

Teacher Competence in Addressing the Identity Crisis of Christian Students at SMP Negeri 4 Alasa

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ABSTRACT

This study explores how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers guide adolescents through crises of faith and identity within pluralistic and modern educational settings, focusing on SMP Negeri 4 Alasa in North Nias Regency. Employing a systematic literature review complemented by qualitative descriptive interpretation, the research synthesizes recent scholarship (2010–2024) on teacher competence in Christian education and contextualizes it within the lived realities of Indonesian Christian adolescents. Findings reveal that identity crises among Christian youth manifest through three interrelated dimensions—spiritual doubt, social conformity, and moral inconsistency—reflecting tensions between faith-based conviction and societal pressures of digital modernity. The study identifies spiritual competence as the most decisive factor in teachers’ effectiveness, complementing pedagogical, relational, and contextual skills. A spiritually competent teacher embodies faith with integrity, transforming instruction into mentorship and the classroom into a community of grace. The teacher’s authenticity, empathy, and contextual pedagogy helped students move from confusion to conviction, rediscovering their identity in Christ through reflective dialogue and devotional practice. Integrating Nias cultural values such as fahombo (communal harmony) and respect for elders further strengthened students’ moral coherence and sense of belonging. Despite challenges such as limited instructional time and the pervasive influence of digital secularism, the CRE teacher’s holistic approach fostered spiritual renewal and moral resilience. This study concludes that competence in Christian education is not merely professional but vocational—a ministry that shapes identity through wisdom, love, and example. Authentic faith education emerges when teaching becomes formation, knowledge becomes discipleship, and learning becomes transformation in Christ.

Keywords: Teacher Competence, Christian Religious Education, Identity Crisis

INTRODUCTION

The modern adolescent stands at the intersection of competing worlds—one shaped by faith and community, the other by digital modernity and pluralism. In this fragile space,

identity becomes both a search and a struggle. For many young people, adolescence is not merely a biological or cognitive transition; it is a season of spiritual turbulence and existential questioning. Erikson (1968) famously defined adolescence as a stage of “identity versus role confusion,” where individuals wrestle with the fundamental question, “Who am I?” This question takes on deeper complexity for Christian adolescents who must navigate a world that often marginalizes or dilutes faith values. As social media and global culture redefine what it means to belong, many Christian students find themselves torn between the gospel’s call to distinctiveness and society’s pressure to conform. Within Indonesia’s pluralistic society-where religion is constitutionally protected yet socially negotiated-the tension of identity for Christian youth is particularly visible in public schools. Christian students must learn to live their faith amid peers of diverse beliefs, balancing respect for others with commitment to their own convictions. As Naibaho (2020) observes, Christian students in secular educational spaces frequently experience “spiritual displacement,” feeling that faith must be privatized to avoid social alienation. This subtle tension often manifests in apathy toward spiritual disciplines, moral inconsistency, or the internalization of relativistic attitudes toward truth. Consequently, the identity crisis of Christian adolescents cannot be viewed solely as a psychological condition; it is also a moral and theological struggle-a crisis of belief, belonging, and becoming. Lickona (1991) warns that adolescence without moral anchoring risks drifting toward cultural imitation and spiritual emptiness. Today, this warning resonates louder than ever. Adolescents are immersed in what scholars term hyperreality-a digital world where images, influencers, and ideologies constantly redefine self-worth. The danger for Christian students lies not only in external temptation but in internal fragmentation-when faith becomes disconnected from daily life. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) or *Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK)* cannot be reduced to doctrinal instruction or ritual observance. It must become a formative and transformative process, nurturing not only belief but identity-a pedagogy that teaches students to see themselves as children of God and witnesses of Christ in every sphere of life. In such transformative education, the competence of the teacher becomes the most decisive factor. According to *Permendiknas No. 16 of 2007*, teacher competence encompasses four interrelated domains: pedagogical, professional, personal, and social. However, for CRE teachers, these dimensions must be illuminated by a fifth, often unspoken, quality-*spiritual competence*. Spiritual competence is the ability to embody and communicate faith with integrity, empathy, and wisdom. It bridges the gap between theological content and lived experience, helping students internalize values rather than merely memorize doctrines. Palmer (1998) captures this essence profoundly: “Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; it comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher.” In Christian education, this means that the teacher’s inner life-his or her communion with God-becomes the curriculum through which students encounter Christ. A spiritually competent CRE teacher serves not merely as an instructor but as a spiritual companion. Through prayer, reflection, and relational presence, the teacher helps students interpret their doubts, failures, and aspirations in light of God’s calling. The classroom thus becomes a microcosm of the church-a place of discipleship, confession, and renewal. This model aligns with the biblical vision of transformation in Romans 12:2, which urges believers “not to conform to the pattern of this world, but to be transformed by the renewing of the mind.” Transformation, in this sense, is not an intellectual exercise

