

Integrating the Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers within the Spiritual Framework of Philippians 4:13: A Case Study at SDS GKPS Sibaganding

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ABSTRACT

The integration of professional competence and spiritual formation is a central concern in Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly within faith-based school contexts. This study explores how the competence of CRE teachers is integrated within the spiritual framework of Epistle to the Philippians 4:13 at SDS GKPS Sibaganding, where 55 students and 7 teachers are Christian, including one CRE teacher. Using a qualitative case study design combined with a biblical-exegetical approach, this research investigates how Christ-centered dependence shapes pedagogical, personality, and social competencies in daily teaching practice. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis, and were analyzed using thematic analysis. The findings indicate that Philippians 4:13 is understood by teachers not as a slogan of self-confidence but as a confession of dependence on Christ as the source of strength in fulfilling their professional calling. This spiritual understanding reinforces pedagogical competence through patient instruction, adaptive teaching strategies, and ethical assessment practices. Social competence is manifested in inclusive communication, restorative conflict management, and collaborative relationships with colleagues and students. However, the study also identifies challenges such as administrative workload, cultural expectations of authoritative leadership, and limited educational resources that test the sustainability of this integration. The study concludes that the integration of teacher competence and spirituality is a continuous process of spiritual and professional formation. When grounded in Christ-centered dependence, teacher competence becomes holistic, ethically consistent, and spiritually resilient. These findings offer important implications for the development of CRE teacher education and professional formation programs that intentionally unite pedagogical training with biblical spirituality.

Keywords: *Competence, Christian Religious Education, Spiritual Framework*

INTRODUCTION

Teacher competence is a fundamental pillar in the quality of educational practice, particularly in the field of Christian Religious Education (CRE), where professional skills are

inseparable from spiritual identity. In the Indonesian educational context, CRE teachers are expected not only to master pedagogical strategies but also to embody Christian values consistently in their professional conduct. This integration becomes increasingly important in faith-based schools such as SDS GKPS Sibaganding, where 55 Christian students and 7 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, interact daily in a learning environment that combines national curriculum standards with ecclesial spiritual formation. Teacher competence is commonly understood as a multidimensional construct consisting of pedagogical, professional, personality, and social dimensions (Knight, 2006; Lickona, 2013). However, in Christian education, these competencies cannot be detached from spiritual foundations. Theological perspectives emphasize that Christian teachers are not merely facilitators of knowledge but instruments through whom God's formative work is manifested in students' lives (Groome, 2011). The integration of competence and spirituality becomes a central concern in CRE pedagogy. A powerful biblical foundation for this integration is found in Epistle to the Philippians 4:13: "*I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.*" This verse reflects the apostle Paul's testimony of spiritual sufficiency rooted in union with Christ amid circumstances of limitation, suffering, and service. The Greek construction *en tō endynamounti me Christō* emphasizes that human capability is not autonomous but derives its power from Christ's continual empowerment (Fee, 2014). Thus, Philippians 4:13 presents a theology of dependence that challenges merit-based and self-reliant models of professional competence. In the context of CRE, this Christ-centered empowerment has profound implications for teacher competence. Pedagogical skill, emotional resilience, ethical consistency, and social sensitivity are not merely professional assets but spiritual graces sustained by Christ's strength. Without this spiritual grounding, competence risks being reduced to technical efficiency or personal achievement rather than a vocation shaped by obedience and service. Therefore, integrating teacher competence within the spiritual framework of Philippians 4:13 is not a matter of adding spirituality as a supplementary dimension but of reorienting the entire professional identity of the CRE teacher toward Christ-centered dependence. Many empirical studies on teacher competence still approach the topic from secular pedagogical or psychological perspectives. While such studies provide valuable insights into instructional effectiveness, they often overlook the theological foundations that shape motivation, endurance, and moral integrity in Christian teachers (Hendricks & Hendricks, 2013). As a result, the lived integration between professional competence and biblical spirituality remains underexplored, especially within concrete school contexts. This gap becomes even more apparent in elementary schools where students are at a critical stage of character and faith formation. Teachers at this level function as primary moral and spiritual models. At SDS GKPS Sibaganding, the presence of a relatively large Christian student body creates both opportunities and responsibilities for CRE teachers to integrate competence with spiritual authenticity. Yet, the practical dynamics of how Philippians 4:13 informs teachers' pedagogical confidence, emotional endurance, interpersonal engagement, and professional discipline have not been systematically studied. Another important dimension concerns the contextual challenges faced by CRE teachers. Educational demands, administrative pressures, limited resources, and students' diverse socio-cultural backgrounds often place teachers in situations of physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue. In such circumstances, reliance on Christ's strength becomes not merely

