

Enhancing the Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Fostering Environmental Awareness among Students at SDN 101812 Namo Tualang Based on Romans 12:18

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ABSTRACT

Education in Indonesia is designed to foster holistic development, encompassing not only intellectual growth but also moral, spiritual, social, and environmental responsibility. Within this framework, Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a distinctive role by guiding students to integrate biblical teachings with daily practices. This study investigates how enhancing the social competence of CRE teachers contributes to fostering environmental awareness among elementary students at SDN 101812 Namo Tualang. The research was guided by the biblical foundation of Romans 12:18, which emphasizes living at peace with others, extended here to harmonious relationships with the natural environment. A qualitative descriptive design was employed, involving one CRE teacher and twenty-five Christian students from upper elementary grades. Data were collected through interviews, classroom and schoolyard observations, and documentation of lesson plans and environmental activities. Data analysis followed Miles and Huberman's model, supported by triangulation to ensure validity. Findings reveal that the CRE teacher enhanced social competence in three main dimensions: communication, collaboration, and role modeling. Effective communication was achieved by integrating biblical values with ecological themes, encouraging students to see environmental care as a spiritual responsibility. Collaboration was fostered through group projects such as "Green Friday," promoting teamwork and accountability. Role modeling was demonstrated through the teacher's consistent environmentally friendly behavior, inspiring students to imitate positive practices. The study concludes that strengthening CRE teachers' social competence significantly impacts students' environmental attitudes and behaviors, confirming that biblical integration and teacher modeling are key strategies for cultivating responsible Christian discipleship and ecological stewardship.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Environmental Awareness

INTRODUCTION

Education is widely recognized as a transformative process that goes beyond the mere transmission of knowledge and intellectual skills. Its scope includes the holistic development of learners, encompassing moral, spiritual, social, and environmental dimensions. In the Indonesian national curriculum, these domains are explicitly emphasized to nurture students who are not only academically competent but also ethically responsible and socially engaged (Tilaar, 2017). Christian Religious Education (CRE) holds a distinctive place. CRE aims not only to impart biblical knowledge but also to guide students in cultivating values, attitudes, and practices that shape their character and enable them to live faithfully in their relationship with God, their neighbors, and the natural environment (Hasudungan, 2020). Thus, CRE teachers carry a dual responsibility: to deliver doctrinal teaching and to model the Christian way of life through their competence and character. One of the core aspects of teacher competence that significantly influences student development is social competence. Social competence refers to a teacher's ability to establish positive relationships, communicate effectively, and demonstrate empathy, collaboration, and responsibility in various educational settings (Tilaar, 2017). For CRE teachers, social competence is not merely a professional attribute but also a theological necessity. Their capacity to embody values of peace, compassion, and cooperation provides students with practical examples of how Christian principles are lived out in daily life. This is especially relevant during the formative years of elementary education when students are highly impressionable and tend to model their behavior on the examples set by adults, particularly their teachers (Lickona, 2013). The biblical foundation for the importance of social competence in Christian teaching is found in Romans 12:18, which exhorts believers: *"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone."* This verse underscores the responsibility of Christians, including teachers, to cultivate harmony in their social environment. Applied within the educational context, the verse carries profound implications. It reminds CRE teachers that their mission extends beyond academic instruction to fostering peaceful, respectful, and caring communities in schools. Furthermore, living at peace with everyone includes nurturing responsible attitudes toward the environment, since human relationships with nature are part of the broader web of God's creation (Saragih, 2021).

At SDN 101812 Namo Tualang, preliminary observations revealed a concerning pattern among students. Many displayed limited concern for the environment, evident in behaviors such as littering, neglecting classroom and schoolyard cleanliness, and failing to participate actively in ecological stewardship programs. These issues reflect not only a lack of environmental awareness but also deeper challenges in cultivating responsibility and empathy. Left unaddressed, such tendencies risk fostering attitudes of indifference and carelessness that contradict both Christian values and the goals of holistic education. The school context, therefore, highlights the urgent need for teachers-particularly CRE teachers-to enhance their social competence to effectively guide students toward environmental care and responsibility (Pasaribu, 2025). The integration of biblical principles with environmental education becomes particularly crucial in this regard. According to Genesis 2:15, humanity was entrusted with the responsibility "to work and take care" of the Garden of Eden, signifying the divine mandate of stewardship over