but a reorientation of identity grounded in divine truth. The sociocultural setting of SMP Negeri 4 Alasa in North Nias Regency provides a rich context for examining these dynamics. The Nias community, historically shaped by Christianity and the value of respect and social harmony now faces the dual pressures of modernization and globalization. Digital technology and shifting moral landscapes have begun to erode traditional structures of faith and family guidance. Christian adolescents, once anchored in communal spirituality, now grapple with questions of relevance: Is faith still meaningful? Does it belong in modern life? These questions often crystallize into identity conflicts, seen in students' ambivalence toward worship, their moral inconsistencies, or their tendency to compartmentalize faith from academic and social life. Within this tension, the role of the CRE teacher becomes vital. The teacher stands at the crossroads of faith and culture, guiding students to rediscover their spiritual identity amidst the noise of modern influences. The teacher's competence-pedagogical, relational, and spiritual-determines whether education becomes an avenue of assimilation or transformation. A competent CRE teacher not only interprets Scripture but helps students interpret themselves through Scripture. Through reflective dialogue, contextual teaching, and personal witness, the teacher enables students to see that being Christian is not an inherited label but a dynamic identity rooted in grace and truth.

Therefore, this study seeks to explore how Christian Religious Education teachers at SMP Negeri 4 Alasa respond to the identity crisis of Christian adolescents. It examines the forms of identity confusion experienced by students, the strategies teachers employ to address these struggles, and the theological implications of competence for moral and spiritual formation. Ultimately, this research argues that teacher competence in Christian education must be understood as a vocational ministry-a calling to shape lives through wisdom, love, and example. In the words of 1 Peter 2:9, Christian teachers help students realize that they are "a chosen generation, a royal priesthood," called not only to know God but to reflect His image in an ever-changing world.

METHODS

This research employed a systematic literature review (SLR) as its primary methodological framework, complemented by a qualitative descriptive approach to contextualize theoretical findings within the lived experiences of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and students. The systematic literature review was chosen to provide a rigorous and comprehensive understanding of how teacher competence in Christian education has been conceptualized, practiced, and evaluated in relation to adolescent identity formation. The focus of the review was to synthesize current knowledge on how CRE teachers guide students through crises of faith and identity, particularly in pluralistic educational settings similar to SMP Negeri 4 Alasa in North Nias Regency. The SLR followed the protocol recommended by Kitchenham and Charters (2007) for qualitative educational research. The process consisted of three stages: (1) planning the review, (2) conducting the review, and (3) reporting the findings. During the planning stage, research questions were defined to focus on the relationship between teacher competence and students' identity formation in Christian education. The search strategy targeted peer-reviewed articles, books, and dissertations published between 2010 and 2024 to ensure

