

Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Teaching the Importance of Interethnic Communication: An Exegetical Study of Genesis 34:21 at SMK Negeri 2 Susua

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching the importance of interethnic communication at SMK Negeri 2 Susua-South Nias, using Genesis 34:21 as the exegetical foundation. The verse, which emphasizes peaceful coexistence, openness, and relational integrity among different groups, provides a theological lens for understanding how biblical values shape the pedagogical practices of teachers working in multiethnic school environments. Employing a qualitative descriptive design, the research integrates exegetical analysis with field-based data collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis involving two CRE teachers who actively interact with students from diverse ethnic backgrounds. The exegetical findings highlight three core themes-hospitality, mutual trust, and communal peace-which inform the interpretation of teachers' behaviors and strategies. Empirical results show that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Susua demonstrate strong social competence characterized by empathetic communication, inclusive classroom management, and sensitivity to cultural differences. They consistently employ dialogical learning activities, mediation techniques, and culturally responsive approaches to guide students toward respectful interethnic interactions. The study concludes that the integration of theological reflection and professional competence enables CRE teachers to effectively promote interethnic communication in pluralistic educational settings. By embodying the principles found in Genesis 34:21, teachers become transformative agents who help students appreciate diversity and practice harmonious social relationships. The research recommends ongoing professional development in multicultural pedagogy and the incorporation of peacebuilding themes into CRE curricula to enhance the teachers' capacity to foster unity within ethnically diverse classrooms.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Interethnic Communication

INTRODUCTION

In contemporary multicultural educational settings, the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers extends far beyond the transmission of doctrinal knowledge. Teachers are also responsible for cultivating social competence, promoting meaningful communication, and fostering interethnic harmony among students. This responsibility is particularly urgent in Indonesia, where ethnic diversity is both a national strength and a potential source of misunderstanding if not handled constructively. The context of SMK Negeri 2 Susua–South Nias represents a microcosm of this broader reality. As a public vocational school that brings together students from various ethnic backgrounds—including Nias, Batak, Minangkabau, Javanese, and Malay communities—it stands as a strategic site for examining how CRE teachers develop and model interethnic communication as part of their pedagogical practice. Social competence in the context of CRE involves the ability to communicate effectively, build harmonious relationships, demonstrate empathy, and foster inclusive dialogue. These abilities enable teachers to guide students to appreciate cultural differences and to engage respectfully with peers from different ethnic groups. Within Christian theology, this competence is grounded in a biblical understanding of human relationships, dignity, and the divine call to live in peace with one another. Genesis 34:21 provides a meaningful scriptural lens for examining this theme. Although situated within a complex and morally challenging narrative about Shechem and Jacob’s family, verse 21 presents a statement made by the people of the land: “These men are at peace with us; let them dwell in the land and trade with us.” While the broader narrative contains ethical ambiguities, this verse captures an ancient expression of intergroup openness, hospitality, and communication. From an exegetical standpoint, Genesis 34:21 highlights important social values within the ancient Near Eastern context. The declaration “these men are at peace with us” reflects a desire for coexistence and relational reciprocity. Although the motives of Shechem’s community may be questioned, the linguistic emphasis on peace (*shalom*) and coexistence carries significant theological implications. The invitation to “dwell in the land and trade with us” reflects a socio-economic vision that acknowledges the benefits of intercultural cooperation. Therefore, this verse becomes a valuable reference for discussing the importance of interethnic communication, not as mere social interaction but as a means of building peace, trust, and mutual flourishing. In the educational setting of SMK Negeri 2 Susua, such insights are highly relevant. Students in this school encounter peers with diverse traditions, linguistic expressions, and cultural assumptions. Without careful guidance, diversity can become a barrier to interaction, leading to prejudice or misunderstanding. CRE teachers, therefore, play a crucial mediating role. Their social competence enables them to model effective communication and to teach biblical principles that encourage respect across ethnic boundaries. Teachers who embody such competence not only fulfill professional expectations but also reflect Christian ethical commitments toward peacebuilding and communal harmony.

