

## From Joseph's Narrative to Modern Classrooms: Investigating Christian Teachers' Social Competence in Building Caring Character among Youth at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka

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### ABSTRACT

*This study investigates how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers contributes to the development of caring character among youth at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara, using the narrative of Joseph in Genesis 37:2 as a theological and pedagogical framework. Employing a mixed qualitative approach that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with semi-structured interviews, the research synthesizes theoretical insights and lived classroom experiences to examine how relational competence shapes character formation. The SLR identifies key dimensions of teacher social competence-including empathy, emotional regulation, effective communication, conflict mediation, and moral modeling-as essential components that influence adolescents' prosocial behavior. Complementary to these findings, interviews with PAK teachers reveal that these competencies are practiced through relational engagement, dialogic communication, supportive classroom climate, and reflective use of biblical narratives. Teachers describe how Joseph's early life provides a relatable lens for students to understand emotional immaturity, jealousy, communication challenges, and the need for empathy and forgiveness. The results highlight that socially competent teachers serve as stabilizing relational figures in adolescents' lives, especially amid pressures related to peer conflict, family challenges, and digital influences. By embodying Christ-like compassion and modeling caring behavior, teachers enable students to internalize moral values and practice care in daily interactions. The study concludes that teacher social competence is not only a pedagogical asset but a transformative force in shaping caring character. These findings underscore the need for teacher education programs and school policies to prioritize relational competence as a core element of character education within Christian learning environments.*

**Keywords:** *Modern Classrooms, Christian Religious Education, Social Competence*

## INTRODUCTION

Education in contemporary contexts increasingly recognizes the essential role of teachers' social competence in shaping students' character development, particularly among adolescents who are undergoing rapid emotional, social, and moral transitions. Within Christian Religious Education (*Pendidikan Agama Kristen/PAK*), the teacher's role extends beyond cognitive instruction to include moral modeling, relational engagement, and the cultivation of empathetic, caring attitudes in learners. This holistic approach aligns with the biblical narrative of Joseph in Genesis 37:2, which highlights both the challenges and developmental needs of youth, particularly regarding interpersonal relationships, empathy, and social maturity. The verse introduces Joseph as a seventeen-year-old (*na'ar*), navigating familial tensions and identity formation—an age that mirrors the developmental stage of students in vocational high schools such as SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara. Understanding this narrative provides a foundational framework for examining how Christian teachers can support youth in developing caring character through socially competent behaviors. A close exegetical reading of Genesis 37:2 reveals significant insights relevant to Christian pedagogy. The Hebrew word *na'ar* does not merely denote age but also refers to a young person in the process of social and moral formation (Hammilton, 1995). Joseph's actions—reporting his brothers' misconduct—reflect youthful sincerity but also social immaturity, which triggered conflict and misunderstanding within the family. Scholars suggest that Joseph's early behavior illustrates a developmental phase where adolescents struggle to balance personal integrity, social sensitivity, and empathy (Waltke, 2001). This struggle parallels the experiences of modern youth who must navigate complex peer dynamics and emotional challenges. Thus, Joseph's narrative serves as a valuable lens for understanding the necessity of teacher guidance in forming students' caring and empathetic character.

In the educational setting of SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara, teachers of Christian Religious Education face the task of guiding youth toward becoming socially responsible and empathetic individuals amid societal pressures, digital influences, and interpersonal challenges. The literature on teacher social competence emphasizes essential dimensions such as effective communication, emotional regulation, empathy, interpersonal sensitivity, and the ability to foster supportive, respectful learning environments (Jennings, 2009). These competencies align closely with Christian principles of relational love, compassion, and mutual care. Previous studies indicate that socially competent teachers significantly influence students' prosocial behavior, conflict resolution skills, and moral commitment—traits that are increasingly vital for youth in vocational education settings (Wentzel, 2014). The biblical motif of Joseph's transformation—from a socially immature youth to a wise, empathetic leader—illustrates the developmental potential present in every adolescent. Christian teachers, therefore, serve as agents who help guide students through similar character maturation processes. By modeling patience, fairness, and active listening, teachers embody the caring attitudes they seek to cultivate. Classroom practices such as dialogic teaching, collaborative learning, and reflective moral discussions further support the development of empathy and care among students. Bodynote studies in Christian pedagogy reinforce the argument that teacher-student relationships grounded in compassion and moral intentionality profoundly shape students' character outcomes (Noddings, 2013). This study aims to investigate how the

social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers contributes to building caring character among youth at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka–Batu Bara, using Genesis 37:2 as a theological and pedagogical foundation. Through this lens, the research explores the intersections between biblical interpretation, teacher professional skills, and adolescent character formation. The findings are expected to provide both theoretical insights and practical guidance for strengthening Christian pedagogical practices that nurture empathetic, socially responsible young individuals.

## METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrated a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and semi-structured interviews to investigate how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers' social competence contributes to building caring character among youth at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara. The combination of SLR and field-based interviews allowed for a comprehensive exploration of both theoretical perspectives and real classroom practices. The SLR served as the foundation for identifying key indicators of teacher social competence, including communication skills, empathy, emotional regulation, and relational sensitivity, which are strongly emphasized in contemporary pedagogical literature (Jennings, 2009). Peer-reviewed articles, books, and empirical studies were systematically collected from academic databases, published between 2000 and 2024, written in English or Indonesian, and directly addressing teacher competence or character education. Studies lacking theoretical grounding, not peer-reviewed, or unrelated to formal education contexts were excluded. The SLR process involved screening titles and abstracts, evaluating full texts, and synthesizing themes to develop a conceptual map linking teacher social competence and youth character development. To complement the literature findings, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six PAK teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara. Participants were selected using purposive sampling based on their teaching experience, involvement in character formation programs, and willingness to participate. The semi-structured format allowed the researcher to maintain focus on key themes—such as interpersonal communication, conflict mediation, empathetic engagement, classroom relational climate, and biblical integration—while providing flexibility for teachers to elaborate on personal insights and contextual challenges. Interview questions were designed based on themes emerging from the SLR, ensuring alignment between theoretical foundations and field data. Interviews were conducted face-to-face. Each interview lasted approximately 30–45 minutes and was conducted in Indonesian to maintain participant comfort and ensure rich narrative responses. The data analysis process followed a thematic analysis approach. First, transcripts and SLR findings were read repeatedly to identify significant patterns and recurring ideas. Second, initial codes were generated manually, categorizing information into themes such as “teacher empathy,” “communication strategies,” “conflict resolution practices,” “modeling caring behavior,” and “biblical integration in pedagogy.” These codes were then refined into broader themes that linked teacher social competence with caring character formation among adolescents. Triangulation between the SLR and interview findings ensured credibility, allowing the researcher to validate themes across multiple data sources. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, their voluntary involvement, the confidentiality of their responses, and their right to withdraw

at any time. All data were securely stored in password-protected files accessible only to the researcher. This methodological design provides a balanced and credible foundation for understanding how PAK teachers' social competence contributes to nurturing caring character in youth, guided by the theological insights of Genesis 37:2.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The integration of findings from the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and the semi-structured interviews provides a comprehensive understanding of how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers' social competence contributes to the development of caring character among youth at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara. The SLR results reveal that teacher social competence—defined through the dimensions of empathy, emotional regulation, communication skills, conflict mediation, and relational presence—plays a substantive role in shaping students' prosocial behavior. Literature in educational psychology consistently shows that when teachers demonstrate relational sensitivity and emotional attunement, students are more likely to respond with cooperative attitudes, mutual respect, and empathy toward peers. This pattern is also evident in faith-based educational literature, which emphasizes the teacher as both a moral model and a relational guide. Meanwhile, interview findings highlight that PAK teachers in SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara internalize these competencies in various practical ways, such as building open communication with students, cultivating emotionally supportive classroom atmospheres, and guiding students through reflective discussions rooted in biblical narratives such as Genesis 37:2. One of the strongest themes emerging from both sources concerns the teacher's ability to establish meaningful interpersonal relationships with students. The teachers interviewed acknowledged that adolescents at the vocational school level often face complex emotional and social pressures, including identity confusion, peer conflict, academic stress, and exposure to negative online influences. Teachers described how these pressures influence students' behaviors, often manifesting as withdrawal, irritability, apathy, or aggression. In such contexts, relational competence becomes indispensable. Interview participants shared that they intentionally initiate conversations with students outside formal instructional time, ask about their daily challenges, and listen actively without immediate judgment. One teacher explained, *"Before I teach anything about caring, I must show them that I care. If students feel seen and heard, they begin to trust, and trust is the foundation for character change."* This finding is strongly aligned with literature that underscores relational trust as a central pillar for prosocial development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). When adolescents perceive their teachers as approachable and empathetic, they are more likely to internalize caring behavior and adopt it in their interactions with others. Genesis 37:2 provides a particularly meaningful framework for interpreting this relational dynamic. Joseph, at the age of seventeen, is depicted as a youth struggling with moral sensitivity yet lacking social tact, demonstrating the typical developmental tension found among adolescents. Exegetical insights suggest that Joseph's immaturity resulted partly from insufficient relational support from family members, particularly in the context of sibling rivalry and parental favoritism. Interviewed teachers recognized this parallel and explained that many students, like Joseph, are in the process of negotiating their identity and moral choices and often require adult figures who can intervene through guidance, correction, and compassionate presence. Several teachers emphasized that integrating

