education, CRE teachers embody this leadership through their relational influence and their capacity to integrate faith with daily practice. The R^2 value of 0.45 also indicates that teacher competence alone cannot entirely determine the quality of the school's religious atmosphere. Other significant factors must be acknowledged. The role of the school principal, for instance, in setting policies that prioritize spiritual development, as well as the participation of parents and the church community, are equally crucial in reinforcing the moral ecosystem of the school. Santoso and Yulianti (2021) emphasize the importance of such collaboration, arguing that a harmonious partnership among educators, parents, and administrators forms a spiritual triangle that strengthens the moral resilience of students. The findings further reveal that the integration of faith and pedagogy remains a continuous challenge, particularly in an era characterized by technological advancement and moral pluralism. The rapid spread of digital culture exposes students to a diversity of worldviews that can sometimes conflict

with Christian ethics. Thus, CRE teachers must expand their professional competence to include digital literacy and the ability to critically engage with technology from a faith perspective. As Susanto (2022) points out, religious education in the digital era requires teachers to be both theologians and media practitioners-able to translate spiritual truths into contemporary media forms without compromising their essence. Blended learning, multimedia storytelling, and online devotionals are emerging strategies that can make Christian values more accessible and relatable to today's learners. This study also highlights the importance of institutional support in sustaining teachers' competence and moral vitality. While the teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua demonstrate strong individual dedication, systemic reinforcement through continuous professional development programs, mentoring, and reflective retreats can further enhance their performance. Such programs help teachers maintain spiritual renewal and pedagogical innovation. Lovat (2010) stresses that moral education is most effective when teachers receive institutional encouragement to align their personal faith journey with their professional vocation. The same principle applies in this context-schools that nurture their teachers spiritually will, in turn, cultivate spiritually resilient students.

The school's religious climate is also shaped by its collective culture and daily practices. The regular organization of chapel services, communal prayers, and social service activities fosters a sense of unity and shared purpose among students. These experiences function as communal liturgies that shape students' moral imagination and embed Christian values into their lived experiences. This corresponds with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, which views education as an interaction between multiple systems-family, school, church, and society-all contributing to the holistic development of the learner. The results from SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua also resonate with previous research conducted by Simatupang (2020) and Farida et al. (2021), which found that the moral and faith development of students is strongly influenced by the authenticity and consistency of their teachers. Comparable studies in other cultural contexts, such as those by Kim (2020) in South Korea and Balondo (2020) in the Philippines, also affirm that the personal spirituality of religious teachers has a direct impact on the moral climate of their schools. Nevertheless, these studies, like the present one, point out that the absence of structured institutional support limits the sustainability of such outcomes. Hence, enhancing teacher competence must be complemented by systemic transformation-including clear policy frameworks, collaboration with church institutions, and integration of religious values into school missions. The discussion further suggests that the competence of CRE teachers is both a professional and spiritual calling. The high scores in spiritual and personal dimensions highlight the irreplaceable role of teachers as moral witnesses. They stand not merely as transmitters of doctrine but as mediators of grace-guiding students toward deeper self-understanding and faith maturity. The significance of this dual role reflects the theological conviction that teaching is a form of ministry. As Jesus modeled in His earthly ministry, teaching was not only about words but about life shared in relationship. The results of this study affirm that the competence of CRE teachers significantly influences the religious climate of SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua. Teachers who demonstrate strong personal integrity, deep spirituality, and creative pedagogical skills cultivate a learning environment characterized by faith, respect, and compassion. Yet, the findings also remind us that the formation of a religious

