

Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Explaining God's Covenant with Abraham: An Expository Study of Genesis 17:5 at SD Negeri 177931 Tumus

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ABSTRACT

The professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is a decisive factor in shaping students' faith, values, and moral character. This study examines the professional competence of CRE teachers in explaining God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:5) at SD Negeri 177931 Tumus, employing a qualitative-expository design. The research integrates theological exegesis and educational inquiry to analyze how teachers interpret, contextualize, and communicate biblical truths in classroom practice. Data were collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis, with participants consisting of two CRE teachers, eight students, and one school administrator. Thematic analysis revealed four dimensions of competence: (1) theological literacy, reflected in the teachers' ability to understand and apply the covenantal message of faith, transformation, and divine calling; (2) pedagogical creativity, demonstrated in their use of storytelling, visual media, and reflective learning activities to engage students; (3) communicative empathy, expressed through dialogue and pastoral care that fostered spiritual growth; and (4) spiritual integrity, evidenced by congruence between belief and behavior. The study concludes that the professional competence of CRE teachers is covenantal in nature-uniting biblical faithfulness, pedagogical excellence, and moral authenticity. It recommends that theological training and reflective practice be strengthened in teacher development programs, ensuring that faith-based education remains relevant and transformative. The findings contribute to the discourse on religious pedagogy by positioning teacher professionalism not merely as technical skill but as a sacred vocation of covenantal faithfulness and educational ministry.

Keywords: Professional Competence, Christian Religious Education, Covenant

INTRODUCTION

Education in the Christian perspective is not merely an academic enterprise but a sacred vocation that integrates faith, knowledge, and moral formation. Within this framework, Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia, serves as both a spiritual and intellectual

ministry that aims to form students who understand and embody biblical truths in daily life. The competence of teachers, particularly their professional competence, plays a decisive role in realizing this mission. Professional competence refers to the teacher's mastery of subject matter, pedagogical skill, and the ability to translate theological concepts into meaningful learning experiences. For teachers of Christian Religious Education, this competence must be accompanied by spiritual maturity and the ability to communicate the Word of God effectively, contextually, and faithfully. It is through such competence that biblical narratives are not only taught cognitively but also lived out as moral and spiritual truths. One of the most profound biblical narratives that encapsulate the essence of faith, obedience, and divine promise is God's covenant with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 17:5: *"No longer shall your name be called Abram, but your name shall be Abraham; for I have made you the father of many nations."* This verse represents a theological turning point in the history of salvation. It reveals God's sovereign initiative in establishing a covenantal relationship that transcends time and ethnicity, emphasizing faith as the foundation of righteousness and divine purpose. For students in primary education, understanding this covenant can nurture early awareness of faith identity, divine calling, and the value of trust in God's promises. However, the successful communication of this theological truth largely depends on the professional competence of the CRE teacher-how the teacher interprets, contextualizes, and delivers the message in age-appropriate and pedagogically engaging ways.

In Indonesia, the challenge of teaching Christian Religious Education within public schools such as SD Negeri 177931 Tumas lies in the pluralistic and multi-religious environment of the nation. Teachers must balance the task of maintaining biblical fidelity while promoting interfaith respect and national values of tolerance and unity. Professional competence in this context involves not only theological understanding but also cultural sensitivity, pedagogical creativity, and ethical integrity. A competent CRE teacher must be able to explain theological concepts-such as God's covenant with Abraham-through methods that connect divine revelation with students' lived experiences, ensuring that faith education remains relevant, formative, and transformative. This competence encompasses the ability to design effective lesson plans, use contextual examples, apply appropriate learning media, and assess students holistically in cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions. From a pedagogical perspective, Genesis 17:5 provides rich material for moral and spiritual instruction. The renaming of Abram to Abraham symbolizes transformation, mission, and divine trust. When explained effectively, this text can teach students about identity in God, faithfulness in commitment, and responsibility as God's chosen people. A professionally competent teacher will not only explain the historical and theological meaning of the verse but also guide students to reflect on their own sense of purpose and faith journey. In doing so, the teacher becomes both a communicator of Scripture and a facilitator of spiritual growth. God's covenant with Abraham also offers a model for understanding divine-human partnership in educational contexts. Just as God entrusted Abraham with the mission to be a blessing to nations, Christian educators are entrusted with the mission to be channels of truth and love within their classrooms. Thus, professional competence in CRE is not limited to technical proficiency but rooted in spiritual vocation-the teacher's participation in God's redemptive work through education. This study seeks to explore and analyze the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in explaining God's covenant with Abraham