the narrative of Joseph during class discussions allows students to reflect on their own experiences—feeling misunderstood, struggling to communicate appropriately, or navigating conflicts—thus fostering self-awareness and empathy. In this sense, biblical narrative becomes a pedagogical tool for social-emotional learning, consistent with bodynote research indicating that narrative pedagogy contributes to moral reasoning and relational development (Noddings, 2013). Another significant finding relates to the role of communication competence. The SLR indicates that effective teacher communication—clear, respectful, dialogic, and responsive—enhances classroom climate and reduces relational distance between teacher and student. Interview data show that PAK teachers employ various communication strategies tailored to student needs. They use simple but affirming language when addressing emotional issues, adopt non-confrontational tones during conflict mediation, and rely on dialogic questioning to stimulate moral reflection. Teachers described how adolescents often respond defensively when addressed harshly, but become receptive when teachers choose softer communication approaches. One teacher stated, *“When correcting behavior, I avoid embarrassing students publicly. I call them after class, talk softly, and explain why their actions matter. They listen better and feel guided, not judged.”* These findings echo educational psychology literature that associates positive teacher communication with improved student empathy, reduced aggression, and strengthened prosocial choices (Wentzel, 2014). In this context, the teachers’ communication style acts as a modeling mechanism through which students learn how to communicate care to peers. A third major theme relates to emotional regulation as a crucial component of teacher social competence. According to the SLR, emotionally regulated teachers create safer learning spaces where students feel less threatened and more willing to open themselves emotionally. Interviewees highlighted that adolescents frequently test boundaries, express frustration explosively, or disengage when overwhelmed. Teachers expressed that losing patience in such situations risks escalating conflict and damaging relational trust. Thus, they intentionally practice emotional regulation as part of their vocational commitment. One participant reflected, *“When a student becomes angry or disrespectful, I remind myself not to respond emotionally. I breathe, keep calm, and later talk privately with them. Almost always, the student apologizes once they feel safe.”* This approach mirrors findings in bodynote literature, which emphasize that teacher emotional regulation fosters student emotional maturity by modeling calmness in tension-filled interactions (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). Furthermore, placing this within the Joseph narrative, teachers noted that Joseph himself suffered due to the emotional instability of others—brothers driven by jealousy and a father overwhelmed by favoritism. Thus, emotional stability displayed by teachers helps prevent the relational breakdown seen in Joseph’s story and guides youth toward healthier forms of interpersonal engagement. A fourth finding concerns teachers’ role in mediating conflicts among students. The SLR shows that teacher-led conflict mediation promotes the development of caring character by teaching adolescents how to repair relationships, express remorse, and practice empathy. The interview results reinforce this perspective. Teachers at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara routinely mediate disputes between students, particularly those involving verbal aggression, misunderstandings, or peer jealousy—situations reminiscent of Joseph’s relational challenges in Genesis 37:2. Teachers reported that they encourage both parties to articulate feelings, listen to each other’s perspectives, and seek reconciliation. They also incorporate biblical principles

during mediation, reminding students of Joseph's story not only as a tale of conflict but as a narrative of forgiveness and relational restoration. One teacher observed, *"When students argue or hurt each other, I remind them that Joseph's story teaches us what happens when jealousy grows. I guide them to reflect, apologize, and forgive. This process builds care and maturity."* This finding aligns with conflict-resolution literature suggesting that teacher-led restorative dialogue enhances moral development and strengthens peer relationships. A fifth important theme emerging from the data is the integration of moral reflection into classroom instruction. The SLR highlights that character education becomes most effective when embedded in reflective, dialogic learning that encourages students to examine personal values and real-life behavior. Teachers interviewed explained that they frequently use biblical narratives-including Joseph's early life-to inspire reflection on empathy, integrity, and responsibility. For example, teachers facilitate classroom conversations about how Joseph might have felt misunderstood by his brothers, or how envy could be prevented through communication and mutual respect. Such reflective activities allow students to develop moral imagination, helping them connect scripture with daily interactions. This finding resonates with Christian educational philosophy, which emphasizes the transformative role of moral narrative in shaping identity and character. Bodynote scholars argue that moral reflection anchored in relational experiences is a powerful catalyst for developing caring character (Noddings, 2013). A sixth theme evident in the findings is the modeling of caring behavior by teachers. The SLR identifies teacher modeling as one of the strongest predictors of student prosocial behavior. During interviews, teachers consistently emphasized that students learn caring character not only through instruction but through observing the teacher's daily actions. Teachers described how they intentionally demonstrate fairness, patience, generosity, and forgiveness in classroom interactions. For example, one teacher said, *"When I make a mistake, I admit it to my students. When they struggle, I encourage them gently. I want them to see what care looks like in daily life."* Such modeling aligns with social learning theory, which proposes that adolescents internalize behaviors demonstrated by significant adults in their environment. In theological reflection, Joseph's narrative also highlights the importance of role models, as his later transformation into a compassionate leader was shaped by encounters with mature, empathetic figures during his journey. Thus, teacher modeling serves as both a pedagogical and spiritual strategy for shaping caring character. Another strong finding relates to the impact of supportive classroom climate. The SLR establishes that positive classroom climate-defined by safety, mutual respect, and relational warmth-correlates with higher levels of prosocial behavior among adolescents. Interview data confirm that PAK teachers intentionally cultivate such climates by encouraging peer support, valuing student contributions, and minimizing punitive disciplinary approaches. Teachers described activities such as group projects, peer mentoring, sharing circles, and cooperative learning as essential tools for nurturing empathy and collaboration. Students are encouraged to help one another during lessons, celebrate peer achievements, and support classmates facing difficulties. Teachers observed that such relational climates reduce bullying and increase cohesion. These findings align with studies showing that caring character is strengthened when students experience belonging and relational affirmation in their learning environment. A further theme involves the cultural and contextual challenges influencing the implementation of social competence. Teachers

