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Preparing the Golden Generation: Strategies for Enhancing the Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the enhancement of professional competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli, Nias, within the national vision of "Indonesia Emas 2045." In an era demanding both intellectual excellence and moral integrity, the role of CRE teachers becomes pivotal in shaping students' faith, ethics, and social responsibility. Using a qualitative case study design, this research investigates how CRE teachers develop pedagogical competence through contextual, reflective, and faith-based practices. Data were collected via classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, involving two CRE teachers, the school principal, students, and parents. Findings reveal four interrelated strategies that underpin professional competence: (1) need-based professional training, enabling teachers to design contextual and value-oriented lessons; (2) reflective mentoring, fostering pedagogical growth through dialogue and mutual learning; (3) digital technology integration, modernizing faith-based instruction while enhancing student engagement; and (4) teacher learning communities (TLCs), promoting collaborative innovation and spiritual solidarity. These approaches collectively transformed classroom dynamics, leading to more participatory, reflective, and value-centered learning experiences. The study concludes that professional competence in CRE is not solely a technical skill but a spiritual vocation that integrates faith, pedagogy, and reflection. Teachers who embody Christlike humility and creativity become catalysts of transformative learning-bridging biblical truths with real-life applications. Despite challenges in digital literacy and infrastructure, the findings affirm that when professional growth is rooted in faith and community, Christian education becomes a living practice of discipleship that nurtures both intellect and spirit.

Keywords: *Golden Generation, Christian Religious Education, Professional Competence*

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INTRODUCTION

Education serves as a fundamental pillar in preparing the next generation of a nation-one that is excellent in competence, noble in character, and capable of competing in an increasingly globalized world. In Indonesia, the national vision of "Indonesia Emas 2045" underscores the strategic role of education in shaping a generation that is not only intellectually capable but also morally upright and spiritually grounded. This vision calls for an education system that fosters integrity, innovation, and inclusivity as foundations for national development (Tilaar, 2004). Within this framework, religious education-particularly Christian Religious Education (CRE)-holds a pivotal role. CRE is not merely concerned with doctrinal transmission but with holistic formation, nurturing students to internalize spiritual, moral, and social values grounded in Christian faith (Groome, 1998). Through CRE, learners are expected to grow in wisdom, compassion, and ethical discernment-qualities essential for building a society that reflects love and justice. Christian Religious Education teachers at the elementary level occupy a uniquely strategic position. As front-line facilitators of Christian value formation, they are responsible not only for delivering biblical content but also for integrating faith with everyday experiences. Their vocation extends beyond instruction to mentorship and modeling of Christian virtues such as humility, empathy, and service (Palmer, 1998). Professional competence among CRE teachers therefore encompasses far more than mastery of theological content-it requires pedagogical innovation, digital literacy, and reflective practice that enable faith-based learning to remain meaningful in the 21st century classroom (Banks, 2019). SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli, an elementary school located in the Nias Islands, represents a compelling case for examining how teacher competence can be strengthened amid both opportunity and challenge. Situated within a culturally diverse and resource-limited region, the school embodies the realities of many Indonesian educational institutions striving for improvement. Teachers in this context face complex demands: limited access to learning resources, rapid technological changes, and the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of students. The Christian Religious Education teacher, in particular, must navigate these dynamics while ensuring that biblical teachings remain relevant and transformative. Such conditions make the enhancement of professional competence not merely desirable but essential for achieving educational excellence and spiritual formation.

Professional competence for CRE teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli encompasses four interrelated dimensions. The first is content mastery-a deep understanding of Christian doctrine, biblical interpretation, and ethical application. The second is curricular competence-the ability to design, implement, and evaluate instructional plans that align with both national education standards and theological principles. The third is methodological competence, referring to the creative use of pedagogical strategies that contextualize Christian teachings in culturally meaningful and developmentally appropriate ways. The fourth dimension is self-reflective growth, where teachers continually evaluate and refine their practice through ongoing professional learning, peer collaboration, and engagement with contemporary educational research (Zeichner & Liston, 1996). Collectively, these competencies enable teachers to serve as facilitators, motivators, and role models within the school community-demonstrating through action the faith they teach in words. The need for professional development is

