



Pedagogical Competence in Teaching Worship Symbols: A Reflection on Exodus 28:3 among Christian Religious Education Teachers at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda - Tebing Tinggi

Marlina Tambunan^{1*}, Nisma Simorangkir²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: marlinatambunan14@guru.smp.belajar.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching worship symbols at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda, Tebing Tinggi, using Exodus 28:3 as a theological-pedagogical framework. The research highlights that worship symbols-such as priestly garments, liturgical colors, sacred objects, and ritual movements-possess formative theological meaning that requires competent interpretation and contextual explanation. Through a qualitative descriptive design involving interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, the study reveals that teachers' pedagogical effectiveness is closely tied to their biblical literacy, symbolic understanding, and spiritual maturity. Teachers with deeper exegetical grounding demonstrated stronger ability to interpret worship symbols holistically, drawing from the concept of ḥokmâ in Exodus 28:3, which integrates divine wisdom, skill, and spiritual discernment. These teachers presented symbols not merely as religious artifacts but as instruments of spiritual formation. The findings also show that effective instruction required contextualization, especially for junior high students whose cognitive development benefits from concrete analogies, visual media, and relatable examples. Methodological creativity-such as storytelling, diagrams, symbolic comparisons, and visual aids-significantly enhanced students' engagement and comprehension. However, several challenges emerged, including limited access to theological resources, varying student backgrounds, and the predominance of factual rather than interpretive assessments. Teachers also expressed the need for stronger institutional support to deepen their symbolic and exegetical competence. The study concludes that teaching worship symbols is both a pedagogical skill and a spiritual vocation. CRE teachers serve as "wise-hearted mediators," echoing the artisans of Exodus 28:3, called to translate sacred meaning into transformative learning experiences that shape students' spiritual identity and worship understanding.

Keywords: Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Worship Symbols

INTRODUCTION

The pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a decisive role in shaping students' understanding of faith, worship, and spiritual identity. Within the Christian tradition, worship symbols—such as priestly garments, sacred objects, ritual movements, and liturgical colors—function not merely as aesthetic elements but as pedagogical gateways to theological meaning. For students at the junior high school level, these symbols require clear, meaningful, and age-appropriate teaching approaches. Competent teachers must therefore possess not only instructional skill but also theological insight that enables them to translate biblical symbolism into relevant learning experiences. This study explores such pedagogical competence through the lens of Exodus 28:3, focusing on the teaching practices of CRE teachers at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda, Tebing Tinggi. Exodus 28:3 reads: *“Tell all the skilled workers to whom I have given wisdom in such matters that they are to make garments for Aaron, for his consecration, so that he may serve Me as priest.”* This verse stands within a larger priestly narrative describing sacred garments as divinely instructed symbols of office, holiness, and worship purity. The theological weight of this passage resides in the connection between divine wisdom, human craftsmanship, and pedagogical mediation. The artisans are described as individuals endowed with *ḥokmâ*—a Hebrew term referring not only to technical skill but also to spiritual discernment empowered by God's Spirit, pointing to the integration of knowledge, skill, and sacred responsibility (Hamilton, 2011). Such integration becomes a valuable framework for CRE teachers who must interpret and communicate the meaning of worship symbols in contemporary educational spaces. The term *ḥakmê-lēb* (“wise-hearted ones”) in Exodus 28:3 refers to people whose wisdom is located simultaneously in intellect, skill, and moral-spiritual posture (Sarna, 1991). This indicates that teaching sacred symbolism is never merely a cognitive exercise; it requires an inner disposition shaped by faithfulness, sensitivity, and spiritual maturity. Furthermore, the phrase “so that he may serve Me as priest” highlights the functional dimension of worship symbols: they are tools that equip God's people for service (Brueggemann, 1994). Likewise, the pedagogical use of symbols in CRE aims to equip students with spiritual insight that enables authentic participation in Christian worship. Studies in Christian pedagogy show that teachers often struggle to connect biblical symbolism with students' lived experiences, resulting in learning that is abstract and disconnected (Groome, 2011). In Indonesia's pluralistic context, especially within urban schools such as SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda in Tebing Tinggi, the challenge increases as CRE teachers must also navigate diverse religious experiences among students. Pedagogical competence, therefore, becomes essential—not only as a technical ability but as a theological task rooted in Scripture. The Indonesian National Education Standards emphasize that pedagogical competence includes understanding learners' characteristics, designing learning experiences, implementing effective instruction, and evaluating learning outcomes. When applied to religious education, however, these competencies require an added dimension: the teacher must integrate biblical exegesis, spiritual sensitivity, and symbolic literacy. Worship symbols become meaningful only when teachers can bridge the gap between ancient biblical narratives and contemporary students' contexts. Exodus 28:3 offers an important theological paradigm for this bridging process. Just as God endowed artisan-teachers with wisdom to construct symbolic