Prior research in Christian education underscores the importance of teacher social competence in shaping student attitudes. Studies suggest that teachers who demonstrate empathy, intercultural sensitivity, and effective communication significantly influence students’ capacity to engage respectfully with others. However, few studies have

attempted to connect these competencies with biblical exegesis, particularly within the Old Testament narrative tradition. Even fewer have explored how such theological insights can inform CRE teaching in ethnically diverse Indonesian schools. Therefore, this study fills an important gap by integrating exegetical interpretation of Genesis 34:21 with field-based analysis of CRE teachers' social competence at SMK Negeri 2 Susua. The purpose of this study is to analyze how CRE teachers interpret and communicate the biblical importance of interethnic communication, how they embody social competence in their interactions, and how these practices shape student understanding of interethnic relationships. By combining exegesis and qualitative inquiry, the study seeks to demonstrate that Scripture provides not only theological guidance but also practical wisdom for contemporary issues of diversity and communication. Ultimately, this research aims to show that CRE teachers, grounded in biblical insight and equipped with strong social competence, can serve as agents of peace and unity within Indonesia's pluralistic educational landscape.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive research design to explore how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Susua-South Nias develop and demonstrate social competence in teaching the importance of interethnic communication, interpreted through the exegetical lens of Genesis 34:21. A qualitative approach was chosen because it allows for an in-depth understanding of teacher experiences, behaviors, and pedagogical strategies within their natural school environment. This design also enables the integration of biblical exegesis with empirical data, providing a holistic framework for interpreting how scriptural insights shape educational practice. The study was conducted at SMK Negeri 2 Susua, a public vocational school characterized by its ethnic diversity. Students come from Nias, Batak, Javanese, Minangkabau, and Malay backgrounds, making the school a suitable setting for examining interethnic communication. Two CRE teachers were purposively selected as participants. The criteria ensured that the participants possessed both experience and opportunities to demonstrate social competence. Semi-structured interviews explored teachers' understanding of Genesis 34:21, their perceptions of interethnic communication, and their experiences in fostering inclusive classroom environments. Questions encouraged participants to describe practical situations requiring social competence, such as conflict mediation, adapting communication styles, and promoting intercultural respect. Non-participant observation such as classroom sessions, discussion activities, and student-teacher interactions were observed to capture real-time indicators of social competence. Attention was given to verbal communication, listening skills, empathy, conflict handling, and the ability to include students from different ethnic backgrounds. The documents provided additional insight into how biblical principles and social competence are formally integrated into teaching processes. To ensure the biblical foundation of the study, an exegetical analysis of Genesis 34:21 was conducted using the historical-critical method. Key steps included examining the Hebrew text, exploring the socio-cultural context of the narrative, identifying linguistic themes such as *shalom* (peace), and interpreting the verse within its broader literary setting. Although Genesis 34 contains morally complex elements, verse 21 was isolated for its thematic relevance to intergroup peace, openness,

