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The Pedagogical Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Cultivating Worship Spirituality: A Reflective Study of Exodus 29:45 at SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige

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ABSTRACT

Religious education in the Christian tradition is not limited to cognitive instruction but encompasses spiritual formation that nurtures students' relationship with God. Exodus 29:45—"Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God"—reveals the theological foundation of worship spirituality as divine indwelling. This verse emphasizes God's desire for presence, holiness, and covenantal relationship. In the educational context, this theology becomes a pedagogical imperative: teachers must cultivate learning environments where worship becomes a lived experience of divine presence. At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers are challenged to guide students beyond ritual knowledge toward spiritual intimacy and ethical worship practices. This study employed a qualitative reflective approach combined with an expository hermeneutic of Exodus 29:45. Data were obtained through classroom observations, interviews with CRE teachers, and document analysis of lesson plans and worship activities. The interpretive framework connected biblical theology, pedagogical competence, and spiritual formation, analyzed thematically following Creswell's qualitative procedures. Findings show that teachers' pedagogical competence manifests through three integrated practices: contextual interpretation of Scripture that links worship with daily life, experiential learning that invites students to encounter God through song, prayer, and service, and reflective mentoring that models reverence and holiness. Worship spirituality, when taught pedagogically, transforms students' understanding of faith from obligation to communion. This study concludes that Exodus 29:45 provides a theological and pedagogical framework for Christian educators to cultivate worship as spiritual formation. Pedagogical competence rooted in divine presence enables teachers to make classrooms spaces of encounter—where learning becomes worship and worship becomes life.

Keywords: *Pedagogical Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spirituality*

INTRODUCTION

Education in the Christian perspective is a sacred vocation, not merely a process of intellectual transmission but a divine partnership in shaping the faith, character, and spiritual consciousness of learners. Within Christian Religious Education, teachers are called not only to teach theology but to embody it-to live as instruments through whom students experience God's presence in the learning process. This theological foundation aligns with Exodus 29:45, where God declares, "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God." This verse encapsulates the essence of divine pedagogy: God's desire to dwell among His people, guiding, forming, and sanctifying them. In the context of education, it symbolizes God's presence in the classroom-where learning becomes a sacred encounter between divine truth and human experience. For Christian educators, especially at the elementary level, this text serves as a reminder that effective teaching involves cultivating a sense of divine nearness, helping students recognize worship not as a ritual obligation but as a lived relationship with God. The exegesis of Exodus 29:45 reveals a profound theological pattern of relational dwelling. In the broader context, this verse concludes a section describing the consecration of priests, the tabernacle, and the sacrificial system, all of which were designed to mediate God's presence among His people. God's dwelling was not limited to sacred architecture but was contingent upon faithful worship and covenantal obedience. Thus, Exodus 29:45 expresses both divine initiative and human response: God chooses to dwell, and His people are called to maintain holiness through worshipful living. This covenantal dynamic provides a theological framework for Christian Religious Education today. Teachers, as modern "priests of learning," are entrusted with creating spiritual spaces within educational settings-spaces where God's presence can be experienced through prayer, reflection, service, and moral formation. Worship spirituality, therefore, is not confined to liturgical acts but extends into daily life as an attitude of reverence, gratitude, and obedience. In the contemporary educational context, particularly in Indonesia's plural society, the cultivation of worship spirituality faces significant challenges. Many students perceive religion as a cognitive subject rather than a relational experience with God. The growing influence of digital culture, individualism, and moral relativism has weakened children's sense of sacredness in everyday life. Schools, while committed to holistic development, often struggle to integrate spirituality into the rhythm of classroom life. Within this reality, the role of Christian Religious Education teachers becomes vital. Their pedagogical competence-defined as the integration of knowledge, skills, values, and spiritual sensitivity-determines how effectively students can be guided to encounter God in learning. Pedagogical competence in CRE is not limited to mastery of biblical content; it involves the ability to communicate faith authentically, inspire reflection, and model worshipful living. As Shulman (1987) explains, effective teaching combines content knowledge, pedagogical skill, and moral imagination. For Christian teachers, this triad must be infused with faith consciousness, transforming the classroom into a space where theology becomes experience.