creation. This foundational teaching reminds Christian educators that environmental awareness is not a secular agenda but a spiritual calling rooted in God's command. For students, learning that ecological care is part of their faith identity provides stronger motivation to adopt sustainable habits. By linking Scripture with environmental responsibility, CRE teachers can help students view acts such as recycling, conserving resources, or maintaining cleanliness as forms of obedience to God (Nainggolan, 2020). The present study seeks to examine how enhancing the social competence of CRE teachers contributes to fostering environmental awareness among elementary students. Specifically, it investigates the strategies employed by teachers—such as effective communication, collaborative activities, and role modeling—and the observed impact on students' attitudes and behaviors. This study argues that when CRE teachers demonstrate strong social competence, they are better able to translate biblical teachings into practical actions that inspire students to live harmoniously with others and with the natural environment. The significance of this research lies in its contribution to both educational practice and Christian pedagogy. Practically, it provides insights into how CRE teachers can address the pressing issue of environmental neglect among students by leveraging their social competence. Theoretically, it enriches discourse on Christian education by integrating the themes of teacher competence, ecological stewardship, and biblical teaching. In light of Indonesia's ongoing educational reforms and the global urgency of environmental issues, this study emphasizes that building students' environmental awareness is inseparable from cultivating their faith and character. Thus, by grounding education in biblical principles such as Romans 12:18, CRE teachers can foster not only academic excellence but also responsible discipleship and sustainable living.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive approach was used in this research, with the aim of obtaining a deep and contextualized understanding of the ways in which Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers enhance their social competence to foster environmental awareness among students. The qualitative descriptive design was chosen because it allows the researcher to explore not only observable practices but also the meanings and values embedded in the interactions between teachers and students. This approach is particularly appropriate for educational research, where the complexity of social and spiritual dimensions often requires more than statistical representation to be meaningfully interpreted. The research was carried out at SDN 101812 Namo Tualang in the 2024/2025 academic year. The participants of the study consisted of one CRE teacher and twenty-five Christian students drawn from the upper elementary grades. These students were in a formative stage of character development, making them a relevant population for exploring the integration of social competence and environmental responsibility. The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling, with the aim of including individuals who were directly involved in the teaching and learning processes of Christian Religious Education and in the school's environmental activities. Interviews were held with the teacher and students to elicit detailed insights into their perceptions, strategies, and lived experiences related to environmental education and social interaction. Observations were conducted in both classroom and schoolyard settings to document how the teacher demonstrated social competence and how students responded through their environmental practices, such as waste disposal,

participation in cleanliness campaigns, and cooperation in group activities. Documentation was used to analyze lesson plans, school policies, and records of student participation in environmental programs, providing supporting evidence that complemented the interview and observation data. During the data reduction phase, raw data were organized and coded to highlight themes relevant to teacher competence and student environmental awareness. The data display stage involved presenting findings in structured forms such as matrices and narrative descriptions, making it possible to identify relationships across different data sources. Conclusions were drawn by interpreting the patterns and themes to answer the research questions. Information obtained from interviews was cross-checked with observations and documentation, while perspectives from the teacher were compared with those of the students.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this research demonstrate that the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher at SDN 101812 Namo Tualang has successfully enhanced her social competence in ways that directly influence students' environmental awareness. The findings highlight three core dimensions through which this competence was manifested: communication, collaboration, and role modeling. Each dimension played a crucial role in shaping not only the students' attitudes toward environmental stewardship but also their integration of biblical values into daily practices. These findings provide a clear picture of how teacher competence can serve as a transformative force in cultivating environmental responsibility in elementary school students, particularly within the framework of Christian education. The first dimension identified was effective communication. The CRE teacher consistently demonstrated an ability to integrate biblical teachings with environmental issues, making abstract theological principles concrete and relevant to the students' lived experiences. For example, Romans 12:18, which exhorts believers to "*live at peace with everyone*," was expanded to include living harmoniously with nature. The teacher explained that peace is not only the absence of conflict among humans but also the avoidance of destructive behavior toward the environment. By framing environmental care as an extension of discipleship, students began to see littering or damaging plants not merely as violations of school rules but as actions contrary to Christian living. Classroom observations confirmed that students were responsive to this approach, as they started articulating connections between their environmental practices and their faith commitments. This finding echoes the argument of Tilaar (2017), who emphasizes that effective teacher communication must contextualize knowledge so that it resonates with students' moral and spiritual frameworks. The integration of biblical values into environmental education also revealed the teacher's capacity to make communication dialogical rather than monological. Instead of simply giving instructions, the teacher frequently engaged students in reflective discussions, asking questions such as, "*How do you think God wants us to treat His creation?*" or "*What happens when we hurt the environment God gave us?*" These open-ended questions encouraged students to think critically and develop their own understanding of stewardship. Such communication practices align with constructivist pedagogy, where meaning is co-constructed rather than passively received (Vygotsky, 1978). The interviews with students supported this observation, as many expressed that they learned to view the environment

