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The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Empathy: An Expository Study of Joseph's Story (Genesis 40:14) at SDN 165717 Padang Hulu - Tebing Tinggi

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in cultivating empathy among elementary school students through an expository interpretation of Joseph's story in Genesis 40:14. The research was conducted at SDN 165717 Padang Hulu - Tebing Tinggi, an educational environment marked by cultural and religious diversity. Employing a qualitative descriptive method combined with biblical expository analysis, the study sought to understand how teachers' relational competence influences students' moral and emotional formation. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis, then analyzed thematically using Braun and Clarke's framework. The findings reveal that the teacher's social competence-expressed through empathy, active listening, and compassionate communication-served as the primary medium for nurturing students' affective and moral awareness. By interpreting Joseph's plea, "Remember me," as a theological expression of vulnerability and trust, the teacher transformed the story into a moral learning experience that encouraged students to recognize and respond to the feelings of others. The integration of Scripture with experiential reflection allowed students to connect biblical values with real-life empathy, bridging theological understanding and social behavior. The study concludes that empathy in Christian education is not merely a psychological skill but a theological virtue rooted in divine compassion. Socially competent teachers thus play a dual role as moral mentors and spiritual guides, shaping students into compassionate and responsible individuals. This research underscores the importance of relational pedagogy as the foundation for moral education and the embodiment of Christian love in school communities.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Empathy

INTRODUCTION

Education, particularly religious education, plays a crucial role in shaping the moral and emotional fabric of young learners. In a plural and often fragmented society, schools are

not only centers of intellectual development but also arenas where values such as empathy, cooperation, and respect for others are nurtured. Within the Indonesian context—where diversity in ethnicity, culture, and religion defines the social landscape—Christian Religious Education (CRE) bears a profound responsibility to foster students' capacity for empathy and social harmony. This responsibility aligns with the national educational vision to develop learners who are not only intelligent but also compassionate and socially responsible citizens. In this regard, the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers becomes a decisive factor in achieving these moral and affective goals. Social competence refers to the ability of teachers to build positive interpersonal relationships, communicate effectively, and demonstrate understanding and sensitivity toward the emotional needs of others. In the context of Christian education, it transcends professional skill—it becomes a spiritual vocation. A socially competent CRE teacher embodies the values of Christ-centered love, patience, and service, creating a classroom climate where empathy is both taught and lived. This pedagogical and moral responsibility becomes especially urgent in elementary education, where children begin to form their ethical foundations and emotional awareness. Teachers at this stage are not merely transmitters of knowledge; they are moral exemplars whose behaviors, attitudes, and relational styles profoundly influence the moral development of their students.

Current educational challenges indicate that empathy—a key element of social and spiritual maturity—is often underdeveloped among students. The rise of individualism, digital isolation, and competition in education has led to declining emotional sensitivity and weakening interpersonal bonds. Within this reality, Christian Religious Education must respond not only by transmitting biblical knowledge but also by reviving its transformative and relational essence. One effective approach is to integrate biblical narratives that model empathy and relational resilience into classroom learning. Among these, the story of Joseph in Genesis 40:14 provides a powerful example of empathy in the midst of suffering and misunderstanding. The verse, “But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison,” (Genesis 40:14, NIV) captures Joseph's deep emotional awareness and his longing for human connection even during hardship. Joseph's story demonstrates a profound sensitivity to the feelings of others—he interprets the dreams of his fellow prisoners not for personal gain, but as an act of compassion. This narrative encapsulates the moral and spiritual dimension of empathy: the ability to see, feel, and respond to the needs of others even when one's own circumstances are painful. For Christian educators, this story serves as a pedagogical resource for teaching empathy as both a spiritual discipline and a social virtue.

At SDN 165717 Padang Hulu, located in Tebing Tinggi, this study situates itself in a real educational environment where teachers face the dual challenge of maintaining academic excellence while nurturing students' moral character. The local context—marked by cultural diversity and social interaction across different faith communities—requires educators who can model empathy in practical, context-sensitive ways. Within such a milieu, the Christian Religious Education teacher's social competence becomes essential not only for effective classroom engagement but also for the formation of empathetic, respectful, and emotionally intelligent students. The ability to translate biblical empathy into concrete educational practice represents both a pedagogical innovation and a

