



# Global Perspectives on Christian Education and Theology



## Personal Competence in Faith-Based Teaching: A Reflection on Jacob's Gratitude in Genesis 33:20 among Christian Religious Education Teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu

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### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the personal competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu through the lens of gratitude, as exemplified by Jacob in Genesis 33:20. Personal competence in teaching encompasses emotional regulation, ethical judgment, relational mindfulness, and spiritual groundedness, all of which are vital for effective faith-based pedagogy. By reflecting on Jacob's act of building an altar and expressing thankfulness after reconciliation, this study investigates how gratitude shapes teachers' professional identity and classroom practice. A qualitative methodology combining a systematic literature review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews was employed. The SLR examined existing research on gratitude, personal competence, and faith-based education, providing a theoretical framework. Semi-interviews with CRE teachers allowed for in-depth understanding of lived experiences, capturing how biblical values of gratitude influence emotional stability, ethical decision-making, and teacher-student-parent interactions. Data were analyzed thematically, integrating scriptural insights with practical pedagogical reflections. Findings indicate that gratitude functions as a foundational principle in cultivating personal competence. Jacob's expression of gratitude offers a theological and practical model that enriches the personal competence of CRE teachers. Embedding gratitude in professional practice fosters holistic development, improves relational and ethical capacities, and enhances the educational and spiritual climate of the school. This research underscores the value of faith-informed reflective practice in teacher development and provides insights for integrating biblical virtues into contemporary educational contexts.*

**Keywords:** *Personal Competence, Christian Religious Education, Faith-Based Teaching*

### INTRODUCTION

Personal competence is one of the core dimensions of teacher professionalism, especially for Christian Religious Education teachers whose task extends beyond academic instruction to the formation of spiritual character and moral identity. In the Indonesian

educational framework, the competence of teachers encompasses pedagogical, professional, social, and personal dimensions, with the latter emphasizing integrity, emotional stability, exemplary behavior, spiritual maturity, and the ability to reflect Christian virtues in everyday life (Sanjaya, 2020). For CRE teachers, personal competence is not merely a professional expectation but a theological responsibility grounded in Scripture and expressed through daily practices that witness to the values of Christian faith (Suryawati, 2021). One of these essential values is gratitude—a disposition that shapes how teachers respond to challenges, build relationships, and nurture students in a faith-informed educational environment. The concept of gratitude in the Christian tradition is deeply rooted in biblical narratives, particularly those that demonstrate how individuals recognize God's guidance and respond with acts of thanksgiving. One meaningful example is found in Genesis 33:20, where Jacob, after a long journey of conflict, fear, reconciliation, and divine intervention, builds an altar and names it "*Elohe-Israel*," an act symbolizing gratitude for God's protection and covenantal fidelity. Scholars argue that Jacob's gesture embodies a transformation of character—a shift from self-reliance and deception to humility, acknowledgement, and thanksgiving toward God (Brueggemann, 1982). This narrative offers rich pedagogical value for CRE teachers, providing a model for personal spiritual reflection and a framework for cultivating gratitude as an inner disposition that influences professional behavior.

In the context of SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu, where Christian education serves as one of the foundational pillars of student development, the personal competence of CRE teachers plays a critical role in shaping the ethos of the school environment. Teachers are expected to embody Christian virtues such as integrity, patience, gratitude, and compassion in their interactions with students, colleagues, and the broader community (Manalu, 2019). Gratitude, in particular, is not simply an emotional response but a theological stance that recognizes God's sovereignty and goodness in all circumstances. When teachers internalize and practice gratitude, they become more capable of maintaining emotional stability, responding gracefully to challenges, and inspiring students through lived example (Tampubolon, 2022). Thus, integrating the value of gratitude from Genesis 33:20 into teacher identity formation is both educationally strategic and theologically grounded. Previous research has highlighted the importance of spiritual formation in enhancing teacher personal competence. Studies suggest that teachers who cultivate habits of spiritual reflection, prayer, and thanksgiving are more resilient, empathetic, and capable of ethical decision-making (Nainggolan, 2020). However, there remains a gap in the literature regarding the specific role of biblical narratives—particularly the story of Jacob's gratitude—in shaping the personal competence of CRE teachers in local school contexts. Empirical explorations within rural Christian school environments, such as SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu, remain limited, despite their significant contribution to character-based education in Indonesia. This research therefore aims to explore how the value of gratitude exemplified in Genesis 33:20 informs and enhances the personal competence of CRE teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu. By employing an interpretive and qualitative approach, the study investigates teachers' understanding of Jacob's act of thanksgiving, their integration of gratitude into personal spirituality, and the implications for their teaching practices and relational dynamics. Ultimately, this study contributes to the broader discourse on faith-based teacher

