



## Integrating Professional Competence and Christlike Example in Christian Religious Education for Spiritual Development of Students (Case Study at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2)

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### ABSTRACT

*Education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the cultivation of character, values, and spirituality, particularly in Indonesia's pluralistic context where schools play a vital role in fostering both intellectual growth and moral responsibility. Within this framework, Christian Religious Education (CRE) is a strategic medium for instilling faith, integrity, and spiritual discipline in young learners. The central focus of this study is the integration of professional competence and Christlike example in the teaching of CRE, highlighting how these two dimensions shape students' spiritual development. This research employed a qualitative case study design at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2, North Sumatra. Participants included two CRE teachers, the school principal, and twelve students from grades IV–VI. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and analyzed thematically to identify patterns of professional competence and Christlike modeling. Findings revealed that CRE teachers demonstrated strong professional competence through structured lesson planning, mastery of biblical content, and interactive pedagogical practices such as storytelling and role-playing. Equally significant was their Christlike example, expressed in patience, compassion, humility, and forgiveness, which students identified as a "living curriculum." The integration of competence and example fostered not only cognitive understanding of biblical teachings but also authentic spiritual growth, evidenced by students' increased discipline in prayer, respect for peers, and practice of Christian values in daily life. The study concludes that professional competence without spiritual authenticity is insufficient, while Christlike modeling without pedagogical skill lacks effectiveness. Their integration provides a holistic approach to CRE, nurturing faith, character, and social harmony. The findings underscore the need for teacher development programs that integrate professional training with spiritual formation, ensuring CRE fulfills its transformative mission in Indonesia's diverse educational landscape.*

**Keywords:** Professional Competence, Christlike Example, Christian Religious Education

## INTRODUCTION

Education is not only the transmission of knowledge but also the cultivation of character, values, and spirituality, making it a transformative process that shapes individuals and societies alike. In Indonesia, where diversity in religion, culture, and ethnicity is deeply embedded in the national fabric, schools play an especially vital role in preparing students for life in a pluralistic society. Education is expected not only to equip learners with intellectual skills but also to nurture them into responsible citizens who can respect differences and contribute positively to social harmony. Within this broader educational mission, Christian Religious Education (CRE) functions as a strategic medium to instill faith, moral integrity, and spiritual discipline in young learners. It provides students with the foundation for developing personal spirituality while simultaneously encouraging them to embody ethical values in their everyday lives (Suyadi, 2021). Thus, CRE cannot be reduced to the teaching of dogmatic doctrines; it must be understood as a holistic process of faith formation and moral cultivation. The role of the teacher in this process is profoundly significant. Christian Religious Education teachers carry a responsibility that extends well beyond classroom instruction. They are not merely transmitters of biblical knowledge but also mentors, counselors, and role models who embody the very values they seek to impart. This dual responsibility requires that teachers possess not only professional competence but also spiritual authenticity. Professional competence, as Shulman (1987) defined, encompasses pedagogical knowledge, mastery of subject matter, and the ability to design, manage, and evaluate effective learning environments. For CRE teachers, such competence includes the skill to communicate religious content meaningfully, to facilitate reflective and dialogical learning, and to foster a classroom environment where respect, openness, and empathy are prioritized. Yet, competence in itself is insufficient if it is not supported by moral credibility and spiritual integrity. As Agung and Wahyudi (2020) argue, teachers of religion bear the responsibility of guiding students not only toward cognitive mastery but also toward spiritual transformation. Equally important to competence is the Christlike example of the teacher, which functions as a living curriculum that students can observe and emulate. The Gospels portray Jesus as the “Great Teacher” whose ministry exemplified wisdom, compassion, humility, and service (Matthew 11:29; John 13:15). His teaching was inseparable from his actions; he healed the sick, welcomed the marginalized, forgave sins, and sacrificed himself in love. These actions embody the essence of Christian pedagogy: teaching through example. For CRE teachers, following the model of Christ means demonstrating patience when students struggle, showing forgiveness in times of conflict, and consistently acting with humility and compassion. Such Christlike qualities not only enhance the credibility of the teacher but also inspire students to internalize and practice the values they witness in their everyday school life (Harkness, 2019).