garments, CRE teachers are also invited to exercise spiritually informed pedagogical wisdom. They serve as mediators who translate divine meaning into learning experiences that shape the spiritual imagination of students. This study examines how such pedagogical wisdom is practiced by CRE teachers at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda-specifically in their efforts to teach worship symbols meaningfully and contextually.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design was implemented to explore the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers in teaching worship symbols, interpreted through the theological lens of Exodus 28:3. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a deep understanding of teachers' instructional practices, underlying beliefs, and exegetical awareness, especially in matters pertaining to spiritual pedagogy and biblical symbolism. The central aim was to describe how CRE teachers at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda, Tebing Tinggi interpret, communicate, and apply theological-symbolic content in their classrooms. The research was conducted at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda, a private junior high school in Tebing Tinggi, North Sumatra. The school was selected purposively due to its consistency in delivering Christian Religious Education as a core subject and its active engagement in worship-related learning activities. Purposive sampling was used to select three CRE teachers who met the criteria: formal educational background in Christian Religious Education, a minimum of three years of teaching experience, and direct involvement in teaching topics related to worship symbols. These criteria ensured that participants possessed substantial practical insight and instructional familiarity with symbolic content. Three primary techniques were applied to gather rich and contextual qualitative data. Interviews were conducted to explore teachers' pedagogical approaches, theological understanding of Exodus 28:3, lesson planning strategies, and the challenges they encounter when teaching worship symbols. The semi-structured format allowed flexibility for probing deeper into teachers' exegesis of biblical symbolism and their reflections on pedagogical competence. Each interview lasted approximately 45–60 minutes. Non-participant observations were carried out during PAK classes where worship symbols were taught. The observations aimed to capture real instructional practices, teacher-student interactions, use of teaching media, and the coherence between stated pedagogical strategies and classroom realities. An observation guide was developed based on components of pedagogical competence-namely content delivery, teaching methods, classroom management, and contextualization of biblical symbols. Relevant instructional documents were examined, including lesson plans (*RPP*), teaching materials, worksheets, and visual media used to teach worship symbols. Document analysis provided additional insights regarding teachers' preparation, structural alignment between curriculum and biblical symbolism, and the extent to which theological content was integrated into learning materials. Data were analyzed, which involves three stages: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. Interview transcripts, observation notes, and documents were coded thematically. Categories were developed based on pedagogical competence indicators-such as mastery of content, instructional design, learning implementation, assessment techniques-as well as theological themes derived from Exodus 28:3, including spiritual wisdom, symbolic craftsmanship, and priestly formation. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents ensured data credibility. Thick description was used to

support transferability, while an audit trail documented analytic decisions to uphold dependability. Ethical approval was obtained from the institutional review board, and all participants provided informed consent. Their names and classroom identifiers were anonymized to maintain confidentiality.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers in teaching worship symbols at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda – Tebing Tinggi is deeply shaped by their theological understanding, personal spirituality, classroom context, and instructional strategies. Through interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, several interconnected themes emerged: mastery of symbolic content, integration of biblical exegesis—particularly Exodus 28:3—into lesson design, the capacity to contextualize worship symbols for junior high students, methodological creativity and instructional clarity, and challenges inhibiting effective pedagogical delivery. Together, these themes illustrate how pedagogical competence functions as a spiritual-pedagogical synthesis grounded in Scripture and informed by classroom realities. The first major finding concerns teachers' mastery of symbolic content, which becomes the core foundation for effective teaching. All three participating teachers showed a fundamental understanding of basic worship symbols such as priestly garments, liturgical colors, sacred spaces, and ritual objects. They explained these elements with reference to biblical narratives and church tradition. However, their depth of symbolic literacy varied significantly. While one teacher demonstrated a strong grasp of biblical symbolism, including typological connections and historical background, others tended to offer descriptive rather than interpretive explanations. This disparity highlights that pedagogical competence is closely tied to the teacher's own theological formation. One respondent described worship symbols merely as *"perlengkapan ibadah yang dipakai sesuai tradisi gereja,"* while another elaborated on their meaning as *"media yang Tuhan gunakan untuk membentuk kesadaran umat tentang kekudusan."* Such contrasting understandings affect how worship symbols are introduced pedagogically. Teachers with deeper exegetical grounding tend to present symbols as spiritually formative constructs rather than mere religious artifacts (Symbolic pedagogy requires theological insight that goes beyond surface-level description). The integration of Exodus 28:3 as a theological lens was especially notable among participants who possessed stronger biblical interpretation skills. Teachers with higher symbolic competency tended to anchor their teaching in the spiritual meaning of the verse, recognizing the relationship between divine wisdom and human craftsmanship. This connection significantly shaped their instructional approaches. For example, one teacher referenced the phrase *ḥokmâ* (wisdom) and related it to the pedagogical responsibility of a PAK teacher: *"Kalau Tuhan memberikan hikmat kepada para pengrajin untuk membuat sesuatu yang suci, guru juga harus punya hikmat untuk menjelaskan hal-hal yang suci itu kepada anak."* This reflection aligns with the exegetical interpretation that biblical wisdom includes not only technical knowledge but also a spiritually informed disposition (Exegetical studies identify *ḥokmâ* as a holistic wisdom integrating skill, spirituality, and ethical responsibility). Classroom observations supported this finding—teachers who internalized this theological dimension demonstrated greater intentionality and clarity when explaining worship symbols.