and communication. The exegetical findings served as an interpretive framework for analyzing teacher interviews and classroom interactions. Codes were grouped into categories such as “teacher empathy,” “communication strategies,” “interethnic awareness,” “biblical integration,” and “peacebuilding practices.” These categories were then compared with the exegetical themes of Genesis 34:21 to create an integrated interpretation. Triangulation across the three data sources enhanced credibility and consistency. The study followed ethical guidelines for research in educational settings, including respect for cultural diversity and sensitivity to religious perspectives.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study reveal a rich interplay between biblical insight, teacher social competence, and the lived realities of interethnic communication within the multicultural environment of SMK Negeri 2 Susua–South Nias, demonstrating how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers interpret, embody, and teach the values reflected in Genesis 34:21. Drawing from interviews, observations, and document analysis, three broad findings emerged: teachers’ exegetical integration of Genesis 34:21 into classroom instruction, their social competence as manifested in daily interactions, and the pedagogical strategies they employ to cultivate interethnic communication among students. When examined together through thematic analysis, these findings highlight both strengths and challenges in developing socially competent, biblically grounded educators capable of fostering interethnic harmony. First, the study found that CRE teachers possessed a meaningful yet varied understanding of Genesis 34:21 as a scriptural foundation for intergroup relations. Both participants interpreted the verse’s emphasis on “peace” and “dwelling together” as an affirmation of the biblical mandate to pursue harmonious relationships across ethnic boundaries. Their interpretations acknowledged that although the broader Genesis 34 narrative is ethically complex, verse 21 offers a snapshot of intergroup openness characterized by the desire to coexist peacefully. Teachers consistently referred to the word *shalom* as a principle that transcends cultural boundaries and fosters a community characterized by trust, cooperation, and mutual respect. However, there were differences in how deeply teachers engaged with exegetical nuances; one teacher demonstrated strong familiarity with Old Testament cultural background and the linguistic significance of *shalom*, while the other relied more on practical interpretation, focusing on the verse’s applicability to day-to-day school life rather than its historical context. Despite these differences, both teachers agreed that Genesis 34:21 provides a theological basis for teaching students the importance of interethnic communication, positioning the classroom as a modern context for practicing biblical peace. The findings also show that CRE teachers’ social competence plays a central role in modeling and reinforcing interethnic communication. Observations across multiple class sessions revealed that teachers consistently demonstrated empathy, active listening, adaptability in communication styles, and sensitivity to cultural nuances among students. Teachers frequently used inclusive language, addressed students by name regardless of ethnic background, and encouraged participation from quieter students who belonged to minority groups within the school. One noteworthy observed practice involved a teacher intentionally pairing students from different ethnicities during group discussions to facilitate cross-cultural learning and reduce cliques based on ethnic similarity. Teachers also played a mediating role in resolving interpersonal conflicts; when

misunderstandings arose due to linguistic or cultural differences, teachers employed gentle questioning, clarification techniques, and value-based guidance to help students reach mutual understanding. These practices reflect sophisticated aspects of social competence-emotional regulation, perspective-taking, and conflict mediation-which align strongly with the relational ideals expressed in Genesis 34:21. Interviews further revealed that teachers viewed their social competence as an extension of their faith and calling. They emphasized that effective communication requires not only professional skill but also spiritual maturity, stating that daily prayer, self-reflection, and scriptural grounding helped them maintain emotional stability and relational sensitivity. This relational posture embodies the biblical principle of peace expressed in Genesis 34:21, demonstrating how spiritual formation can manifest in socially competent teaching.

The study found that CRE teachers used a range of pedagogical strategies to teach students the importance of interethnic communication. Lesson plans often incorporated discussions on diversity, group activities requiring cross-ethnic collaboration, and narratives from biblical texts emphasizing unity and reconciliation. Genesis 34:21 was used as a starting point for broader conversations about peace and cooperation. Teachers encouraged students to analyze how historical communities interacted across ethnic lines and invited them to evaluate both positive and negative examples of intergroup communication in Scripture. This practice reflects a hermeneutical approach that connects ancient narratives to contemporary social realities. Teachers also integrated local cultural frameworks, such as the Nias concept of *famangani* (mutual cooperation), with biblical teaching, explaining that both Scripture and local wisdom promote hospitality, mutual assistance, and peaceful coexistence. This integration not only contextualized biblical principles but also strengthened students' sense of identity while promoting appreciation of cultural diversity. Observations revealed that students responded positively to such teaching strategies, demonstrating increased willingness to collaborate, share experiences, and discuss cultural differences openly. However, challenges also emerged. Some students carried stereotypes rooted in their family or community experiences, and teachers needed to address these misconceptions through guided dialogue and reflective exercises. While teachers were proactive in addressing prejudice, they admitted that changing mindset patterns requires consistent, long-term effort. The discussion of these findings reveals several key insights. First, the integration of biblical exegesis with social competence underscores the multidimensional nature of CRE teaching. Genesis 34:21, when read through the lens of peace and coexistence, becomes a theological anchor for promoting interethnic communication. The teachers in this study demonstrated that Scripture can inform both the content and method of teaching; it shapes not only what is taught but how it is practiced. This supports the notion found in Christian educational literature that biblical values must be embodied in teacher behavior to have transformative impact. The data suggest that the teachers' personal interpretation of Scripture directly influenced their relational posture, creating a learning environment marked by trust and empathy. This aligns with prior research emphasizing that teacher behavior significantly influences student attitudes toward diversity. By translating the *shalom* principle into practical communication strategies, teachers contributed to a classroom culture that reflects biblical hospitality and inclusiveness. Teacher social competence emerged as a decisive factor in shaping interethnic

