

Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Building Relationships through Prayer: An Exegetical Insight from Genesis 32:26 at SMA Negeri 1 Alasa

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ABSTRACT

This study examines how the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers can be strengthened through the relational and theological insights drawn from Genesis 32:26, with a specific focus on SMA Negeri 1 Alasa. Social competence defined as a teacher's ability to build empathetic, respectful, and constructive relationships, is essential in contemporary educational environments where students face complex emotional, social, and cultural challenges. Through exegetical analysis, the study identifies Jacob's declaration, "I will not let You go unless You bless me," as a model of relational perseverance, spiritual dependence, and transformative engagement with God. Using a qualitative descriptive design, data were gathered through interviews, observations, and document analysis involving CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Alasa. The findings indicate that prayer significantly contributes to teachers' social competence by enhancing empathy, patience, emotional resilience, and the capacity to respond constructively to student needs. Teachers reported that prayer deepened their relational awareness, supported them during conflict situations, and strengthened their ability to foster trust within the classroom. The integration of prayer with pedagogical practice also promoted a positive relational climate and encouraged teachers to model Christian relational ethics. The study concludes that prayer-informed social competence enables CRE teachers to build stronger relationships with students and colleagues, contributing to a more supportive and spiritually grounded school environment. These insights suggest the importance of ongoing spiritual formation and relational training in teacher development programs.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Relationships

INTRODUCTION

The formation of social competence among Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers plays a significant role in shaping the relational, ethical, and spiritual climate within Indonesian schools. In a diverse and pluralistic educational context such as SMA Negeri 1

Alasa, where interpersonal harmony, empathy, and mutual respect are essential, CRE teachers are expected to model relational maturity that integrates pedagogical ability, pastoral sensitivity, and spiritual wisdom. The ability of teachers to build healthy relationships with students is not merely a pedagogical obligation but also a theological calling anchored in the biblical narrative, particularly in the motif of prayer as a transformative medium of encountering God. One biblical text that illuminates this dynamic is Genesis 32:26, which depicts Jacob's intimate and persistent struggle in prayer as the foundation of relational transformation. This passage offers a rich theological lens for understanding how prayer shapes the social competence of educators in their daily interactions. Genesis 32:26 presents Jacob's earnest plea, *"I will not let You go unless You bless me,"* portraying prayer as an act of deep dependence and relational commitment. Exegetically, this verse emphasizes perseverance (ḥāzaq), humble petition, and relational engagement as Jacob wrestles not only with God but also with his own fears and fractured relationships, especially with Esau. Scholars argue that Jacob's struggle represents an inner transformation necessary for reconciliation (Hamilton, 1995). The narrative shows that prayer is not merely verbal communication but a relational practice that refines identity, reshapes attitudes, and reorients one's relational disposition toward others. Thus, prayer becomes a pedagogical model for teachers, particularly in contexts where they must navigate students' emotional diversity, social challenges, and moral development. In the school context, social competence is widely understood as the capacity to build and sustain positive interactions, communicate empathy, manage conflicts, and foster mutual trust among members of the learning environment. According to contemporary educational theorists, teachers who possess strong social competence contribute significantly to students' psychological safety, motivation, and character development (Jennings & Greenberg, 2009). For CRE teachers, however, social competence is not merely a social-emotional skill but a spiritual responsibility. Their interactions with students should reflect the values of humility, perseverance, compassion, and relational integrity, which are deeply embedded in both the Christian tradition and the character of God revealed in Scripture.

At SMA Negeri 1 Alasa, the role of CRE teachers in relationship-building is particularly crucial due to the diverse socio-cultural backgrounds of students and the emerging challenges of adolescent identity formation. Teachers must create a climate of trust in which students feel seen, valued, and supported. This requires teachers to embody a spirituality rooted in prayer, similar to Jacob's encounter with God, which fosters inner resilience and relational authenticity. Prayer aids teachers in maintaining emotional balance, practicing forgiveness, responding with patience, and demonstrating genuine care, elements that are central to social competence. Thus, integrating prayer into the pedagogical identity of CRE teachers strengthens their ability to relate meaningfully with students. Previous studies highlight that spiritual practices, especially prayer, enhance teachers' relational awareness and empathy, enabling them to perceive students' needs with greater sensitivity (Palmer, 1998). Prayer also promotes reflective teaching, encouraging educators to examine their motivations, emotions, and responses within relational contexts. When viewed through the exegetical lens of Genesis 32:26, prayer emerges not simply as a devotional practice but as a transformative discipline that empowers teachers to engage relationally with students in ways that reflect God's

