

Teaching in the Context of Human Suffering: A Study of Pedagogical Competence Based on Genesis 31:42 (Case Study at SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun)

Debita Sagala

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

*correspondence: debitasagala52@guru.sd.belajar.id

ABSTRACT

This study investigates the pedagogical competence of Christian teachers in guiding students through the reality of human suffering based on the theological perspective of Book of Genesis 31:42 at SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun. The research was conducted in a public elementary school context involving 136 Christian students and eight Christian teachers, including one Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher. The data were analyzed using thematic analysis to identify patterns of pedagogical practice, theological interpretation, emotional guidance, and spiritual formation. The findings indicate that Christian teachers demonstrate pedagogical competence through the integration of biblical theology of suffering, responsive instructional strategies, pastoral sensitivity, and consistent teacher modeling. Genesis 31:42 serves as a central theological foundation in helping students reinterpret suffering as a space of God's faithful presence and just intervention rather than mere misfortune. Teachers apply this perspective through reflective biblical instruction, dialogical learning, personal mentoring, and prayerful accompaniment. As a result, students show increased spiritual resilience, emotional stability, and moral perseverance in responding to personal and social hardships. The study concludes that effective Christian pedagogy in the context of human suffering requires a holistic integration of cognitive learning, emotional guidance, and spiritual formation. Pedagogical competence is expressed not only in teaching strategies but also in the lived witness of teachers who embody faith, compassion, and endurance. This research contributes to Christian education scholarship by offering an empirically grounded model of pedagogical competence for guiding students through suffering within a pluralistic public-school environment.

Keywords: *Human Suffering, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Competence*

INTRODUCTION

Human suffering is an inevitable reality in the life of every individual, including children within the school environment. In the educational context, students may experience various forms of suffering such as family conflict, economic hardship, bullying, emotional

neglect, illness, or social exclusion. These realities significantly influence students' emotional well-being, learning motivation, and character formation (Garbarino, 2017; Masten, 2018). For Christian education, suffering is not merely a psychological or social phenomenon but also a spiritual reality that must be interpreted and addressed through faith-based pedagogy. Therefore, the pedagogical competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers becomes crucial in guiding students to understand, endure, and grow through experiences of suffering. Pedagogical competence refers to a teacher's ability to design, implement, and evaluate learning activities that respond meaningfully to students' developmental, emotional, and spiritual needs (Shulman, 1986; Darling-Hammond, 2017). In the context of Christian education, this competence is expanded to include the capacity to integrate biblical truths, spiritual formation, and pastoral sensitivity into instructional practice. When students face suffering, teachers are not only educators but also spiritual mentors who accompany learners through pain with compassion, wisdom, and theological grounding (Estep & Kim, 2018).

A powerful biblical foundation for understanding God's presence in human suffering is found in Book of Genesis 31:42. This verse records Jacob's confession that if the God of his father had not been with him, he would have been sent away empty-handed after enduring injustice and oppression under Laban. This text affirms that God is not indifferent to human suffering but actively accompanies, protects, and vindicates those who endure hardship faithfully. From a pedagogical perspective, this verse offers a theological framework for guiding students to view suffering not as abandonment by God, but as a space where divine faithfulness and justice are revealed. Genesis 31:42 emphasizes two key theological themes: divine presence in suffering and God's advocacy for the oppressed. The Hebrew expression *ra'ah et-'onyi* (God has seen my affliction) highlights that suffering is fully visible to God, while *yōkhaḥ emesh* (He rebuked you last night) underscores divine intervention on behalf of the suffering person. This theological insight provides a strong biblical basis for CRE teachers to help students interpret their pain through the lens of God's faithfulness and protection. This demands a learning process that does not separate cognitive biblical knowledge from emotional healing and character formation. In Indonesian public schools, including SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun, Christian students often represent a minority group within a pluralistic environment. With only a limited number of Christian learners and typically one CRE teacher serving the entire Christian student population, the pedagogical responsibility becomes both complex and pastoral in nature. Teachers are required to teach curriculum content while simultaneously addressing students' emotional struggles rooted in family, social, and economic realities. In rural contexts such as Dairi Regency, issues of poverty, migration of parents, and limited educational resources further intensify the vulnerability of students to emotional and spiritual suffering (Suryadarma & Jones, 2013). Empirical studies that specifically examine the pedagogical competence of CRE teachers in guiding students through suffering remain limited, particularly within the Indonesian elementary education context. Most existing research focuses on general teacher competence, character education, or pastoral care in church settings, rather than in public school classrooms where Christian educators operate within institutional constraints and religious diversity (Lickona, 2019; Groome, 2011). This gap highlights the need for context-specific research that explores how biblical theology of suffering is translated into

