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Parables as Pedagogical Tools in Christian Religious Education: Insights for CRE Teachers from Matthew 13 at SD Swasta Batas Marubi

Bosar Sudirman Lubis

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

* correspondence: bosar.sudirman50@guru.sd.belajar.id

ABSTRACT

This study explores the pedagogical significance of biblical parables as instructional tools in Christian Religious Education (CRE), focusing on insights drawn from Gospel of Matthew chapter 13 and their implementation at SD Swasta Batas Marubi. The research is motivated by the need to strengthen faith-based pedagogy that not only transmits biblical knowledge but also shapes students' character and spiritual maturity. The study involved 31 Christian students, supported by one Christian classroom teacher and one CRE teacher. Using a qualitative case study design combined with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, document analysis, and reflective field notes. The findings reveal that parable-based instruction significantly enhances students' understanding of theological concepts, stimulates moral reflection, and nurtures spiritual awareness. Parables such as the Sower, the Weeds, the Mustard Seed, and the Hidden Treasure were found to be particularly effective in cultivating values of perseverance, discernment, patience, humility, and commitment to God's kingdom. The effectiveness of this approach is strongly influenced by the pedagogical competence of teachers, especially in narrative communication, contextualization, dialogical engagement, and spiritual modeling. Teachers' lived example emerged as a central factor in enabling students to internalize biblical values meaningfully. This study concludes that parables are not merely narrative teaching strategies but transformative pedagogical instruments that integrate cognitive, affective, moral, and spiritual dimensions of learning. The results contribute to the development of contextual Christian pedagogy, especially in elementary education, by offering an empirically grounded and biblically rooted model of parable-based instruction suitable for pluralistic educational settings.

Keywords: *Parables, Christian Religious Education, Pedagogical Tools*

INTRODUCTION

Teaching in Christian Religious Education (CRE) demands not only doctrinal accuracy but also pedagogical creativity that enables students to internalize faith in meaningful and transformative ways. Among the various teaching methods employed by Jesus, parables

stand out as one of the most powerful and enduring pedagogical tools. Parables function not merely as illustrative stories but as formative instruments that invite learners into deep reflection, decision-making, and spiritual transformation. In contemporary Christian education, especially within public and private elementary school contexts, parables offer an effective pedagogical bridge between biblical truth and the lived experiences of young learners. This study explores the use of parables as pedagogical tools based on Gospel of Matthew chapter 13 and its implications for CRE teachers at SD Swasta Batas Marubi, where 31 Christian students are guided by one Christian classroom teacher and one CRE teacher. Parables align closely with constructivist and narrative-based learning theories, which emphasize meaning-making through stories, dialogue, and students' active engagement with content. Children at the elementary level learn most effectively when abstract theological concepts are presented through concrete narratives, symbols, and life-related illustrations. Parables stimulate imagination, moral reasoning, emotional engagement, and spiritual reflection simultaneously. Therefore, for CRE teachers, especially those ministering in contexts with limited instructional resources and small teaching teams, the parabolic method offers a powerful and accessible teaching strategy that can nurture both biblical knowledge and Christian character.