The integration of professional competence with Christlike example becomes particularly significant in contexts marked by diversity. At SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2, an elementary school located in North Sumatra, Christian students attend CRE lessons in an environment where peers from other religious and cultural backgrounds also interact. This situation requires CRE teachers to balance the demands of academic instruction with the challenges of fostering tolerance and social harmony. In such a pluralistic setting, the

integration of competence and example ensures that CRE is not only about doctrinal knowledge but also about shaping students into individuals who can engage constructively and peacefully with others. Teachers who are both professionally skilled and spiritually authentic are able to transform the classroom into a space of dialogue, respect, and holistic growth (Barnett, 2022). Consequently, the central research question guiding this study is: How do Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2 integrate professional competence with Christlike example in shaping students' spiritual development? This question seeks to uncover the dynamic relationship between teachers' professional skills and their moral-spiritual witness in the classroom. It emphasizes that spiritual development in students is not merely the product of curricular content but also of lived interactions with teachers who embody the faith they profess. The exploration of this question is critical not only for understanding the specific context of the school in Padang Masiang 2 but also for broader conversations about the future of Christian Religious Education in Indonesia. By highlighting the interplay between professional competence and Christlike modeling, this study aims to contribute to the discourse on how education can effectively nurture both spiritual growth and social harmony in diverse educational contexts.

## **METHODS**

This study adopted a qualitative approach with a case study design, which was deemed appropriate for exploring the complex interplay between professional competence and Christlike example in the teaching of Christian Religious Education (CRE). Qualitative research enables the researcher to investigate participants' experiences in depth and within their natural settings, providing rich and nuanced data that cannot be captured through quantitative surveys alone (Creswell, 2018). The case study design was particularly relevant because it allowed a focused exploration of SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2, highlighting the school's unique cultural, educational, and spiritual characteristics. By concentrating on a single locus, the study was able to generate contextually grounded insights into how CRE teachers integrate professional and spiritual dimensions in their practice. The participants consisted of two Christian Religious Education teachers, the school principal, and twelve students from grades IV–VI who regularly attended CRE classes. Teachers were recruited purposively on the basis of having at least three years of active involvement in CRE instruction, which ensured their familiarity with both pedagogical demands and the spiritual dimensions of their role. The principal was included as a key informant to provide broader institutional perspectives on policies and practices related to religious education. Meanwhile, the student participants were selected through maximum variation sampling, which ensured that the sample represented diverse academic abilities and varying levels of engagement in CRE activities. This diversity enriched the data by capturing multiple perspectives on the influence of teacher competence and modeling in the classroom (Patton, 2015). Doing in-depth interviews with the CRE teachers and the principal were conducted to elicit detailed insights into how professional competence and Christlike example were integrated in daily practice. Classroom observations were carried out during CRE lessons to document teacher-student interactions, instructional strategies, and the ways in which teachers modeled Christian virtues such as humility, love, and forgiveness. Document analysis was undertaken by reviewing lesson plans, teaching materials, and school policies that