concrete pedagogical practice. This study aims to examine how pedagogical competence based on Genesis 31:42 is manifested in the daily teaching practices of a CRE teacher at SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun Dairi. The study focuses on how the teacher understands suffering theologically, designs learning experiences that respond to students' emotional struggles, and accompanies students through pastoral-pedagogical guidance. By grounding the analysis in both biblical exegesis and educational theory, this research seeks to contribute to the development of a holistic model of Christian pedagogy that integrates cognitive learning, emotional healing, and spiritual formation in the face of human suffering.

METHODS

A qualitative case study design was adopted to examine the pedagogical competence of Christian teachers in guiding students through the reality of human suffering based on the theological perspective of Book of Genesis 31:42 at SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun. The qualitative approach was selected to enable an in-depth exploration of pedagogical practices, theological interpretation, emotional guidance, and spiritual accompaniment as they occur naturally within a real educational setting. The participants of this study consisted of 136 Christian students across various grade levels and 8 Christian teachers, including the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants based on their direct involvement in Christian instruction, mentoring, and student pastoral guidance. The inclusion of multiple teachers allowed the study to capture a broader perspective on how pedagogical competence in addressing suffering is practiced not only within CRE classes but also through interdisciplinary Christian character guidance within the school environment. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Classroom observations were conducted over several instructional sessions to examine teaching strategies related to biblical instruction on suffering, teacher–student interaction patterns, emotional classroom climate, and the integration of faith with students' lived experiences of hardship. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all Christian teachers and a representative group of students to explore their understanding of suffering, their learning experiences related to Genesis 31:42, and their perceptions of teacher guidance in times of emotional difficulty. The interview protocol was developed to capture theological comprehension, pedagogical planning, emotional support strategies, instructional challenges, and perceived student transformation. Document analysis included reflective journals, assessment instruments, and institutional policies related to spiritual and character education. Data analysis was generated inductively from the data and then organized into broader themes such as theological framing of suffering, pedagogical strategies for resilience building, pastoral sensitivity, teacher modeling, and student spiritual response.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study reveal that the pedagogical competence of Christian teachers, particularly the Christian Religious Education (CRE) teacher, in guiding students through experiences of human suffering is expressed through an integrated approach that

combines theological understanding, instructional sensitivity, emotional support, and character formation rooted in Book of Genesis 31:42. The presence of 136 Christian students and 8 Christian teachers within a public-school environment creates a unique educational ecosystem in which faith-based guidance must be exercised with both spiritual depth and institutional sensitivity. Observational data indicate that classroom instruction related to suffering is not delivered as abstract theological content but is contextualized within the real-life struggles experienced by students, including economic hardship, family separation, parental migration, illness, academic pressure, and peer conflict. Teachers consistently frame these experiences within the biblical narrative of Jacob's suffering under Laban, emphasizing that God sees affliction, accompanies the oppressed, and acts justly on behalf of His people. This theological framing becomes the foundation for pedagogical practice, transforming biblical instruction into a living resource for emotional resilience and spiritual meaning-making. From a pedagogical perspective, the CRE teacher demonstrates strong competence in designing learning experiences that are responsive to students' emotional realities. Lesson plans analyzed in this study show that Genesis 31:42 is taught not merely as historical narrative but as a theological lens for interpreting contemporary suffering. Learning objectives consistently include cognitive understanding of the text, affective reflection on God's faithfulness, and behavioral implications for perseverance, forgiveness, and trust in God. Instructional strategies include guided biblical storytelling, reflective journaling, group discussion, role-playing of biblical scenes, and prayer-based reflection. These strategies align with constructivist pedagogy, where students actively construct meaning from Scripture in relation to their lived experiences. During classroom observations, students were encouraged to articulate personal struggles and relate them to Jacob's experience of injustice and divine protection. This dialogical learning environment fosters emotional safety and theological reflection, enabling students to interpret suffering not as divine punishment but as a context for experiencing God's sustaining presence.