particularly urgent in the face of 21st-century educational transformations. Digital technologies, inclusive learning paradigms, and character-based education have reshaped how learning occurs and how teachers perform their roles (Trilling & Fadel, 2009). CRE teachers must therefore be equipped to integrate technological tools with faith-based pedagogy-using digital media to communicate biblical truths while cultivating critical and ethical thinking. Moreover, in a pluralistic classroom, teachers must develop intercultural sensitivity and inclusive attitudes, ensuring that Christian values of love and respect are expressed toward all, regardless of background (Banks & Banks, 2019). This study aims to explore strategies for enhancing the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli. Specifically, it seeks to understand how teachers engage in reflective professional growth, how they apply pedagogical innovation within the constraints of limited resources, and how such efforts contribute to the holistic development of students. Employing a qualitative case study design, this research focuses on lived experiences rather than abstract theory, uncovering practical insights into teacher development in real-world educational contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The findings are expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to the discourse on Christian education in Indonesia. Theoretically, the study advances understanding of professional competence as a multidimensional construct integrating faith, pedagogy, and reflection. Practically, it provides recommendations for policy and training initiatives aimed at strengthening the capacity of CRE teachers in primary education. In a broader sense, the study underscores that the preparation of Indonesia's Golden Generation depends not only on cognitive excellence but also on the moral and spiritual integrity modeled by its educators. As Lickona (1991) affirms, character formation must engage both intellect and heart; thus, the true success of education lies in producing individuals who not only know what is good but are committed to doing it in the service of God and humanity.

METHODS

A case study design was chosen for its strength in uncovering the complex, contextual, and dynamic realities surrounding the professional competence development of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli. Unlike quantitative methods that focus on generalization, a qualitative case study allows the researcher to capture the depth, nuance, and lived experiences of participants within their authentic educational environment. According to Yin (2018), case study research is particularly suitable for investigating contemporary phenomena within their real-life context, especially when the boundaries between the phenomenon and the context are not clearly defined. In this study, the case design provided a comprehensive framework to explore not only what strategies teachers employ to enhance their competence but also how and why these strategies emerge in response to specific institutional and cultural conditions. The research was conducted over a three-month period, encompassing both classroom and community settings to capture the holistic nature of teacher professionalism in a Christian education context. The study focused on two active CRE teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli, the principal as an institutional leader, and several students and parents who served as supporting informants. This multi-perspective sampling approach ensured data richness and allowed triangulation of viewpoints across different

stakeholders in the educational process (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The selection of participants was based on purposive sampling, targeting individuals with relevant experience and insight into the processes of professional growth and pedagogical innovation in religious education. Data were collected through three complementary techniques: participant observation, in-depth interviews, and document analysis. Participant observation enabled the researcher to directly observe the daily teaching practices, interpersonal interactions, and learning environments created by the CRE teachers. This method provided firsthand insights into how teachers translated their professional competence into classroom behavior-such as lesson planning, communication style, and student engagement. In-depth interviews were conducted with each participant to gather narratives about their experiences, motivations, challenges, and reflective practices in developing professional competence. Interviews followed a semi-structured format, allowing flexibility to probe deeper into emerging themes while maintaining consistency across respondents. Meanwhile, document analysis included reviewing teaching materials, professional development records, and school reports. These documents served as supplementary evidence to validate and enrich the findings derived from observation and interviews (Bowen, 2009). Informed consent was obtained, and confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing all participant identities. The researcher also adhered to ethical principles of honesty, respect, and humility, consistent with the Christian educational ethos of integrity and compassion (Philippians 2:3–4). This case study design provided an in-depth and context-sensitive exploration of how professional competence among CRE teachers is cultivated within the realities of a public elementary school in Gunungsitoli. By combining observation, interviews, and document analysis, the study achieved a nuanced understanding of the interplay between institutional support, personal motivation, and pedagogical reflection in shaping teacher professionalism. This methodological framework not only captures the lived experiences of the participants but also illuminates broader implications for developing competent, reflective, and spiritually grounded educators in Indonesia's faith-based educational settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal a multifaceted picture of how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli have developed their professional competence in response to the evolving challenges of contemporary education. Drawing from in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, four major strategies emerged as pillars of this competence-building process: need-based professional training, sustained mentoring and supervision, the integration of digital technology in CRE instruction, and professional collaboration through teacher learning communities. Each strategy reflects a contextual adaptation of professional development theories to the realities of a small public school in Nias-where limited resources, diverse student backgrounds, and rapid technological change intersect within a Christian educational framework. The most significant and recurring finding across data sources was the impact of contextual, need-based training programs tailored to the actual challenges faced by CRE teachers. Instead of generic seminars emphasizing theory, these programs focused on practical application-linking Christian values with effective classroom pedagogy. Teachers emphasized that such training enhanced not only their