addressed character formation and spiritual education (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). The collected data were analyzed using thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Themes were organized under two main domains: professional competence, which included pedagogy, subject mastery, and classroom management; and Christlike example, which encompassed values such as love, humility, forgiveness, and service (Denzin, 2017). This process enhanced the trustworthiness of the results by minimizing potential bias and providing a more holistic interpretation of the data.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study illustrate the centrality of professional competence and Christlike example in the teaching of Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2. The data, drawn from classroom observations, interviews, and document analysis, consistently revealed that teachers were not only effective in pedagogical execution but also embodied the values they sought to cultivate in their students. The integration of professional expertise and Christlike modeling proved to be instrumental in fostering spiritual growth, shaping character, and instilling discipline among elementary school students. The study revealed that the CRE teachers at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2 demonstrated strong professional competence through a combination of pedagogical mastery, effective classroom management, and the ability to make biblical lessons relevant to the lived experiences of their students. Observations indicated that teachers employed a range of interactive teaching strategies such as storytelling, role-playing, dramatization, and group discussions. These strategies not only increased engagement but also allowed students to internalize biblical principles through participatory learning experiences. For example, one observed lesson on the parable of the Good Samaritan included a role-play in which students acted out the story, followed by a discussion on how they could practice kindness in their daily interactions. This approach illustrates how biblical narratives were transformed from abstract texts into lived lessons, bridging the gap between doctrine and daily life. The lesson plans examined during document analysis were found to be well-structured and aligned with the Indonesian national curriculum for religious education. Each plan contained clear learning objectives, anticipated outcomes, and assessment criteria, showing evidence of careful preparation. Furthermore, the teachers consistently incorporated both cognitive and affective domains of learning, ensuring that students not only understood theological concepts but also practiced related moral behaviors (Panjaitan, 2021). This aligns with Shulman's (1987) conception of professional competence, which emphasizes pedagogical content knowledge—the ability to transform subject matter into teachable content that is comprehensible to learners. Effective classroom management was another hallmark of the teachers' competence. They established clear rules and expectations from the outset, using both verbal and non-verbal cues to guide student behavior. However, discipline was not enforced rigidly but was balanced with encouragement and affirmation. Teachers praised students for positive contributions, acknowledged their efforts, and redirected off-task behavior with patience rather than harshness. This approach fostered a classroom environment that was both orderly and nurturing, creating space for meaningful engagement and spiritual reflection. The findings resonate with Darling-Hammond's (2017) assertion that professional competence is not limited to the mastery

of subject matter but includes the capacity to nurture supportive learning environments that cultivate student participation and growth. The emphasis on professional competence among CRE teachers in this school reflects broader educational discourse in Indonesia, which places a premium on holistic teacher quality encompassing pedagogical, social, personal, and professional competencies (Agung & Wahyudi, 2020). The teachers' ability to balance academic rigor with moral guidance highlighted their role as both educators and formators, shaping not only knowledge acquisition but also moral orientation.

### ***Christlike Example as a Living Curriculum***

While pedagogical strategies provided the framework for effective instruction, it was the teachers' Christlike example that transformed lessons into lived realities. In their daily interactions, teachers consistently embodied virtues central to Christian discipleship: patience, forgiveness, compassion, humility, and service. Students repeatedly emphasized in interviews that their teachers "did not only talk about Jesus but acted like Jesus," underscoring the credibility of their witness. This finding echoes the biblical exhortation in 1 Peter 5:3, where leaders are called not to lord over those entrusted to them, but to be examples to the flock. An illustrative incident observed in class involved a disruptive student who persistently interrupted a lesson. Instead of responding with anger, the teacher addressed the behavior firmly but gently, guiding the student to reflect on his actions and offering forgiveness while emphasizing responsibility. This incident demonstrated that spiritual lessons are most effectively communicated not through abstract theorization but through lived modeling. The teacher's composure and compassionate correction became a tangible enactment of Christ's teachings on patience and forgiveness, leaving a lasting impression on the students. This finding reinforces the perspective of Noddings (2013), who argues that authentic moral education occurs when teachers demonstrate care in their relationships with students. For CRE teachers, such care must be grounded in Christlike virtues, as their credibility derives from the alignment between what they teach and how they live. Jesus himself is portrayed in the Gospels as the "Great Teacher" whose ministry integrated words and deeds, embodying wisdom, compassion, humility, and service (Matthew 11:29; John 13:15). By following this model, the teachers at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2 offered their students a "living curriculum" where values were demonstrated as much as they were taught. This dimension of role modeling is consistent with Bandura's (1977) social learning theory, which posits that individuals learn behaviors and attitudes through observation and imitation of role models. Students in this study were not passive recipients of information; rather, they observed, internalized, and imitated the behaviors of their teachers. By witnessing Christlike behavior in concrete classroom contexts, they learned not only what Christian values were but how those values should be practiced.