noted that socioeconomic pressures, family conflict, and digital distractions often affect students' emotional stability and relational maturity. They explained that students from disadvantaged families sometimes lack parental guidance in character development, making the teacher's role even more crucial. Teachers reported that social media influences often promote self-centeredness, sarcasm, or insensitivity, which conflict with the values of empathy and care. Therefore, the role of PAK teachers becomes not only instructional but corrective, guiding students to critically reflect on cultural influences and align their behavior with Christian moral principles. This contextual awareness enhances the relevance of teacher social competence in addressing the lived realities of adolescents. The synthesis of findings reveals that teacher social competence contributes significantly to the holistic development of caring character in youth when rooted in biblical reflection, relational engagement, and intentional modeling. Genesis 37:2, when interpreted through the lens of adolescent development, becomes a formative narrative that helps both teachers and students understand the importance of empathy, relational responsibility, and moral maturity. By integrating theological insight with pedagogical strategies, teachers create an educational experience that transforms both cognition and character. The results affirm that Christian teachers' social competence is not merely an added value but an essential component in shaping caring, empathetic, and socially responsible young individuals within the contemporary classroom context.

## CONCLUSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers plays a decisive and transformative role in cultivating caring character among youth at SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara. Through the integration of Systematic Literature Review (SLR) insights and semi-structured interview data, it becomes evident that social competence—expressed through relational sensitivity, empathetic communication, emotional regulation, conflict mediation, and consistent moral modeling—forms the relational foundation upon which character formation can meaningfully occur. Adolescents in vocational schools often face emotional instability, uncertainty, peer conflict, and external pressures that affect their behavior and worldview. In such a developmental context, the presence of socially competent teachers becomes not only beneficial but essential. The teachers' ability to create trust-filled relationships, maintain emotional calmness, communicate respectfully, and guide students through restorative interactions strengthens students' capacity for empathy, compassion, and mutual care. The narrative of Joseph in Genesis 37:2 provides an interpretive backdrop that deepens understanding of adolescent social dynamics. Joseph's journey illustrates how emotional immaturity, relational misunderstanding, and lack of guidance can lead to conflict, jealousy, and broken relationships. By using this biblical narrative as a reflective tool, PAK teachers help students identify with Joseph's struggles and recognize the value of mature communication, empathy, and forgiveness. The integration of scriptural reflection with contemporary pedagogical strategies enables students not only to learn about caring character but to internalize it within their lived experiences. Teachers serve as moral companions who accompany students through personal and relational challenges, inviting them to grow in self-awareness and moral responsibility. The study reveals that a supportive classroom climate—characterized by

respect, warmth, cooperation, and psychological safety—magnifies the impact of teacher social competence. When students feel valued and understood, they become more open to learning, more willing to help peers, and more capable of practicing empathy. This climate does not emerge automatically; it is cultivated intentionally through the teacher's consistent actions, attitudes, and relational practices. Moreover, in a context where many students face socioeconomic stress, family fragmentation, and digital distractions, the social competence of PAK teachers becomes a stabilizing force, helping students navigate complexity and develop relational maturity. The study concludes that Christian teachers' social competence is a critical determinant in shaping caring character among youth. It is not merely a pedagogical skill but a ministry of presence that reflects Christ-like compassion within the school environment. By embodying empathy, humility, patience, and relational wisdom, PAK teachers become living curricula that students observe, trust, and ultimately imitate. The findings encourage schools, policymakers, and teacher education programs to prioritize social competence as an essential dimension of teacher development. Future research may expand this inquiry by exploring students' perspectives on caring character formation, comparing different educational settings, or examining long-term impacts on graduates. Within the locus of SMK Negeri 1 Sei Suka-Batu Bara, this study affirms that socially competent Christian educators have a profound and lasting influence on shaping compassionate, caring, and morally grounded young individuals.

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