Matthew 13 is the longest collection of Jesus' parables in the New Testament and represents a climactic moment in His teaching ministry. It includes the Parable of the Sower, the Weeds among the Wheat, the Mustard Seed, the Leaven, the Hidden Treasure, the Pearl of Great Price, and the Net. Exegetically, these parables are centered on the theme of the "kingdom of heaven" (*basileia tōn ouranōn*), which in Matthew's Gospel represents God's sovereign rule breaking into human history through Christ. The Parable of the Sower (Matt. 13:1-23), for example, emphasizes the condition of the human heart as the determining factor in receiving God's word, while the Parable of the Mustard Seed (Matt. 13:31-32) highlights the mysterious yet powerful growth of God's kingdom from small beginnings. These narratives offer rich pedagogical content for teaching children about faith, perseverance, discipleship, moral discernment, and hope. From a Christological and pedagogical perspective, Jesus' deliberate use of parables reveals an educational strategy that both reveals and conceals truth. Matthew 13:10-15 records Jesus explaining that parables are given to reveal the mysteries of the kingdom to receptive hearts while simultaneously challenging those who are spiritually indifferent. This dynamic underscores that learning in Christian education is not merely a cognitive process but also a spiritual one that involves openness, humility, and moral responsiveness. For CRE teachers, this means that teaching through parables is not only about storytelling technique but also about nurturing the spiritual posture of students so that they may become good "soil" for God's word. In the Indonesian educational context, particularly in small private schools such as SD Swasta Batas Marubi, CRE teachers face unique challenges. With only 31 Christian students and a limited number of Christian educators, teachers often carry multiple roles as instructors, mentors, and spiritual guides. The effectiveness of their pedagogy greatly depends on their ability to deliver biblical truth in ways that are engaging, contextually meaningful, and developmentally appropriate. Many students come from rural and semi-rural backgrounds where access to rich theological resources is limited, making narrative-based biblical pedagogy, such as teaching through parables, especially relevant and practical. Empirical studies that

specifically examine their pedagogical implementation in contemporary CRE classrooms remain relatively limited, particularly at the elementary school level in Indonesia. Most existing studies focus on theological interpretation of parables or general Christian teaching methods, without sufficiently exploring how parables function as concrete instructional tools in everyday classroom practice. This gap calls for research that integrates biblical exegesis with educational analysis in real school settings. Therefore, this study aims to examine how the parables in Matthew 13 are utilized as pedagogical tools by CRE teachers at SD Swasta Batas Marubi and how these parables shape students' understanding of faith, character, and discipleship. By grounding the analysis in both sound exegesis and classroom practice, this research seeks to contribute to the development of a biblically rooted and pedagogically effective model of Christian Religious Education for elementary learners in contemporary Indonesian contexts.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative case study design integrated with a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) to examine the use of parables as pedagogical tools in Christian Religious Education (CRE) based on Gospel of Matthew chapter 13 at SD Swasta Batas Marubi. The case study approach was chosen to capture in-depth pedagogical practices within a real classroom context, while the SLR was conducted to strengthen the theoretical and empirical foundation of the findings. The participants in this study consisted of 31 Christian students, one Christian classroom teacher, and one CRE teacher who were directly involved in the teaching and learning process during the academic year of the study. Purposive sampling was used to ensure that participants had direct experience with parable-based instruction in CRE. The SLR followed four main stages: identification, screening, eligibility, and inclusion. Scholarly articles and books published between 2010 and 2024 were systematically searched through databases such as Google Scholar, ERIC, Semantic Scholar, and DOAJ using keywords including "parable pedagogy," "Matthew 13," "Christian Religious Education," "biblical narrative in education," and "faith-based pedagogy." Inclusion criteria focused on peer-reviewed studies, biblical education research, and pedagogical analyses directly related to parables and narrative-based learning, while non-empirical opinion papers without methodological clarity were excluded. Primary qualitative data for the case study were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, and document analysis. Observations were conducted in several CRE learning sessions to examine how parables from Matthew 13 were presented, how students engaged with the narratives, and how teachers facilitated reflection, discussion, and moral application. The focus of observation included instructional strategies, classroom interaction patterns, use of storytelling techniques, student participation, and the integration of cognitive, affective, and behavioral learning domains. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the CRE teacher, the Christian classroom teacher, and selected students to explore their perceptions of the effectiveness of parable-based instruction, students' spiritual understanding, and character formation outcomes. Document analysis included the review of lesson plans, syllabi, teaching modules, student worksheets, reflective journals, and assessment instruments related to parable-based learning. Data from classroom observations, interviews, and documents were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis through stages of open coding,