not just as a school concern but as part of their Christian responsibility. In this way, the teacher's communication served as a bridge connecting theology, pedagogy, and ecological awareness. The second dimension was collaboration, manifested in the teacher's efforts to design collective activities that promoted teamwork and environmental responsibility. One prominent initiative was the "*Green Friday*" program, where students worked together every week to clean their classrooms and schoolyard, plant flowers, and collect recyclable materials. Rather than presenting environmental care as an individual obligation, the teacher framed it as a shared task, emphasizing that everyone must contribute to maintain a harmonious and clean environment. This collaborative approach had a noticeable effect on students' motivation. In interviews, several students mentioned that they felt more enthusiastic about caring for the environment when the tasks were completed as a group. They explained that working alongside their peers made them more committed, as they did not want to be the only one neglecting the responsibility. Social interaction is essential in the development of higher-order thinking and moral reasoning (Vygotsky, 1978). By engaging students in group-based environmental projects, the teacher provided opportunities for them to learn from one another, negotiate responsibilities, and experience the collective satisfaction of achieving shared goals. Moreover, collaboration extended beyond routine school activities to creative initiatives, such as organizing environmental poster campaigns and participating in local ecological programs. These efforts reinforced the students' sense of belonging and responsibility toward their school and community, while also strengthening interpersonal skills such as cooperation, empathy, and conflict resolution. Another noteworthy finding was the way collaboration fostered a sense of accountability among students. When assigned to group tasks such as maintaining flower beds or managing waste bins, students reported that they felt responsible not only to the teacher but also to their peers. This peer accountability created a social climate where environmental neglect was discouraged, and positive behaviors were reinforced. As Dewi and Hallatu (2017) observe, collaborative learning environments help students internalize values because social approval and shared responsibility become powerful motivators for behavior change. In the case of SDN 101812 Namo Tualang, collaboration cultivated not only environmental awareness but also a sense of Christian community, where caring for creation was understood as a shared expression of faith. The third dimension of the teacher's social competence was her role as a model of environmentally responsible behavior. Throughout the study, observations revealed that the teacher consistently practiced the values she encouraged in her students. For example, she made a point of disposing of waste properly, reusing materials whenever possible, and showing visible care for the schoolyard by watering plants and tidying spaces without prompting. These consistent actions communicated a powerful message to students: environmental stewardship is not just something to be taught but something to be lived. As Lickona (2013) asserts, character education must be both taught and caught, meaning that students internalize values most effectively when they observe them embodied in trusted role models.

Interviews with students confirmed the impact of this modeling. Many reported that they felt inspired to imitate the teacher's behavior because they respected her and believed that her actions reflected genuine care. One student explained, "*When I see my teacher*

picking up trash, I feel ashamed if I don't do the same." Another commented that the teacher's consistency made them realize that caring for the environment should be part of daily life, not just something done when the teacher is watching. These testimonies support Harianto's (2018) finding that students are more likely to adopt moral values when they see congruence between a teacher's words and actions. By embodying environmental responsibility, the teacher provided a living example of integrity, which students found both credible and inspiring. Observations during the course of the research revealed a significant reduction in littering, greater student participation in cleaning routines, and increased enthusiasm for school environmental programs. For example, students began to compete informally to maintain the cleanest classroom, and some initiated their own projects, such as creating small posters reminding peers not to litter. More importantly, students demonstrated a deeper understanding of the connection between environmental care and Christian discipleship. During interviews, several students explained that keeping the school clean was not only about following rules but also about respecting God's creation. This shift in perspective indicates that the teacher's social competence succeeded in embedding environmental awareness within the framework of Christian faith and values. According to Dewi and Hallatu (2017), teachers who demonstrate empathy, collaboration, and integrity create learning environments where students feel respected and motivated to internalize similar values. Harianto (2018) similarly emphasizes that consistent modeling of moral values by teachers has a direct influence on students' character development. In this study, the CRE teacher's actions confirmed these insights, as students not only imitated specific environmental behaviors but also developed a spiritual interpretation of those behaviors. This suggests that when teacher competence is grounded in biblical principles, its impact extends beyond outward conduct to the formation of moral and spiritual identity. The integration of Romans 12:18 provided a strong theological grounding for the teacher's practices. By linking the call to live at peace with everyone to the responsibility of living in harmony with the environment, the teacher reinforced that environmental stewardship is not an optional activity but a spiritual obligation. This perspective aligns with the biblical principle of stewardship found in Genesis 2:15, where humanity is entrusted with the responsibility to "work and take care" of the earth. Students who internalized this teaching began to view environmental responsibility not as an external imposition but as a natural outflow of their Christian faith. The significance of this theological integration cannot be overstated, as it provided a moral and spiritual motivation that sustained students' engagement in environmental practices beyond mere compliance with school rules. These findings also highlight the interconnectedness of teacher competence, student development, and ecological responsibility. Teacher social competence, expressed through effective communication, collaborative practices, and consistent role modeling, acted as a catalyst for student transformation. This transformation was not only behavioral but also cognitive and spiritual, as students developed new ways of thinking about their relationship with the environment. In this sense, the study affirms the holistic vision of Christian education, which seeks to integrate faith, knowledge, and practice in the formation of responsible individuals (Saragih, 2021). The study acknowledges certain challenges that remain. While many students showed noticeable improvements, some continued to exhibit carelessness, particularly outside the structured school programs. This suggests that while teacher influence is powerful,