professionalism by demonstrating how biblical reflection can enrich personal character formation and strengthen the moral-spiritual fabric of Christian education.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design with a dual approach: a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews to explore how the value of gratitude, as exemplified in Genesis 33:20, informs the personal competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu. A qualitative approach was selected because personal competence, particularly when grounded in spiritual values, is best understood through interpretive insights rather than quantitative measures, allowing for in-depth exploration of lived experiences, perceptions, and reflective practices (Creswell, 2021). The SLR was conducted to establish a theoretical and empirical foundation regarding teacher personal competence, gratitude in Christian pedagogy, and the integration of biblical narratives into professional practice. Relevant studies were identified through academic databases. Inclusion criteria encompassed peer-reviewed articles, books, and book chapters published within the last 20 years, written in English or Indonesian, that discussed teacher professional development, spiritual virtues in education, or biblical reflections in pedagogy. Exclusion criteria included studies not directly addressing Christian education or teacher personal competence. Each source was critically analyzed for relevance, credibility, and contribution to the conceptual framework, and key themes were synthesized to guide the semi-structured interview questions (Booth, Sutton, & Papaioannou, 2016). The SLR provided insight into established models of personal competence, the role of gratitude in professional and spiritual growth, and practical strategies for integrating biblical principles into teacher conduct. To complement the literature review, semi-structured interviews were conducted with CRE teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu to capture their reflections and practical experiences in embodying gratitude in their professional and personal lives. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants who have a minimum of three years of teaching experience and are actively engaged in PAK teaching, ensuring rich insights into reflective practice and spiritual integration (Patton, 2015). A total of five teachers participated, representing different grade levels and years of service. The interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore three main areas: teachers' understanding of personal competence and gratitude, their interpretation of Jacob's gratitude in Genesis 33:20, and strategies for integrating gratitude into classroom practice and personal interactions with students and colleagues. Sample questions included: *"How do you define personal competence in the context of Christian teaching?"* and *"In what ways does Jacob's gratitude inspire your professional conduct?"* Interviews were conducted in Bahasa Indonesia to facilitate natural and authentic expression, with each session lasting approximately 40–60 minutes. Data from both the SLR and interviews were analyzed, allowing the identification of patterns, recurring ideas, and insights linking biblical principles with teacher personal competence (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Codes were developed both inductively from interview transcripts and deductively from literature-derived themes, particularly focusing on gratitude, reflection, integrity, emotional regulation, and pedagogical application. Triangulation between literature and participant perspectives enhanced credibility and interpretive validity. Reflexive notes were

maintained throughout the research process to acknowledge potential researcher bias and ensure transparency. Participants were fully informed about the study's aims and procedures and provided written consent. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality, and participants retained the right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. All data were securely stored to protect participants' privacy.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex interplay between personal competence, gratitude as a spiritual virtue, and the professional practice of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu. By integrating insights from the systematic literature review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews, the discussion illustrates how teachers internalize the biblical example of Jacob in Genesis 33:20 and translate it into relational, pedagogical, and reflective behaviors that enhance their personal competence. Through both literature and interviews, personal competence emerged as a multidimensional construct encompassing emotional regulation, ethical integrity, reflective practice, and interpersonal sensitivity. Literature emphasizes that personal competence in teaching extends beyond cognitive skills and instructional ability to include self-awareness, resilience, and spiritual grounding (Day & Gu, 2014; Shapiro, 2016). Within the context of CRE, personal competence is deeply intertwined with spiritual maturity, particularly the ability to model Christlike virtues such as humility, patience, and gratitude. Teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu described personal competence as a combination of professional skill, moral integrity, and relational sensitivity. One teacher explained: *"Being personally competent means knowing myself, regulating my emotions, and ensuring that every action I take as a teacher reflects my faith and care for students."* This reflection aligns with SLR findings highlighting that personal competence is both a professional and spiritual attribute, allowing teachers to navigate challenging classroom and relational situations while remaining anchored in ethical and theological principles (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009; Tisdell, 2003).

Gratitude emerged as a central theme linking personal competence with the biblical example of Jacob in Genesis 33:20, where Jacob builds an altar and names it *"El-Elohe-Israel,"* expressing thankfulness to God for reconciliation and divine protection. The SLR revealed that gratitude is not only a moral virtue but also a psychological and relational resource that supports professional resilience, fosters positive interpersonal relationships, and enhances well-being (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2010). Teachers described their understanding of gratitude as a conscious acknowledgment of both divine provision and the collaborative efforts of colleagues, students, and parents. One participant stated: *"Every time I prepare lessons or interact with students, I remind myself to be thankful-for the opportunity to teach, for the students' efforts, and for the support from parents. Gratitude shapes how I act and respond."* This perspective echoes the SLR insights that gratitude is both reflective and active: it involves internal appreciation and externalized expressions through words, gestures, and ethical conduct (Watkins et al., 2015). In the CRE context, teachers' gratitude manifests in careful attention to students' needs, positive reinforcement, and empathetic engagement, which reinforces relational competence and contributes to classroom harmony.