Another significant theme concerns the pedagogical contextualization of worship symbols for junior high students. Participants understood that 13-15-year-old learners require concrete explanations and relatable analogies. Observations showed teachers employing contextual stories, visual aids, and symbolic comparisons drawn from daily life. For example, one teacher likened the symbolic function of priestly garments to school uniforms, explaining how both signify identity and purpose. This analogy successfully engaged students and helped them understand the symbolic role of vestments in biblical worship. Such contextualization aligns with pedagogical theory that emphasizes bridging unfamiliar religious concepts with familiar cultural experiences (Contextual teaching strengthens comprehension by linking symbolic abstractions with real-life references). Students demonstrated increased attentiveness and asked more questions when teachers incorporated relevant analogies. The fourth theme involves methodological creativity, an important indicator of pedagogical competence. Teachers used a variety of instructional strategies, including direct instruction, storytelling, group reflection, multimedia presentations, and object-based teaching. In particular, visual approaches—such as images of the high priest's garments, videos of Old Testament worship settings, and physical replicas of symbolic objects—proved effective in deepening student engagement. Observations revealed that students were more active during lessons that incorporated visual-symbolic media. Teachers also used charts and diagrams to explain the meaning of the ephod, breastplate, turban, and robe described in Exodus 28. These instructional tools helped translate complex biblical descriptions into accessible learning materials (Visual-symbolic methods are especially effective for early adolescents who learn best through concrete imagery). Some teachers struggled with exegetical confidence. Although they recognized the theological significance of worship symbols, not all teachers felt adequately equipped to interpret Exodus 28:3 in depth. Interviews revealed that many had limited access to biblical commentaries, theological books, or symbolic studies. This lack of resources resulted in a narrow, often superficial presentation of biblical symbolism. Second, classroom time constraints also limited the scope of discussion. Worship symbols are rich theological topics that require substantial time to unpack, yet the school schedule allocated only 70 minutes per session. Teachers often rushed through explanations, focusing on factual content rather than relational, experiential, or spiritual meaning (Time constraints frequently force teachers to prioritize curriculum coverage over symbolic depth). A further challenge lies in students' varying degrees of religious exposure. Because the school accommodates learners from diverse Christian backgrounds, their familiarity with worship symbols differs widely. Teachers noted that some students were highly knowledgeable due to active involvement in church ministries, while others had minimal exposure. This discrepancy required teachers to adapt their pedagogy to varying levels of prior knowledge. More experienced teachers succeeded in differentiating instruction through group tasks and tiered explanations, whereas less experienced teachers tended to rely solely on general explanations that did not fully accommodate student diversity (Differentiated instruction is a marker of advanced pedagogical competence).