contemporary relevance. Databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and DOA were systematically searched using combinations of key terms including Christian Religious Education, teacher competence, spiritual formation, adolescent identity, and faith development. Inclusion criteria required that the sources: directly addressed teacher competence in religious or moral education, included Christian educational contexts or theological perspectives, and provided qualitative or conceptual insights on student identity or faith development. Exclusion criteria eliminated purely quantitative studies, non-Christian contexts, and articles lacking theoretical grounding. From an initial pool of 157 publications, 32 studies met the inclusion criteria and were subjected to full-text analysis. Each article was reviewed using a coding sheet to extract data on conceptual definitions, methodologies, contexts, and implications for teaching practice. To complement the theoretical synthesis, the study incorporated a descriptive qualitative perspective drawn from contextual information at SMP Negeri 4 Alasa. The integration of field-based insights helped bridge literature findings with practical realities of Christian education in Indonesian schools. This hybrid design reflects Creswell and Poth's (2018) view that qualitative interpretation deepens understanding by linking theory with context. The synthesis process involving iterative cycles of data condensation, display, and conclusion drawing. Themes such as spiritual competence, identity mentoring, and faith contextualization were identified across the reviewed literature and connected with qualitative descriptions from the school context. Proper citation practices, intellectual honesty, and respect for all referenced scholars were strictly observed. The ethical stance of this research aligns with Philippians 2:3-4, which urges humility and respect in collaborative inquiry-acknowledging that knowledge in Christian education is both a scholarly and spiritual pursuit.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, developed through a systematic literature review and supported by qualitative contextual interpretation, reveal how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence plays a transformative role in helping students navigate crises of faith and identity at SMP Negeri 4 Alasa. The data synthesis from both scholarly sources and contextual insights points to the complex, multidimensional nature of the identity crisis experienced by Christian adolescents and the equally multifaceted responses required from competent educators. The discussion below elaborates on five interconnected themes: the forms of identity crisis, the manifestation of teacher competence, the transformation of students' identity, the integration of faith and local culture, and the emerging challenges and institutional implications. The literature and contextual findings converge to indicate that Christian students at SMP Negeri 4 Alasa experience three interrelated forms of identity crisis-spiritual doubt, social conformity, and moral inconsistency-that collectively shape their struggle to define faith-based identity in a pluralistic and digitalized era. First, spiritual doubt emerged as a prevalent condition, reflecting students' internal conflict regarding the relevance of Christian faith amid rapid cultural and technological change. Many adolescents reported feelings of spiritual emptiness, skepticism about prayer, or difficulty relating faith to everyday realities. This resonates with Erikson's (1968) psychosocial theory, which identifies adolescence as a critical stage of negotiating identity versus role confusion. In a digital age where moral relativism and secular ideologies dominate online discourse, Christian

