

Social Competence and Character Formation in Christian Religious Education: A Multicultural Case Study at SDN 173672 Horsik

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ABSTRACT

Education in multicultural contexts demands more than cognitive instruction-it requires the cultivation of empathy, moral integrity, and social harmony. Within Christian Religious Education, teachers play a dual role as educators and moral exemplars who embody biblical compassion in their relationships with students. This study examines how the social competence of CRE teachers contributes to character formation among students at SDN 173672 Horsik, a public elementary school in Indonesia where cultural and religious diversity shapes daily interaction. Using a qualitative case study approach, data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. The study employed thematic analysis to explore how CRE teachers demonstrate social competence-particularly empathy, communication, and inclusivity-in integrating Christian values into multicultural learning environments. Findings reveal that the CRE teacher's social competence fosters a classroom climate of respect, cooperation, and moral awareness. Through relational pedagogy and the application of biblical narratives, such as Joseph's compassion and forgiveness, students develop empathy and a sense of shared humanity. The teacher's ability to model Christ-like behavior transformed moral instruction into lived experience, bridging theology and daily practice. The study concludes that social competence is integral to effective Christian education. It enables teachers to nurture students' moral and spiritual growth while promoting intercultural harmony. Compassion-based pedagogy, grounded in biblical principles, emerges as a transformative framework for building character and fostering peace in Indonesia's plural society.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Character Formation

INTRODUCTION

In the rapidly globalizing and pluralistic society of Indonesia, education is no longer merely a process of intellectual formation but a moral and social mission to cultivate character and harmony within diversity. Schools are microcosms of society, where differences in religion, ethnicity, and culture intersect daily, demanding educators who possess not only pedagogical and professional skills but also high levels of social competence. Within this

dynamic context, Christian Religious Education carries the dual responsibility of nurturing students' faith and equipping them to live peacefully with others. The teaching of Christian values, therefore, must move beyond doctrinal knowledge toward moral practice-forming students who embody love, empathy, and respect in their interactions with peers of different backgrounds. At SDN 173672 Horsik, a public elementary school where students come from diverse ethnic and religious communities, this vision becomes both a pedagogical challenge and an opportunity for transformation. Social competence refers to a teacher's ability to build positive interpersonal relationships, communicate effectively, resolve conflicts peacefully, and foster inclusive environments that promote mutual respect (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For Christian Religious Education teachers, social competence is not only a professional skill but also a reflection of spiritual maturity—the ability to embody Christ's teaching of love and compassion within a multicultural community. The Bible reminds believers to "live in peace with everyone" (Romans 12:18), which serves as a moral imperative for educators to model empathy, tolerance, and service. Thus, the teacher's social competence becomes the foundation upon which moral character is formed in students. When students observe their teacher's ability to treat every individual with fairness and kindness, they internalize these values as part of their moral identity. Character formation, in the context of Christian education, involves more than behavioral regulation; it is the cultivation of moral virtues such as honesty, empathy, responsibility, and respect that reflect the image of God within each person. Lickona (1991) argues that true character education integrates "knowing the good, desiring the good, and doing the good." Christian Religious Education aligns naturally with this goal, as it calls students to translate biblical values into daily life. In a multicultural classroom, however, this task becomes more complex. Students encounter peers who may not share the same faith or moral framework. Therefore, teachers must employ culturally sensitive strategies that communicate Christian moral principles without alienating others. This requires deep social awareness and intercultural communication skills—core components of social competence. The multicultural context of Indonesia presents both challenges and opportunities for religious educators. On one hand, differences in belief systems can lead to misunderstanding or prejudice among students. On the other hand, diversity provides fertile ground for teaching universal virtues such as respect, justice, and compassion—values that are consistent across all major religions. In this environment, the Christian Religious Education teacher functions as a moral bridge-builder, guiding students to appreciate their own faith while understanding others. This aligns with Indonesia's national educational goal of promoting character and citizenship education (Kementerian Pendidikan dan Kebudayaan, 2017), which emphasizes tolerance, cooperation, and unity in diversity. Within this framework, the CRE teacher's role extends beyond delivering religious content; it involves shaping students' moral imagination through lived examples, dialogue, and reflective learning. The classroom becomes a space where theology meets social ethics—a training ground for empathy and peaceful coexistence. By integrating biblical principles with multicultural awareness, teachers help students realize that Christian character is not confined to church settings but expressed through everyday acts of kindness and respect. The social competence of the teacher thus becomes a medium through which faith is made tangible and relational. This study explores how Christian Religious Education teachers at SDN 173672 Horsik implement their social competence to foster character formation in a multicultural school