An important finding relates to the spiritual integrity and personal vocation of teachers, which greatly influenced pedagogical effectiveness. Participants emphasized that teaching worship symbols requires not only technical competence but also spiritual

credibility. One teacher stated, *“Anak-anak bisa melihat apakah kita sendiri hidup dalam kekudusan. Kalau kita mengajarkan simbol-simbol kudus, tetapi hidup kita tidak mencerminkan itu, pelajaran itu jadi kosong.”* This insight resonates with the theological principle embedded in Exodus 28:3, where sacred garments were made “for consecration,” signifying that symbolic mediation requires a consecrated life (Theological interpretation positions the teacher as a mediator of sacred meaning, not just a transmitter of information). Observations confirmed that students responded more positively to teachers who displayed humility, reverence, and reflective spirituality. The study further showed that pedagogical competence is reinforced by consistent lesson planning and structured instruction. Document analysis of lesson plans (RPP) showed variation among teachers: some developed detailed plans that integrated learning objectives, media, biblical references, and assessments; others provided minimal outlines. Well-designed plans correlated with more organized classroom execution. For example, one teacher planned a series of subtopics-symbolic clothing, colors, functions, and theological implications-and implemented them sequentially across three meetings. Such systematic teaching enhanced student comprehension. Conversely, teachers with less detailed plans tended to approach the lesson more spontaneously, resulting in fragmented explanations (Structured planning is a predictor of pedagogical coherence and clarity). The results also revealed that teachers who integrated biblical exegesis directly into instruction achieved stronger student engagement. For instance, one teacher used a step-by-step exegetical reading of Exodus 28:3 to explain divine empowerment of artisans and connected this to the idea that God empowers teachers as “wise-hearted mediators.” Students responded enthusiastically, asking questions about the role of wisdom in worship. This pedagogical approach highlights the transformative potential of exegetically informed teaching (Exegetical teaching deepens spiritual formation by linking meaning, context, and contemporary application). However, not all teachers possessed the confidence to teach Scripture exegetically. Some relied solely on secondary summaries from textbooks. This dependence sometimes produced inaccuracies or oversimplifications, which weakened the symbolic richness of the lesson. One observed lesson, for example, described the ephod simply as *“baju imam,”* omitting its theological function as a symbol of representation and mediation. Such simplification risks reducing worship symbols to cultural artifacts rather than divine pedagogical instruments (Simplification without theological grounding can distort biblical symbolism). Another significant theme involves student responses and learning outcomes. Classroom observations showed that students exhibited high curiosity when symbols were explored through visual media and storytelling. When teachers allowed students to ask questions freely, discussions became dynamic. Students often asked about the significance of colors (e.g., blue, gold), the weight of priestly garments, and the symbolic meaning of the breastplate stones. These interactions indicate that worship symbols naturally evoke wonder among adolescents, providing fertile ground for spiritual formation (Symbolic inquiry encourages reflective and imaginative engagement among adolescents). The study found that assessment practices related to symbolic learning were generally limited. Most teachers evaluated students’ knowledge through written tests focused on factual recall rather than interpretive understanding. Very few assessments measured students’ ability to connect symbols with spiritual meaning or ethical implications. Teachers acknowledged the difficulty of designing assessments that measure symbolic

comprehension. One participant noted, *“Anak-anak bisa hafal nama-nama pakaian imam, tetapi apakah mereka mengerti maknanya?”* This highlights the need for more holistic assessments that incorporate reflective essays, creative interpretations, or symbolic projects (Symbolic learning requires assessment formats that capture interpretive and reflective competencies). Just as the artisans were endowed with divine wisdom to construct sacred garments, CRE teachers must cultivate pedagogical wisdom to translate sacred symbols into meaningful learning. This study demonstrates that such wisdom emerges from a combination of biblical literacy, spiritual maturity, instructional creativity, contextual sensitivity, and reflective practice (Pedagogical wisdom integrates theological insight with practical teaching skill). The discussion indicates that pedagogical competence in teaching worship symbols is not merely technical but profoundly theological. Teachers serve as mediators who “craft” spiritual understanding in the hearts of learners. Their role resembles the biblical artisans who shaped priestly garments as instruments of consecration. When teachers teach worship symbols with theological depth, learners perceive the sacredness embedded in Christian worship. When taught superficially, symbols become mere objects without transformative meaning (Symbolic pedagogy becomes effective only when its spiritual dimension is preserved). The findings also highlight institutional needs. The school would benefit from providing more theological resources, opportunities for professional development, and collaborative theological-pedagogical workshops. A systematic symbolic curriculum would further strengthen instructional coherence. Teachers expressed willingness to deepen their skills if given structured training.