compassion and blessing. This study aims to explore the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers in building relationships through prayer, drawing exegetical insights from Genesis 32:26. By connecting biblical interpretation with pedagogical theory, this research provides a theological-pedagogical framework for understanding how spiritual practices can enhance relational quality within schools. The case study at SMA Negeri 1 Alasa offers a contextualized understanding of how CRE teachers embody social competence grounded in prayerful spirituality. Ultimately, this study contributes to the ongoing discourse on Christian pedagogy by demonstrating that prayer is not only a spiritual discipline but also a relational strategy that shapes teachers' interactions, classroom management, and student engagement in meaningful ways.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative exegetical, case study design to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Alasa develop social competence in building relationships through the spiritual practice of prayer, interpreted through the theological framework of Genesis 32:26. The qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth exploration of the subjective, spiritual, and relational dimensions of teaching practice that cannot be adequately captured through quantitative measurement alone. As Creswell (2014) notes, qualitative research is particularly effective in examining human experiences, social interactions, and meaning-making processes within natural settings. This methodological choice aligns with the study's aim to understand how teachers internalize and embody prayer as a relational and pedagogical discipline. The exegetical component of the research was conducted through a close reading and theological analysis of Genesis 32:26 using historical-grammatical principles. This method involved examining the original Hebrew terms, particularly *hāzaq* (to cling, to hold fast) along with literary context, narrative structure, and canonical themes. Secondary biblical scholarship from commentaries, journal articles, and theological works was used to enrich the interpretation and connect the text with relational and pedagogical implications. The exegetical insights were then integrated into the educational domain to build a conceptual framework linking prayer, personal transformation, and social competence in teaching. The case study portion focused on SMA Negeri 1 Alasa, selected through purposive sampling due to its diverse student population and the active role of CRE teachers in character formation. Three CRE teachers participated as key informants, chosen based on their teaching experience, involvement in pastoral interactions with students, and willingness to articulate their spiritual practices. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observation, and reflective dialogues. The interviews explored teachers' understanding of prayer, their relational strategies, conflict-management experiences, and how spiritual practices influence their interactions with students. Classroom observations examined teacher–student communication patterns, relational warmth, attentiveness, and responses to students' emotional needs. Reflective dialogues allowed participants to narrate moments when prayer influenced their relational decisions or interpersonal challenges. Data analysis followed thematic procedures, beginning with transcription, coding, categorization, and theme development. The analysis sought to identify recurring patterns related to social competence, such as empathy, relational sensitivity, conflict mediation, emotional

regulation, and trust-building, as well as the role prayer played in shaping these competencies. The data were interpreted in light of the exegetical findings from Genesis 32:26 to draw meaningful connections between the biblical narrative and professional educational practice. Triangulation of interview data, observations, and exegetical insights strengthened the validity of the findings by ensuring that interpretations did not rely on a single data source. Ethical considerations were upheld throughout the research. Participation was voluntary, with informed consent obtained from all participants. Their identities were anonymized to maintain confidentiality. The study also respected the school's guidelines and ensured that spiritual discussions remained within the participants' comfort levels. This methodological integration of exegesis and qualitative case study provides a rigorous framework for examining the relational and spiritual dimensions of CRE teachers' professional competence. It allows the study to illuminate how the persistence, humility, and relational commitment exemplified in Jacob's prayer can inform and enrich contemporary teaching practice at SMA Negeri 1 Alasa.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The exegetical analysis of Genesis 32:26 reveals Jacob's profound spiritual encounter at the Jabbok, where he wrestles throughout the night and refuses to release the divine figure until he receives a blessing. The phrase *"I will not let you go unless you bless me"* reflects a striking spiritual tenacity marked by relational persistence, humility, and dependence on God. This narrative foregrounds a central theme: prayer as an act of clinging to God and acknowledging divine authority in moments of vulnerability. The theological implications of the text directly resonate with the relational responsibilities of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, who are called to embody steadfastness, compassion, and hope in their interactions with students. The study participants consistently echoed this exegetical insight by describing prayer as a source of strength that shapes their relational behavior. Teachers reported that prayer functions as a grounding discipline through which they develop patience and perseverance when dealing with students who face emotional, behavioral, or academic challenges. Jacob's insistent persistence in Genesis 32:26 becomes a spiritual model for teachers as they maintain relational commitment even when students are resistant, discouraged, or disengaged. Rather than withdrawing or reacting emotionally, teachers emphasized that prayer helps them remain present, attentive, and supportive. Thus, the exegetical theme of spiritual persistence serves as a conceptual foundation for understanding the social competence of CRE teachers in the school's relational context. The narrative's emphasis on vulnerability, Jacob alone, wrestling through the night, parallels the emotional labor teachers experience when guiding students through personal difficulties. Participants shared that their spiritual discipline of prayer encourages the humility and openness required to form authentic relationships. This connection between biblical insight and classroom practice demonstrates that the exegetical reading of Genesis 32:26 offers more than theological reflection; it becomes a framework for relational pedagogy in CRE contexts.