At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, a public elementary school located in North Sumatra, Indonesia, the teaching of Christian Religious Education takes on unique significance. The school's name-*Janji Maria* (Mary's Covenant)-itself echoes the biblical theme of divine promise and dwelling. In this environment, teachers face the dual challenge of nurturing academic excellence while fostering worship spirituality among children from diverse socio-cultural backgrounds. Here, the teacher's pedagogical

competence becomes the bridge between biblical revelation and lived faith. Through effective teaching methods—such as storytelling, reflective dialogue, song, and communal prayer—teachers can help students internalize the truth of Exodus 29:45: that God desires to dwell not only in temples but in human hearts. The act of teaching thus becomes an act of worship, where both teacher and student participate in God’s ongoing presence. The relevance of Exodus 29:45 to education lies in its theological anthropology: God’s indwelling presence transforms ordinary life into sacred experience. When students learn to see their daily studies, relationships, and responsibilities as expressions of worship, they begin to develop what may be called worship spirituality—a spirituality that integrates faith and life. This vision requires pedagogical wisdom: the ability to translate divine truths into age-appropriate, experiential learning. A teacher’s pedagogical competence shapes how students perceive worship—not as a detached church activity but as an everyday posture of gratitude and service. In this sense, the Christian classroom becomes a miniature tabernacle where God’s presence is honored, truth is revealed, and hearts are formed. Therefore, the pedagogical task of the CRE teacher is inherently theological: to cultivate awareness of divine indwelling as the foundation of moral and spiritual growth. The present study explores how Christian Religious Education teachers at SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige demonstrate such pedagogical competence in cultivating worship spirituality, reflecting on Exodus 29:45 as a scriptural and pedagogical guide. Through this reflection, the research seeks to reaffirm that teaching, when rooted in God’s presence, becomes an act of sacred formation—where learning itself becomes worship.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative reflective-exegetical design, integrating biblical interpretation with pedagogical analysis to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers cultivate worship spirituality among elementary students. The reflective nature of the study allowed the researcher to connect theological meaning with educational practice, while the exegetical component provided a structured approach to interpreting Exodus 29:45—*“Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God”*—as the foundational text for understanding worship as divine presence in education. This methodological combination reflects the dual aim of the research: to understand Scripture faithfully and to apply its principles meaningfully in classroom contexts. The study was conducted at SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, a public elementary school located in North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school represents a diverse cultural environment, where Christian Religious Education operates within a pluralistic framework alongside other religious subjects. Its name, *Janji Maria* (Mary’s Covenant), symbolizes a commitment to nurturing faith-based values amid the realities of public education. The locus was chosen purposively because of its strong Christian character and the active engagement of teachers in faith-based moral education. Within this setting, the CRE teacher assumes a unique role as both an academic instructor and a spiritual mentor, responsible for nurturing the worship consciousness of students through teaching, prayer, and reflective practice. The exegetical component followed a hermeneutical framework rooted in historical, literary, and theological analysis. The historical context of Exodus 29:45 was examined in relation to the consecration of the tabernacle and