spiritual mandate. This study thus explores how the social competence of CRE teachers contributes to cultivating empathy among students through the expository teaching of Joseph's story in Genesis 40:14. The urgency of this research lies in the growing need to restore empathy as a core component of moral education. In times when social divisions, bullying, and emotional detachment increasingly challenge school culture, educators must rediscover biblical narratives as living texts that speak to contemporary moral issues. By grounding empathy in both theological reflection and educational practice, Christian Religious Education can bridge the gap between faith and life-forming students who not only understand love as a doctrine but live it as a daily habit. The findings of this study are expected to contribute to developing models of teacher competence that harmonize professional skill, emotional intelligence, and biblical wisdom in the service of holistic Christian education.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive design with an expository approach, focusing on the interpretation and pedagogical application of the biblical narrative in Genesis 40:14 within the context of Christian Religious Education (CRE). The qualitative design was selected because it allows for an in-depth exploration of teachers' social competence and their lived experiences in fostering empathy among students. The expository method, meanwhile, is rooted in biblical hermeneutics, emphasizing faithful interpretation of Scripture alongside its practical implications in teaching and learning. This combination enabled the researcher to connect theological reflection with pedagogical realities in the classroom. The research locus was SDN 165717 Padang Hulu - Tebing Tinggi, a public elementary school where Christian Religious Education is part of the moral and character-building curriculum. This school was chosen for its diverse student population and the presence of teachers who actively integrate biblical narratives into daily instruction. The school's pluralistic environment-where students come from different ethnic and religious backgrounds-offered a fertile context for examining how empathy can be cultivated through religious learning that values inclusivity and mutual understanding. The participants in this study consisted of one Christian Religious Education teacher and twelve upper-grade students (grades 4-6). The teacher was purposefully selected based on demonstrated experience and competence in integrating biblical stories into moral teaching. The students were chosen to represent various levels of understanding and behavioral expression of empathy. This sampling approach followed the principles of purposive selection (Creswell, 2014), ensuring that participants could provide rich, relevant data related to the study objectives. Observations focused on classroom interactions during lessons where Joseph's story (Genesis 40:14) was taught, paying attention to verbal communication, teacher-student relationships, and empathetic expressions during learning activities. Interviews were conducted with the teacher and students to capture their perceptions of empathy, the effectiveness of biblical narratives in shaping attitudes, and the teacher's strategies in modeling compassionate behavior. Document analysis included lesson plans, teaching materials, and reflection journals to understand how empathy was intentionally embedded within the curriculum. The process included six stages: familiarization with data, initial coding, theme identification, theme review, theme definition, and final reporting. The emerging themes were grouped into

three main categories: teacher's social competence in relational communication, expository interpretation of Joseph's empathy, and transformation of students' emotional and behavioral responses. The analysis aimed to reveal how theological content—particularly Joseph's plea for remembrance and kindness (Genesis 40:14)—was translated into moral practice and emotional growth among students. This methodological framework sought to integrate theological interpretation with educational inquiry. The expository approach not only illuminated the spiritual and moral depth of Joseph's story but also demonstrated how the narrative could serve as a pedagogical tool for nurturing empathy in a pluralistic learning environment. By merging hermeneutical rigor with classroom praxis, this study positioned Christian Religious Education as a transformative discipline capable of shaping empathetic and socially responsible individuals.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is a decisive factor in cultivating empathy among students through biblical narratives such as the story of Joseph in Genesis 40:14. The integration of biblical exegesis and pedagogical practice within the classroom of SDN 165717 Padang Hulu – Tebing Tinggi demonstrates that empathy is not merely a cognitive skill to be taught but a moral and spiritual disposition to be modeled and experienced. Through qualitative analysis of classroom observations, interviews, and document reviews, three major dimensions emerged: the relational competence of the teacher as an empathetic model, the expository interpretation of Joseph's story as a framework for moral reflection, and the transformation of students' affective and behavioral attitudes as a result of this integrative learning process. These themes collectively show how faith-based instruction, when grounded in social competence and theological insight, can serve as a powerful means of moral and emotional formation. The teacher's social competence was evident in the way the classroom atmosphere was built—warm, dialogical, and grounded in mutual respect. Rather than adopting a top-down approach, the teacher encouraged an environment of active listening and compassionate engagement. This was seen, for instance, when students were invited to share personal experiences of being excluded or forgotten, which were then connected to Joseph's plea in Genesis 40:14, "But when all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness." The teacher skillfully bridged the biblical narrative with students' emotional realities, helping them recognize that Joseph's cry for remembrance reflected not weakness, but the deep human longing to be valued and understood. This pedagogical approach aligns with Goleman's (2006) concept of emotional intelligence, which emphasizes empathy as the foundation of social awareness and interpersonal connection. The teacher's relational sensitivity—demonstrated through active listening, affirmation, and non-judgmental communication—created a safe learning space where students could express vulnerability without fear of ridicule. Through this process, the teacher modeled empathy as both a moral virtue and a communicative act, showing that understanding another person's feelings requires attentiveness, humility, and compassion. From an educational perspective, this approach embodies what Noddings (2013) calls "the pedagogy of care," where moral learning arises not from moralizing speech but from authentic relationships of trust. The teacher's