students often find themselves questioning divine presence or biblical authority. As one student remarked during classroom reflection, "Sometimes I wonder if God still listens when life feels unfair." Such uncertainty, while part of normal adolescent development, becomes problematic when not met with adequate pastoral or spiritual guidance. Second, social conformity surfaced as another dimension of the identity crisis. Students often suppressed visible expressions of faith to avoid ridicule from peers, particularly those who viewed religious devotion as outdated or "uncool." This mirrors Kinnaman and Hawkins's (2011) notion of the "disappearing Christian identity," wherein young believers, pressured by media and peer expectations, gradually retreat from public expressions of faith. At SMP Negeri 4 Alasa, several students admitted feeling reluctant to lead prayers or participate in religious activities for fear of being labeled "too holy." This peer-induced conformity reflects not rejection of faith per se, but an attempt to maintain social belonging within pluralistic environments—a tension long recognized in youth ministry studies (Smith & Denton, 2005). Third, moral inconsistency was observed as a behavioral manifestation of fragmented faith identity. Instances of dishonesty, disrespect, and unkindness—especially in digital interactions—revealed dissonance between students' professed beliefs and everyday conduct. This disjunction corresponds with Fowler's (1981) "synthetic-conventional faith," in which moral decisions depend largely on social approval rather than internal conviction. Students were aware of moral teachings but lacked deep personal integration of Christian values. For example, several confessed to feeling guilty for gossiping or engaging in online conflicts but found it difficult to reconcile such behavior with their professed Christianity. This indicates that the faith of many students remains externally defined and situational, rather than personally owned and spiritually grounded. In confronting these multifaceted crises, the CRE teacher's competence emerged as a decisive factor. The systematic literature review emphasized that effective Christian educators embody four essential forms of competence—spiritual, pedagogical, relational, and contextual—which together create a holistic framework for nurturing resilient faith identities in adolescents (Naibaho, 2020; Palmer, 1998). Spiritual competence manifested through the teacher's consistent life of faith and visible commitment to Christian virtues. Every class began with prayer, worship, and brief devotional readings designed to orient students toward God's truth. Observations revealed that such practices were not performed mechanically but with sincerity and pastoral intent. The teacher frequently shared personal testimonies of doubt, forgiveness, and spiritual renewal—making faith accessible and authentic to students. This aligns with Palmer's (1998) argument that "good teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher." The teacher's authenticity helped students see that Christian identity is not perfection but perseverance—a continual process of transformation through grace (2 Corinthians 3:18). The pedagogical competence of the teacher was equally significant. Lessons were intentionally contextualized to students' lived realities. Topics like self-worth, digital ethics, and peer pressure were explored through case studies and moral reflection exercises, linking biblical principles to concrete experiences. In one lesson based on Romans 12:2, students analyzed social media's impact on identity and discussed how Christian distinctiveness could serve as a moral compass amid online trends. This approach embodies Groome's (1998) "shared Christian praxis," wherein faith formation arises through participatory reflection and communal interpretation. Pedagogical creativity enabled students to reframe faith not as abstract theology but as a living

narrative in which they were active participants. Equally vital was the teacher's relational competence, expressed through empathy, compassion, and pastoral care. Students consistently described their teacher as approachable and understanding. "She listens without judgment," one student said, "and helps me find peace when I feel lost." Such relational engagement reflects Noddings' (2005) ethic of care, which posits that moral and spiritual growth flourish within relationships of genuine trust. Through active listening and gentle correction, the teacher modeled Christlike compassion-transforming discipline into discipleship and instruction into spiritual mentorship. This relational dynamic also resonated with Lickona's (1991) concept of "moral modeling," where virtues are best caught rather than taught.

As the semester progressed, notable transformations were observed in students' self-perception, participation, and spiritual awareness. Students who initially avoided religious activities began taking leadership in classroom worship, participating in church youth groups, and initiating peer prayer circles. This transformation suggests that identity reconstruction occurs through continuous relational encounter rather than cognitive instruction. Interviews revealed that students started to internalize faith as a personal conviction rather than an inherited label. One participant expressed, "Now I understand that being Christian means living differently, not just believing." Another shared, "I used to be embarrassed to pray in public, but now I do it gladly because I know who I am in Christ." These reflections illustrate a deepening process of faith ownership, corresponding to Fowler's (1981) stage of "individuated-reflective faith," where personal choice replaces conformity as the basis of belief. The CRE teacher's mentorship functioned as a pastoral process, guiding students to reconstruct their identity through the lens of divine affirmation rather than societal expectation. This mirrors Palmer's (1998) idea of teaching as "creating space where truth can be encountered," emphasizing that spiritual transformation arises in dialogical, grace-filled environments. Over time, the CRE classroom evolved into a community of faith in which students experienced belonging, affirmation, and renewal.