environmental awareness must also be reinforced through family, community, and church contexts. Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory reminds us that child development is shaped by multiple interacting systems, including family, peers, and societal influences (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, the sustainability of students' environmental behavior depends not only on the competence of teachers but also on consistent reinforcement from other socializing agents. The findings from SDN 101812 Namo Tualang underscore the decisive role of CRE teachers' social competence in fostering environmental awareness among elementary school students. Through effective communication grounded in biblical values, collaborative environmental projects, and consistent role modeling, the teacher was able to inspire significant behavioral and attitudinal changes in her students. These results support previous research on the importance of teacher social competence while also contributing a unique theological dimension through the integration of Romans 12:18. It demonstrates that social competence is not a peripheral skill but a central aspect of the teacher's vocation, enabling them to cultivate not only social harmony but also ecological stewardship as an expression of Christian discipleship.

CONCLUSION

This study has provided comprehensive insights into the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' social competence in fostering environmental awareness among elementary school students at SDN 101812 Namo Tualang. The findings demonstrate that teacher social competence-expressed through effective communication, collaborative practices, and consistent role modeling-serves as a transformative factor in shaping students' attitudes, values, and behaviors toward ecological stewardship. By embedding biblical principles, particularly Romans 12:18, into daily interactions and classroom practices, the CRE teacher was able to connect theological teachings with practical applications, enabling students to view environmental care as an inseparable aspect of their Christian discipleship. The significance of this research lies in its confirmation that education is not merely the transmission of academic knowledge but the holistic cultivation of students' intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social capacities. The teacher's ability to communicate effectively by contextualizing biblical teachings provided students with a framework to understand environmental care as part of their faith commitment. Through collaboration in initiatives such as the "Green Friday" program, students learned that ecological responsibility is not an individual burden but a shared expression of community. Moreover, the teacher's role modeling offered a living curriculum, demonstrating integrity and consistency that inspired students to internalize environmentally friendly practices. Together, these three dimensions of social competence created a learning environment where environmental stewardship was normalized, respected, and connected to Christian values. The results also contribute to the theoretical discourse on Christian pedagogy. Character education must be both taught and caught, and this study confirms that teacher modeling is central to students' character and environmental formation. The findings emphasizing that while teachers play a decisive role, the sustainability of behavioral change also depends on reinforcement from family, peers, church, and the wider community. Thus, although the CRE teacher's social competence accounted for significant improvements in students' environmental attitudes, the research acknowledges that long-term transformation

requires collaboration across multiple social systems. The theological foundation provided by Romans 12:18 enriched the practical outcomes of this study. The verse's call to live at peace with everyone was reinterpreted by the teacher and students to include living harmoniously with the natural environment. This biblical grounding not only legitimized environmental education within the context of Christian faith but also gave students spiritual motivation to sustain ecological responsibility beyond school programs. By integrating Genesis 2:15 as a reminder of humanity's stewardship mandate, the study reaffirmed that environmental care is not a peripheral concern but a divine calling. In practical terms, this study underscores the urgent need for teacher training programs to prioritize the development of social competence as part of professional growth. Schools should encourage CRE teachers to strengthen their communication skills, foster collaborative learning environments, and embody the values they teach. In doing so, teachers can more effectively guide students toward holistic maturity, where faith, knowledge, and environmental responsibility are integrated. This research concludes that enhancing the social competence of CRE teachers is a powerful strategy for cultivating environmental awareness in students. By serving as communicators, collaborators, and role models, teachers are not only educators but also agents of transformation who embody the biblical vision of living at peace with others and with creation. The findings affirm that when Christian education is grounded in Scripture and lived out through teacher competence, it equips students to grow into individuals who are not only intellectually capable but also morally responsible, spiritually rooted, and environmentally conscious.

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