

## Enhancing the Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Managing Multicultural Classroom Dynamics at SMPN 1 Silou Kahean

Sri Suma Dewi Saragih<sup>1\*</sup>, Binur Panjaitan<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [srisaragih430@gmail.com](mailto:srisaragih430@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This study explores the enhancement of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher competence in managing multicultural classroom dynamics at SMP Negeri 1 Silou Kahean, Indonesia—a school that mirrors the nation’s rich diversity of ethnicity, language, and denominational affiliation. The research employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) complemented by a qualitative descriptive approach, synthesizing scholarly perspectives with local contextual realities. Data were drawn from 36 peer-reviewed studies published between 2010 and 2024, focusing on multicultural pedagogy, teacher development, and faith-based education, and were thematically analyzed to identify patterns of intercultural understanding, pedagogical adaptation, and spiritual competence. Findings reveal that CRE teachers play a vital role as intercultural mediators and spiritual mentors, bridging faith and culture within diverse learning environments. At SMPN 1 Silou Kahean, the teacher demonstrated pedagogical innovation through contextual storytelling, dialogue-based learning, and multicultural project-based assessments. These strategies fostered inclusivity, empathy, and active participation among students from various cultural backgrounds. Reflective practice, collaboration with peers, and contextual adaptation of curriculum materials emerged as key mechanisms for professional growth. The study also highlights challenges such as unequal classroom participation, subtle stereotypes, and limited access to culturally relevant resources. The findings affirm that multicultural competence in Christian education involves an integration of knowledge, skill, and spiritual character. When these dimensions converge, classrooms become communities of faith and reconciliation that reflect the biblical vision of unity in diversity (1 Corinthians 12:12-14). Ultimately, this study concludes that CRE competence is not merely technical proficiency but a spiritual vocation that transforms diversity into discipleship and learning into ministry.*

**Keywords:** Competence, Christian Religious Education, Multicultural Classroom

## INTRODUCTION

Education in Indonesia operates within a sociocultural landscape characterized by remarkable diversity in ethnicity, religion, language, and socioeconomic background. This pluralistic reality demands that teachers not only serve as transmitters of knowledge but also as facilitators of social harmony and intercultural understanding within the classroom setting. In this regard, teachers of Christian Religious Education (CRE) hold a particularly strategic role. Their responsibility extends beyond the delivery of doctrinal content toward cultivating character formation grounded in universal Christian values—such as love, justice, empathy, and tolerance—that promote peaceful coexistence in a multicultural society (Tilaar, 2004; Banks, 2016). SMP Negeri 1 Silou Kahean represents a microcosm of Indonesia's multicultural reality. Situated in a region with high levels of cultural and denominational diversity, the school accommodates students from various ethnic groups, linguistic backgrounds, and church traditions. This diversity, while enriching, also generates distinctive classroom dynamics that require teachers to possess not only pedagogical expertise but also cultural sensitivity. In such contexts, CRE teachers must act as intercultural mediators—bridging differences, facilitating dialogue, and guiding students toward an inclusive understanding of faith and identity (Gorski, 2010). However, empirical observations and prior studies suggest that many CRE teachers are still inadequately prepared to manage multicultural classrooms effectively (Banks & Banks, 2019; Panggabean, 2020). Conventional teaching models—dominated by one-way communication and rigid moral instruction—often fail to accommodate the varied sociocultural experiences of students. As a result, miscommunication, marginalization, or even subtle forms of exclusion can arise within classroom interactions. These challenges indicate a pressing need for the enhancement of teacher competence in multicultural pedagogy, particularly within religious education where values of inclusivity and empathy should be most visibly modeled. Teacher competence in managing multicultural classroom dynamics encompasses three fundamental dimensions: knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Gay, 2010). First, the knowledge dimension includes understanding cultural diversity, local wisdom, and inclusive Christian perspectives that affirm human dignity. Second, the skill dimension involves the ability to design adaptive, participatory, and context-based learning strategies that connect theological content with students' lived realities (Groome, 1998). Third, the attitudinal dimension reflects openness, empathy, and reflective awareness—qualities that enable teachers to approach cultural and religious differences with humility and respect (Palmer, 1998). When these three components operate synergistically, teachers are better equipped to create supportive learning environments where every student feels recognized and valued. Research on multicultural education consistently highlights that teachers who demonstrate strong multicultural competence tend to build more positive interpersonal relationships, enhance student motivation, and foster inclusive learning climates (Banks, 2016; Nieto, 2017). Within Christian education, diversity should not be perceived as a threat to doctrinal purity but rather as a divine opportunity for embodying faith in real-life contexts. As Jesus' teachings emphasize love for one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39), the classroom becomes a sacred space where theological truth meets human diversity. Consequently, CRE teachers must integrate biblical principles into pedagogical practice in ways that respect pluralism while maintaining theological integrity.