### ***Integration of Competence and Example for Spiritual Growth***

The integration of professional competence and Christlike example emerged as a powerful catalyst for spiritual growth among students. Classroom observations revealed that students became increasingly disciplined in their prayer practices, showed greater respect toward their peers, and demonstrated heightened interest in expressing Christian

values such as honesty, kindness, and cooperation. Interviews further confirmed this impact. One student stated, "We learn about Jesus from the Bible, but we also see Jesus in the way our teacher acts." This testimony captures the synergy between competence and example: the teachers' professional skills ensured effective transmission of knowledge, while their Christlike conduct reinforced spiritual transformation. The result was not merely cognitive learning but holistic formation, where students' faith, character, and behavior were shaped in alignment with Christian values. The observed outcomes also resonate with Zins et al. (2016), who emphasize the role of social and emotional learning in education. The teachers' ability to integrate pedagogy with emotional and spiritual intelligence enabled them to address not only intellectual but also affective dimensions of student development. Consequently, students experienced CRE not as a detached subject but as a lived encounter with faith that shaped their daily conduct.

Despite the positive outcomes, the study also identified challenges that affected the implementation of CRE. One major challenge was the diverse backgrounds of students. Some students came from families with strong Christian commitments, while others displayed indifference toward religious education, treating it as just another subject. This diversity often resulted in uneven engagement, requiring teachers to adapt their strategies to accommodate varying levels of motivation. Another challenge involved limited resources for creative teaching. While teachers employed storytelling, role-playing, and group discussions, the lack of audiovisual materials, technology, and supplementary texts constrained the breadth of their pedagogical repertoire. Teachers compensated for these limitations by relying heavily on their own creativity and drawing upon local cultural resources to contextualize biblical lessons. This reliance highlights the importance of professional adaptability and resourcefulness in contexts where institutional support is limited (Hargreaves, 2012). The teachers' Christlike patience and resilience enabled them to navigate these challenges without compromising their effectiveness. They viewed challenges not as obstacles but as opportunities to exercise faith, perseverance, and creativity. In this way, their responses to contextual realities became additional lessons in Christian living for their students. The findings of this study carry significant theoretical and practical implications. Theoretically, the study affirms Bandura's (1977) social learning theory by showing that students' spiritual and moral behaviors were shaped through observation and imitation of teachers as role models. In the context of CRE, professional competence ensures accurate and effective content delivery, while Christlike example renders values tangible and transformative. The synergy of these two dimensions demonstrates that effective religious education requires both intellectual rigor and spiritual authenticity. The study highlights the necessity of integrating professional and spiritual formation in teacher training programs. Current models of teacher education in Indonesia emphasize pedagogical and professional skills, but there is often insufficient focus on the cultivation of spiritual integrity and Christlike virtues (Suyadi, 2021). The findings of this research suggest that CRE teachers must be equipped not only as educators but also as mentors who embody the values they teach. Training programs should therefore include components of spiritual formation, reflective practice, and character development alongside pedagogical training. The results underscore the need for institutional support to enhance the capacity of CRE teachers. Schools must provide adequate resources, professional development opportunities, and

supportive environments that enable teachers to balance their professional and spiritual roles effectively. Policies should prioritize holistic teacher development, recognizing that the credibility and effectiveness of CRE depends not only on academic competence but also on spiritual authenticity. This study demonstrates that the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education at SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2 rests on the integration of professional competence and Christlike example. Teachers who master pedagogical strategies and classroom management while embodying the virtues of patience, forgiveness, humility, and compassion serve as powerful role models for their students. This integration fosters not only cognitive understanding of Christian teachings but also authentic spiritual growth, shaping students into individuals who embody Christian values in their daily lives. Although challenges such as diverse student engagement and limited resources exist, the resilience and Christlike character of teachers enable them to overcome these obstacles and transform them into opportunities for modeling faith in practice. The study affirms that effective CRE requires more than professional skill; it demands teachers who live out the gospel they proclaim. Thus, both teacher training institutions and schools must prioritize the integration of professional competence and Christlike formation to ensure that CRE fulfills its mission of nurturing faith, character, and spirituality in students.