(Genesis 17:5) at SD Negeri 177931 Tumas. Through an expository approach, the research aims to interpret the biblical text in light of pedagogical practice and assess how teachers integrate scriptural understanding with professional standards of teaching. By focusing on this intersection of theology and pedagogy, the study contributes to the ongoing discourse on faith-based education in Indonesia, particularly regarding the role of teacher competence in shaping students' spiritual foundations. Ultimately, this research underscores that effective Christian education depends not only on curriculum and content but on the teacher's professional and spiritual integrity-the capacity to translate divine truth into living knowledge that transforms both heart and mind.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design combined with an expository theological approach to analyze the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in explaining God's covenant with Abraham, as recorded in Genesis 17:5, within the learning environment of SD Negeri 177931 Tumas. The qualitative design was chosen because it enables a deep understanding of teachers' lived experiences, interpretive processes, and pedagogical practices in conveying theological concepts to young learners. The expository method complemented this approach by providing a systematic analysis of the biblical text, ensuring that the theological content being taught remains faithful to its scriptural foundation. The qualitative design focused on exploring how CRE teachers demonstrate professional competence in both the preparation and implementation of teaching biblical content. Following Creswell and Poth (2018), this study sought to interpret meaning within its natural setting, allowing data to emerge from the authentic interaction between teachers, students, and Scripture. The expository dimension of the research followed the interpretive framework proposed by Fee and Stuart (2014), emphasizing the grammatical-historical method of biblical interpretation. This dual approach ensured theological accuracy while connecting the biblical message to pedagogical realities. The research was conducted at SD Negeri 177931 Tumas, a public elementary school in Indonesia where Christian Religious Education is taught to students from Christian backgrounds. The school was selected due to its established commitment to religious and moral education within a pluralistic environment. Participants included two Christian Religious Education teachers who were actively teaching Grades 4-6, along with eight students and one school principal who provided contextual insights into the learning environment. Purposive sampling was used to select participants who possessed relevant experience and demonstrated reflective engagement in teaching biblical lessons. All participants provided informed consent, and the study adhered to ethical standards ensuring confidentiality and respect for institutional guidelines. Interviews were conducted with CRE teachers to explore their understanding of Genesis 17:5, teaching strategies, and reflections on professional competence. Classroom observations focused on instructional methods, teacher-student interactions, and the integration of biblical principles into pedagogical activities. Supporting documents such as lesson plans, student work samples, and teaching media were analyzed to identify evidence of professional competence in planning, implementation, and evaluation. Field notes were taken to capture non-verbal cues and contextual nuances during teaching sessions. All qualitative data were transcribed, coded,