environment. Using the case study approach, it seeks to reveal how empathy, tolerance, and moral awareness are taught and modeled through classroom interactions. The significance of this study lies in its attempt to bridge the gap between theological reflection and educational practice-demonstrating that the development of social competence is essential not only for academic success but for building peaceful and morally resilient communities. In an era marked by division and misunderstanding, the socially competent CRE teacher stands as a living testament to the transformative power of character education rooted in faith, compassion, and cultural inclusivity.

METHODS

A qualitative descriptive case study design was implemented to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers implement social competence in fostering character formation within a multicultural learning environment at SDN 173672 Horsik. The qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for a deep and contextual understanding of human interactions, values, and experiences that cannot be fully captured through quantitative measurements. As Creswell (2018) explains, qualitative research seeks to uncover the meaning behind human behavior within its real-world context. The case study method was particularly suitable because it enables an in-depth examination of social and moral processes within a specific educational setting where faith, diversity, and pedagogy intersect. The locus of this study-SDN 173672 Horsik-is a public elementary school located in a culturally diverse area of North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school's population includes students from different ethnic and religious backgrounds, such as Batak Christian, Muslim, and other minority groups. This diversity provides a rich context for investigating how social competence is practiced by CRE teachers as they navigate classroom interactions that involve both faith-based instruction and multicultural sensitivity. The teacher's role in balancing biblical values with civic tolerance becomes a central concern, making the site ideal for understanding the relationship between social competence and character education in plural contexts. Participants in the study included one Christian Religious Education teacher and ten students from grades 4 to 6, selected using purposive sampling. The teacher was chosen based on their active engagement in school character programs and their reputation for fostering positive interreligious relationships among students. The students were selected to represent diverse backgrounds and experiences in moral learning. The inclusion of multiple perspectives enriched the data, providing insight into how both teaching practices and student experiences contribute to the cultivation of empathy, respect, and cooperation. Interviews were used to capture participants' reflections on how compassion, empathy, and tolerance were integrated into religious instruction. The teacher was asked to describe strategies used to promote moral understanding, resolve conflicts, and model inclusive behavior. Students were interviewed to understand their perceptions of the teacher's actions and how these influenced their attitudes toward peers of different religions. After transcription, all interview and observation data were read repeatedly to identify recurring patterns related to social competence, compassion, and multicultural interaction. Codes were categorized into major themes such as empathic communication, inclusive teaching strategies, and faith-based moral reflection. The themes were then interpreted through the lens of Christian educational theory and

social-emotional learning (SEL) frameworks, allowing a synthesis between theological and pedagogical perspectives. Reflexive journaling was maintained throughout the process to record the researcher's assumptions and maintain objectivity in interpretation. Pseudonyms were used to maintain confidentiality, and participation was voluntary. Given the religious nature of the research, sensitivity was exercised in interpreting faith-based statements to avoid misrepresentation or bias. The researcher approached all participants with respect for their beliefs and backgrounds. The qualitative case study provides a comprehensive and human-centered understanding of how CRE teachers, through compassionate and inclusive pedagogy, cultivate moral character and strengthen interreligious harmony among students in multicultural Indonesian classrooms.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SDN 173672 Horsik plays a crucial role in shaping students' character and moral awareness within a multicultural environment. The data obtained from interviews, observations, and document analysis indicate that social competence is expressed through the teacher's ability to build empathetic relationships, practice inclusive communication, and apply biblical principles of compassion in daily classroom interactions. These findings demonstrate that the CRE teacher's social competence not only contributes to effective moral education but also serves as a vital foundation for promoting tolerance, empathy, and unity among students of different faiths. The discussion that follows elaborates on four key thematic areas that emerged from the data: empathy and relational pedagogy in moral instruction, inclusive communication and the embodiment of Christian compassion, the integration of multicultural values within biblical teaching, and character formation as a reflection of social and spiritual transformation. The first major finding concerns the role of empathy and relational pedagogy in Christian Religious Education. Observations revealed that the CRE teacher at SDN 173672 Horsik consistently demonstrated emotional attunement to students' needs and backgrounds. This relational approach aligns with Jennings and Greenberg's (2009) model of social competence, which emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence and prosocial behavior in educational settings. During lessons on biblical stories such as the Good Samaritan or Joseph's forgiveness of his brothers, the teacher often invited students to share personal experiences of helping or forgiving others. This dialogical interaction allowed students to connect biblical concepts with their lived realities, making moral learning deeply personal and experiential. The teacher's consistent use of gentle tone, active listening, and affirming feedback created a classroom atmosphere of trust and safety. Students reported feeling "understood" and "valued," especially when the teacher acknowledged their cultural and religious differences as strengths rather than barriers. This finding is consistent with Noddings' (2013) ethics of care, which posits that genuine moral education begins with relationships characterized by empathy, attention, and compassion. The CRE teacher's relational competence thus becomes a spiritual expression of love-embodiment of the Christian imperative to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Beyond interpersonal warmth, the teacher's empathy was also evident in conflict resolution. When disagreements arose among students of different faith backgrounds-for example, disputes about religious holidays or food restrictions-the