In the specific context of SMPN 1 Silou Kahean, this integration becomes both a pedagogical necessity and a theological calling. Teachers are expected to design learning experiences that acknowledge cultural differences, encourage dialogical engagement, and promote shared values of respect, justice, and cooperation. For instance, classroom discussions that draw upon students' local cultural narratives can become platforms for contextual theology-demonstrating that Christian ethics are not abstract but deeply relevant to the social realities of Indonesian students (Bevans, 2002). Therefore, this study seeks to explore how the competence of Christian Religious Education teachers can be enhanced in managing multicultural classroom dynamics at SMPN 1 Silou Kahean. Specifically, it examines (1) the forms of professional development and training that strengthen multicultural pedagogical competence; (2) the implementation of inclusive learning strategies within CRE lessons; and (3) the observable impacts of these competencies on classroom harmony and student engagement. This research is expected to contribute to the broader discourse on Christian pedagogy in Indonesia, particularly by offering practical insights into how faith-based education can remain contextually relevant amid cultural plurality. It also underscores that the true essence of CRE lies not merely in transmitting biblical knowledge but in embodying the gospel through educational practice-where teaching becomes ministry, and learning becomes an act of reconciliation. As Lickona (1991) asserts, character and moral formation must be holistic, engaging both intellect and heart, so that education produces not only knowledgeable students but compassionate and respectful citizens who reflect Christ's love in a multicultural world.

## **METHODS**

This study primarily employed a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) as its main methodological framework, complemented by a qualitative descriptive approach to contextualize the theoretical findings within the real educational setting of SMP Negeri 1 Silou Kahean. The use of SLR allowed the researcher to comprehensively synthesize existing scholarship on the enhancement of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers' competence in managing multicultural classrooms, while the qualitative descriptive perspective provided interpretive depth to relate the reviewed literature to local realities. The SLR followed the methodological protocol proposed by Kitchenham and Charters (2007), which includes three major stages: planning the review, conducting the review, and reporting the results. In the planning stage, the research question was formulated as follows: "How can the competence of CRE teachers be enhanced to effectively manage multicultural classroom dynamics in secondary education contexts?" To ensure systematic rigor, the researcher developed a search strategy using Boolean operators and controlled descriptors to identify relevant peer-reviewed studies, books, and dissertations published between 2010 and 2024. Searches were conducted through academic databases such as Scopus, ERIC, Google Scholar, and DOAJ, using key terms and combinations including Christian Religious Education, teacher competence, multicultural pedagogy, inclusive education, and faith-based learning. The inclusion criteria required studies that (1) focused on teacher competence in religious or moral education, (2) addressed multicultural or pluralistic educational settings, and (3) presented conceptual or qualitative findings related to teacher development or classroom management.