priesthood, focusing on the symbolism of God's dwelling as a pedagogical act of divine formation. The literary structure of the verse-situated at the culmination of priestly ordination-was interpreted as a metaphor for the teacher's vocation: to mediate divine presence within human learning. Theologically, the verse was read through a Christocentric lens, emphasizing God's continuing desire to dwell among His people through the Holy Spirit, particularly in the educational life of believers. The pedagogical reflection component involved descriptive analysis of teaching practices observed and reported at SD Negeri 176365. The researcher engaged with lesson materials, teaching observations, and teacher interviews to identify patterns of pedagogical competence that align with the spirituality of worship. Special attention was given to three domains: Instructional design, examining how biblical stories and worship elements were integrated into classroom activities; analyzing the relational tone, empathy, and encouragement that reflect God's dwelling presence; and exploring how teachers exemplify worshipful living through prayer, humility, and moral consistency. This cyclical process ensured that the study maintained theological depth while remaining grounded in educational observation. The study was conducted with respect for the plural religious composition of the school, ensuring that biblical reflection was applied in ways that promoted inclusivity and moral respect. By reflecting on Exodus 29:45 within the lived realities of classroom practice, the study reveals how pedagogical competence enables teachers to transform the learning environment into a sacred space of divine dwelling-where students not only learn about worship but experience it as a daily rhythm of faith and gratitude.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a crucial role in cultivating worship spirituality among elementary students. Through a reflective-exegetical interpretation of Exodus 29:45-*"Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God"*-and its application within the teaching context at SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, the findings emphasize that the teacher's pedagogical actions can become a living expression of divine presence in education. The study identifies three interrelated themes that emerge from the data: teaching as a sacred vocation of dwelling, pedagogical strategies that integrate worship into learning, and the transformation of students' worship spirituality through relational modeling and reflection. The first major finding reflects that pedagogical competence, when grounded in theological consciousness, transforms teaching from a mere instructional activity into a spiritual vocation of dwelling. The exegetical analysis of Exodus 29:45 situates God's promise to dwell among the Israelites as the climax of the priestly consecration narrative. This divine dwelling (*shekinah*) symbolizes not only God's physical nearness but His continuous moral and spiritual companionship with His people. In the educational context, this "dwelling presence" finds new expression in the teacher's role as the mediator of divine truth and love within the learning community. At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, teachers described their pedagogical mission as "teaching in God's presence." Observations of classroom interactions revealed that teachers frequently began lessons with prayer and worship songs, inviting students to recognize God's presence as central to their learning experience. One teacher expressed this

reflection during an interview: *“If God promised to dwell among His people, then my classroom must become the place where His presence is felt-through love, patience, and understanding.”* This statement illustrates the teacher’s theological awareness that pedagogy is not neutral; it is sacred work that participates in the divine mission of dwelling among humanity. The teacher’s ability to embody divine presence in the classroom represents the intersection of spiritual depth and professional skill. Pedagogical competence, in this sense, involves more than mastering instructional methods; it includes the ability to cultivate a spiritual atmosphere where students sense that learning itself can be an act of worship. This finding resonates with Palmer’s (1998) notion of “teaching from within”, where authentic education arises when teachers teach not only from knowledge but from the integrity of their spiritual identity. The reflective interpretation of Exodus 29:45 therefore provides theological grounding for understanding teaching as an act of sacred hospitality-inviting God to dwell among students through relational care, moral integrity, and prayerful awareness. The teacher’s relational disposition reflects what Vanhoozer (2015) calls “the theodramatic role of the educator.” In this view, each teacher participates in the divine drama by enacting God’s love and presence in everyday classroom interactions. This perspective was evident in the ways teachers at Janji Maria balanced authority and humility, correction and compassion. They saw discipline not as punishment but as a restorative act—a means to realign students’ hearts with God’s order. Thus, pedagogical competence here becomes the