instructional design skills but also their ability to integrate moral and spiritual formation into daily lessons. One particularly influential program was the workshop titled Designing Contextual Christian Value-Based Learning", organized by the Nias Regency Education Office. This workshop guided teachers in developing lesson plans and learning activities grounded in students' local cultural experiences-integrating biblical principles such as compassion, forgiveness, and stewardship with traditional Nias wisdom. Teachers reported that these sessions empowered them to "speak the students' language" while remaining faithful to the theological essence of the curriculum. This finding supports Darling-Hammond's (2017) assertion that effective professional development must be continuous, practice-oriented, and contextually relevant to teachers' daily experiences. Rather than perceiving training as an administrative requirement, CRE teachers viewed it as a transformative opportunity for growth-renewing both pedagogical creativity and spiritual motivation. The sense of being valued and supported through such training fostered intrinsic motivation, consistent with Deci and Ryan's (2000) self-determination theory, which links autonomy and competence with sustained professional engagement.

Another vital component contributing to the teachers' professional development was ongoing mentoring and reflective supervision. At SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli, supervision extended beyond bureaucratic evaluation-it became a mentoring process rooted in dialogue, trust, and mutual growth. The principal and local education supervisors regularly engaged teachers in reflective conversations about instructional practices, classroom challenges, and student moral formation. Weekly coaching sessions provided a structured space for teachers to analyze their experiences, share dilemmas, and co-develop new strategies for improvement. For instance, one teacher described how feedback from her supervisor helped her shift from a purely lecture-based approach to a dialogical teaching style that encouraged student participation and moral reasoning. This change resulted in noticeably higher engagement among students during discussions on biblical ethics and social responsibility. Such mentoring practices align with the reflective supervision model proposed by Schön (1983), emphasizing that teacher competence develops through critical reflection on experience rather than mere adherence to technical standards. Similarly, Widodo (2016) argues that sustainable professional growth occurs when mentoring becomes transformational-helping teachers internalize educational values rather than merely conform to institutional expectations. In this school, mentoring evolved into a form of spiritual companionship, where educational leaders acted as co-learners and encouragers, embodying the Christian principle of mutual edification (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

Integration of Technology in Christian Education

As the digital era reshapes educational practices, the CRE teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli have embraced technology as a tool to enhance both pedagogical effectiveness and student engagement. Observations revealed that teachers utilized interactive media such as PowerPoint presentations, biblical video clips, online quizzes (Kahoot and Quizizz), and music-based devotionals to enliven classroom instruction. This integration of technology not only made lessons more engaging but also bridged the gap between abstract Christian teachings and students' lived digital realities. For instance,

during a lesson on gratitude, the teacher used short video testimonies of young Christians facing adversity-prompting students to reflect on real-life faith expressions. Students responded enthusiastically, stating that "the videos made God's word more real." The teachers' adoption of technology demonstrates the principles of Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK), which emphasizes the interdependence of technological, pedagogical, and content expertise in modern teaching (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). It reflects OECD's (2019) recognition that digital literacy forms an integral part of 21st-century teacher competence. By creatively merging faith-based pedagogy with digital tools, CRE teachers not only increased instructional variety but also cultivated students' critical digital discernment-encouraging them to evaluate online content through biblical principles (Philippians 4:8). Integrating technology also revealed disparities in digital readiness among teachers. Senior educators expressed anxiety about operating new applications, while limited internet connectivity in the school sometimes hindered implementation. Despite these obstacles, the commitment to continuous learning was evident. Teachers often collaborated after school to experiment with new tools, demonstrating resilience and collective problem-solving-qualities essential for sustaining technological innovation in resource-limited contexts.