Interviews revealed that teachers consciously draw lessons from Jacob's gratitude to guide their personal and professional behavior. For example, one teacher reflected on Jacob's act of building an altar as a symbolic acknowledgment of God's faithfulness and peace: *"I see Jacob's gratitude as a reminder to pause, reflect, and honor God's guidance in my daily teaching. This reflection influences how I handle conflicts and how I recognize students' achievements."* Teachers reported applying this biblical principle in several ways. First, gratitude shaped their reflective practice, prompting them to evaluate daily interactions and decisions in light of spiritual values. Reflection often occurred at the end of the school day, during personal prayer, or in professional discussions with colleagues. This practice aligns with the literature on reflective teaching, which emphasizes that continuous self-assessment enhances both pedagogical effectiveness and personal growth (Schön, 1983; Day & Gu, 2014). Second, gratitude informed classroom behavior, particularly in maintaining patience, encouraging student participation, and acknowledging efforts rather than merely outcomes. Teachers highlighted that recognizing students' progress—even in small steps—creates a positive learning environment and models Christlike acknowledgment of human dignity. Third, gratitude influenced interpersonal relationships with colleagues and parents. Teachers deliberately communicated appreciation for cooperative efforts and demonstrated humility, thereby strengthening collaborative networks critical for student development. Such behaviors align with the literature emphasizing that relational competence and gratitude are mutually reinforcing, enhancing social cohesion and professional efficacy (Froh et al., 2010).

While teachers expressed a strong commitment to embodying gratitude, several challenges emerged. Time constraints, administrative demands, and classroom management pressures sometimes limited opportunities for reflective practice and intentional expression of gratitude. One teacher noted: *"There are days when I feel rushed and cannot fully pause to reflect or express thanks. I try, but sometimes practicality overtakes ideal practice."* This finding corresponds with literature highlighting the tension between spiritual ideals and practical teaching demands. Integrating gratitude into professional behavior requires intentionality, especially in environments with heavy workloads and diverse student needs (Shapiro, 2016). Some students and parents may not recognize or reciprocate expressions of gratitude, which can challenge teachers' persistence in maintaining relational and reflective practices. Teachers employed coping strategies such as brief reflective pauses, journaling, or verbal acknowledgments, ensuring that gratitude remains embedded in their personal competence framework. Teachers frequently reported that gratitude contributes to emotional regulation and professional resilience. By focusing on positive aspects of their work, teachers were able to maintain composure during difficult interactions, reduce stress, and respond to challenges constructively. One teacher remarked: *"When I feel frustrated with a student or situation, remembering God's blessings and the support I have from others helps me calm down and respond thoughtfully."* SLR evidence corroborates these observations, indicating that gratitude interventions can reduce negative affect, enhance self-efficacy, and promote adaptive coping strategies in professional contexts (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Wood et al., 2010). In the CRE setting, this emotional regulation is particularly

relevant, as teachers frequently navigate morally and spiritually charged classroom discussions while modeling Christian virtues.

Another theme that emerged was the influence of gratitude on ethical decision-making. Teachers articulated that recognizing their responsibilities as instruments of God's guidance instilled a sense of accountability. They interpreted Jacob's gratitude as an ethical model: acknowledging God and others' roles in shaping life circumstances. This awareness informed decisions regarding fairness, discipline, and pedagogical interventions. Teachers consciously avoided favoritism, dishonesty, or punitive measures inconsistent with the values of love and respect emphasized in biblical narratives. This finding aligns with SLR insights suggesting that gratitude strengthens moral awareness and guides ethical behavior in professional settings (Algoe et al., 2013). The integration of gratitude into personal competence has broader implications for teacher formation and professional development. Participants suggested that CRE teacher training should include reflective exercises, biblical case studies, and opportunities to practice gratitude-centered pedagogy. Literature supports this recommendation, noting that reflective and spiritually informed professional development enhances teacher efficacy, relational competence, and student outcomes (Knight, 2016; Tisdell, 2003). By systematically incorporating gratitude and other virtues into teacher education, schools can cultivate professionals capable of modeling Christlike character and sustaining resilient, positive learning environments. The combination of SLR and semi-structured interviews provided a holistic understanding of personal competence as a spiritually grounded construct. While literature offered theoretical frameworks and empirical evidence linking gratitude to professional and relational efficacy, interviews demonstrated how these principles are internalized and operationalized in daily teaching practice. This triangulation reinforces the validity of findings, showing that Jacob's gratitude in Genesis 33:20 serves as both a theological exemplar and a practical guide for CRE teachers' personal competence. The study contributes to the discourse on faith-based pedagogy by illustrating how scriptural narratives can inform teacher development beyond doctrinal instruction. Jacob's gratitude offers a model for integrating spiritual reflection into professional practice, enhancing emotional intelligence, ethical conduct, and relational sensitivity. The findings highlight the dynamic interplay between faith, pedagogy, and personal competence, underscoring that effective teaching in Christian contexts involves holistic integration of cognitive, relational, and spiritual dimensions. While the study offers valuable insights, limitations include the small sample size and focus on a single school, which may limit generalizability. Additionally, participants' self-reported reflections could be influenced by social desirability bias, particularly given the religious context. Future research could expand to multiple schools, employ longitudinal observation, or explore the impact of gratitude-focused interventions on teacher effectiveness and student outcomes. Further studies might also investigate cross-cultural interpretations of biblical gratitude and their implications for diverse educational contexts. The findings reveal that CRE teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu integrate gratitude as a key component of personal competence through reflective practice, relational sensitivity, ethical decision-making, and emotional regulation. Jacob's gratitude in Genesis 33:20 provides a theological and moral anchor, guiding teachers in translating spiritual reflection into professional behavior. Gratitude fosters resilience, strengthens interpersonal relationships, and