Prayer as a Catalyst for Empathy and Relational Sensitivity

One of the strongest themes emerging from the data is that prayer significantly enhances teachers' capacity for empathy, which forms a core dimension of social competence. Teachers in SMA Negeri 1 Alasa described prayer as a moment of emotional alignment with God's compassion, enabling them to see students beyond their surface-level behavior. Several participants explained that when students exhibit anger, apathy, or conflict, prayer helps them pause, listen deeply, and interpret the underlying needs rather than reacting impulsively. This practice resonates with existing educational research emphasizing that social competence requires emotional attunement, patience, and the capacity to recognize nonverbal cues. Teachers shared narratives of students who came from troubled homes, experienced bullying, or struggled with self-esteem, and they highlighted how prayer enabled them to respond with gentleness and warmth. In moments when students displayed resistance, teachers reported recalling the relational posture found in Genesis 32:26—namely, God's willingness to engage Jacob's wrestling. This insight encouraged them to stay engaged even with difficult students, modeling a form of "relational staying power" inspired by scripture. The findings demonstrate that prayer does not operate merely as a spiritual ritual but as a transformative relational practice. By grounding teachers emotionally and spiritually, prayer enhances their ability to respond to students' needs with empathy, thereby promoting the creation of supportive learning environments. The study thus contributes to broader research on teacher-student relationships, showing that spirituality, particularly prayer, plays a meaningful role in strengthening relational sensitivity in Christian educational contexts. Another major finding concerns the role of prayer in conflict resolution among students. Teachers expressed that prayer equips them with patience, wisdom, and emotional stability necessary for mediating disputes. Rather than relying solely on disciplinary rules or administrative intervention, they approach conflict from a pastoral and relational perspective. Participants described engaging in prayer before addressing student conflicts, believing that spiritual grounding helps them remain calm, impartial, and compassionate. Several accounts illustrate this practice. In one case, a teacher explained that when two students were involved in verbal conflict, the teacher paused to pray silently before speaking with them. This brief moment of prayer helped the teacher regulate emotions and choose words that were restorative rather than punitive. The students eventually expressed remorse and reconciled, an outcome the teacher attributed to the relational disposition formed through prayer. The exegetical insight from Genesis 32:26 supports this dimension of social competence. Jacob's willingness to struggle toward transformation and blessing mirrors the process of guiding students through conflict. The text encourages teachers to maintain relational persistence, not giving up on strained relationships but seeking transformation. Teachers reported that prayer deepened their capacity to forgive students, to remain hopeful during difficult situations, and to approach conflicts with a desire for reconciliation. This linkage between prayer and conflict mediation aligns with Christian educational theory emphasizing peace, forgiveness, and communal harmony. The findings contribute to existing literature by demonstrating that spiritual practices—particularly prayer—serve as practical tools for building relational peace in school communities. Thus, prayer becomes a bridge between theological reflection and concrete pedagogical action.

Building Student Trust through Consistent Prayer-Informed Interactions

A recurring theme throughout the interviews and classroom observations is that prayer significantly influences teachers' consistency, which in turn builds student trust. Trust is a foundational component of social competence because it determines whether students feel safe, respected, and valued in classroom relationships. Teachers described how prayer enables them to respond consistently across various emotional situations, preventing reactive or unpredictable behavior that could undermine trust. Teachers explained that their prayer life provides a stabilizing force, shaping attitudes of patience, fairness, and steadfastness even when faced with challenging students. Students quickly notice this consistency, which fosters openness and vulnerability. Several teachers shared that students often confide personal problems not because of formal counseling frameworks but because they perceive their CRE teachers as emotionally stable, caring, and spiritually grounded individuals. Prayer also motivates teachers to practice intentional presence-listening attentively, offering words of encouragement, and showing gentleness in correction. These behaviors communicate respect and care, which, according to participants, help build a relational climate in which students feel safe to express questions, fears, and emotional struggles. This dynamic corresponds with the biblical narrative in Genesis 32:26, where Jacob experiences a transformative, intimate encounter with God. Teachers noted that their relational engagement with students becomes a micro-reflection of that transformative presence, mediated through prayerful attitudes. The findings affirm that prayer enhances relational consistency, which, in turn, fosters trust. This dynamic significantly contributes to students' emotional development and strengthens the relational foundation essential for effective Christian Religious Education.