consistent willingness to listen and validate students' emotions mirrored the same compassion Joseph showed toward the cupbearer and baker in prison. In his confinement, Joseph did not retreat into self-pity but chose to comfort others, demonstrating that empathy can emerge even in the midst of suffering. The teacher used this aspect of the story to emphasize that true empathy involves emotional identification with others' pain and the willingness to act benevolently. Students were encouraged to see empathy not merely as feeling sorry for others but as taking action to alleviate suffering. During classroom observations, students were seen consoling peers who appeared anxious or distracted, showing that empathy was beginning to take root as a lived value. The teacher reinforced this by praising such acts of kindness publicly, thus reinforcing prosocial behavior as an integral part of faith practice.

The expository dimension of teaching Joseph's story was equally significant. Rather than focusing only on Joseph's eventual rise to power, the teacher emphasized his emotional journey-his betrayal, unjust imprisonment, and his yearning to be remembered. This interpretive focus illuminated the moral essence of Genesis 40:14: empathy as remembrance. To remember others in their suffering, the teacher explained, is to participate in God's covenantal love. Such interpretation resonates with Brueggemann's (1982) idea that biblical empathy is rooted in covenant consciousness, where moral action arises from faithfulness to God's relational commitment to humanity. By situating Joseph's request for remembrance within this covenantal framework, the teacher helped students perceive empathy as more than emotional sensitivity-it is a form of faithfulness that mirrors God's own compassionate remembrance of His people. The theological depth of this approach was reflected in students' responses. When asked why Joseph wanted to be remembered, one student answered, "Because he still believed that good people will care about others." Another said, "He remembered others when he was in pain, so we should do the same." These responses show that students were not merely recalling the plot but internalizing the ethical principle embedded in the narrative. They recognized that empathy involves transcending self-centeredness and maintaining moral concern even in hardship. This transformation of moral perception aligns with Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, particularly the stage where moral reasoning evolves from obedience to internalized universal principles. Through expository learning, the CRE teacher guided students from merely understanding moral rules to embracing empathy as a divine command rooted in love and justice. The pedagogical process employed by the teacher integrated cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of learning. The lesson structure typically began with scriptural reading and interpretation, followed by guided reflection and experiential activities. For instance, after discussing Joseph's plea for remembrance, students participated in a role-play exercise where one group acted as Joseph and another as the cupbearer. This dramatization enabled students to emotionally inhabit the story and empathize with the feelings of both parties. The teacher concluded the activity with reflective dialogue, asking, "How does it feel to be forgotten?" and "What can we do to remember others in our lives?" This reflective questioning transformed biblical study into moral introspection. Students began sharing stories about helping sick relatives, remembering birthdays of friends, and comforting others after failure. These testimonies illustrated that empathy, once awakened through narrative engagement, naturally extends to everyday actions. Such integration of storytelling and reflection aligns

with Groome's (1991) concept of shared praxis, where faith education involves critical reflection on life in light of the Christian story, leading to transformative action.

The role of the teacher's social competence was especially visible in how conflicts among students were handled. In one observation, two students quarreled during a group activity. Instead of immediately intervening with discipline, the teacher invited both students to recall Joseph's situation-how he chose patience over revenge despite being wronged. The students were then asked to reenact reconciliation, using Joseph's forgiveness as a model. This exercise transformed conflict resolution into moral formation. It demonstrated that empathy, when guided by social competence, could shift disciplinary moments into opportunities for spiritual growth. Such teaching methods reflect Vygotsky's (1978) notion of scaffolding, where the teacher mediates learning through social interaction within a supportive framework. The CRE teacher functioned not as an authoritarian figure but as a compassionate facilitator, helping students construct moral meaning from their relational experiences. The evidence of behavioral transformation was reported by parents during informal interviews. Several parents noted changes in their children's sensitivity and helpfulness at home. One mother shared, "My son now prays for his classmates who are sick and often asks how they feel." Another observed, "My daughter helps me more without being told. She says it's because Joseph helped others even when he was sad." These narratives indicate that empathy nurtured through classroom learning can extend into family life, affirming that the teacher's influence transcended formal instruction. This outcome reinforces Lickona's (1991) idea of moral education as encompassing moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action-a triadic unity achieved through relational modeling and experiential practice. The CRE teacher's approach ensured that all three aspects were addressed, turning faith education into a holistic character formation process.