contributes to ethical and effective pedagogical practice. By embedding gratitude into daily routines and interactions, teachers not only enhance their personal competence but also model virtuous behavior for students and colleagues, reinforcing the spiritual and moral aims of Christian education.

## CONCLUSION

This study demonstrates that personal competence among Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu is profoundly influenced by the biblical model of gratitude exemplified in Jacob's actions in Genesis 33:20. By building an altar and naming it "El-Elohe-Israel," Jacob expresses sincere thankfulness for reconciliation and divine protection, offering a vivid example of reflective, relational, and ethical engagement. The research shows that teachers do not merely interpret this narrative as doctrinal content but internalize it as a guiding principle that informs their professional conduct, emotional regulation, and relational interactions. First, the study concludes that gratitude functions as a central pillar of personal competence. Teachers described how reflective acknowledgment of God's providence, their students' efforts, and the support of colleagues and parents helps cultivate patience, empathy, and ethical sensitivity. Through semi-structured interviews, participants consistently emphasized that gratitude shapes their interactions both inside and outside the classroom. They engage in deliberate practices such as reflective pauses, verbal affirmations of appreciation, and prayerful consideration of daily teaching challenges. These practices resonate with findings from systematic literature reviews, which indicate that gratitude enhances resilience, reduces professional stress, and promotes relational competence (Emmons & McCullough, 2003; Froh et al., 2010). Second, the integration of gratitude into personal competence strengthens teachers' relational and ethical behaviors. Observations from the interviews revealed that teachers consciously apply Jacob's model to nurture constructive communication with students, parents, and colleagues. Gratitude encourages relational mindfulness, ethical decision-making, and reflective judgment, ensuring that interactions are guided by respect, fairness, and compassion. Teachers actively cultivate a learning environment where students feel valued and supported, modeling Christlike behavior and reinforcing the holistic aims of Christian education (Groome, 1998; Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Third, the research highlights the role of gratitude in emotional regulation and professional resilience. Teachers indicated that reflecting on blessings and divine guidance allows them to remain composed in challenging situations, mitigating frustration and fostering patience. This aligns with the literature emphasizing that gratitude promotes psychological well-being and adaptive coping strategies, which are essential for sustaining personal competence in demanding educational contexts (Wood et al., 2010; Shapiro, 2016). Fourth, while teachers demonstrated effective integration of gratitude into practice, they faced challenges such as time constraints, administrative pressures, and varying levels of parental engagement. Nevertheless, they employed adaptive strategies-such as concise reflections, journaling, and flexible communication methods-to maintain consistency in applying gratitude-based practices. These findings suggest that the cultivation of personal competence is both dynamic and context-sensitive, requiring intentionality, flexibility, and spiritual grounding. The study concludes that embedding gratitude into CRE teachers' professional and personal practices

contributes not only to individual development but also to the broader school environment. Teachers' gratitude-informed behaviors enhance collaboration, foster trust, and model ethical and spiritual virtues that positively influence students, parents, and colleagues. The biblical narrative of Jacob thus functions as both a theological exemplar and a practical framework for cultivating personal competence that integrates faith, reflection, and relational mindfulness. Personal competence in CRE teaching is multidimensional, encompassing emotional, ethical, relational, and spiritual capacities. Gratitude, as reflected in Jacob's expression of thanks in Genesis 33:20, serves as a core virtue that anchors teachers' professional identity, strengthens their relational and ethical practices, supports emotional resilience, and enhances the educational and spiritual climate of SMP Swasta BNKP Luzamanu. The study underscores the importance of faith-informed reflective practice in teacher development and invites further research on structured interventions to cultivate gratitude and personal competence in diverse educational settings.

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