The interviews with students reveal that many of them previously perceived suffering primarily as misfortune or personal failure. However, after systematic instruction based on Genesis 31:42, a significant shift in theological understanding emerged. Students increasingly interpreted suffering as part of life's journey in which God remains faithful and attentive. Several students testified that learning about Jacob's suffering helped them reinterpret their own pain, particularly those experiencing parental separation due to economic migration or family conflict. They expressed a growing awareness that God "sees" their struggles, just as He saw Jacob's affliction. This theological internalization indicates that pedagogical competence is not merely measured by content delivery but by the teacher's ability to guide students toward transformative faith understanding. The CRE teacher's consistent emphasis on God's faithfulness and justice (*mišpāṭ*) shapes students' spiritual worldview and emotional resilience. Beyond the CRE classroom, the involvement of other Christian teachers contributes significantly to the development of a school-wide culture of pastoral sensitivity. The eight Christian teachers collaborate informally in identifying students who display signs of emotional distress, withdrawal, or academic decline related to personal suffering. These teachers integrate biblical values into non-religious subjects through moral reinforcement, compassion-oriented classroom management, and personal mentoring. This interdisciplinary expression of pedagogical

competence demonstrates that guiding students through suffering is not limited to formal religious instruction but becomes a shared responsibility within the Christian teaching community. Teachers reported that students who receive consistent emotional affirmation and spiritual encouragement across subjects exhibit higher emotional stability, improved classroom participation, and greater openness in expressing personal challenges. A crucial dimension of pedagogical competence observed in this study is teacher modeling. The teachers' personal attitudes toward suffering significantly influence students' spiritual interpretation of hardship. Observations show that teachers consciously model patience, empathy, prayerfulness, and dependence on God in difficult teaching situations. When confronted with classroom disruption, student conflict, or institutional limitation, teachers respond with calmness and prayerful reflection rather than punitive reactivity. Students repeatedly noted that they learn not only from what teachers say about suffering but also from how teachers live through challenges. This finding confirms the classical Christian pedagogical principle that character is transmitted not merely through instruction but through embodied example. As Jacob's testimony in Genesis 31:42 affirms that God personally intervened in human injustice, teachers' lived testimony becomes a concrete demonstration of trust in divine guidance amid daily struggles.