categorization, and theme development. Findings from the SLR were then used as a comparative analytical framework to interpret and validate the empirical results from the case study. To ensure trustworthiness, the study applied triangulation of data sources, member checking with teachers, prolonged engagement, and detailed methodological documentation. Ethical considerations were strictly observed through institutional permission, informed consent from teachers and students' guardians, confidentiality, and anonymization of all participant identities.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that the parables recorded in Gospel of Matthew chapter 13 function as highly effective pedagogical tools in Christian Religious Education (CRE) at SD Swasta Batas Marubi, where 31 Christian students are guided by one Christian classroom teacher and one CRE teacher. Both the empirical classroom data and the SLR results confirm that parable-based pedagogy fosters holistic learning that integrates cognitive understanding, emotional engagement, moral discernment, and spiritual formation. Observation data show that students displayed significantly higher levels of attention, participation, and reflective thinking when learning was delivered through parabolic narratives compared to conventional lecture-based instruction. Students were more willing to ask questions, share personal experiences, and relate biblical truth to daily life when lessons were framed as stories rather than abstract doctrines. From a cognitive learning perspective, the use of parables enhanced students' biblical comprehension. Teachers consistently used the Parable of the Sower as an entry point for teaching about receptivity to God's word, self-examination, and the importance of perseverance. Students were able to identify the four types of soil and associate each with real-life attitudes toward learning, obedience, and discipline. The SLR findings support this result, showing that narrative-based biblical instruction significantly improves students' recall, conceptual understanding, and interpretive skills because stories activate both analytical and imaginative cognitive processes. The integration of metaphor and concrete imagery in parables enables young learners to grasp complex theological ideas in developmentally appropriate ways. The CRE teacher's ability to guide students from narrative comprehension to theological reflection illustrates strong pedagogical competence in scaffolding learning from the concrete to the abstract.

Affective engagement emerged as one of the most significant outcomes of parable-based pedagogy. Students displayed emotional resonance with the characters, symbols, and conflicts embedded in the parables. For example, during the lesson on the Parable of the Weeds among the Wheat, students expressed feelings of frustration toward injustice and moral confusion, which led naturally to discussions on patience, divine justice, and self-control. The teachers facilitated these emotional responses through reflective questioning, personal storytelling, and small-group discussions. This result aligns with the SLR literature indicating that parables function as affective learning instruments that stimulate empathy, moral emotion, and internal motivation. Students do not merely learn about values; they feel the tension and ethical struggle within the narrative, which deepens moral internalization. The parables in Matthew 13 proved to be powerful tools for nurturing faith awareness and discipleship orientation. The themes of the kingdom of heaven, spiritual growth, hidden value, and final judgment fostered students' sense of

belonging to God's purposes. The Parable of the Mustard Seed and the Leaven were particularly effective in shaping students' understanding of spiritual growth as a gradual, often unseen process. Students conveyed an emerging awareness that small acts of faith, kindness, and obedience have long-term spiritual significance. This reflects the SLR conclusion that parables are not merely moralistic tools but vehicles for shaping a kingdom-centered worldview. The teachers' consistent emphasis that the kingdom begins in the heart helped students reinterpret their daily school routines—learning, discipline, friendship, and responsibility—as part of their spiritual formation. The two Christian teachers demonstrated strong competence in selecting, sequencing, and implementing parables as instructional media. Teaching methods observed included narrative storytelling, guided imagination, dramatization, drawing activities, reflective journaling, and dialogical questioning. These strategies align closely with active learning and constructivist pedagogy, where students become co-constructors of meaning. SLR findings indicate that such methods belong to best practices in narrative-based religious education, as they integrate auditory, visual, kinesthetic, and reflective learning modalities. Students with varying academic abilities were able to participate meaningfully, demonstrating that parables function as inclusive pedagogical tools that minimize learning barriers.

The collaborative role between the Christian classroom teacher and the CRE teacher also emerged as a critical success factor. Although only one teacher had a formal CRE assignment, the classroom teacher consistently reinforced parabolic values during general lessons, classroom discipline, and daily interactions. For instance, when addressing honesty in examinations or patience in group work, the teacher made explicit references to the mustard seed and hidden treasure as metaphors for integrity and perseverance. This interdisciplinary reinforcement strengthened the internalization of biblical values because students encountered the same spiritual principles across different learning contexts. SLR studies confirm that cross-subject spiritual reinforcement significantly enhances character formation and prevents the compartmentalization of faith as merely a “religion class” issue. Teacher modeling was another decisive dimension of pedagogical effectiveness. Students repeatedly stated in interviews that they learned more about patience, forgiveness, and humility from observing how teachers handled conflict than from verbal instruction alone. When teachers responded to classroom disruptions with calmness, dialogue, and prayer rather than anger, students associated these behaviors with the moral principles taught in the parables. This finding corroborates SLR literature which emphasizes that narrative pedagogy must be embodied in the teacher's life for transformative learning to occur. Parables are not solely instructional content; they become formative when they are mirrored in lived practice.