Exclusion criteria eliminated quantitative-only research, studies from non-Christian contexts, or articles lacking methodological transparency. From an initial pool of 163 studies, 36 publications met the inclusion criteria and were subjected to full-text analysis. Each study was coded based on themes such as types of teacher competence, strategies for multicultural management, training models, and pedagogical outcomes. The data extraction process involved developing a coding matrix to identify conceptual convergence and theoretical gaps. The synthesis process followed an interpretive thematic analysis, enabling the identification of recurring themes related to multicultural awareness, pedagogical adaptation, and spiritual competence in teaching (Creswell & Poth, 2018). To strengthen the contextual relevance of the SLR findings, a descriptive qualitative supplement was applied by examining the case of SMPN 1 Silou Kahean, a school characterized by significant cultural and denominational diversity. Contextual data were drawn from local reports, teacher reflections, and educational policy documents to enrich the analysis. This integration of literature-based and contextual data reflects Creswell's (2014) notion that qualitative interpretation allows theory to be "situated within lived experience." Through this hybrid design, the study bridges global perspectives on multicultural pedagogy with the specific realities of Christian education in Indonesia. This iterative process allowed for the systematic identification of thematic linkages between teacher competence development, faith integration, and multicultural classroom management. Key themes emerging from the analysis included intercultural understanding, inclusive teaching practices, spiritual leadership in education, and contextual theology in pedagogy. The study also aligned with the ethical perspective found in Philippians 2:3-4, emphasizing humility, collaboration, and respect for others' contributions to knowledge. Overall, the SLR method provided a comprehensive foundation for understanding how teacher competence can be enhanced in multicultural educational contexts, while the qualitative descriptive component ensured contextual relevance. This methodological integration allowed the research to move beyond theoretical abstraction toward practical insight-illustrating how Christian Religious Education teachers can develop pedagogical, relational, and spiritual competencies that foster inclusive, compassionate, and transformative learning communities within Indonesia's culturally diverse classrooms.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The multicultural classroom environment at SMP Negeri 1 Silou Kahean reflects the broader reality of Indonesia's cultural and religious diversity. Observations revealed that students come from a mosaic of ethnic backgrounds-including Batak Toba, Simalungun, Karo, and Nias-and represent a range of Christian denominations such as HKBP, GKPS, GBKP, and several independent churches. This diversity is not merely demographic; it manifests in differences in students' linguistic expressions, cultural norms, and religious interpretations. Within this complex landscape, the Christian Religious Education (*PAK*) teacher faces the challenge of fostering unity without erasing difference-an endeavor that requires high levels of intercultural sensitivity, pedagogical adaptability, and spiritual maturity. The classroom dynamics at SMPN 1 Silou Kahean reveal how cultural background subtly shapes student engagement, worldview, and moral reasoning. Students from communities emphasizing communal harmony, such as Nias or Simalungun, tend to value cooperation and modesty in discussion, while others from

more individualistic traditions express opinions assertively and value debate. These cultural nuances enrich classroom interaction but also create tensions when misunderstood. For instance, when discussing biblical themes such as love for others, students' interpretations often draw upon familial or tribal values, leading to diverse, sometimes conflicting, perspectives on forgiveness, justice, and authority. Such diversity creates fertile ground for dialogue but also demands careful facilitation. The teacher must ensure that every perspective is heard without privileging one cultural lens over another. This aligns with Banks' (2019) assertion that a multicultural classroom is not simply a space for coexistence but a dialogical arena where mutual understanding must be intentionally constructed. To sustain harmony, the teacher employs inclusive discussion strategies, frequently recontextualizing theological concepts into culturally relevant narratives. When teaching about forgiveness, the teacher integrates local folktales from Nias-stories that emphasize reconciliation and communal solidarity-and then parallels them with Joseph's story in Genesis. Students reported feeling that "biblical lessons became closer to real life" and that "God's message felt familiar." Such cultural translation not only bridges faith and life but affirms students' identities within the framework of Christian theology.