The emotional guidance dimension of pedagogical competence is also strongly evident in the findings. Teachers employ both formal and informal counseling practices to accompany students through suffering. These include personal conversations after class, prayer sessions with individual students, small-group spiritual mentoring, and parental communication. Several teachers reported that they intentionally make time to listen to students' stories of hardship without judgment, fostering a sense of being seen and valued. This pastoral dimension reflects the theological core of Genesis 31:42, in which God is portrayed as One who sees affliction and responds with justice. Students who participated in these mentoring encounters reported feelings of relief, acceptance, and renewed motivation to learn. This indicates that emotional healing and academic engagement are deeply interconnected and that pedagogical competence in Christian education must address both dimensions simultaneously. From the perspective of spiritual resilience, the study finds that students who receive sustained pedagogical guidance grounded in biblical theology show greater capacity to endure hardship with hope. Students exhibited increased consistency in prayer practices, greater willingness to forgive peers, and more positive attitudes toward academic challenges. While suffering did not disappear from their lives, their capacity to respond to suffering with faith and perseverance grew measurably in qualitative terms. This aligns with the theological message of Genesis 31:42, which presents suffering not as the final determinant of human destiny but as a context in which God's faithfulness is revealed. The pedagogical process thus becomes a means of spiritual formation, shaping students' interpretive frameworks for life's difficulties. In discussing these findings, the study affirms that pedagogical competence in the context of suffering requires the integration of cognitive, affective, and pastoral dimensions. Traditional pedagogical models that prioritize content mastery alone are insufficient for addressing the complex emotional and spiritual realities of students. Instead, what emerges is a holistic pedagogical model in which biblical theology provides the interpretive foundation, instructional strategy shapes learning engagement,

emotional guidance nurtures psychological well-being, and teacher modeling reinforces moral formation. This integrated model reflects the essence of Christian pedagogy as a formative rather than merely informative process. The public-school context presents both challenges and opportunities. Teachers must navigate religious instruction within legal and cultural boundaries while remaining faithful to theological convictions. The study finds that teachers at SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun successfully balance these demands by focusing on universal values derived from biblical theology, such as compassion, justice, perseverance, and gratitude, while maintaining explicit spiritual articulation within approved CRE learning spaces. This pedagogical wisdom allows Christian teachers to provide faith-based guidance without generating institutional or interreligious tension. The respectful coexistence within the pluralistic school environment further models for students how to live out faith compassionately amid diversity.

Genesis 31:42 proves to be a powerful pedagogical text for teaching about suffering. Jacob's experience illustrates that suffering is often caused by injustice, relational exploitation, and power imbalance, realities that resonate with contemporary student experiences in different forms. The text also affirms that God's faithfulness operates not only through miraculous intervention but through sustained presence and moral vindication over time. This theological nuance helps students develop a mature faith that is not dependent on immediate relief but grounded in long-term trust in God's justice. Teachers who master this theological depth demonstrate advanced pedagogical competence because they are able to translate complex doctrinal themes into age-appropriate spiritual guidance. The study also reveals that students' understanding of God evolves through this pedagogical process. Initially, many students held a transactional view of God, believing that obedience should result in immediate blessing and that suffering signaled divine displeasure. Through sustained engagement with Genesis 31:42 and guided reflection, students progressively adopted a relational and covenantal understanding of God as faithful even in adversity. This theological maturation is a significant indicator of successful Christian pedagogy, as it reflects not only knowledge acquisition but worldview transformation. The findings also identify several challenges. Teachers face time limitations, large class sizes, and limited access to professional training in pastoral counseling. Some teachers reported emotional fatigue due to the cumulative burden of accompanying many students through diverse forms of suffering. These challenges underscore the need for institutional support, continuous professional development, and collaborative pastoral networks among Christian educators. Pedagogical competence in the context of suffering cannot rely solely on individual dedication but must be supported by systemic capacity building. The results of this study demonstrate that the pedagogical competence of Christian teachers at SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun in guiding students through suffering is expressed through: strong theological grounding in Genesis 31:42, responsive and reflective instructional strategies, pastoral sensitivity in emotional accompaniment, consistent teacher modeling of faith and endurance, and collaborative Christian teaching culture. These dimensions work synergistically to foster students' spiritual resilience, emotional stability, and moral growth. The discussion confirms that Christian pedagogy in the context of human suffering is most effective when it integrates biblical exegesis, educational psychology,

and lived spiritual practice. This integration enables suffering to be reframed from a purely negative experience into a formative space for encountering God's sustaining presence and justice.