Professional Collaboration in Teacher Learning Communities

The establishment of a Teacher Learning Community (TLC) marked a transformative step in enhancing professional competence. Functioning as both a reflective forum and a peer support network, the TLC provided opportunities for teachers to share best practices, analyze teaching challenges, and design innovative projects collaboratively. CRE teachers took leadership roles by facilitating case study sessions on Integrating Gospel Values into Classroom Learning. These peer-led discussions encouraged teachers from other subjects to approach education through moral and spiritual lenses, fostering interdisciplinary collaboration. Teachers described the TLC as a "safe space for growth"-a venue where professional identity was strengthened through shared reflection rather than competition. This finding resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which emphasizes that learning is fundamentally social and that knowledge construction occurs through interaction within a community of practice. It supports Wenger's (1998) notion of communities of practice-where professional growth is sustained by participation, mutual accountability, and collective learning. In the case of SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli, the TLC nurtured a culture of collegiality and faith-centered collaboration, effectively bridging professional and spiritual dimensions of teaching. The teacher community also played a significant role in local innovation. For instance, members co-designed a series of "Faith in Action" classroom projects that combined biblical learning with community service-such as environmental cleanups and charity visits. These activities embodied experiential learning principles (Kolb, 1984) and reflected Christian ethics of service and stewardship. Through shared reflection sessions, teachers discussed not only pedagogical outcomes but also personal spiritual growth experienced through these acts of service. The combined implementation of these four strategies yielded observable improvements in classroom quality, instructional design, and student behavior. Classroom observations revealed more interactive, student-centered lessons where learners engaged in discussion, reflection, and creative expression rather than passive listening. Lessons that once relied on rote memorization were replaced by inquiry-

based exploration of biblical themes contextualized to students' cultural experiences. Students became noticeably more participative and reflective. They began drawing parallels between Christian values and local traditions-recognizing, for example, how the Nias custom of communal cooperation aligns with the biblical principle of loving one's neighbor (Matthew 22:39). This pedagogical shift fostered what Lickona (1991) calls a moral community, where respect, empathy, and responsibility became shared classroom norms. Teachers also demonstrated measurable professional growth. They developed contextually rich lesson plans aligned with the *Pancasila Student Profile* framework, incorporated formative assessments emphasizing reflection and moral reasoning, and designed creative media that linked faith and culture. This movement from normative competence (knowing what to do) toward performative competence (doing it effectively) marked a critical transformation in their professional identity. Students themselves attested to these changes. One student expressed, "*PAK is no longer boring; I feel I can understand how the Bible connects to my life*." Another mentioned, "*Our teacher helps us discuss our problems and reminds us that God cares*." Such testimonies highlight the affective dimension of learning-suggesting that effective CRE teaching nurtures not only intellectual understanding but also emotional and spiritual formation. These findings align with Banks' (2016) theory of transformative multicultural education, which positions the classroom as a moral microcosm of society-where learners negotiate values, identity, and social responsibility. In this context, the CRE teacher's role expanded beyond instructor to moral mentor and spiritual guide, shaping students' worldview through authentic modeling of faith in action. The most prominent is the uneven digital competence among teachers, particularly older educators less familiar with technology. Limited internet connectivity and insufficient digital infrastructure also constrained the full implementation of tech-based learning. Furthermore, while the TLC model fostered collaboration, it required consistent administrative support to maintain momentum. These constraints underscore the importance of systemic backing from educational authorities. The principal's leadership, local education policy, and community participation are crucial for sustaining professional development. Aligning with Fullan's (2014) concept of educational change, teacher competence must be supported by organizational capacity-building-ensuring that innovation becomes a shared institutional culture rather than an isolated effort. At a deeper level, the findings illuminate the spiritual dimension of professional competence in Christian education. For the teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli, professional growth was inseparable from personal faith formation. They viewed teaching as a vocation-a calling to embody Christlike values in their practice. As Palmer (1998) notes, "Good teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher." The teachers' reflective and collaborative efforts demonstrated this principle, transforming their classrooms into living testimonies of faith-informed pedagogy. This study reveals that the enhancement of professional competence among CRE teachers is both a pedagogical and spiritual journey. It requires intentional investment in training, mentoring, and technology, but also in cultivating humility, resilience, and relational depth. When these elements converge, the classroom becomes a sacred space of learningwhere knowledge, character, and faith are interwoven in harmony. The professional competence development of CRE teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli is characterized by a dynamic interplay between institutional initiatives and personal commitment. Need-based training empowered teachers with