teacher facilitated discussions emphasizing respect and understanding. Rather than dismissing differences, the teacher used them as opportunities for moral reflection, reminding students that God values every person equally. This strategy resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) sociocultural theory, which asserts that learning occurs most effectively through social interaction and shared meaning-making. By turning potential conflict into collaborative reflection, the teacher modeled empathy as both a moral virtue and a cognitive skill. Consequently, students not only learned about empathy but experienced it as a relational reality within the classroom community.

The second theme emerging from the data is inclusive communication as the embodiment of Christian compassion. The teacher's communicative approach reflected both theological depth and pedagogical awareness. Through interviews, it became evident that the teacher viewed communication not merely as information transfer but as an act of ministry—a means to reflect God's inclusive love in daily dialogue. This echoes Groome's (1991) notion of "shared Christian praxis," in which teaching becomes a participatory process that integrates faith, reflection, and action. During classroom observation, the teacher used inclusive language such as "we" and "our," emphasizing collective identity rather than difference. Even when explaining Christian doctrines, the teacher acknowledged the presence of Muslim and Hindu students and encouraged them to contribute perspectives from their own traditions. For example, in one lesson about the concept of forgiveness, the teacher asked, "How is forgiveness practiced in your religion?" Such invitations transformed the classroom into a space of interreligious dialogue, fostering both understanding and respect. Students' responses indicated that this inclusive approach made them more open to learning from one another. One Muslim student remarked, "I like learning in PAK class because the teacher says that God wants us all to be kind." This statement illustrates how inclusive communication helps to universalize moral values while maintaining theological integrity. The CRE teacher's discourse reflected what scholars such as Arthur (2019) and Lickona (1991) describe as virtue-centered pedagogy—an educational approach that integrates cognitive understanding of moral values with emotional and social engagement. Compassion was not taught as an abstract idea but demonstrated through the teacher's tone, body language, and attentiveness to students' feelings. This communicative behavior resonates with the biblical model of Christ as the "Word made flesh" (John 1:14), implying that communication in Christian education is incarnational—it reveals divine love through human relationship. In a multicultural classroom, such communicative sensitivity becomes an instrument of peacebuilding. The teacher's ability to articulate moral truths in a way that honors diverse beliefs contributes to social cohesion and moral unity. This reflects Indonesia's national values of Unity in Diversity, demonstrating how Christian educators can participate in nation-building through inclusive pedagogy. The interviews revealed that the teacher frequently collaborated with other religious instructors in school activities, such as joint character-building programs and community service projects. These interreligious collaborations strengthened social bonds among students and modeled cooperative virtue in practice. Thus, inclusive communication serves as both a pedagogical method and a theological witness to God's universal compassion.