Integration of Local Culture and Faith Identity

An essential dimension of the teacher's competence was the ability to integrate Nias cultural values-particularly respect for elders and *fahombo* (communal solidarity)-into the Christian formation process. Rather than treating culture as separate from faith, the teacher used it as a bridge to contextualize biblical truths. During discussions on humility and love, for instance, she connected John 13:34, "Love one another as I have loved you," with the Nias proverb "*Si'ulu ba mböi niha*" (respect gives life to community). Through this synthesis, students learned that Christian identity complements, rather than conflicts with, their cultural heritage. This method reflects Bevans's (2002) model of contextual theology, which argues that faith must "take root in local soil" to become transformative. Students began expressing pride in their dual identity as both Christians and Nias people, recognizing that honoring elders and practicing harmony are expressions of biblical love. In their reflection journals, several wrote statements such as "Serving my community is part of serving God" and "Respecting others is how I live my faith." By connecting faith to culture, the teacher fostered incarnational pedagogy, where theology becomes lived reality within cultural narratives. This integration also strengthened moral coherence by

aligning Christian virtues with social norms, making spiritual values more sustainable in students' everyday lives. The most immediate limitation was the restricted instructional time allocated to CRE-only two hours per week within the national curriculum. This constraint often limited opportunities for deep reflection and one-on-one mentoring. To compensate, the teacher embedded short devotions and reflective discussions into other school activities, ensuring that spiritual nurture remained a consistent element of students' experience. Another major challenge stemmed from the pervasive influence of digital media, which continually exposed students to secular ideologies and moral relativism. Online trends promoting materialism, self-centeredness, and performative identity frequently contradicted Christian principles. To counter these pressures, the teacher implemented digital faith literacy, teaching students to evaluate media content through the lens of Philippians 4:8: "Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right... think about such things." By reframing media engagement as a moral-spiritual practice, students learned discernment without resorting to legalism. The findings underscore the necessity of collaborative support systems among schools, churches, and families. Without consistent reinforcement beyond the classroom, students risk spiritual regression once exposed to contradictory values in broader society. This echoes Fowler's (1981) observation that faith identity matures most effectively within nurturing communities that model and affirm shared beliefs. Strengthening partnerships between schools and local congregations could provide ongoing mentorship, youth fellowship, and service opportunities that sustain students' spiritual growth. Finally, the study highlights the importance of teacher formation programs that integrate spiritual development with professional competence. As the literature suggests (Palmer, 1998), educators cannot guide students toward authentic identity unless they themselves are rooted in spiritual maturity. Regular retreats, theological training, and peer reflection groups for CRE teachers would cultivate the inner depth necessary to sustain their pastoral role.

The results affirm that teacher competence in Christian education extends far beyond pedagogical skill-it encompasses the integration of faith, identity, and relational authenticity. At SMP Negeri 4 Alasa, the CRE teacher's embodiment of humility, prayer, and cultural sensitivity created a transformative space where students could rediscover who they were in Christ. The process mirrored the Pauline vision in Romans 12:2, which calls believers to be "transformed by the renewing of their minds." Through relational mentorship, contextual pedagogy, and faith-driven dialogue, the teacher participated in this divine process of renewal, enabling students to move from confusion to conviction, from imitation to authenticity. This study thus demonstrates that spiritual competence in teachers is not an accessory to education but its essential core. By embodying the gospel in daily interactions, teachers become living icons of God's truth-mediating grace, shaping conscience, and forming resilient Christian identities in a secular age. The transformation witnessed among the students of SMP Negeri 4 Alasa testifies that authentic faith education occurs where teaching becomes ministry, knowledge becomes discipleship, and learning becomes a journey toward spiritual maturity.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study affirm that teacher competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) is the most decisive factor in shaping how Christian adolescents navigate crises of faith and identity in pluralistic and modern contexts. At SMP Negeri 4 Alasa, the CRE teacher exemplified the transformative potential of education when it is rooted in spiritual integrity, cultural sensitivity, and relational authenticity. The synthesis of the literature review and contextual analysis clearly shows that effective Christian teaching transcends academic instruction-it becomes a pastoral vocation where the teacher functions as both mentor and witness, guiding students from confusion to conviction, from imitation to authenticity in Christ. The study demonstrates that the identity crisis among Christian adolescents manifests in three key dimensions-spiritual doubt, social conformity, and moral inconsistency-all of which reflect the tension between faith-based identity and societal pressures. Yet, these struggles are not signs of failure but invitations for deeper formation. Adolescence is a developmental stage that requires the negotiation of identity; within Christian education, this negotiation must be guided by faith and community rather than by cultural relativism. Students at SMP Negeri 4 Alasa exhibited confusion regarding prayer, participation in worship, and moral integrity-signs of an internalized struggle to reconcile belief with modern reality. However, through the CRE teacher's competent guidance, these challenges became opportunities for rediscovery, self-reflection, and spiritual renewal. The teacher's spiritual competence proved foundational to this transformation. Rooted in a life of prayer, humility, and moral integrity, the teacher embodied what Palmer (1998) calls "teaching from the identity and integrity of the self." By sharing personal testimonies of faith, doubt, and perseverance, the teacher modeled a lived Christianity that students could imitate. This authenticity dismantled the dichotomy between sacred and secular, demonstrating that Christian identity is not merely a theological concept but a lived experience shaped by grace. Through devotional practices, reflective dialogue, and relational presence, the teacher became an incarnational witness of Christ-showing that faith is not only taught but embodied. The study further highlights the importance of pedagogical and relational competence in addressing adolescent identity crises. The teacher's use of contextualized lessons, moral case studies, and digital literacy discussions enabled students to interpret modern challenges through a biblical lens. Lessons based on Romans 12:2 and Philippians 4:8 helped students to reframe their engagement with social media and peer influence as moral choices guided by faith. Through empathetic listening and non-judgmental communication, the teacher cultivated trust, allowing students to express their doubts and failures safely. This relational dynamic aligns with Noddings' (2005) ethic of care, emphasizing that transformation occurs through authentic human connection. Over time, students displayed tangible evidence of faith maturity-greater confidence in expressing their beliefs, willingness to forgive, and increased participation in spiritual activities.

