



Crafting Perseverant Learners: Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers Inspired by Exodus 37:1 at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers contributes to the development of student perseverance, drawing conceptual inspiration from the craftsmanship motif in Exodus 37:1 and situating the inquiry at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara. Using a mixed qualitative design that combines a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, the study explores the pedagogical processes through which perseverance is shaped as both an academic disposition and a moral-spiritual virtue. Eleven purposively selected participants—including CRE teachers, students, and school leaders—provided insights into how planning, instruction, assessment, and classroom climate influence students' capacity to persist through challenges. Data were analyzed through an inductive thematic approach, triangulated with SLR findings to strengthen interpretive depth. The results show that perseverance emerges not from isolated motivational techniques but from a holistic pedagogical ecology. Teachers foster perseverance through structured lesson planning, relational and dialogic instruction, reflective formative assessment, and emotionally safe classroom environments. The theological image of craftsmanship in Exodus 37:1 enriches these practices by offering a metaphor of patient, purposeful effort that resonates with students' learning experiences. Students demonstrate greater resilience when teachers model perseverance, encourage risk-taking, reframe mistakes as learning opportunities, and connect academic struggle with meaningful narratives of growth. Furthermore, the findings indicate that pedagogical competence is most effective when infused with relational sensitivity and a clear vision of character formation. This study concludes that the cultivation of perseverant learners requires an integrated pedagogy that combines professional expertise, relational support, and spiritually grounded meaning-making. The findings offer theoretical and practical contributions for educators seeking to strengthen perseverance as a core educational outcome.

Keywords: *Perseverant Learners, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Perseverance has increasingly become a crucial attribute for learners in contemporary education, particularly in environments where students face academic, social, and psychological challenges that demand resilience and sustained effort. In the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE), perseverance is not only viewed as an academic disposition but also as a spiritual and moral virtue that shapes character and long-term motivation. The role of the teacher, especially in the field of Christian education, is therefore pivotal in cultivating this quality among students. Pedagogical competence—encompassing mastery of teaching strategies, classroom management, student engagement, and the ability to contextualize learning—serves as one of the key determinants of students' perseverance in school settings. When teachers demonstrate strong pedagogical competence, they are more capable of creating learning environments that encourage persistence, meaningful reflection, and spiritual growth. In Indonesia, including schools such as SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara, Christian Religious Education teachers operate within a multicultural and multireligious environment where the development of student perseverance requires a delicately balanced pedagogical approach. CRE teachers are expected not only to deliver biblical knowledge but also to embody values that inspire students to remain steadfast when confronting academic challenges or moral dilemmas. As such, examining the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers becomes increasingly relevant, particularly in light of contemporary concerns regarding declining student motivation, fragmented attention, and the influence of digital distractions on learning persistence. The biblical foundation of this study is drawn from Exodus 37:1, which describes Bezalel crafting the Ark of the Covenant with meticulous skill, dedication, and obedience. Bezalel's craftsmanship symbolizes not only technical mastery but also perseverance embodied through deliberate, purposeful, and faithful work³. The verse functions as a theological metaphor for pedagogical competence: just as Bezalel was equipped with divine wisdom, craftsmanship, and understanding to complete a sacred task, Christian educators are likewise called to embody skill, diligence, and steadfastness in shaping the character and learning attitudes of their students. This theological parallel suggests that pedagogical competence in CRE is not purely technical but deeply spiritual, involving the integration of skill, motivation, and moral intention. In the Indonesian education landscape, pedagogical competence is formally recognized as a core standard for professional teachers. It includes the ability to design meaningful learning experiences, apply appropriate methods, utilize assessment instruments, and understand student characteristics. However, empirical observations in various regions, including North Sumatra, reveal substantial variation in the implementation of these competencies. Some teachers exhibit strong mastery, while others struggle with lesson planning, contextualized pedagogy, and the use of creative learning strategies that stimulate perseverance. Given that perseverance is closely linked to teacher influence—both instructional and relational—understanding the competence of CRE teachers becomes essential for improving educational outcomes.

SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara presents a unique locus for studying this issue. The school is situated in an environment where students come from diverse socio-economic and religious backgrounds, requiring CRE teachers to navigate both academic and spiritual

dimensions with sensitivity. Several preliminary observations indicate that although students demonstrate potential, many struggle with sustaining motivation, completing assignments, and maintaining consistency in their learning behavior. These conditions demand teachers who are pedagogically skilled, spiritually grounded, and capable of fostering perseverance through instructional practices rooted in biblical values. Research exploring the intersection between Christian Religious Education, pedagogical skill, and biblical reflection—especially through the lens of Exodus 37:1—remains scarce. Most existing studies concentrate either on teacher competence broadly or on biblical character formation, but few examine how theological narratives like Bezalel’s craftsmanship can inform contemporary pedagogical practices. Therefore, this study seeks to fill that gap by analyzing how CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara integrate pedagogical competence with biblical inspiration to cultivate perseverance among learners. Grounded in both educational theory and biblical theology, this study argues that pedagogical competence rooted in spiritual understanding can significantly enhance students’ perseverance. By viewing teaching as a sacred craft—analogue to Bezalel’s divinely inspired workmanship—CRE teachers can model and cultivate resilience, commitment, and diligence within the classroom. Ultimately, this research aspires to contribute to Christian educational discourse and offer practical insights for strengthening teacher competence in shaping perseverant learners.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative design that integrated a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews to produce a triangulated and contextually grounded understanding of how pedagogical competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers fosters student perseverance at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara. The mixed-qualitative strategy was chosen to combine rigorous theoretical synthesis with empirical, practice-based insights (Creswell, 2018). The SLR formed the conceptual backbone of the research. Following established SLR procedures, the review proceeded through identification, screening, eligibility assessment, and thematic synthesis. Searches were conducted in major academic databases including Google Scholar, ERIC, JSTOR, and DOAJ for the period 2013–2024 using keywords such as “pedagogical competence,” “Christian Religious Education,” “student perseverance,” “biblical pedagogy,” and “Exodus 37:1” (Peters et al., 2015). Inclusion criteria emphasized peer-reviewed studies, theoretical treatments of teacher competence in values-based education, empirical work on perseverance or resilience in schooling, and theological reflections applicable to pedagogy. After duplicate removal and relevance screening, 41 articles met the inclusion threshold and were synthesized into thematic clusters: frameworks of pedagogical competence, conceptualizations of perseverance in education, biblical metaphors of craftsmanship, and classroom practices in CRE (Kitchenham, 2004). Complementing the SLR, semi-structured interviews gathered in-depth perspectives from actors directly involved in CRE at the study locus. Purposive sampling identified participants with relevant experience: two CRE teachers, the school principal, and three students, enabling triangulation of instructional and learner viewpoints. Semi-structured interviews were selected for their balance between consistency across interviews and flexibility to probe emergent topics (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). An interview guide—derived from SLR themes—explored domains of pedagogical planning, instructional strategies, assessment for

perseverance, classroom management, and the pedagogical appropriation of Exodus 37:1 as a metaphor for craftsmanship and persistence. Interviews lasted approximately 45-60 minutes. Field notes from classroom observations supplemented interview data to capture contextual subtleties such as teacher-student interactions, learning materials, and evidence of perseverance in practice (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011). Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's interactive model: data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Literature-derived themes functioned as sensitizing concepts during initial coding, but the analytic approach remained open to inductive emergence from interview transcripts and observation notes. The integration of SLR and interview findings was operationalized through thematic convergence mapping-identifying where practice aligned with, extended, or diverged from the literature-and producing a coherent interpretive account. Trustworthiness was addressed via criteria adapted from Lincoln and Guba: credibility through methodological triangulation (SLR + interviews + observation), member checking with participating teachers, dependability via an audit trail of analytic decisions, and transferability by supplying rich contextual description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Ethical safeguards included informed consent, anonymity of participants, secure storage of recordings, and explicit use of data solely for scholarly purposes. By combining the breadth of the SLR with the depth of semi-structured interviews, the study sought to link theoretical constructs about pedagogy and perseverance with lived classroom practices, thereby illuminating how CRE teachers-conceived as craftspeople of character in the tradition of Exodus 37:1-can intentionally foster student perseverance.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a complex yet coherent picture of how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara cultivate perseverance among students through pedagogical competence shaped by both professional frameworks and theological reflection on Exodus 37:1. The integration of insights from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews demonstrates that the construction of student perseverance is neither accidental nor incidental; rather, it is formed through deliberate pedagogical craftsmanship, echoing the meticulous work of Bezalel in crafting the Ark of the Covenant (as emphasized in Exodus 37:1). Across the empirical data and literature, several interrelated themes emerge, highlighting how planning, instruction, assessment, classroom climate, character formation, and the symbolic integration of biblical narratives collectively foster perseverance as a moral and academic disposition. The first major finding concerns the centrality of pedagogical planning in shaping perseverance. Interviews with CRE teachers indicate that lesson planning extends beyond the usual requirement to structure content; it becomes a strategic act of aligning learning objectives, activities, and assessments with moral formation goals. Teachers described planning as a process of "building a structure that students can continue to climb," an expression that resonates strongly with SLR findings showing that perseverance thrives when learning pathways are transparent, predictable, and appropriately scaffolded (as noted in Zimmerman, 2011). The teachers' planning practices reflect a focus on clarity and gradual sequencing, enabling students to face challenges without feeling overwhelmed. Notably, the metaphor of craftsmanship from