a theological confession but a lived necessity. The extent to which this reliance is internalized and articulated in professional competence constitutes a significant area of inquiry. This study seeks to examine how the competence of Christian Religious Education teachers is integrated within the spiritual framework of Philippians 4:13 at SDS GKPS Sibaganding. Specifically, the research addresses three key questions: How do CRE teachers understand Philippians 4:13 in relation to their professional calling? How is Christ-centered empowerment manifested in their pedagogical, personality, social, and professional competencies? What challenges and supporting factors influence the integration of spiritual dependence and teacher competence in this school context? By combining biblical reflection with empirical investigation, this study aims to contribute to the development of a holistic model of CRE teacher competence that is not only professionally sound but also theologically grounded. The findings are expected to offer both theoretical enrichment for Christian educational studies and practical guidance for teacher formation and professional development within faith-based schools in Indonesia.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design integrated with a biblical-exegetical approach to explore how the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is integrated within the spiritual framework of Philippians 4:13 at SDS GKPS Sibaganding. The qualitative approach was selected because it enables in-depth understanding of meaning, experience, and values that shape teachers' professional and spiritual lives within their natural educational setting (Yin, 2018; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). The case study design was particularly appropriate given the unique characteristics of the school context, which includes 55 Christian students and 7 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher. The exegetical component of this research focused on Philippians 4:13 using the historical-grammatical method to establish a sound theological framework for interpreting teacher competence. The analysis examined the literary context of Paul's imprisonment, the semantic range of key Greek terms such as *ischyō* (to be strong) and *endynamounti* (to empower), and the theological meaning of dependence on Christ as the source of strength for faithful service (Fee, 2014; O'Brien, 1991). This exegetical reflection functioned as the normative lens through which empirical data were interpreted. Data were collected through in-depth semi-structured interviews and classroom observations. Participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure that those directly involved in CRE and Christian educational practice were included. The main participants comprised the CRE teacher, three Christian classroom teachers, and one school administrator. Each interview lasted between 45 to 70 minutes and explored participants' understanding of Philippians 4:13, their perceptions of teacher competence, experiences of spiritual dependence in professional duties, and the challenges they encountered in integrating faith and competence (Groome, 2011; Hendricks & Hendricks, 2013). Classroom observations were conducted during CRE lessons and selected general subjects taught by Christian teachers. The observations focused on indicators of teacher competence, including instructional clarity, classroom management, teacher-student interaction, emotional control, ethical consistency, and collaborative behavior. An observation guide was developed based on national teacher competence standards and Christian pedagogical principles (Knight, 2006; Lickona, 2013). These documents were

examined to identify coherence between stated learning objectives, instructional strategies, evaluation practices, and the spiritual values articulated by teachers in interviews. Initial codes were generated from recurrent patterns related to Christ-centered strength, pedagogical confidence, emotional resilience, ethical discipline, and social engagement. These codes were then organized into overarching themes that reflected the integration of professional competence and spiritual dependence. Participants were informed of their right to withdraw at any stage without consequence. Through these methodological procedures, the study aimed to produce credible, transferable, and theologically grounded findings regarding the integration of CRE teacher competence within the spiritual framework of Philippians 4:13.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