The final major theme highlights how teachers integrate prayer with professional approaches to interpersonal competence. Prayer is not seen as a substitute for pedagogical skill or communication strategies; instead, it enhances and enriches them. Teachers reported that prayer reshapes their intentions, helping them approach students with humility, love, and a commitment to building healthy relationships. This mindset complements professional competencies such as effective communication, emotional regulation, and collaborative problem-solving. Teachers emphasized that prayer aligns their hearts with their educational mission, reminding them to prioritize student welfare over administrative pressures or personal frustrations. For example, teachers described entering classrooms with prayerful readiness, seeking to cultivate an atmosphere of peace and mutual respect. This spiritual preparation helps them manage classroom dynamics more effectively, especially in moments of tension. Data also revealed that teachers integrate prayer with specific communication strategies—such as reflective listening, non-judgmental engagement, and restorative dialogue. These strategies reflect broader educational frameworks that emphasize socio-emotional learning, yet the teachers' motivations are rooted in their spiritual convictions. The alignment of professional competence with spiritual formation demonstrates a holistic model of Christian pedagogy, where prayer becomes both the foundation and the sustaining force of relational practice. The exegetical engagement with Genesis 32:26 strengthens this integration by offering a theological lens through which teachers interpret their relational responsibilities. The encounter between Jacob and God reflects a model of transformative

engagement marked by perseverance and openness. Teachers draw from this insight to shape their approach to student difficulties, believing that relational transformation requires both spiritual grounding and pedagogical intentionality. Thus, the integration of prayer and social competence forms a unified framework that enriches both educational practice and spiritual formation.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers can be strengthened through the theological and pedagogical insights found in Genesis 32:26, particularly as they relate to building meaningful relationships through prayer within the school community of SMA Negeri 1 Alasa. The exegetical analysis of the verse reveals that Jacob's insistence-*"I will not let You go unless You bless me"*-represents a profound model of relational perseverance, spiritual dependence, and transformative engagement with God. This spiritual dynamic provides a framework for understanding how prayer functions not merely as a religious ritual, but as a formative relational practice that shapes character, empathy, communication, and openness to others. In the educational setting, especially within CRE teaching, this biblical insight becomes deeply relevant, as the relational dimension is foundational to teachers' effectiveness in guiding, supporting, and nurturing students. The findings demonstrate that CRE teachers with strong social competence, expressed through empathetic communication, active listening, patience, and relational consistency, are better able to cultivate trust and create emotionally safe learning environments. When these competencies are integrated with the value of prayer as a relational posture, teachers develop a deeper sensitivity to students' social and emotional needs. Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Alasa reported that prayer not only strengthens their personal spirituality but also enhances their ability to understand and relate to students, colleagues, and school stakeholders. Prayer becomes a source of emotional resilience, helping teachers respond wisely in conflict, support students facing challenges, and maintain humility in interpersonal interactions. The study highlights that prayer-informed social competence fosters a culture of respectful dialogue and relational healing within the school. As seen in Jacob's transformative encounter in Genesis 32, prayer prepares individuals to face relational tensions with renewed courage, empathy, and clarity. For CRE teachers, this contributes to their mission of modeling Christian relational ethics in everyday educational practice. The integration of exegetical insights with lived pedagogical experiences thus provides a holistic framework for enhancing teacher competence. This research affirms that social competence rooted in spiritual discipline, particularly relational prayer, plays a crucial role in strengthening the relational dynamics between CRE teachers and students. Genesis 32:26 offers a powerful theological foundation for viewing prayer as an active relational engagement that shapes teachers into compassionate, resilient, and relationally skilled educators. For SMA Negeri 1 Alasa, this insight underscores the need for continuous spiritual formation, reflective practice, and relational training for CRE teachers. Future studies may expand this exploration by examining how prayer-based relational competence influences student outcomes, school climate, and interfaith relations in broader educational contexts.

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