contextual pedagogical tools; sustained mentoring fostered reflective professionalism; technological integration modernized faith-based teaching; and collaborative learning communities strengthened collective growth. Together, these strategies have transformed PAK education from routine instruction into a transformative practice that nurtures both intellect and spirit. This case demonstrates that when teachers are equipped with relevant skills and spiritual depth, they become catalysts for holistic education-forming students who not only know about faith but live faithfully in a pluralistic and digital world. As Indonesia pursues its “Golden Generation 2045” vision, such models of teacher development hold profound implications for the future of Christian education—where professionalism and spirituality walk hand in hand to shape generations grounded in wisdom, compassion, and service.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli represents a dynamic synthesis of pedagogical skill, contextual understanding, and spiritual integrity. The case demonstrates that enhancing teacher competence in Christian education is not merely an academic or administrative pursuit but a deeply spiritual vocation-a process of formation that integrates the mind, heart, and hands in the service of God and humanity. Through a holistic and reflective approach to teaching, CRE teachers at this school have transformed their classrooms into spaces of both intellectual and spiritual growth, where learning becomes a living testimony of faith in action. The findings affirm that professional competence in CRE must be understood as multidimensional, encompassing mastery of theological content, pedagogical creativity, cultural sensitivity, and reflective practice. Teachers who internalize this integrated model are able to contextualize biblical truths in ways that resonate with students’ lived experiences, thereby bridging the gap between faith and everyday life. The incorporation of local culture-such as the Nias traditions of mutual cooperation and community solidarity-provided a fertile ground for embedding Christian values like love, humility, and stewardship. This contextual pedagogy echoes Groome’s (1998) vision of shared Christian praxis, where learning becomes participatory, dialogical, and transformative. It also supports Tilaar’s (2004) assertion that true education must cultivate both competence and conscience, shaping learners who embody moral responsibility within society. The study also reveals that effective professional development depends on four interrelated strategies: need-based training, reflective mentoring, digital integration, and collaborative learning communities. Need-based training programs that address local challenges empowered teachers to design more relevant and engaging lessons, enhancing both instructional quality and student motivation. Mentoring and reflective supervision further deepened teachers’ pedagogical maturity, transforming routine evaluation into a process of spiritual and professional renewal. Technology integration modernized CRE instruction, making faith-based learning more interactive and relatable to students growing up in a digital age. Finally, teacher learning communities (TLCs) served as spaces of collegiality and mutual encouragement, fostering a professional culture grounded in shared reflection, innovation, and faith. Together, these initiatives created a sustainable ecosystem for teacher growth-where competence evolved not as an external demand but as an internal calling.

The study also identifies challenges that require ongoing attention. Uneven digital literacy among teachers, limited infrastructure, and inconsistent institutional support remain barriers to sustaining innovation. Addressing these challenges demands systemic collaboration between schools, local education authorities, and faith-based organizations. As Fullan (2014) emphasizes, educational change is not achieved through isolated effort but through collective capacity-building. Institutional support must therefore complement teachers' personal dedication to ensure that professional growth becomes a shared culture within the educational community. The professional journey of CRE teachers at SD Negeri 070978 Gunungsitoli exemplifies Palmer's (1998) conviction that "good teaching flows from the identity and integrity of the teacher." These educators demonstrated that authentic competence arises when knowledge is animated by love, reflection, and purpose. Their work embodied the biblical vision of teaching as ministry-modeling the compassion of Christ, the wisdom of Scripture, and the service of faith. Through their dedication, Christian education transcends the boundaries of classroom instruction to become a transformative act of discipleship. This study also underscores that national progress depends not only on cognitive excellence but also on the moral and spiritual depth of its educators. When CRE teachers unite professional excellence with spiritual authenticity, they nurture students who think critically, act ethically, and live faithfully. In doing so, they contribute to a generation that embodies wisdom, compassion, and integrity-hallmarks of a truly golden civilization shaped by faith and learning.

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