and categorized into themes related to (a) theological understanding of God's covenant, (b) pedagogical translation of biblical content, (c) communication skills, and (d) teacher professionalism. The expository analysis of Genesis 17:5 served as the theological lens through which these themes were interpreted. Key exegetical insights-such as the meaning of "name change," "divine calling," and "father of many nations"-were correlated with the teachers' instructional narratives and lesson objectives. Triangulation across interviews, observations, and documents was applied to ensure data validity and interpretive credibility. All biblical interpretations were cross-checked with standard exegetical sources to maintain theological soundness. The qualitative-expository synthesis not only illuminates the teachers' interpretive skill but also reveals the transformative power of Scripture in shaping faith-based education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study demonstrate that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in explaining God's covenant with Abraham (Genesis 17:5) at SD Negeri 177931 Tumas is not only a matter of cognitive mastery or pedagogical technique, but also a reflection of theological depth and spiritual maturity. The first and most fundamental element of professional competence in teaching biblical content is the teacher's ability to comprehend and interpret Scripture accurately. Both teachers involved in this study demonstrated awareness that Genesis 17:5 represents a covenantal milestone in salvation history-marking Abram's transformation into Abraham, symbolizing not only a change in name but in identity, mission, and destiny. In their reflections, the teachers consistently emphasized that God's covenant is relational and redemptive, grounded in divine initiative rather than human merit. During classroom observations, this theological foundation became evident in how teachers introduced the lesson. One teacher began by reading the verse aloud, then asked students to reflect on what it means to have a new name and a new purpose. She explained that "God changed Abram's name to Abraham because He wanted him to understand that his life had a greater purpose-to be a blessing to many nations." This explanation, while simplified for children, remained faithful to the expository meaning of the text. From an exegetical standpoint, the Hebrew term Abraham (אַבְרָהָם) signifies "father of a multitude," while Abram means "exalted father." The shift, therefore, conveys an expansion of vocation-from personal honor to universal mission. Both teachers connected this theological meaning with students' moral development, explaining that "God also gives each of us a purpose-to bless others through kindness, honesty, and faith." By doing so, they transformed an ancient covenant into a living message for children's ethical growth. This approach aligns with the professional competence standard of mastery of subject matter, as outlined in Indonesia's Teacher Competency Framework (Permendiknas No. 16/2007), which emphasizes deep understanding of the content taught. In this context, CRE teachers demonstrated theological literacy-the ability to interpret Scripture accurately while contextualizing it within the developmental stage of their students. Moreover, their teaching reflected a balanced hermeneutical approach, combining textual fidelity with pedagogical relevance. The data also revealed variations in interpretive depth. One teacher tended to focus more on the moral implications of Abraham's faith (obedience, trust, and humility), while the other explored the covenantal aspects of God's promise. Although both approaches were appropriate for primary-level learners, the study found

that theological integration could be strengthened through collaborative lesson planning, peer reflection, and continuous theological education. These findings support previous research by Van Brummelen (2009) and Lickona (1991), who emphasize that effective religious educators are those who teach from a “transformed understanding of Scripture”—a combination of biblical knowledge and spiritual insight. The second theme concerns the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers—how they translate theological truth into developmentally appropriate learning experiences. Observations showed that teachers employed various strategies, such as storytelling, visual media, group discussion, and moral reflection, to make the concept of God’s covenant accessible to elementary students. In one lesson, the teacher used a creative storytelling technique, narrating Abraham’s journey with simple visuals. She then invited students to draw what they imagined when God promised Abraham to be the father of many nations. This activity allowed students to engage both cognitively and emotionally with the biblical story. The teacher concluded by asking, “How do you think Abraham felt when God gave him this promise?” Students responded with words like happy, thankful, and surprised, showing affective engagement with the narrative. Another pedagogical innovation involved role-play. In one session, the teacher divided students into small groups and asked them to dramatize the moment when God spoke to Abraham. This experiential approach helped students internalize the message, aligning with the constructivist principle that learning occurs through active participation and reflection (Piaget, 1972; Vygotsky, 1978). Moreover, it reflected the biblical pedagogy of “learning by doing,” as modeled in Deuteronomy 6:7, which encourages teaching through conversation and lived experience. Document analysis of lesson plans showed that teachers incorporated clear learning objectives aligned with the Indonesian Christian Education curriculum—focusing on faith development, moral reasoning, and character formation. Yet, one limitation identified was the lack of integration between biblical exegesis and assessment methods. Teachers tended to assess students based on factual recall rather than reflective understanding. For instance, quizzes often asked, “What was Abraham’s new name?” instead of prompting deeper reflection like, “What can we learn from God’s promise to Abraham?” This finding echoes research by Tichenor and Tichenor (2005), who argue that true professional competence in religious education involves not only methodological proficiency but the ability to design assessment that captures spiritual learning outcomes. The teachers at SD Negeri 177931 Tumas demonstrated commendable effort in contextualizing Scripture, but professional development in biblical pedagogy and reflective assessment could further strengthen their practice. The pedagogical competence observed in this study reflects a dynamic integration of faith and learning. The teachers did not merely transmit religious knowledge; they facilitated personal encounter with biblical truth, helping students perceive God’s covenant not as ancient history but as a living invitation to trust, obey, and serve. The third theme relates to the communication competence of CRE teachers—their ability to convey theological meaning clearly, empathetically, and persuasively. Communication in religious education is more than verbal instruction; it involves spiritual dialogue, emotional resonance, and the creation of a sacred atmosphere conducive to reflection and moral formation. Both teachers exhibited strong interpersonal communication skills, using accessible language, storytelling, and questioning techniques to maintain student attention. The tone of their teaching was warm and relational, aligning with Christ-centered pedagogy that values