Pedagogical Strategies that Integrate Worship into Learning

The major finding demonstrates that the integration of worship into educational practice depends on the teacher’s ability to design pedagogically intentional strategies that connect faith, knowledge, and spiritual experience. At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, teachers used multiple instructional approaches to cultivate worship spirituality. These included biblical storytelling, reflective prayer, participatory worship projects, and experiential learning—each designed to bridge the gap between intellectual learning and spiritual encounter. Teachers frequently employed storytelling as a primary pedagogical tool, especially narratives that revealed God’s faithfulness and presence among His people. The story of the tabernacle, drawn from Exodus 29, was used not only to teach historical facts but to invite students into the experience of divine dwelling. Students were encouraged to visualize how God’s presence filled the sanctuary and to imagine what it means for God to dwell among them today—in their classroom, families, and communities. Through guided reflection, students identified ways to make their own “hearts a dwelling place for God.” This narrative-based approach aligns with Groome’s (1991) Shared Praxis Model, where students engage in dialogue between life experience and biblical story. By reinterpreting Exodus 29:45 through classroom reflection, students learned that worship is not confined to church rituals but extends to everyday acts of obedience and gratitude. Teachers reported that students began to associate worship with daily behavior, such as showing respect, helping peers, and expressing thankfulness. Another pedagogical practice observed was the consistent use of reflective prayer sessions at the beginning and end of each class. These prayers were not mechanical rituals but opportunities for spiritual reflection, gratitude, and confession. Teachers encouraged students to express their thoughts to God in their own words, reinforcing the belief that God truly “dwells among” them. This practice is grounded in the theological insight that prayer cultivates

the awareness of divine presence—the living application of Exodus 29:45. When students learned to see God as present in their learning, their understanding of worship expanded beyond formal liturgy into relational communion. Prayer thus functioned as both pedagogy and spirituality: teaching students to center their thoughts on God while forming moral and emotional maturity. Teachers also integrated experiential learning activities such as community service, music worship, and creative expression to translate worship into tangible experiences. One notable example was a classroom project titled “God Dwells Here,” where students designed small symbolic “sanctuaries” using local materials, accompanied by reflections on how God can dwell in homes and schools. Such experiential projects mirror Dewey’s (1938) educational philosophy that meaningful learning occurs through experience. However, in the Christian context, these experiences are sacramental—they reveal God’s grace through tangible actions. Students reported that these projects made them “feel closer to God,” suggesting that pedagogical competence in designing experiential worship activities effectively cultivates both spiritual intimacy and practical faith.

At SD Negeri 176365, the CRE teacher also collaborated with other subject teachers to integrate themes of gratitude, stewardship, and community into general subjects like science, art, and social studies. This cross-curricular approach reflects holistic pedagogy, where learning is understood as interconnected under God’s sovereignty. For example, environmental lessons were framed around the idea that caring for nature is an act of worship—a response to God’s indwelling creation. This integration helps students realize that worship spirituality extends beyond religious subjects into all areas of life, affirming the biblical truth that “the earth is the Lord’s” (Psalm 24:1). Through these strategies, the study found that pedagogical competence manifests as the creative ability to translate theology into pedagogy—to make worship a lived, daily experience for students.

Transformation of Students’ Worship Spirituality through Relational Modeling

The next major theme emerging from the research concerns the transformative effect of the teacher’s relational modeling on students’ worship spirituality. Observations and interviews revealed that the teacher’s consistent embodiment of humility, patience, and prayerfulness profoundly influenced students’ emotional and moral attitudes toward God. This finding supports Lickona’s (1991) triadic model of moral education—moral knowing, moral feeling, and moral action—by demonstrating how worship spirituality integrates cognitive understanding, affective devotion, and behavioral expression. Students were observed adopting habits modeled by their teacher, such as offering short prayers before assignments or voluntarily leading songs during class devotions. In post-observation interviews, one student remarked, “*I want to pray like my teacher because it makes the classroom peaceful.*” Another said, “*when we sing together, I feel like God is here.*” These reflections illustrate that students’ worship awareness grows not only from direct instruction but from observational learning—the imitation of spiritually authentic behaviors. This phenomenon can be analyzed through Bandura’s (1986) Social Learning Theory, which emphasizes that learners internalize behaviors observed in trusted role models. The CRE teacher’s visible reverence and compassionate attitude served as the emotional and spiritual blueprint for students’ own expressions of faith. As students