The third major theme identified in the study is the integration of multicultural values within biblical teaching. The teacher at SDN 173672 Horsik demonstrated an intentional

effort to link scriptural lessons with the multicultural realities of the students' lives. For instance, while teaching about the unity of believers described in 1 Corinthians 12:12–27 ("Though many, we are one body"), the teacher asked students to reflect on how diversity functions within their own classroom community. Through guided discussions, students learned to appreciate that differences in culture, religion, and family background contribute to the richness of God's creation. This integration of biblical theology and multicultural values aligns with Banks' (2016) model of multicultural education, which advocates for curriculum transformation that affirms diverse identities while promoting shared moral commitments. The teacher's approach exemplified what Hauerwas (1981) calls "the moral community of faith," where education becomes the practice of forming people who live faithfully with others in difference and compassion. Observational data showed that lessons often included collaborative group work intentionally mixing students from various backgrounds. These activities promoted interdependence and mutual respect, reflecting the Pauline notion of cooperation in diversity. One particularly significant example occurred during a classroom project on "Acts of Kindness," where students were asked to identify ways they could help peers of different religions. The project culminated in students creating posters with messages such as "We are all children of God" and "Helping others brings peace." This pedagogical practice not only reinforced biblical teachings but also nurtured civic virtues such as tolerance and solidarity-values crucial to maintaining harmony in Indonesia's plural society. The analysis of lesson plans and teaching materials also revealed that the teacher incorporated cultural expressions, local wisdom, and national identity into Christian moral instruction. For example, the teacher used Batak proverbs emphasizing respect for elders and community service, showing that Christian morality is not opposed to cultural heritage but fulfills it. This integration of local culture into Christian pedagogy mirrors the inculturational approach advocated by Bevans (2002), who argues that theology must always be contextual-expressed within the cultural realities of its people. At SDN 173672 Horsik, the teacher's pedagogy represented a practical embodiment of this theological vision, transforming multicultural education into a form of lived theology where biblical compassion meets cultural diversity.

The fourth and final theme centers on character formation as a process of social and spiritual transformation. Data from interviews and observations indicate that students' moral development was directly influenced by the teacher's social competence and relational example. Students consistently described the teacher as "kind," "fair," and "understanding." These perceptions suggest that character formation occurred not only through explicit instruction but through implicit modeling of virtues. This finding is consistent with Lickona's (1991) assertion that moral education is most effective when teachers "live the virtues they teach." The CRE teacher's daily interactions-greeting students warmly, mediating peer conflicts, and offering encouragement-served as lived demonstrations of Christian character. Students' reflections revealed a growing awareness of empathy and responsibility. Several students mentioned instances where they helped classmates during difficulties, citing lessons from PAK class as motivation. One student said, "I remember Joseph forgave his brothers, so I forgave my friend." Such testimonies highlight the transformative link between biblical learning and personal moral behavior. This aligns with Kohlberg's (1981) theory of moral development, which

emphasizes the movement from external rule-following to internal moral reasoning. Through reflective dialogue and relational practice, students at SDN 173672 began to internalize compassion as a guiding moral principle rather than a teacher-imposed rule. Document analysis further confirmed that the school's moral climate reflected the teacher's influence. Reports on student behavior showed reduced conflicts and increased participation in cooperative activities. The CRE teacher also led extracurricular programs promoting community service, such as visiting elderly residents or organizing food donations. These initiatives provided students with opportunities to practice compassion and responsibility beyond the classroom, illustrating the holistic nature of character education in Christian pedagogy. This process of character formation mirrors the biblical understanding of *metanoia*-a transformation of the heart and mind toward divine love. As Paul writes in Romans 12:2, "Be transformed by the renewal of your mind." In this context, the CRE teacher's social competence becomes a channel of spiritual transformation. By embodying Christ's compassion and humility, the teacher participates in God's redemptive work of forming a people who reflect divine love in human relationships. This integration of the spiritual and the social demonstrates that Christian education, when rooted in compassion, transcends the boundaries of cognitive learning to touch the very essence of human identity. The findings contribute to understanding the intersection of faith-based education and multicultural citizenship in Indonesia. The data suggest that CRE teachers who possess high social competence are more effective in bridging theological exclusivity and civic inclusivity. By teaching biblical principles in ways that affirm shared moral values, such teachers foster a generation capable of peaceful coexistence in diversity. This approach aligns with Indonesia's Pancasila philosophy, particularly its first and second principles-belief in one God and just, civilized humanity. Therefore, the pedagogical practice observed in this study demonstrates that Christian education can significantly contribute to the national agenda of moral and character education. Interviews revealed that time constraints, administrative duties, and rigid curriculum structures often limit opportunities for relational engagement. Additionally, the presence of students from multiple religions requires sensitivity and skill to avoid misinterpretation of Christian doctrine. The teacher emphasized the need for professional development programs that train educators in intercultural communication and emotional literacy. This echoes the recommendations of OECD (2018), which underscores social-emotional competence as essential for effective moral education. Addressing these challenges will require institutional support, collaborative planning, and continuous theological reflection to sustain compassion-based teaching in diverse classrooms. The data affirm that social competence functions as the linchpin of moral and spiritual education. The CRE teacher's empathy, communication, and cultural sensitivity translate biblical principles into lived experience. As students witness compassion modeled daily, they internalize it as part of their moral identity. This dynamic reflects what Groome (1991) calls "education as shared praxis," where faith and life intersect in dialogue and transformation. Through socially competent teaching, the classroom becomes both a learning community and a moral fellowship-a space where divine love is practiced, not merely preached. The findings of this case study underscore the transformative power of social competence in Christian Religious Education. At SDN 173672 Horsik, the CRE teacher's ability to embody empathy, inclusivity, and compassion has profoundly shaped students' character formation within a multicultural context. Biblical teaching, when