compassion and personal connection. For instance, one teacher used humor to illustrate Abraham's initial disbelief at God's promise of a son in old age, inviting laughter before transitioning to a moral reflection about patience and faith. Observations indicated that teachers employed a balance between didactic clarity (explaining facts and meanings) and dialogical engagement (inviting student participation). This aligns with Freire's (1970) concept of dialogical pedagogy, where learning becomes a collaborative process of discovery rather than one-way transmission. The use of open-ended questions such as, "What do you think it means to trust God's promise?" encouraged critical and spiritual thinking even among young learners. Another aspect of communication competence was the teacher's ability to adapt explanations to the students' cultural and emotional context. At SD Negeri 177931 Tumas, where students come from modest rural backgrounds, teachers drew analogies from everyday life—such as a parent's promise or a farmer's trust in rainfall—to help children relate to Abraham's faith. This contextual communication reflected both cultural sensitivity and theological imagination, two hallmarks of professional teaching in faith-based settings. Some communication challenges were observed. One teacher occasionally relied heavily on monologue explanations, reducing interactive learning moments. This indicates a need for training in student-centered communication strategies, particularly in facilitating dialogue and reflective discussion. Nevertheless, the overall communication style observed was marked by sincerity, empathy, and narrative richness—qualities essential for spiritual influence in education. Communication in CRE teaching is also incarnational—it embodies the message being taught. As Christ communicated divine truth through parables and personal encounter, so teachers act as mediators of God's Word through words, gestures, and relationships. In this sense, the communication competence of a CRE teacher becomes a form of ministry, bridging divine revelation and human understanding (Tillich, 1964). The fourth theme—spiritual integrity—emerged as the core dimension that unites all aspects of professional competence in Christian Religious Education. Teachers' effectiveness in explaining God's covenant with Abraham was deeply influenced by their own spiritual maturity and moral example. Students observed not only what the teachers said, but how they lived. Interviews revealed that both teachers viewed their profession as a calling rather than a mere occupation. One stated, "Teaching God's Word to children is a responsibility before God. I must first live in obedience, as Abraham did, before I can teach about faith." This reflective attitude shows alignment between personal faith and professional practice, consistent with the biblical notion of integrity of heart and skillful hands (Psalm 78:72). During classroom interactions, teachers demonstrated patience, compassion, and fairness—embodying the virtues they sought to instill. Their daily conduct served as a silent testimony of faith, reinforcing the content of their teaching. Students responded positively to this congruence between message and messenger, expressing that "our teacher is kind like Abraham, who trusts God." Such remarks illustrate that spiritual modeling may have stronger formative power than doctrinal explanation. This finding supports Palmer's (2007) assertion that "we teach who we are." In Christian education, the teacher's character functions as a living curriculum. The covenantal message of Genesis 17:5—centered on transformation, mission, and faith—is best conveyed through a teacher who embodies these same principles. Hence, spiritual integrity becomes the foundation of professional competence, ensuring that knowledge, pedagogy, and communication are all anchored in authentic faith. The study also