observed integrity between the teacher's words and actions, they began to perceive worship as a lifestyle rather than a ritual obligation. Relational modeling enabled the teacher to address spiritual formation through moral conflict. During an incident where two students quarreled, the teacher used the situation as a reflective moment, drawing from Exodus 29:45 to remind them that "*God dwells among us-so our words and actions must make Him welcome.*" This approach shifted disciplinary correction into spiritual reflection, encouraging students to see moral behavior as an extension of worship. The relational nature of this pedagogical practice aligns with Noddings' (2013) ethics of care, which posits that moral education is realized through genuine, empathetic relationships. At Janji Maria, the teacher's gentle authority and emotional availability cultivated a sense of sacred community, where students felt safe to express fears, ask questions, and experience grace. Worship spirituality, therefore, was not imposed but invited-emerging naturally from relationships imbued with God's presence.

The exegetical dimension of this study deepens the pedagogical findings by interpreting Exodus 29:45 as both a theological and educational metaphor. In Scripture, God's dwelling among His people marks the fulfillment of covenantal intimacy—a divine initiative that transforms ordinary spaces into holy ground. In the same way, the teacher's presence—when animated by spiritual awareness—transforms the classroom into a sanctuary of learning. God's dwelling implies proximity and participation. He does not remain distant but enters human space to teach, guide, and sanctify. This mirrors the teacher's vocation: to dwell among students not as an authority detached from their struggles but as a compassionate participant in their growth. As Brueggemann (1982) argues, the theology of divine presence is relational—it creates a community of belonging grounded in covenant faithfulness. Thus, when the teacher practices patient listening, affirms student worth, and nurtures shared worship, they enact the reality of Emmanuel—God with us—in pedagogical form. From a Christological perspective, the incarnational model of Jesus provides the ultimate paradigm for this dwelling pedagogy. Christ, as the divine Teacher, dwelt among humanity to reveal truth through both word and deed (John 1:14). His teaching integrated worship, service, and relational care—the same triad observed in the CRE classroom at Janji Maria. Therefore, the teacher's pedagogical competence is not simply a set of skills but a participation in Christ's ongoing ministry of presence and transformation. The findings also reveal practical implications for teacher training and educational policy. First, pedagogical competence in Christian education must include spiritual formation as an integral component. Teachers cannot effectively cultivate worship spirituality without first experiencing the reality of God's dwelling in their own lives. Therefore, professional development for CRE teachers should combine instructional skill enhancement with opportunities for spiritual retreat, reflection, and mentorship. Second, curriculum design in Christian education should intentionally integrate worshipful experiences into lesson structures. Worship must not be an add-on to learning but the foundation of it—a pedagogical principle that infuses every subject with divine purpose. For instance, science can explore creation as God's handiwork, while art can express gratitude and wonder. This holistic integration reflects the Hebrew understanding of *avodah*, a term meaning both "work" and "worship," suggesting that all learning can become an act of devotion. Third, this study suggests that emotional intelligence and relational communication are essential elements of pedagogical competence in CRE.