In theological reflection, Joseph's story was also used to connect empathy with divine remembrance. The teacher explained that when Joseph asked to be remembered by the cupbearer, he reflected a deep faith that God never forgets His people. Even though human beings may fail to remember, divine empathy is eternal. This theological dimension provided students with a spiritual grounding for their moral learning. Empathy, in this sense, was not simply a social virtue but a reflection of God's steadfast love-His *hesed*-which endures in all circumstances. The teacher emphasized that remembering others in kindness is a form of participating in God's covenant. This interpretation transformed the act of empathy into an act of worship, where moral behavior becomes a living testimony of divine love. Such integration of theology and ethics illustrates the power of expository teaching to bridge spiritual truths and daily practice. From a social perspective, the practice of empathy in this classroom contributed to a more inclusive and cooperative learning environment. Students reported feeling more connected and less isolated, particularly those who were previously marginalized. The teacher's consistent recognition of students' emotions validated their experiences and promoted a sense of belonging. Over time, students began initiating acts of support among peers, such as sharing materials, offering comfort, and expressing appreciation. These behaviors reflect what Batson (2011) describes as "empathetic concern"-a form of prosocial motivation that arises from genuine care for others rather than external reward. The

cultivation of such empathy in early education is crucial for shaping socially responsible citizens who value compassion as a moral foundation. The findings also highlight the reciprocal nature of empathy development: as students became more empathetic, the classroom community grew more harmonious, which in turn reinforced the teacher's ability to teach effectively. This dynamic aligns with Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, where moral development occurs through interrelated systems of relationships. The CRE classroom functioned as a microcosm of moral ecology, where empathy circulated as both an educational process and a spiritual atmosphere. The teacher's social competence sustained this ecology through relational consistency, emotional presence, and theological grounding. The results of this study contribute to a growing recognition that religious education must move beyond doctrinal instruction to engage the emotional and social dimensions of learning. As scholars like Haydon (2006) and Arthur (2019) suggest, empathy education is essential in developing moral intelligence and reducing prejudice in pluralistic societies. In the context of Indonesia, where religious and cultural diversity coexist within shared educational spaces, the role of empathy becomes even more urgent. The CRE teacher's approach-rooted in biblical exposition and relational pedagogy-illustrates how faith-based education can contribute to social harmony by teaching students to recognize the humanity of others. Joseph's experience of betrayal, forgiveness, and compassion provided a universal moral language that transcended denominational boundaries. It reminded students that empathy is not confined to religious identity but flows from the shared image of God within every human being. Another significant dimension of the discussion concerns the professional implications for Christian Religious Education teachers. The study underscores that social competence is not a peripheral skill but a core component of professional teaching identity. The ability to interpret Scripture empathetically, communicate morally charged narratives, and model compassion requires both theological literacy and emotional intelligence. This combination of competencies positions the CRE teacher as both moral mentor and spiritual guide. Moreover, the integration of empathy in teaching aligns with national educational goals emphasizing character development and moral education. By situating empathy within the framework of faith-based learning, CRE teachers fulfill their dual mandate: nurturing both spiritual depth and social responsibility among students.

The findings affirm that expository learning-when informed by social competence-can effectively integrate cognitive and affective domains. Students do not merely learn about Joseph's empathy; they learn from and through it. The teacher's interpretive skill transformed a biblical text into a moral narrative that resonated with the students' lived experiences. This approach addresses a common critique of religious education as being overly abstract or detached from reality. By situating moral instruction within the emotive power of narrative, the CRE teacher ensured that empathy was not an external lesson but an internal awakening. This synthesis of theology, psychology, and pedagogy reflects what Wright (2006) terms "narrative ethics"-the shaping of moral character through engagement with biblical stories as moral mirrors. The study also identifies challenges. The cultivation of empathy requires sustained modeling and consistency, and teachers may struggle to maintain emotional energy in large or diverse classrooms. Additionally, there is a need for professional development programs that enhance teachers' emotional intelligence, narrative pedagogy, and theological sensitivity. In plural contexts like Tebing