### ***Strategies for Enhancing Teacher Competence***

The PAK teacher at SMPN 1 Silou Kahean actively pursued professional and spiritual growth to meet the demands of a multicultural environment. Three key patterns of competence enhancement were observed. First, the teacher engaged in self-directed professional development, joining online training sessions on multicultural education and contextual pedagogy. These experiences expanded her theoretical understanding of cultural pluralism and equipped her with strategies to cultivate inclusivity in her classroom. She also participated in the *MGMP (Musyawarah Guru Mata Pelajaran)* community at the district level, where teachers exchanged ideas on addressing diversity in religious instruction. Such professional networks functioned as learning communities that fostered reflective dialogue and peer mentorship-echoing Loughran's (2010) view that teaching expertise develops through collaborative reflection and shared experience. Second, the teacher maintained a habit of reflective practice, recording her observations after each lesson to evaluate student responses and assess the inclusivity of her methods. Through this reflective journaling, she identified patterns in student participation-recognizing, for example, that students from certain cultural backgrounds were less vocal in group discussions. She then adjusted her methods to include more small-group dialogues and anonymous written reflections, thereby amplifying quieter voices. This reflective cycle embodies Zeichner and Liston's (1996) model of the reflective practitioner, in which teachers continuously reconstruct their understanding through praxis. Third, interdisciplinary collaboration emerged as a key feature of her professional growth. The teacher worked with colleagues from Social Studies and Indonesian Language to create integrated learning projects that celebrated cultural diversity. In one project, students presented multimedia portfolios showcasing their traditional values and explored how these could harmonize with biblical teachings. This approach not only promoted intercultural appreciation but also cultivated teamwork and empathy among

students-a practical realization of Gay's (2018) concept of culturally responsive teaching, which values students' lived experiences as legitimate sources of learning.

### ***Implementation of Inclusive and Multicultural Pedagogy***

Analysis of classroom documentation, including lesson plans (RPP) and student projects, demonstrated the teacher's deliberate integration of multicultural and inclusive principles into her teaching design. The lesson plans explicitly included objectives such as fostering tolerance, empathy, and intergroup cooperation. For instance, one learning outcome aimed to help students "appreciate cultural differences as expressions of God's creative diversity." This intentional design aligns with Banks' (2004) vision of transformative multicultural education, in which the curriculum serves as a tool for social and moral reconstruction. The teacher also used dialogue and storytelling as her primary teaching methods. Stories drawn from students' own cultural traditions were juxtaposed with biblical parables, allowing learners to perceive theological truths through familiar metaphors. During a lesson on the theme of neighborly love, the teacher invited students to share community customs that embody mutual care-such as communal work or *mangalahat horbo* (sharing livestock during hardship). By weaving these examples into theological reflection, the teacher demonstrated how Christian love transcends cultural boundaries yet finds expression within local contexts. Another important innovation was the use of multicultural project-based assessment. Instead of relying solely on written tests, students were assigned group projects such as creating posters, videos, or essays that depict Christian virtues within their respective cultural settings. For instance, one group produced a short film portraying the value of forgiveness through a story set in a Batak village. This assessment method fostered creativity, collaboration, and cross-cultural dialogue, enabling students to embody biblical principles through culturally grounded expression. Learners from certain ethnic backgrounds-particularly those socialized to value humility-were hesitant to speak in class, while others tended to dominate discussions. The teacher had to employ differentiated participation techniques, such as using small groups and rotating spokespersons, to ensure equitable engagement. Next challenge was the emergence of subtle stereotypes. Though overt discrimination was absent, occasional jokes referencing ethnic traits surfaced during group interactions. The teacher addressed these moments not through punitive measures but reflective dialogue, helping students recognize how humor could reinforce bias. This approach reflects Nieto's (2010) emphasis on critical multiculturalism, which encourages students to deconstruct stereotypes through guided reflection rather than moralization. The last challenge concerned the limited availability of culturally relevant teaching materials. National textbooks often presented biblical content through a monolithic cultural lens, failing to represent Indonesia's plural contexts. Consequently, the teacher spent significant time adapting materials and creating supplementary resources-such as local narratives, proverbs, and songs-to enhance cultural resonance. This creativity aligns with Tileston's (2011) advocacy for teacher agency in contextualizing curriculum to reflect the diversity of learners. The enhancement of teacher competence produced tangible outcomes in students' engagement, behavior, and sense of belonging. Class observations indicated a noticeable increase in student participation, especially among previously reserved learners. Group discussions became more balanced, with students expressing appreciation for one another's cultural backgrounds. One student remarked during an