From a character education perspective, the parables produced measurable qualitative changes in students' moral attitudes and social behavior. Teachers reported noticeable improvements in students' honesty, cooperation, empathy, and self-discipline over the course of the semester. Students became more willing to apologize after conflicts, help peers who struggled academically, and persist in completing tasks despite difficulty. These behavioral shifts were most evident after the sustained teaching of the Parables of the Good and Bad Soil and the Net, which emphasize accountability and moral discernment.

SLR findings strongly support this outcome, concluding that parable-based pedagogy promotes internal moral regulation rather than external behavioral compliance. In terms of student faith development, the data reveal a transition from a surface-level understanding of Christianity toward a more reflective and personal faith orientation. Initially, many students associated Christianity mainly with rules, memorization, and ritual. After engaging deeply with the parables, students increasingly spoke about faith as a personal relationship with God, a moral calling, and a source of hope. This shift reflects the theological depth of Matthew 13, where Jesus does not define the kingdom in institutional terms but in relational, transformative dynamics. SLR sources emphasize that parables facilitate this type of faith maturation because they invite learners into interpretive participation rather than passive reception.

The socio-cultural context of SD Swasta Batas Marubi significantly shaped the pedagogical impact of parables. Many students come from rural families engaged in agriculture, small trade, and manual labor. Teachers intentionally contextualized the parables using agricultural imagery familiar to students, such as seeds, soil, harvest, and fishing nets. This contextualization strengthened comprehension and relevance. For example, students whose parents worked as farmers deeply resonated with the Parable of the Sower because they had firsthand experience observing soil conditions and crop growth. The SLR literature affirms that parables achieve maximum pedagogical effectiveness when contextual bridges are constructed between the biblical world and the learners' social world. Time constraints within the weekly CRE schedule limited the depth of exegetical exploration. Teachers occasionally simplified theological content due to students' limited attention spans or curricular pressures. Furthermore, the absence of structured teaching materials specifically designed for parable-based instruction required teachers to rely heavily on their personal creativity and biblical literacy. The SLR findings similarly report that parable-based pedagogy is highly effective but demands strong teacher competence in biblical interpretation, storytelling technique, and classroom facilitation. Without adequate training, parables risk being reduced to moral tales without theological depth. Teachers also reported difficulty in measuring spiritual and character outcomes using conventional academic evaluation tools. While cognitive understanding could be assessed through worksheets and oral questioning, the internalization of values such as humility, perseverance, and faithfulness required observational and reflective assessment approaches. This aligns with SLR conclusions that affective and spiritual outcomes necessitate qualitative and formative assessment models rather than standardized testing.

The results confirm that Matthew 13 offers a comprehensive pedagogical framework for CRE. The kingdom of heaven is presented as: a call to receptivity (Sower), a context of moral complexity (Weeds), a process of hidden growth (Mustard Seed and Leaven), an object of ultimate value (Treasure and Pearl), and a reality of eschatological accountability (Net). These dimensions collectively shape a balanced theology of discipleship that integrates grace, responsibility, patience, sacrifice, and judgment. When conveyed through age-appropriate pedagogy, these themes function as a moral-spiritual curriculum that is far richer than rule-based instruction. This study reinforces the notion that Jesus' teaching method represents a model of transformative education. The parabolic approach respects the learner's freedom, stimulates interpretive struggle, and invites