Teachers who exhibit empathy, patience, and moral consistency create classrooms that embody the very presence of God. This aligns with Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) framework of teacher social-emotional competence, which identifies relational warmth and self-awareness as predictors of student moral development. The results invite a broader theological reimagining of education as a sacred space of indwelling. When students perceive their classroom as a place where God dwells, learning becomes worship and knowledge becomes wisdom. This vision challenges the compartmentalization of faith and education, calling for an integrated pedagogy where the divine presence animates every interaction, lesson, and reflection. The study concludes that worship spirituality in education is cultivated not through external forms but through internal transformation-the teacher's ability to embody God's indwelling love in the learning process. The verse Exodus 29:45 thus serves as a mirror for pedagogical identity: "*I will dwell among them*" becomes "*I will teach among them.*" The CRE teacher stands as a living tabernacle, mediating the reality of God's presence through knowledge, compassion, and worshipful engagement. At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, this reality was visible in both the classroom ethos and student behavior. The teacher's pedagogical competence-expressed through storytelling, prayer, reflection, and service-transformed ordinary instruction into sacred encounter. Students began to understand worship as life participation rather than ritual performance. The school's culture reflected this transformation: morning devotions were filled with sincerity, classroom discussions with reverence, and daily actions with gratitude. The study demonstrates that when pedagogy becomes worship, education itself becomes redemptive. Through the faithful interpretation of Exodus 29:45, the teacher fulfills the divine promise anew-God dwells among the learners through the pedagogy of His servant. This finding affirms that pedagogical competence, when infused with spiritual consciousness, transcends professionalism to become ministry.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a transformative role in cultivating worship spirituality within the classroom, particularly when grounded in the theological message of Exodus 29:45: "Then I will dwell among the Israelites and be their God." The verse's central motif-God's desire to dwell among His people-serves as both the spiritual foundation and pedagogical metaphor for Christian education. At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, this divine indwelling finds tangible expression through the teacher's capacity to create learning environments where God's presence is consciously acknowledged, experienced, and celebrated through daily teaching practices. The research highlights that pedagogical competence in Christian education transcends technical mastery of curriculum or instructional design. It embodies the teacher's spiritual depth, relational awareness, and ability to translate biblical truths into formative experiences. When the CRE teacher approaches the classroom as sacred space, learning becomes an act of worship and teaching becomes a form of ministry. This perspective redefines pedagogy as dwelling pedagogy-an approach in which the teacher, inspired by God's covenantal promise, mediates divine presence through care, patience, and faithful teaching. The findings indicate that when teachers consciously integrate worship into instruction through

prayer, storytelling, reflective activities, and experiential learning, students begin to perceive their education not as a secular duty but as an encounter with the living God. The teacher's relational modeling emerges as the most influential medium through which worship spirituality takes root. Students learn to worship not only by instruction but by imitation-observing how their teacher prays, forgives, listens, and loves. This relational dynamic affirms the theological truth that God's dwelling among humanity is incarnational; He reveals Himself through relationship and embodied compassion. Thus, the teacher becomes a living testimony of divine presence, reflecting Christ's incarnational pedagogy: teaching truth through love. Through this modeling, students internalize worship as both vertical devotion and horizontal compassion-honoring God by honoring others. The study also underscores that pedagogical competence is inseparable from spiritual formation. A teacher cannot guide students toward worshipful living without first cultivating personal intimacy with God. This finding calls for renewed emphasis in teacher education programs-integrating theological reflection, emotional intelligence, and spiritual practice into professional training. CRE teachers should be equipped not only to teach Scripture but to embody it. Worship spirituality, therefore, is not transmitted through knowledge alone but through authenticity and consistency between faith and action. This study also contributes to the understanding of education as sacred vocation. It suggests that when learning is framed within the consciousness of divine indwelling, schools can become extensions of the sanctuary-places where students encounter truth, grace, and purpose. This reorientation challenges the compartmentalization of faith and education and invites a holistic vision where every subject, activity, and relationship participates in God's dwelling mission. In conclusion, Exodus 29:45 serves not merely as an ancient theological declaration but as a living pedagogical principle: God continues to dwell among His people through teachers who teach in His presence. At SD Negeri 176365 Janji Maria - Balige, the CRE teacher's pedagogical competence transformed the classroom into a spiritual community where learning became worship and knowledge became communion. Theologically, this affirms that the teacher's vocation is a participation in God's own redemptive act of dwelling with humanity. Pedagogically, it reveals that when teaching flows from spiritual awareness and love, it leads students not only to understand God but to experience Him. Thus, the future of Christian education depends on teachers who do not simply speak about God but teach with God-dwelling among their students as vessels of His wisdom, compassion, and enduring presence.

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