CONCLUSION

This study has demonstrated that pedagogical competence in Christian Religious Education is not limited to the mastery of instructional techniques, but fundamentally involves the ability of teachers to guide students spiritually and emotionally in the face of human suffering. Grounded in the theological message of Book of Genesis 31:42, which affirms God's faithful presence and just intervention amid oppression and affliction, the pedagogical practices observed in this study reveal a holistic model of Christian education that integrates biblical understanding, emotional accompaniment, character formation, and spiritual resilience. Within the context of SD No. 034785 Batu Gun-gun, where 136 Christian students and eight Christian teachers interact in a pluralistic public-school environment, pedagogical competence emerges as a living ministry of teaching, caring, and forming faith through daily educational encounters. The findings confirm that effective Christian pedagogy in the context of suffering requires an intentional integration of theological reflection and pedagogical strategy. Teachers who interpret suffering through the biblical narrative of God's faithfulness are better equipped to help students reframe their personal struggles within a redemptive horizon. Through reflective biblical instruction, dialogical learning, pastoral conversations, and prayerful accompaniment, students are guided not only to understand suffering cognitively but also to respond to it spiritually and emotionally. This process fosters spiritual maturity, emotional stability, and moral perseverance among students who live amid various forms of vulnerability.

This study highlights the critical role of teacher modeling as a core dimension of pedagogical competence. Students learn the meaning of faith in suffering not merely from biblical texts but from the lived witness of teachers who embody patience, compassion, trust in God, and emotional wisdom in daily school life. The collaborative involvement of Christian teachers across subjects also strengthens a school culture of care and spiritual sensitivity, showing that guiding students through suffering is a shared educational and pastoral responsibility rather than an isolated task of the Christian Religious Education teacher alone. This study also identifies structural and professional challenges, including limited time, large student populations, emotional burdens on teachers, and the lack of formal training in pastoral counseling. These challenges indicate that pedagogical competence in the context of suffering must be supported by continuous professional development, institutional commitment, and cooperative networks among Christian educators. Without such support, the sustainability and effectiveness of pastoral-pedagogical ministry in public schools may be compromised. This research affirms that Christian pedagogy grounded in Genesis 31:42 offers a powerful theological and educational framework for guiding students through human suffering. When pedagogical competence is exercised holistically, integrating biblical exegesis, instructional design, emotional guidance, and personal modeling, Christian education becomes a transformative space where suffering is not merely endured but interpreted as a formative journey of faith. This study contributes to the growing body of Christian

educational research by demonstrating that the classroom can function not only as a place of knowledge transmission but also as a sacred space of spiritual accompaniment, healing, and hope in the midst of life's hardships.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Darling-Hammond, L. (2017). *Teaching for deeper learning: Preparing educators for the changing world*. Harvard Education Press.
- Estep, J. R., Jr., & Kim, J. H. (2018). *Christian formation: Integrating theology and human development*. B&H Academic.
- Garbarino, J. (2017). *Children and trauma: The role of the family and community*. Oxford University Press.
- Groome, T. H. (2011). *Will there be faith? A new vision for educating and growing disciples*. HarperOne.
- Lickona, T. (2019). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. Bantam Books.
- Masten, A. S. (2018). *Ordinary magic: Resilience in development*. Guilford Press.
- Nainggolan, J. M. (2016). *Pendidikan agama Kristen dalam masyarakat majemuk*. BPK Gunung Mulia.
- Pazmiño, R. W. (2008). *Foundational issues in Christian education: An introduction in evangelical perspective* (3rd ed.). Baker Academic.
- Shulman, L. S. (1986). Those who understand: Knowledge growth in teaching. *Educational Researcher* 15(2), 4-14. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X015002004>
- Suryadarma, D., & Jones, G. W. (2013). *Education in Indonesia*. ISEAS Publishing.
- Wolterstorff, N. (2004). *Educating for life: Reflections on Christian teaching and learning*. Baker Academic.
- Yehuda, R. (2015). The biology of stress and resilience: Implications for prevention and treatment. *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology* 11, 145-172. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev-clinpsy-032814-112733>