moral response without coercion. This contrasts sharply with didactic moralism that seeks immediate behavioral conformity. The CRE teachers at SD Swasta Batas Marubi successfully adopted this pedagogical spirit by allowing students space to think, question, and internalize rather than merely recite correct answers. SLR evidence confirms that such dialogical pedagogy is foundational for deep faith formation. The presence of only two Christian teachers highlights both vulnerability and strength. On one hand, the limited number of educators increases workload and pedagogical pressure. On the other hand, strong collaboration and shared spiritual vision create coherence and consistency in faith-based guidance. This duality illustrates that pedagogical effectiveness depends not merely on quantity of personnel but on quality of commitment, theological clarity, and pedagogical synergy. The integration of SLR findings with classroom evidence demonstrates that parables from Matthew 13 operate as multidimensional pedagogical instruments that shape students' minds, hearts, behaviors, and spiritual identities. The results confirm five core pedagogical functions of parables in CRE: cognitive scaffolding of abstract theology, affective engagement and moral emotion, character formation and behavioral transformation, spiritual worldview construction, and community-based reinforcement through teacher modeling and interdisciplinary collaboration. These dimensions work synergistically to produce holistic Christian education. The findings affirm that parable-based pedagogy is not merely a teaching technique but a theological-pedagogical paradigm rooted in the teaching ministry of Jesus Himself. When faithfully implemented by competent CRE teachers, parables become living instruments of spiritual formation, enabling students to encounter the kingdom of heaven not only as biblical content but as a lived reality shaping their daily decisions, relationships, and moral commitments.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the parables in Gospel of Matthew 13 function as powerful and effective pedagogical tools in Christian Religious Education (CRE) when implemented through competent, reflective, and spiritually grounded teaching. In the context of SD Swasta Batas Marubi, where 31 Christian students are guided by one Christian classroom teacher and one CRE teacher, parable-based pedagogy has proven capable of fostering holistic learning that integrates cognitive understanding, affective engagement, moral development, and spiritual formation. The findings demonstrate that parables are not merely narrative teaching aids but formative instruments that shape students' worldview, character, and faith orientation. The integration of empirical classroom data with the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) confirms that parable-based instruction enhances students' comprehension of biblical truths, stimulates emotional and moral reflection, and nurtures a kingdom-centered understanding of life. The parables of the Sower, the Weeds, the Mustard Seed, the Treasure, and the Net collectively construct a theological-pedagogical framework that teaches receptivity, patience, perseverance, discernment, sacrifice, and accountability. When these parables are communicated through dialogical, contextual, and participatory methods, students do not merely memorize biblical content but internalize spiritual values that influence their daily behavior and social relationships.

This study highlights that pedagogical competence in CRE is not limited to mastery of instructional techniques but also includes the teacher's capacity for biblical interpretation, narrative communication, emotional guidance, and moral-spiritual modeling. The lived example of teachers emerged as a decisive factor in the success of parable-based pedagogy. Students most strongly internalized the values of humility, integrity, patience, and faithfulness when these virtues were consistently embodied by their teachers in daily classroom practice. This affirms that Christian pedagogy is fundamentally incarnational in nature, truth is not only taught but also lived. The findings reveal that effective CRE in small-school contexts is possible when strong collaboration exists between Christian educators, even when personnel are limited. The synergy between the classroom teacher and the CRE teacher at SD Swasta Batas Marubi enabled the reinforcement of biblical values across subjects and daily interactions, preventing the fragmentation of faith learning into a single religious subject. This integrative approach strengthens the sustainability of students' spiritual formation within the school culture. The study also acknowledges enduring challenges, particularly in the areas of time allocation, limited teaching resources, teacher training in narrative pedagogy, and the assessment of spiritual and character outcomes. These challenges underscore the need for systematic professional development for CRE teachers, the provision of structured parable-based learning resources, and the adoption of formative and qualitative assessment models that are sensitive to spiritual growth. This research affirms that the parables of Matthew 13 offer not only theological insight but also a robust pedagogical paradigm for contemporary Christian education. When applied through competent and reflective teaching, parables become transformative instruments that shape students' minds, hearts, and lives. This study contributes to the field of Christian education by providing an empirically grounded and biblically rooted model of parable-based pedagogy that is particularly relevant for elementary education in Indonesian contexts.

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