This section presents and discusses the findings concerning how the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is integrated within the spiritual framework of Philippians 4:13 at SDS GKPS Sibaganding. The analysis reveals four interrelated dimensions: theological understanding of Christ-centered strength, integration of spiritual dependence with pedagogical competence, personality and emotional resilience rooted in faith, and social competence shaped by Christ-like empowerment. The finding shows that CRE teachers interpret Philippians 4:13 not merely as a motivational verse but as a theological foundation for their entire professional vocation. Teachers consistently emphasized that “strength” (*ischyō*) is not self-generated but flows from continual dependence on Christ. This aligns with the exegetical context of Epistle to the Philippians 4:13, where Paul speaks from a position of imprisonment, affirming sufficiency in Christ amid limitation rather than triumphal success (Fee, 2014; O’Brien, 1991). Teachers at SDS GKPS Sibaganding described their professional challenges-heavy workloads, limited facilities, emotional fatigue, and diverse student needs-as conditions that force them to rely spiritually on Christ. This dependence was not abstract but expressed through daily prayer before teaching, personal devotion, and a conscious surrender of anxiety to God. From a theological perspective, this reflects a Pauline spirituality of “contentment in Christ” (Phil. 4:11-12), where competence is reframed as participation in Christ’s enabling grace rather than mere technical ability. This finding strengthens Groome’s (2011) argument that Christian teaching is not only a pedagogical activity but also a spiritual ministry. The teachers’ understanding of Philippians 4:13 reshapes competence from a performance-based construct into a vocation of faithful dependence. This reinterpretation challenges secular models of teacher competence that prioritize autonomy and self-efficacy detached from transcendent sources. The next finding demonstrates that spiritual dependence on Christ directly influences pedagogical competence. In classroom observations, teachers displayed clarity in instruction, patience in explanation, and adaptability in managing students’ learning difficulties. These competencies were not perceived by teachers merely as skills acquired through training but as capacities strengthened through prayer and faith. Teachers reported that when they encountered students with low motivation, learning delays, or behavioral challenges, they consciously sought Christ’s guidance before implementing instructional strategies. This resulted in more reflective planning, the use of varied learning methods, and patient repetition of material without emotional outbursts. Pedagogical confidence, therefore, emerged not solely from mastery of teaching techniques but from spiritual

assurance rooted in Christ's empowering presence. This finding affirms Knight's (2006) view that in Christian education, pedagogy must be grounded in a biblical worldview that shapes both method and motivation. It also extends Lickona's (2013) argument on character-based teaching by demonstrating that ethical pedagogy flows from spiritual formation, not merely from professional training. The integration of competence and spirituality was evident in assessment practices. Teachers consistently emphasized fairness, transparency, and honesty in grading, regardless of students' religious background. They viewed integrity in assessment as a direct expression of accountability before Christ. This confirms that spiritual dependence does not weaken professional rigor but enhances ethical consistency.

Personality Competence and Emotional Resilience Rooted in Christ

The other dimension that emerged strongly from the data is the role of Christ-centered spirituality in shaping teachers' personality competence and emotional resilience. Teachers frequently described moments of frustration, especially when dealing with students who exhibited disruptive behavior or low discipline. However, instead of responding with harsh authority, they intentionally practiced emotional restraint, attributing their self-control to the inner strengthening they received from Christ. This self-regulation reflects what Hendricks and Hendricks (2013) describe as "spirit-formed teaching," where personal character becomes the primary medium of instruction. Teachers' humility, patience, and emotional stability were not viewed as innate personality traits but as fruits of spiritual growth. Philippians 4:13 functioned as an inner confession that sustained endurance in moments of professional exhaustion. From a psychological perspective, such emotional resilience aligns with contemporary theories of spiritual coping, where faith resources enhance stress management and perseverance. However, the present study confirms that in Christian education, resilience is not merely a coping mechanism but a theological response to vocation. Endurance is interpreted as participation in Christ's sustaining power. This finding also highlights the transformative relationship between spirituality and teacher identity. Teachers no longer defined success solely by student achievement or institutional recognition, but by faithfulness in their calling. This identity reorientation prevented burnout and nurtured long-term commitment to the teaching ministry. Social competence emerged as another critical dimension of integrated teacher competence. Teachers demonstrated strong interpersonal communication, collaborative attitudes with colleagues, and sensitivity toward students' socio-emotional needs. These social competencies were consistently interpreted as expressions of Christ's empowering presence in their relational life. In interactions with students, teachers practiced inclusive communication, avoided discriminatory language, and encouraged mutual respect. Particularly in situations of conflict among students, teachers applied restorative approaches rather than punitive measures. They viewed reconciliation as a spiritual responsibility grounded in the peace of Christ. This relational posture reflects the social implications of Pauline spirituality, where life "in Christ" transforms communal relationships (Phil. 2:1-4). Teachers' collaboration with colleagues was likewise shaped by spiritual humility. They willingly supported one another in lesson preparation, disciplinary issues, and administrative tasks without seeking personal recognition. This collegial spirit strengthened institutional

solidarity and reduced bureaucratic tension. From a theoretical standpoint, this finding supports Bush and Glover's (2014) model of relational leadership, which emphasizes ethical influence over formal authority. However, the present study extends this model by rooting social competence explicitly in Christological spirituality rather than in organizational psychology alone.