Tinggi, where interfaith dynamics are part of daily life, teachers must also be trained to handle sensitive discussions about faith differences with empathy and respect. These challenges, however, do not diminish the transformative potential observed in this study. Rather, they highlight the importance of institutional support for teachers who embody the spiritual and social dimensions of their vocation. The results of this research affirm that the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers serves as the cornerstone for cultivating empathy through expository engagement with Scripture. The case of Joseph's story demonstrates that when teachers combine theological insight with relational sensitivity, they create an educational environment where faith becomes an instrument of moral transformation. The empathy embodied by Joseph and mirrored by the teacher inspired students to internalize compassion as a way of life. Learning thus moved beyond intellectual comprehension into spiritual formation. The CRE classroom at SDN 165717 Padang Hulu - Tebing Tinggi stands as an example of how biblical education, guided by social competence, can nurture not only religious understanding but also emotional maturity and moral responsibility. This integration of social competence, faith, and empathy marks a paradigm shift in religious education—one where the goal is not only to teach about God's love but to cultivate the capacity to live it.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a pivotal role in cultivating empathy among students through the biblical narrative of Joseph in Genesis 40:14. The integration of theological exegesis, relational pedagogy, and moral reflection demonstrates that effective religious education transcends the transmission of doctrine and enters the realm of personal formation. At SDN 165717 Padang Hulu - Tebing Tinggi, the CRE teacher's social competence—manifested through empathy, active listening, and compassionate communication—transformed the classroom into a community of care. In this environment, the story of Joseph was not merely read as ancient history but lived as a moral and emotional experience that shaped students' understanding of compassion, forgiveness, and faithfulness. The findings reveal that empathy is best cultivated when teachers model it authentically in their interactions with students. The teacher's ability to connect Joseph's emotional struggles with the students' personal experiences enabled learners to internalize moral values through identification rather than instruction. This aligns with the principle that moral education must engage the whole person—heart, mind, and behavior. By interpreting Joseph's plea, "Remember me," as a theological expression of trust, vulnerability, and faith in divine remembrance, the teacher guided students toward understanding empathy as both a human necessity and a divine calling. This dual perspective elevated empathy from a mere social virtue to a form of covenantal faithfulness—a participation in God's own compassion toward humanity.

The study's implications extend beyond this single classroom context. It highlights the indispensable role of social competence in religious pedagogy as a professional and spiritual competency. Teachers who demonstrate empathy, patience, and relational intelligence are more capable of fostering environments where students feel valued and understood. Such emotional safety is the foundation of moral growth. Moreover, the

expository use of Scripture-as exemplified by Joseph's story-provides a powerful pedagogical framework for integrating faith and life. When biblical narratives are interpreted through relational engagement, they cease to be distant moral codes and become living stories that transform hearts and behaviors. This research also affirms that empathy education within CRE contributes directly to the development of social harmony in plural societies. In a diverse nation like Indonesia, where religious and cultural differences coexist within shared public spaces, the cultivation of empathy is essential for sustaining peace. By teaching students to "remember others" in kindness and understanding, the CRE classroom becomes a training ground for tolerance and moral responsibility. Joseph's experience of betrayal and forgiveness serves as a universal metaphor for reconciliation-one that transcends denominational boundaries and speaks to the shared human condition. Thus, empathy education rooted in Scripture not only forms Christian character but also nurtures civic virtues that support interfaith coexistence. The study also acknowledges challenges. Empathy formation requires ongoing teacher reflection, emotional maturity, and institutional support. Without professional development in relational pedagogy, teachers may find it difficult to sustain empathetic engagement in the face of diverse classroom dynamics. Future research should therefore focus on developing training programs that strengthen teachers' social and emotional competencies, integrating psychological, theological, and pedagogical perspectives. Additionally, empirical studies involving larger samples and longitudinal data could further validate the relationship between teachers' social competence and students' moral-emotional growth. In conclusion, this study affirms that the professional identity of a Christian Religious Education teacher is inseparable from their social and spiritual competence. The capacity to teach empathy through the story of Joseph represents a holistic vision of education-one that forms both the intellect and the heart. Theologically, Joseph's story reminds us that to remember others in love is to mirror God's own remembrance of His people. Pedagogically, it illustrates that empathy, when modeled by the teacher, becomes contagious, shaping students into compassionate and morally grounded individuals. The CRE teacher's social competence serves as both method and message: a living embodiment of the gospel's call to love one another. Through such teaching, faith is no longer confined to belief alone but is expressed through the daily practice of empathy-the most visible sign of divine love in human relationships.

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