identifies a tension between professional expectations and spiritual burdens. Teachers admitted to struggling with maintaining devotional discipline amidst administrative demands. This underscores the need for spiritual formation programs and collegial support systems that sustain teachers' faith lives. Institutions should provide regular retreats, mentorship, and theological workshops to nurture both competence and calling. It mirrors the very structure of God's covenant with Abraham, which unites promise, relationship, and mission. The teacher, like Abraham, is called to embody faithfulness in vocation and to become a channel of blessing for students. These elements correspond to the four pillars of professional competence outlined by the Indonesian Ministry of Education-pedagogical, professional, social, and personal competence-but here reinterpreted through a biblical lens. From a theological perspective, teaching Genesis 17:5 becomes more than recounting history; it becomes an act of covenantal participation. The teacher, in explaining God's covenant, reenacts the covenant's dynamic by entering into a relationship of faith and trust with students. This transforms the classroom into a spiritual community of learning, where divine promises are not only studied but experienced. The findings also affirm the view of Van Dyk (2000) and Knight (2016) that Christian education must integrate worldview and practice-seeing all knowledge as part of God's redemptive narrative. The CRE teachers at SD Negeri 177931 Tumus exemplify this integration, though continuous formation is needed to deepen their theological grounding and pedagogical reflection. The study concludes that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in explaining God's covenant with Abraham is best understood as a sacred synthesis of knowledge, skill, communication, and faith. Their role is both instructional and incarnational-teaching truth while living it. Genesis 17:5 thus becomes a pedagogical mirror: just as God renamed Abraham to fulfill His purpose, teachers are continually "renamed" by their vocation to fulfill God's mission in education. Through professional and spiritual excellence, they become instruments of covenant renewal, nurturing a generation that understands God's promises and embodies His blessings.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the professional competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is a holistic integration of knowledge, pedagogy, communication, and spirituality. The expository analysis of Genesis 17:5-the divine covenant that transforms Abram into Abraham-serves as a theological framework through which the professional identity of CRE teachers can be reinterpreted. Just as Abraham was called, renamed, and commissioned to become a blessing to nations, so too are teachers called to embody and transmit God's promises through their professional vocation. The findings of this study affirm that professional competence in religious education extends far beyond technical mastery; it encompasses theological depth, pedagogical creativity, and personal holiness. The first key conclusion centers on biblical and theological understanding. Teachers who demonstrate profound scriptural literacy are better equipped to connect ancient biblical covenants with contemporary faith formation. At SD Negeri 177931 Tumus, teachers who engaged deeply with the covenant narrative were able to contextualize divine promises into moral and spiritual lessons relevant to children's daily lives. This finding underscores the need for continuous theological formation among Christian educators. Professional

competence must therefore be rooted in sound biblical interpretation—a competence that unites academic understanding with spiritual conviction. The second conclusion concerns pedagogical competence and contextualization. Effective religious education requires more than doctrinal accuracy; it demands the capacity to translate theological truths into age-appropriate and culturally meaningful learning experiences. Teachers in this study successfully employed creative pedagogies—storytelling, role-play, and visual reflection—that transformed the story of Abraham into a dynamic moral encounter. This aligns with constructivist principles and the biblical pattern of experiential teaching. The findings highlight that pedagogical excellence is an act of faith, reflecting God’s own method of revelation through narrative, symbol, and relationship. The third conclusion emphasizes communication competence and relational engagement. Communication in CRE is not merely verbal instruction but a spiritual dialogue between teacher and learner. The teachers’ ability to express faith with warmth, clarity, and empathy allowed students to experience the lesson not only cognitively but emotionally. This dialogical communication echoes Christ’s model as the “Teacher who became flesh”—one who speaks truth through love and presence. Hence, professional competence must include communicative grace: the skill to embody the Word in both message and manner. The fourth and most profound conclusion concerns spiritual integrity and role modeling. The moral and spiritual authority of a Christian educator arises not from institutional position but from congruence between belief and behavior. The teachers in this study exemplified authenticity, humility, and consistency—virtues that made their teaching credible and transformative. As Abraham lived out his covenant through faith and obedience, CRE teachers must likewise live out their faith through daily practice. Their character becomes the living curriculum through which divine truth is made visible to students. The findings reveal that professional competence in Christian Religious Education is covenantal in nature. It is both a divine calling and a professional responsibility, grounded in faithfulness to Scripture and devotion to holistic student formation. Theologically, the teacher’s vocation mirrors God’s covenant with Abraham—marked by transformation, mission, and blessing. Pedagogically, it requires continuous reflection, contextual innovation, and collaboration. Practically, it calls for institutional support through training, mentorship, and spiritual formation programs. Future studies should further explore the relationship between theological understanding and pedagogical performance, particularly in diverse and plural educational settings. Strengthening theological literacy and reflective practice among Christian educators will ensure that the message of God’s covenant continues to inspire both hearts and minds. In this light, the professional competence of CRE teachers is not merely a set of measurable skills, but a sacred ministry—an ongoing response to God’s call to nurture faith, cultivate wisdom, and form character in the next generation.

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