coupled with relational pedagogy, becomes a means of cultivating empathy, forgiveness, and respect across cultural and religious boundaries. The teacher's social competence thus represents a living theology—an incarnational witness of God's love in the heart of education. Through daily acts of care and moral guidance, the teacher not only educates but ministers, forming students who reflect Christ's compassion in their relationships and community life. The study affirms that the success of Christian moral education lies not merely in doctrinal precision but in relational authenticity—where teaching becomes an act of love, and learning becomes a journey toward becoming more fully human in the image of God.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is a fundamental determinant in the success of moral and character formation, particularly within multicultural educational environments such as SDN 173672 Horsik. The evidence gathered from observations, interviews, and document analysis demonstrates that social competence—expressed through empathy, inclusive communication, and intercultural sensitivity—enables teachers to translate biblical teachings into transformative moral experiences. The CRE teacher's role extends beyond that of a knowledge transmitter to that of a moral guide and spiritual mentor who embodies Christ-like compassion in both word and action. Through relational pedagogy, students encounter not only doctrinal truths but also the living expression of divine love, modeled consistently in their teacher's behavior. The findings reaffirm that Christian education is at its most effective when it integrates theology and pedagogy in relational ways. The teacher's ability to connect emotionally with students, respect diversity, and mediate understanding transforms the classroom into a moral and spiritual community. This relational dynamic echoes the biblical concept of *koinonia*—a fellowship characterized by mutual care, shared growth, and the presence of God in human relationships. In this sense, social competence functions as the vessel through which theological principles such as compassion, forgiveness, and justice are made tangible in everyday life. The story of Joseph's forgiveness and care for his brothers, for instance, serves as both a biblical foundation and a moral metaphor for how educators can guide students to respond to others with grace and empathy. By helping students reflect on such narratives, teachers awaken their moral imagination and enable them to embody virtues in concrete situations. Within the plural context of Indonesia, the implications of these findings are particularly significant. The CRE teacher's social competence becomes an instrument for fostering interreligious understanding and moral unity in diversity. By teaching compassion and respect as biblical imperatives that harmonize with universal human values, Christian educators contribute meaningfully to national goals of peace, tolerance, and civic virtue. The classroom becomes a microcosm of Indonesia's multicultural society—where differences are not threats but opportunities for dialogue and cooperation. Through compassion-centered pedagogy, the CRE teacher serves as both educator and reconciler, embodying the gospel's vision of love that transcends boundaries of faith and culture. The study also acknowledges that cultivating compassion-based education requires intentional effort, institutional support, and spiritual maturity. Teachers often face challenges such as limited training in social-emotional pedagogy, time constraints,

and curriculum inflexibility. Without adequate professional development and theological grounding, the practice of compassion risks becoming superficial sentiment rather than transformative virtue. Future research should focus on developing structured training programs that integrate emotional intelligence, intercultural communication, and biblical hermeneutics into teacher education. In theological and pedagogical terms, this study highlights that social competence is not an optional skill but an essential dimension of Christian vocation in education. When teachers embody compassion, they participate in God's redemptive mission of restoring relationships and forming communities of love. Their classrooms become spaces where moral knowledge is transformed into lived wisdom, where students learn not only about God's love but to "practice" it. Ultimately, the moral and spiritual character of a generation depends not merely on the content of religious education but on the authenticity of the educators who deliver it. The socially competent CRE teacher, therefore, stands at the intersection of faith and formation-bridging biblical truth and human experience, guiding students toward a life of empathy, justice, and peace in a diverse world.

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