Exodus 37:1 appears to shape their planning mindset; teachers articulated that “to teach is to craft,” suggesting that, like Bezalel, they must intentionally shape educational experiences with care and precision (referenced in Wright, 2004). This theological framing supports the SLR insight that pedagogical intentionality enhances student perseverance by communicating that learning is purposeful and meaningful. In terms of instructional delivery, the findings highlight a combination of dialogic, reflective, and experiential approaches that promote perseverance by strengthening internal motivation and personal ownership of learning. Classroom observations reveal that teachers frequently employ questioning techniques that invite students to articulate their reasoning, confront difficulties, and narrate their efforts. Such practices align with literature indicating that dialogic instruction fosters growth mindset and task persistence (as suggested in Mercer & Howe, 2012). Interviews indicate that teachers deliberately model perseverance through their verbal and non-verbal communication—such as recounting their own struggles in learning or demonstrating calm persistence when students face challenges. This resonates with motivational pedagogy research suggesting that teacher modeling is a powerful determinant of student resilience (Bandura, 1997). The teachers’ instructional approach appears deeply influenced by biblical narratives, particularly the craftsmanship motif in Exodus 37:1, which they interpret as God’s affirmation of patient, skilled, and sustained effort. They report using this narrative not only as theological content but also as a metaphor to encourage students to see their learning processes as forms of meaningful craftsmanship (as also interpreted in theological works like Brueggemann, 2001).

A significant result emerging from both SLR and interview data pertains to assessment practices oriented toward perseverance development. Rather than using assessment solely as a measure of achievement, CRE teachers employ it as a formative tool designed to reinforce persistence. They adopt frequent low-stakes assessments, reflective journals, and incremental project tasks that reward effort, process, and improvement rather than merely outcomes. This approach echoes SLR findings emphasizing that when assessment highlights progress, students are more likely to persevere despite setbacks (Brookhart, 2013). Students interviewed expressed that they did not fear “getting things wrong” in CRE classes because the teacher consistently framed errors as part of learning—an indicator of psychologically safe assessment environments. Such findings align with adaptive assessment theory, which argues that error-positive environments cultivate resilience (Dweck, 2006). Moreover, teachers reported using biblical reflection as part of assessment, asking students to identify moments when they persevered during learning activities and relate these to the perseverance embodied in biblical characters or narratives (referencing Walton, 2010). This fusion of formative assessment and biblical interpretation constitutes a unique pedagogical innovation, merging academic and spiritual dimensions of perseverance. Classroom climate emerged as another critical determinant of student perseverance. Observations and interviews consistently depicted a relationally warm, emotionally safe, and values-centered classroom culture in CRE lessons. Teachers consciously foster environments where students feel respected, encouraged, and supported. SLR findings underline that such relational environments predict higher perseverance because they reduce anxiety and enhance perceived competence (Niemic & Ryan, 2009). The relational ethos observed in CRE classrooms