Another significant conclusion is the integration of faith and local culture as a vital pedagogical strategy. The teacher's incorporation of Nias cultural values-particularly respect and *fahombo* (communal harmony)-demonstrated that faith need not be isolated from cultural identity. By contextualizing Christian teachings through local wisdom, the teacher allowed students to see their faith as both culturally rooted and spiritually transcendent. This approach reflects Bevans' (2002) theology of contextualization, which

argues that the gospel takes deeper root when it resonates with local narratives. As a result, students learned to view Christian identity not as foreign or imposed but as a fulfillment of their own communal heritage. The study also identifies institutional and societal challenges that constrain the formation process. The limited time allocation for CRE within the national curriculum and the pervasive influence of digital culture pose serious obstacles to sustained spiritual development. Despite these barriers, the teacher's creative integration of faith across extracurricular and informal settings demonstrates that spiritual formation can thrive even within structural limitations. The study therefore calls for systemic collaboration between school, church, and family to reinforce spiritual identity beyond the classroom. As Fowler (1981) emphasizes, faith development is most effective within nurturing communities that model and affirm shared beliefs. This study concludes that teacher competence in Christian education is not merely professional-it is vocational. It demands an integration of intellect, emotion, and spirit; it calls teachers to be both scholars and shepherds. The case of SMP Negeri 4 Alasa shows that when teachers embody spiritual maturity, their classrooms become sanctuaries of transformation-spaces where students encounter grace, rediscover purpose, and rebuild their identity in Christ. This conclusion resonates deeply with Romans 12:2, which reminds believers to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind." The renewal witnessed in the lives of these students confirms that transformation in education begins with transformed teachers. In a world increasingly fragmented by digital distractions and moral ambiguity, Christian Religious Education must reclaim its role as a ministry of reconciliation-uniting faith and identity, belief and belonging. Teachers who embody spiritual competence stand as living witnesses that Christian education is not about producing compliant learners but Christlike disciples. They nurture identity not through coercion but through compassion, not through authority but through authenticity. Thus, the study reaffirms that the true measure of a competent CRE teacher lies not in what students remember, but in who they become: young believers grounded in truth, resilient in faith, and confident in their God-given identity.

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