interactions within the school. The findings affirm established theories on the importance of social competence, indicating that emotionally grounded and relationally skilled teachers serve as models for students navigating multicultural dynamics. In the context of SMK Negeri 2 Susua, the teachers' ability to engage sensitively with diverse students not only facilitated smooth communication but also helped students recognize the value of multicultural relationships. Their capacity for empathy and adaptability demonstrates characteristics associated with spiritually rooted social competence. Observational data indicate that such competence is most effectively demonstrated not through formal instruction but through daily interactions, moment-by-moment practices that convey respect, attentiveness, and inclusiveness. This is consistent with holistic models of Christian formation, which emphasize that character is transmitted as much through relational presence as through explicit teaching. The study highlights the importance of culturally responsive pedagogy in fostering interethnic communication. Teachers who situated biblical teaching within the local cultural context created more accessible and meaningful learning experiences. By comparing Genesis 34:21's call to peaceful coexistence with Nias cultural values, teachers helped students understand that biblical principles harmonize with local traditions rather than oppose them. This approach echoes missiological perspectives asserting that the gospel resonates within cultural frameworks and can strengthen intercultural understanding. The effectiveness of such pedagogical strategies was evident in student engagement and willingness to share perspectives during group activities. However, the research also showed that some students struggled with entrenched stereotypes, indicating a need for ongoing teaching that addresses the underlying prejudices that hinder interethnic communication. Teachers acknowledged that while they could guide and model appropriate communication, broader social influences, such as family attitudes and community interactions, also shape student perceptions. This highlights the need for collaborative efforts among teachers, parents, and community leaders to promote intercultural harmony. The discussion points to several implications for the development of CRE teacher competence. The findings suggest that teacher training programs should integrate biblical exegesis with professional development in social competence and intercultural communication. Teachers who understood Scripture at a deeper level demonstrated greater confidence in applying biblical principles to real-life teaching challenges. Similarly, teachers with well-developed social competence were better equipped to translate those principles into relational practices that foster inclusiveness. The combination of exegetical insight and relational skill is essential for preparing CRE teachers to navigate the complexities of multicultural education. Institutions responsible for preparing teachers should therefore include courses on intercultural sensitivity, conflict mediation, and contextual biblical interpretation. Additionally, the findings indicate that ongoing spiritual formation is crucial. Teachers who demonstrated high levels of social competence consistently engaged in personal spiritual disciplines, suggesting that inner transformation contributes significantly to outward relational effectiveness.

The results of this study reveal that the social competence of CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Susua-South Nias significantly contributes to students' understanding and practice of interethnic communication. Grounded in the exegetical insights of Genesis 34:21, teachers demonstrated how biblical principles can be embodied in relational practices

that promote peace, unity, and mutual respect. Their ability to integrate Scripture with practical teaching strategies, coupled with their culturally responsive pedagogy, strengthened the overall learning environment. At the same time, challenges related to persistent stereotypes and external influences highlight the need for comprehensive efforts that extend beyond the classroom. Ultimately, this study affirms that socially competent, spiritually grounded CRE teachers play a crucial role in shaping students to become agents of peace within Indonesia's diverse society.

CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in teaching the importance of interethnic communication at SMK Negeri 2 Susua-South Nias, using Genesis 34:21 as an exegetical foundation for understanding peacebuilding, openness, and relational integrity. The findings demonstrate that the teachers' social competence is not merely a pedagogical skillset but a dynamic integration of biblical values, personal maturity, and contextual sensitivity to the ethnic diversity present in their school. Through classroom practices, interpersonal engagement, and conflict mediation, the teachers consistently showed an ability to cultivate environments where students from different ethnic groups feel accepted, respected, and encouraged to communicate openly. The results indicate that teachers who internalize the principles embedded in Genesis 34:21-particularly openness, hospitality, and peaceful coexistence-are better equipped to model and teach interethnic harmony. The verse's emphasis on living peaceably with others provides a meaningful theological framework for shaping teachers' approaches to communication and relationship-building. In practice, this theological grounding translated into empathetic listening, attentiveness to cultural differences, consistent use of inclusive language, and deliberate strategies to bridge misunderstandings among students. Teachers acted not only as educators but also as mediators and cultural interpreters who facilitated dialogue and mutual understanding. The analysis further reveals that social competence among CRE teachers develops through three interconnected dimensions: personal spirituality grounded in Scripture, which forms attitudes of humility and patience; professional commitment to nurturing inclusive classrooms, which shapes communication style and teaching strategies; and contextual awareness of students' ethnic identities, which enables the teacher to address potential tensions constructively and sensitively. When these dimensions align, the teacher becomes a transformative agent who helps students cultivate interpersonal skills essential for peaceful coexistence in multicultural societies. The study also highlights the importance of intentional pedagogical design. Teachers who incorporate biblical narratives, contextual stories, and dialogical learning activities succeed in fostering deeper understanding of interethnic communication. Through group discussions, role-play, and reflective dialogues, students gain opportunities to practice empathy, listen to diverse perspectives, and express their own cultural identities without fear of judgment. Such strategies affirm that effective CRE teaching extends beyond doctrinal instruction to include the shaping of relational virtues that reflect Christ's call to love one another. Findings show that the teachers' success in promoting interethnic communication is strengthened by their ability to manage classroom dynamics calmly and fairly. Their capacity to resolve conflicts by encouraging mutual respect and guiding students toward

reconciliation aligns with the biblical theme of pursuing peace with all people. This highlights that social competence for CRE teachers is inseparable from character and integrity. Their behavior becomes a living testimony of the values they teach, making their influence on students both instructional and exemplary. The teachers noted that ethnic prejudice, misunderstandings rooted in cultural stereotypes, and occasional communication barriers still arise among students. These issues require ongoing attention and continuous professional development. Teachers expressed the need for more training in multicultural pedagogy, collaborative problem-solving, and culturally responsive teaching methods. Strengthening institutional support—such as school-wide campaigns on tolerance, tailored character education programs, and training workshops—would further enhance the teachers' ability to sustain interethnic harmony in the school community. This research concludes that CRE teachers at SMK Negeri 2 Susua demonstrate strong social competence that is deeply enriched by biblical reflection and contextual understanding. Their efforts successfully promote interethnic communication and help students appreciate diversity as part of God's creation. By integrating exegetical insights from Genesis 34:21 with practical teaching strategies, they embody the role of educators who teach not only with words but with compassionate and culturally attuned relationships. The study affirms that cultivating interethnic communication is an essential aspect of Christian education within Indonesia's multicultural setting. CRE teachers face the urgent task of guiding students toward peace, mutual respect, and unity—values that are indispensable in shaping the character of future citizens. Theological grounding, combined with social competence and pedagogical intentionality, equips teachers to fulfill this calling. Finally, the study recommends continuous professional development for CRE teachers and the incorporation of multicultural frameworks in CRE curricula to strengthen their contribution to harmonious and inclusive schooling environments.

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