The Integration of Competence and Spirituality

Institutional workload and administrative demands sometimes disrupted teachers' spiritual disciplines. When documentation, reporting, and ceremonial duties intensified, personal devotional time was often reduced, weakening the perceived spiritual vitality that sustained competence. Cultural expectations of authoritative teaching occasionally conflicted with the teachers' Christ-centered approach to humble service. Some parents and even colleagues expected firm discipline expressed through strict control rather than through dialogical guidance. This tension required teachers to negotiate between cultural norms and biblical convictions. Limited facilities and learning resources also tested teachers' reliance on Christ. While teachers viewed lack of resources as an opportunity to exercise faith and creativity, prolonged scarcity created emotional fatigue. In such contexts, Philippians 4:13 functioned not as a promise of unlimited success but as a confession of sufficiency amid insufficiency—an important theological clarification that prevented prosperity-oriented misinterpretation. The findings of this study contribute to the theoretical discourse on Christian teacher competence by demonstrating that spiritual dependence is not an auxiliary dimension but the integrating center of all professional competencies. Pedagogical skill, personality character, and social engagement converge in a Christ-centered source of strength. This integration challenges the secular fragmentation of teacher competence into isolated technical indicators. Instead, competence is revealed as a spiritually unified construct shaped by vocation, faith, and obedience. Theologically, this affirms a Pauline anthropology in which human capability is intrinsically relational-rooted in union with Christ rather than in autonomous self-development. The study implies that teacher education programs for CRE should not isolate spirituality from professional training. Spiritual formation, biblical reflection, and spiritual mentoring must be structurally embedded within competence development. Without this integration, competence risks becoming mechanistic and morally fragile.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined how the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is integrated within the spiritual framework of Epistle to the Philippians 4:13 at SDS GKPS Sibaganding, where 55 Christian students and 7 Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, serve in a faith-based educational environment. The findings demonstrate that teacher competence is not merely constructed through professional training and technical mastery, but is deeply shaped by Christ-centered spirituality that reorients motivation, endurance, and ethical consistency. The results reveal that Philippians 4:13 is understood by teachers as a confession of spiritual dependence rather than a slogan of personal achievement. This theological understanding becomes the inner source of strength that sustains pedagogical confidence, emotional resilience, and moral integrity. Pedagogical competence is expressed through patient instruction, adaptive

teaching strategies, and fair assessment practices rooted in accountability before Christ. Personality competence is reflected in humility, self-control, perseverance, and emotional stability, especially in ethically and emotionally demanding situations. Social competence is manifested through inclusive communication, restorative conflict management, and collaborative relationships with colleagues and students. At the same time, this study also identifies significant challenges in sustaining the integration of competence and spirituality. Administrative workload, cultural expectations of authoritarian teaching, and limited educational resources continually test teachers' spiritual vitality and professional consistency. Teachers who intentionally nurture their spiritual life through prayer, biblical reflection, and communal fellowship are better equipped to endure these pressures without compromising their professional integrity. This study contributes to Christian educational scholarship by affirming that teacher competence in CRE cannot be adequately understood apart from its spiritual foundation. Competence is revealed as a holistic and integrated construct in which pedagogical, personality, social, and professional dimensions converge in dependence on Christ's empowering grace. This challenges secular models of competence that prioritize autonomy and technical performance over vocation and spiritual formation. The findings imply that the formation of CRE teachers must prioritize spiritual maturity alongside pedagogical training. Teacher education institutions, churches, and Christian schools should intentionally integrate biblical spirituality, mentoring, and reflective practice into professional development programs. Without such integration, teacher competence risks becoming fragmented and spiritually disconnected. The integration of teacher competence within the spiritual framework of Philippians 4:13 is not a static condition but a continuous process of spiritual and professional formation. When sustained intentionally, this integration not only strengthens teacher effectiveness but also nurtures a learning environment that authentically reflects the character and power of Christ in Christian education.

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