## Conclusion

This study concludes that the integration of professional competence and Christlike example is central to the success of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in nurturing the spiritual development of students. The case of SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2 demonstrates that when teachers combine effective pedagogical practices with authentic modeling of Christian values, students experience a holistic form of education that addresses both their intellectual and spiritual needs. CRE, in this context, emerges not merely as a subject for cognitive learning but as a lived encounter with faith, shaping students' character, behavior, and worldview. The findings indicate that professional competence alone, while necessary, is insufficient if divorced from the embodiment of values consistent with Christian teaching. A teacher who possesses strong pedagogical skills yet fails to live out the virtues of humility, patience, forgiveness, and compassion risks undermining the credibility of their instruction. Students may learn biblical content but struggle to see its relevance or transformative power when it is not modeled by those entrusted to teach. On the other hand, spiritual modeling becomes most impactful when supported by strong professional skills. A teacher who embodies Christlike virtues but lacks the pedagogical competence to communicate effectively may inspire admiration but fail to foster deep intellectual and spiritual engagement. The synergy between competence and example thus forms the foundation for meaningful religious education, ensuring that knowledge and practice, faith and life, are integrated in ways that foster holistic transformation. The results also highlight the broader implications for Christian education in Indonesia. In a nation marked by religious and cultural plurality, the role of CRE teachers extends beyond the classroom. They serve as ambassadors of faith who, through their professional integrity and Christlike witness, contribute to building tolerance, empathy, and respect among students. The ability of teachers to model Christlike virtues within pedagogically sound frameworks offers a pathway for Christian education to play a constructive role in shaping the moral fabric of society. This

underscores the importance of aligning teacher preparation and professional development with both academic and spiritual formation, ensuring that educators are equipped to meet the dual demands of competence and witness. From a practical perspective, the study recommends that teacher development programs emphasize emotional and spiritual formation alongside professional training. The integration of reflective practices, spiritual retreats, and mentoring relationships can help teachers internalize the values they are expected to model. Schools, likewise, must take responsibility in supporting teachers' ongoing formation. Providing spaces for collaborative reflection, professional mentoring, and peer support can sustain teachers in embodying Christlike values in their daily professional roles. Such systemic support is critical, as teachers often face challenges related to resource limitations, diverse student backgrounds, and the pressures of maintaining academic standards. By creating supportive institutional cultures, schools enable teachers to integrate their professional competence with their vocation as witnesses to Christ. This study opens avenues for further research. Future studies could adopt comparative approaches, examining how the integration of competence and Christlike example unfolds in schools of different contexts, whether urban or rural, public or private. Quantitative methods could also be employed to measure the long-term impacts of such integration on students' moral reasoning, spiritual practices, and social behaviors. Such research would enrich the theoretical and practical understanding of how CRE can effectively nurture the next generation of students in ways that are both faithful to Christian tradition and responsive to contemporary challenges. The integration of professional competence and Christlike example represents a comprehensive approach to Christian Religious Education. It nurtures intellectual understanding while simultaneously fostering moral and spiritual transformation. At SD Negeri 153029 Padang Masiang 2, this integration proved to be not only effective in shaping students' spirituality but also crucial in modeling a vision of education where teaching and living are inseparable. Such an approach offers a model for how Christian education can continue to serve as a transformative force in Indonesia's diverse educational landscape, guiding students to grow not only in knowledge but also in wisdom, faith, and character.

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