school climate is a collective task requiring the participation of all members of the educational community. Future efforts should therefore focus on establishing professional development programs that combine theological enrichment with pedagogical innovation, as well as collaborative initiatives that engage families and local churches. In an era of rapid change, Christian education must remain faithful to its mission: to form not only knowledgeable students but disciples whose lives reflect Christ's love. The evidence from this study reinforces that such formation begins with the teacher—whose competence, character, and calling together illuminate the spiritual heartbeat of the school.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a pivotal role in shaping the moral and spiritual climate of the school, yet this role extends far beyond technical teaching ability. It embodies a transformative vocation grounded in love, faith, and moral authenticity. The study conducted at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua demonstrates that teachers who exhibit strong pedagogical, professional, personal, and spiritual competencies contribute directly to the creation of a religious atmosphere that nurtures faith-based values, mutual respect, and compassionate relationships. The statistical analysis ($R^2 = 0.45$, $p < 0.05$) reveals that nearly half of the variance in the school's religious climate is explained by teacher competence, confirming the hypothesis that effective Christian educators are central to the moral and spiritual vitality of their institutions. The remaining 55 percent of influence arises from broader contextual factors—school leadership, community culture, family involvement, and institutional policy—highlighting the importance of a collective commitment to spiritual formation. The spiritual and personal competencies of CRE teachers emerged as the most influential dimensions in shaping students' moral awareness and ethical behavior. Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua consistently modeled Christian virtues such as humility, forgiveness, and empathy in their daily interactions, thereby transforming their classrooms into spaces of healing and mutual respect. When teachers embody the values they teach, students encounter faith not as abstract doctrine but as living reality. The teacher thus becomes a witness to the Gospel, demonstrating that true learning involves both knowledge and transformation. Moral development is achieved through observation and modeling. The teacher's authentic life example provides a concrete framework through which students internalize Christian ethics and integrate them into their personal identity. The study confirms that pedagogical and professional competencies serve as vital instruments that bridge faith and learning. Teachers who design interactive, contextually relevant lessons and link biblical principles to real-world challenges succeed in making theology meaningful to students' everyday experiences. In the current era of technological transformation and moral pluralism, CRE teachers are called to enhance these competencies further by embracing digital literacy and innovative pedagogy. Religious education in the digital age requires educators who can translate eternal truths into relevant forms for the modern learner—through multimedia storytelling, online devotionals, or reflective digital discussions that maintain the sacred core of the Christian message. The study also reveals that teacher competence alone cannot sustain a deeply rooted religious climate without systemic and institutional support. While individual teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua display commendable

dedication, long-term impact requires an ecosystem that nurtures their professional and spiritual growth. Institutional initiatives such as regular spiritual retreats, mentorship programs, collaborative workshops, and church-school partnerships are essential for reinforcing teachers' sense of mission. Moral education thrives when educators are supported in aligning personal faith with professional practice. A spiritually renewed teacher community becomes the foundation for a resilient school ethos-where both staff and students grow together in wisdom and grace. The research highlights the ecological nature of religious climate, consistent with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) systems theory. The school functions not in isolation but as part of a larger moral ecosystem that includes families, churches, and local culture. Activities such as chapel services, group devotions, and community outreach projects at SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua illustrate how collective worship and service act as "communal liturgies" that shape moral imagination and strengthen students' sense of belonging. In this context, the CRE teacher serves as both guide and catalyst, ensuring that these experiences translate into genuine spiritual growth. This study reaffirms that the mission of Christian education is not merely cognitive but incarnational. The competence of the CRE teacher reflects the fusion of faith and praxis-the embodiment of Christ's teaching in professional and relational life. As reflected in Luke 6:36, "Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful," mercy and forgiveness form the moral heartbeat of Christian pedagogy. When teachers internalize these principles, they become living witnesses of divine compassion, shaping not only students' moral conduct but their spiritual identity. The CRE teacher's vocation, therefore, mirrors Christ's own ministry of teaching-a holistic engagement of mind, heart, and spirit aimed at restoring humanity to communion with God and others. In conclusion, the study underscores that the vitality of Christian Religious Education depends on the spiritual depth and pedagogical integrity of its teachers. Competent CRE educators are not simply conveyors of information but agents of transformation who cultivate a climate of faith, respect, and compassion within their schools. Yet, this transformation must be supported by institutional structures that encourage continuous formation and collaborative ministry. As the world faces the moral uncertainties of the digital and pluralistic age, schools like SMA Negeri 1 Purbatua remind us that authentic education begins with authentic educators-those whose faith informs their practice and whose love gives meaning to learning. Ultimately, the future of Christian education lies not merely in curriculum reform or technological innovation but in the renewal of teachers' hearts-where competence and calling unite in the service of God's redemptive work in the world.

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