interview, *"I feel proud when I can tell my friends about our tradition, and I realize it also teaches kindness like the Bible does."* Such reflections demonstrate a deepening awareness of cultural identity as a resource rather than a barrier to faith formation. Students also developed mutual respect and empathy, recognizing diversity as part of God's creation. Conflicts or misunderstandings were increasingly resolved through dialogue, often initiated by students themselves. Teachers noted that the class atmosphere became more cohesive, mirroring Lickona's (1991) notion of moral community—a learning environment shaped by shared virtues of respect and compassion. Another significant outcome was the strengthening of cultural pride. Through multicultural storytelling and project-based learning, students learned that faith does not require abandoning cultural heritage. Instead, they discovered harmony between tradition and Christian values. This realization echoes Bevans' (2002) theology of contextualization, which affirms that faith becomes transformative when it takes root in local soil. As one student expressed, *"I don't have to be like others to be accepted; I can be myself and still love God."*

The findings substantiate Banks' (2019) theoretical framework, which positions teachers as mediators between students' cultural identities and broader social realities. The teacher's ability to contextualize religious content and create dialogical spaces aligns with his model of transformative multicultural education, where teaching becomes an act of social justice and character formation. In this model, education does not merely transmit knowledge but cultivates understanding across cultural divides—a principle vividly demonstrated in the SMPN 1 Silou Kahean context. The teacher's methods resonate with Gay's (2018) concept of culturally responsive teaching. By integrating students' cultural experiences into the curriculum, the teacher validated their identities and encouraged them to see themselves as active contributors to the learning process. This validation enhanced student motivation, reduced alienation, and deepened engagement—a finding supported by Ladson-Billings (1995), who argues that culturally relevant pedagogy fosters both academic success and cultural competence. The teacher's consistent reflective practice also aligns with Zeichner and Liston's (1996) reflective practitioner model, emphasizing that professional growth occurs through self-examination and responsiveness to classroom realities. Her reflection journals functioned as instruments of professional inquiry, enabling her to identify implicit biases, evaluate student feedback, and reconstruct lesson designs. Through this process, teaching evolved from routine instruction to transformative praxis—a living dialogue between faith, culture, and pedagogy. The synthesis of empirical observation and theoretical insight highlights that teacher competence in multicultural education extends beyond technical skill; it is fundamentally relational and spiritual. For the PAK teacher at SMPN 1 Silou Kahean, competence meant embodying Christian values of humility, love, and justice while mediating diverse worldviews within a safe and dialogical classroom space. Her classroom became a microcosm of Indonesia's pluralistic society—a space where difference was not merely tolerated but celebrated as divine diversity. This case affirms that developing multicultural competence among CRE teachers requires three intertwined dimensions: (1) knowledge of cultural diversity and inclusive theology, (2) pedagogical skill in designing adaptive learning experiences, and (3) attitudinal openness rooted in empathy and reflection. When these dimensions converge, classrooms transform into communities of