aligns with the theological concept of covenantal relationship, in which mutual commitment shapes communal growth (as discussed in Fretheim, 1991). Teachers expressed that their pedagogical relationships reflect this covenantal ethic: they commit themselves to students' holistic development while encouraging students to commit themselves to learning and personal growth. This mutual commitment contributes to a climate where perseverance is expected and nurtured. Another major result concerns the explicit cultivation of perseverance as a character trait. Interviews reveal that CRE teachers do not treat perseverance as an abstract moral idea; rather, they weave it into daily learning routines and discussions. Students are frequently prompted to reflect on how they approach difficulties, how they respond when tasks require repeated effort, and how perseverance relates to their faith. These practices reflect character education literature indicating that virtue development requires consistent reinforcement in real-life contexts (Lickona, 2009). Teachers use narrative reflection, moral dilemmas, and collaborative activities to help students internalize perseverance. For example, a teacher described a classroom activity in which students built small models using limited materials, a task intentionally designed to require sustained effort and problem-solving perseverance. The activity was then linked back to Exodus 37:1, emphasizing craftsmanship, patience, and obedience in the face of demanding tasks. This reflects SLR findings that virtue-based learning experiences significantly enhance perseverance when grounded in meaningful metaphors (as seen in Arthur, 2014). The integration of biblical inspiration, especially the motif of craftsmanship from Exodus 37:1, constitutes a distinctive feature of CRE pedagogy at this school. Teachers interpret Bezalel's work as a model of divine empowerment for craftsmanship, precision, and perseverance. They reported that this verse helps students conceptualize their learning challenges not as academic burdens but as opportunities to participate in meaningful creation. This theological metaphor appears to function as what educational theorists call a "motivational frame"-a conceptual lens that shapes students' engagement with tasks (Snow & Biancarosa, 2003). Both teacher and student interviews confirm that invoking biblical narratives provides spiritual and emotional reinforcement to persevere. While secular educational literature rarely addresses such explicitly theological motivators, the SLR did identify studies showing that metaphors and narratives can significantly enhance perseverance by enriching learners' sense of meaning and purpose (as evident in the work of Wong & Wong, 2006). Thus, this study demonstrates how theological metaphors can serve as powerful pedagogical tools when properly integrated into instruction. A further result relates to the role of teacher identity and spiritual vocation in fostering perseverance. Interviews reveal that CRE teachers perceive their role not only as educators but also as mentors and moral guides. They view perseverance as a virtue they must exemplify before they can expect students to develop it. This finding echoes SLR results showing that teacher authenticity and integrity are crucial in character formation (as emphasized in Sockett, 2012). Teachers described personal practices-such as praying before teaching, engaging in scriptural reflection, or revisiting their sense of calling-that helped them remain patient, consistent, and hopeful in their pedagogical tasks. These practices indirectly strengthen student perseverance because they stabilize the relational and moral environment of the classroom. The idea that spiritual grounding enhances pedagogical competence aligns with theological reflections on educational vocation (as in Palmer, 1998) and contributes an important nuance to existing research on perseverance

development. In synthesizing findings from the SLR and interviews, the discussion reveals that the development of perseverance results from the intersection of several pedagogical factors rather than any single instructional strategy. The SLR emphasized that perseverance is enhanced by structured planning, supportive assessment, growth-oriented instruction, and positive classroom climate. The interviews revealed how these theoretical constructs operate concretely in CRE classrooms and are further enriched by theological reflection. The craftsmanship motif from Exodus 37:1 serves as a unifying conceptual framework, providing teachers with inspiration for planning, metaphors for instruction, and a spiritual rationale for encouraging student perseverance. This integration of CRE pedagogy and biblical symbolism highlights the unique contribution of faith-based instruction to character development in public schooling contexts. The discussion also underscores that perseverance is not merely an individual trait but a socially and spiritually situated virtue. Students develop perseverance when they feel embedded in relational networks of support, when learning tasks are meaningful, and when teachers model intellectual and moral discipline. These findings align with socio-cultural theories of learning, which emphasize that motivation and perseverance are co-constructed within social environments (Vygotsky, 1978). The CRE classroom at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara exemplifies such a community of practice, where perseverance is cultivated through shared narratives, collaborative activities, and relational commitment. The study contributes to literature on faith-integrated pedagogy by showing how biblical themes can enrich secular virtues without compromising academic standards. The pedagogical use of Exodus 37:1 does not function as dogmatic instruction but as a metaphorical and motivational tool that invites students to perceive learning as a form of creative craftsmanship requiring sustained effort. This reaffirms insights from theological education research that biblical narratives can serve as powerful resources for moral and character education when interpreted appropriately (as suggested in Vanhoozer, 2015). The results suggest that the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara successfully fosters perseverance through a synergistic combination of professional practice, relational care, formative assessment, and theological meaning-making. Teaching, in this context, becomes an act of crafting-not only crafting lessons but crafting character, inspired by the craftsmanship depicted in Exodus 37:1. Students are encouraged to persevere not merely for academic success but as an expression of personal and spiritual growth. This fusion of pedagogical and theological craftsmanship stands as the core contribution of this study to educational research.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to explore how the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara contributes to the cultivation of perseverance among students, drawing inspiration from the craftsmanship motif in Exodus 37:1. By integrating a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews and classroom observations, the research has illuminated how perseverance-as both a moral virtue and an academic disposition-is shaped through the deliberate, relational, and spiritually informed pedagogical practices of CRE teachers. The findings reinforce the argument that perseverance is not merely a psychological trait that emerges naturally over time but a cultivated attribute fostered within structured and meaningful pedagogical environments. The teachers' practices demonstrate that perseverance grows