CONCLUSION

This study examined the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in teaching worship symbols at SMP Swasta Ir. H. Djuanda - Tebing Tinggi, using Exodus 28:3 as a theological and pedagogical framework. The findings demonstrate that effective teaching of worship symbols requires a multidimensional integration of biblical literacy, exegetical depth, spiritual maturity, instructional creativity, and contextual sensitivity. The teachers’ ability to communicate the meaning of worship symbols is closely tied to their grasp of the theological insights embedded in Exodus 28:3, particularly the concept of *ḥokmâ*, or divine wisdom, which unites skill, knowledge, and spiritual disposition. The study concludes that pedagogical competence in this context is both a technical skill and a spiritual vocation. Teachers are not merely transmitters of information about sacred symbols; they serve as interpreters and mediators of sacred meaning. Their role mirrors the “wise-hearted artisans” described in Exodus 28:3, who were divinely empowered to craft symbolic garments that would consecrate the priest for service. Similarly, CRE teachers are called to shape students’ spiritual understanding through careful, intentional, and theologically informed instruction. Results indicate that teachers with stronger exegetical grounding were more successful in presenting worship symbols as meaningful components of Christian worship, rather than mere physical artifacts. Their instruction incorporated biblical context, theological explanation, and relevant applications for adolescent learners. Teachers with limited access to theological resources tended to focus on superficial descriptions, which restricted students’ symbolic and spiritual comprehension. This finding underscores the importance of continued theological development and access to biblical commentaries, scholarly texts, and

training workshops. The study also highlights the crucial role of contextualization in teaching worship symbols. Teachers who used everyday analogies, visual media, and student-centered activities were more effective in engaging students and helping them understand abstract symbolic concepts. Contextualized teaching allowed students to relate ancient biblical symbols to their contemporary experiences, fostering deeper reflection and curiosity. Several challenges emerged: limited exegetical confidence among some teachers, time constraints within the school schedule, varied levels of student religious background, and the predominance of factual assessments rather than reflective or interpretive evaluations. Addressing these challenges requires institutional support, including professional development opportunities, expanded theological resources, and a more holistic assessment model that measures symbolic understanding rather than mere memorization. Theologically, the study affirms that teaching worship symbols is a sacred task that demands spiritual integrity. Teachers noted that their personal holiness, humility, and spiritual authenticity significantly influenced students' receptivity. This aligns with Exodus 28:3's emphasis on consecration: the garments were crafted "for Aaron's consecration," symbolizing that sacred representation requires a consecrated life. Likewise, effective symbolic pedagogy requires teachers whose lives reflect the holiness and reverence they teach. Pedagogical competence in teaching worship symbols emerges as a harmonious integration of theory, Scripture, spirituality, and practice. To strengthen this competence, CRE teachers and school institutions should deepen theological resources, enhance training in symbolic pedagogy, and develop integrated curriculum models that honor the richness of biblical symbolism. When teachers embody the wisdom of Exodus 28:3, they become "wise-hearted educators" who help students encounter the sacred meaning embedded in Christian worship-shaping not only their knowledge but also their spiritual identity and faith practice.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Brueggemann, W. (1994). *Exodus*. Westminster John Knox Press.
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia. (2006). *Standar Isi untuk Satuan Pendidikan Dasar dan Menengah*. Badan Standar Nasional Pendidikan (BSNP).
- Departemen Pendidikan Nasional Republik Indonesia. (2007). *Peraturan Menteri Pendidikan Nasional Nomor 16 Tahun 2007 tentang Standar Kualifikasi Akademik dan Kompetensi Guru*. Depdiknas.
- Fee, G. D., & Stuart, D. (2014). *How to read the Bible for all its worth* (4th ed.). Zondervan.
- Groome, T. H. (2011). *Will there be faith? A new vision for educating and growing disciples*. HarperOne.
- Hamilton, V. P. (2011). *Exodus: An exegetical commentary*. Baker Academic.

- Kemp, J. (2020). Symbolic pedagogy in Christian education: Interpreting sacred objects in contemporary classrooms. *Journal of Christian Education* 63(2), 145-162.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Osborne, G. R. (2006). *The hermeneutical spiral: A comprehensive introduction to biblical interpretation* (2nd ed.). InterVarsity Press.
- Panjaitan, B., Sitompul, B., Panjaitan, MB. (2023). Comparison of Learning Outcomes Using Information and Communications Technology Media with Conventional Learning. *International Development Planning Review* 22(2), 1789-1800. <http://idpr.org.uk/index.php/idpr/article/view/503>
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.
- Ryken, P. G. (2016). *Exodus: Saved for God's glory*. Crossway.
- Sarna, N. M. (1991). *Exodus: The traditional Hebrew text with the new JPS translation*. The Jewish Publication Society.
- Torrance, J. B. (1996). *Worship, community and the triune God of grace*. InterVarsity Press.
- Wright, C. J. H. (2006). *The mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's grand narrative*. InterVarsity Press.