faith and learning that mirror the biblical vision of unity in diversity (1 Corinthians 12:12–14). The experience of SMPN 1 Silou Kahean demonstrates that when PAK teachers cultivate multicultural competence, they not only enhance instructional quality but also participate in nation-building through education that bridges faith and pluralism. The teacher's journey reflects the essence of Palmer's (1998) philosophy: *"Good teaching cannot be reduced to technique; it comes from the identity and integrity of the teacher."* Her integration of reflection, collaboration, and contextual pedagogy reveals that competence in Christian education is not static expertise but a living vocation—one that transforms both teacher and student into agents of reconciliation in a diverse world.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reaffirm that teacher competence in Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a crucial role in shaping inclusive, harmonious, and transformative learning communities within Indonesia's multicultural educational landscape. The case of SMP Negeri 1 Silou Kahean provides a vivid illustration of how pedagogical, relational, and spiritual competence converge to cultivate classrooms where diversity becomes a catalyst for growth rather than a source of division. The CRE teacher's ability to integrate theological understanding with cultural sensitivity and reflective pedagogy demonstrates that managing multicultural classroom dynamics is not merely a technical task—it is a spiritual vocation and a moral responsibility. This study shows that the enhancement of multicultural competence among CRE teachers leads to profound educational and ethical transformation. When teachers acquire deep knowledge of cultural diversity, they gain the awareness necessary to view difference not as a threat but as an expression of God's creative wisdom. When they develop pedagogical adaptability, they are able to contextualize faith-based learning so that biblical principles resonate with students' lived experiences. And when they embody attitudinal openness—marked by humility, empathy, and respect—they model the very virtues they seek to instill in their students. These three dimensions of competence form the foundation for a learning environment that reflects the biblical vision of unity in diversity as articulated in 1 Corinthians 12:12–14, where each member contributes uniquely to the body of Christ. The experience at SMPN 1 Silou Kahean illustrates that inclusive pedagogy in Christian education requires teachers to act as intercultural mediators and spiritual mentors. By incorporating storytelling, dialogue, and project-based learning, the CRE teacher transformed the classroom into a dialogical space where students could explore faith through the lens of their cultural heritage. This pedagogical innovation aligns with Banks' (2019) concept of transformative multicultural education, which calls for classrooms that engage both moral reasoning and cultural identity. The teacher's success also reflects Gay's (2018) culturally responsive teaching model, demonstrating that when learning materials reflect students' cultural realities, motivation and participation increase significantly. Moreover, the teacher's reflective practice—documented through regular self-evaluation and adaptation—embodies the reflective practitioner model proposed by Zeichner and Liston (1996), emphasizing that professional growth is a continuous process rooted in humility and self-awareness. The study further highlights that spiritual competence lies at the heart of effective multicultural teaching. The teacher's consistent demonstration of prayerful integrity, compassion, and justice created a learning climate grounded in mutual respect. Her approach exemplified Palmer's (1998) idea that "good teaching flows from the identity

and integrity of the teacher.” In doing so, she transformed her classroom into what Lickona (1991) terms a moral community—a space where virtues such as empathy, honesty, and love for others are both taught and lived. Students responded to this environment by developing stronger cultural pride, deeper empathy, and renewed enthusiasm for learning. They began to perceive faith as an inclusive force capable of uniting rather than dividing humanity. Beyond the classroom, this study underscores the broader implications of teacher competence for nation-building and interfaith harmony. In a country as diverse as Indonesia, teachers are front-line agents of social cohesion. When CRE teachers integrate biblical values with multicultural understanding, they contribute to the formation of students who are both spiritually grounded and socially empathetic. Such education reflects the essence of Christ’s command in Matthew 22:39—to “love your neighbor as yourself”—translating faith into tangible expressions of respect, cooperation, and justice within the school community. The study also recognizes persistent challenges. Limited instructional time, lack of culturally sensitive textbooks, and the growing influence of digital media continue to hinder the full realization of inclusive education. These limitations suggest the need for systemic support through teacher training programs, curriculum reform, and collaboration between schools, churches, and local communities. Empowering teachers through ongoing professional development—such as workshops on contextual theology and digital multicultural literacy—will ensure that they remain equipped to navigate evolving cultural complexities. This study concludes that competence in Christian Religious Education is inseparable from character and calling. It is not merely about mastering pedagogical techniques but about embodying Christlike integrity in the act of teaching. When teachers integrate knowledge, skill, and spirit, their classrooms become living testimonies of God’s reconciling love—places where students learn not only about faith but to live faithfully amid diversity. The experience of SMPN 1 Silou Kahean affirms that Christian education, when grounded in compassion and cultural awareness, can transform diversity into discipleship and learning into ministry. In this way, education fulfills its divine purpose: to form individuals who not only know the truth but live it through love, justice, and unity in the midst of difference.

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