when instructional planning is purposeful, instruction is dialogic and relational, assessment is formative and encouraging, and classroom climate is emotionally safe and theologically anchored. In this sense, the study affirms that the pedagogical processes associated with perseverance are deeply multidimensional and cannot be reduced to motivational techniques alone; rather, they are embedded in the holistic fabric of teaching where cognitive, emotional, social, and spiritual dimensions intersect. The research highlights that pedagogical planning serves as a foundational component of perseverance formation. Teachers who conceptualize their lessons as structured journeys-akin to the patient craftsmanship illustrated in Exodus 37:1-provide students with clear directions, manageable goals, and scaffolded pathways. Such planning reduces learning anxiety, increases clarity of expectations, and creates opportunities for incremental success, all of which contribute to sustained effort. The biblical motif of craftsmanship provides teachers with a conceptual framework that elevates their planning from routine task preparation to a form of intentional formation work. This theological metaphor enriches the professional rationale for structure and care, reminding teachers that perseverance is cultivated through environments that value process as deeply as product. Instructional delivery further reinforces perseverance by fostering internal motivation, reflective thinking, and resilience. The CRE teachers' use of dialogic techniques, storytelling, reflective questioning, and personal modeling aligns with long-standing research showing that relational instruction enhances learner persistence. The teachers' practice of sharing personal experiences of struggle and growth humanizes the learning process and models the perseverance they expect from students. Theologically, the integration of Exodus 37:1 gives these instructional practices symbolic depth, enabling students to perceive their own efforts as part of a larger narrative of craftsmanship and spiritual growth. This demonstrates how biblical narratives-when used thoughtfully-can expand students' motivational horizons, providing meaning that transcends immediate academic challenges. Assessment practices in CRE classrooms emerged as another influential factor in shaping perseverance. Rather than functioning merely as evaluative checkpoints, assessments are designed as formative experiences oriented toward growth, reflection, and incremental improvement. Teachers encourage students to view mistakes as integral to learning, thereby reducing fear of failure and promoting resilience. This error-positive environment aligns with established theories of growth mindset and adaptive learning and reinforces the theological narrative that faithful effort and steady progress are more valuable than perfection. The incorporation of reflective assessment practices also shows how perseverance is strengthened when students are invited not only to perform academically but also to interpret their own learning journeys. The relational climate cultivated in CRE classrooms plays a vital role in enabling students to persist through difficulties. The study demonstrates that when students experience their classrooms as spaces of encouragement, mutual respect, and emotional safety, they are more willing to take risks, seek help, and endure challenges. The relational ethos of these classrooms reflects a covenantal understanding of teaching-a sense of shared responsibility and mutual commitment grounded in Christian anthropology. The warmth and trust that characterize these relationships strengthen perseverance by giving students confidence that their efforts matter and are supported.

A unique contribution of this study lies in its illumination of how theological metaphors—particularly the craftsmanship image in Exodus 37:1—can enrich character education within a public school context. The teachers' use of the verse is not doctrinal enforcement but a metaphorical and motivational resource that encourages students to see their learning as a constructive and meaningful process. This study expands the literature on faith-integrated pedagogy by demonstrating that biblical narratives can function as conceptual frameworks for educational virtues such as perseverance, especially when articulated in ways that resonate with universal human experiences of effort, growth, and craftsmanship. The study concludes that the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers at SMP Negeri 1 Rantau Utara successfully fosters perseverance by integrating professional expertise, relational sensitivity, formative assessment, and spiritually informed storytelling. Perseverance is constructed not through isolated strategies but through a coherent, holistic pedagogy that treats students not as passive recipients of information but as young craftsmen shaping their character and learning. The findings underscore that perseverance grows in classrooms where teachers embody patience, intentionality, and faith in students' potential—mirroring the patient craftsmanship depicted in Exodus 37:1. Thus, the study affirms that cultivating perseverant learners requires not only technique but also vision: a belief that students can craft resilient identities through supported struggle and meaningful effort. In this way, CRE teachers contribute not only to academic success but also to the formation of enduring character that prepares students for the challenges of life beyond the classroom.

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