

Cultivating Students' Empathy through Christian Social Pedagogy: A Study of Genesis 34:1-2 at SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas

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ABSTRACT

Empathy is a foundational moral value in Christian education, yet its cultivation among students requires intentional pedagogical strategies that integrate biblical reflection with relational practice. This study examines how students' empathy can be cultivated through Christian social pedagogy by reflecting on Genesis 34:1-2, the narrative of Dinah, within the context of SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, Seruyan. Employing a qualitative research design, the study combines a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with simple semi-structured interviews to explore the role of teacher social competence in mediating biblical narratives for moral formation. The SLR synthesizes contemporary scholarship on empathy education, teacher social competence, and narrative-based Christian pedagogy, while the interviews provide contextual insights from Christian teachers serving a minority group of 26 Christian students in a public-school setting. The findings reveal that empathy development is most effective when biblical texts are taught not merely as doctrinal content but as ethical narratives that invite emotional engagement, moral reflection, and relational awareness. Genesis 34:1-2 functions as a powerful pedagogical resource by exposing vulnerability, injustice, and the consequences of disregarding human dignity. The study further shows that teacher social competence, expressed through emotional attentiveness, respectful communication, and ethical consistency, significantly influences students' capacity to internalize empathetic values. This research concludes that Christian social pedagogy grounded in Scripture can meaningfully contribute to students' empathy formation when supported by socially competent teaching. By integrating biblical narrative, pedagogical skill, and relational modeling, Christian Religious Education can foster compassionate, ethically aware, and socially responsible students within diverse educational contexts.

Keywords: Social Pedagogy, Christian Religious Education, Empathy

INTRODUCTION

Empathy has emerged as a critical moral and social virtue in contemporary education, particularly in learning environments characterized by diversity, vulnerability, and rapid social change. In school contexts, empathy enables students to recognize the feelings of

others, respond with compassion, and build respectful relationships across differences. However, numerous studies indicate that students today increasingly struggle with empathetic awareness due to factors such as excessive digital engagement, declining face-to-face interaction, peer competition, and reduced moral guidance within families. These challenges are particularly evident among adolescents, who are in a formative stage of emotional, moral, and social development. In response to this condition, value-based education plays an essential role in restoring empathy as a lived ethical practice rather than a merely abstract ideal. Christian Religious Education (CRE) offers a distinctive contribution to empathy formation by grounding moral development in biblical narratives, theological reflection, and relational pedagogy. Within Christian education, empathy is not understood merely as emotional sensitivity but as a moral posture rooted in love for others, respect for human dignity, and responsibility toward the vulnerable. Scripture consistently affirms empathy as a core expression of faith, manifested through compassion, justice, and relational care. Consequently, CRE classrooms become strategic spaces for shaping students' empathetic character through both instruction and example. The effectiveness of this process, however, is closely linked to the social competence of CRE teachers, who function not only as instructors but also as relational models and moral facilitators.

Social competence in teaching refers to the ability to communicate effectively, demonstrate emotional sensitivity, manage interpersonal relationships, and foster a supportive learning environment. For CRE teachers, social competence acquires an added theological dimension, as their interactions with students are expected to reflect Christian values such as compassion, patience, humility, and respect. When teachers demonstrate empathetic engagement, students are more likely to internalize empathy as a meaningful and actionable value. Conversely, when social competence is weak, moral instruction risks becoming disconnected from students' lived experiences. Therefore, examining how social competence operates within Christian pedagogy is essential for understanding how empathy can be cultivated authentically in school settings. Genesis 34:1-2 provides a compelling biblical narrative for reflecting on empathy within Christian education. The passage recounts the story of Dinah, whose vulnerability and suffering are often overshadowed by subsequent acts of violence and honor-driven responses. From a pedagogical perspective, this narrative invites ethical reflection on human dignity, power imbalance, emotional awareness, and the moral responsibility to respond to suffering with empathy rather than exploitation or indifference. Although frequently approached from a historical or moralistic angle, Genesis 34:1-2 offers rich potential as a teaching resource for developing students' empathetic awareness, particularly when guided by socially competent educators who can navigate the narrative with sensitivity and care. In the context of Indonesian public schools, where Christian students often represent a minority, the role of CRE teachers becomes increasingly significant. SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, Seruyan, presents a meaningful locus for this study. With 26 Christian students and five Christian teachers, including a CRE teacher, the school operates within a multicultural environment that requires careful negotiation of values, relationships, and emotional expression. In such a setting, the cultivation of empathy is not only a religious objective but also a social necessity for maintaining harmony and mutual respect. CRE teachers are challenged to translate biblical values into inclusive pedagogical practices that resonate

with students' real-life experiences. Limited research has explored how specific biblical narratives are pedagogically mediated through teacher social competence in public-school contexts. Particularly scarce are studies that integrate Old Testament narratives, teacher relational skills, and student empathy formation within Christian Religious Education. This gap underscores the need for research that connects biblical exegesis with pedagogical practice and social interaction. This study aims to explore how students' empathy can be cultivated through Christian social pedagogy by reflecting on Genesis 34:1-2 within the CRE context at SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, Seruyan. The study focuses on how the social competence of CRE teachers shapes the interpretation and application of biblical narratives in fostering empathetic attitudes among students. By integrating biblical reflection, educational theory, and contextual analysis, this research seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of empathy formation as an essential outcome of Christian education in contemporary school settings.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrates a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) with a simple, complementary interview to examine how students' empathy can be cultivated through Christian social pedagogy, particularly through the interpretation of Genesis 34:1-2 in Christian Religious Education (CRE). The methodological framework was chosen to ensure theological depth, conceptual rigor, and contextual relevance, allowing the study to connect biblical interpretation with pedagogical practice in a public-school environment. The primary methodological foundation of the study is the SLR, which enables a structured synthesis of scholarly perspectives on empathy formation, teacher social competence, and Christian pedagogy, while the interview component functions as contextual validation rather than as a primary source of empirical generalization. The SLR followed established qualitative review procedures, beginning with the identification of relevant academic literature published between 2014 and 2024. The initial search yielded 92 sources, including peer-reviewed journal articles, theological commentaries, and academic books. These sources were then screened based on relevance, methodological quality, and conceptual alignment with the research focus. Exclusion criteria included non-peer-reviewed publications, studies lacking pedagogical or ethical relevance, and works that did not engage explicitly with empathy, teacher competence, or biblical moral formation. After abstract and full-text screening, 31 high-quality sources were selected for in-depth analysis. The selected literature was analyzed thematically to identify recurring concepts related to empathy development, social competence in teaching, narrative-based moral education, and the pedagogical use of biblical texts. Special attention was given to studies that emphasize relational pedagogy, emotional intelligence, and moral modeling within Christian education. This thematic synthesis provided the analytical framework for interpreting Genesis 34:1-2 as a pedagogical resource for empathy formation, highlighting how biblical narratives can be ethically mediated through teacher-student interaction rather than presented merely as historical accounts. In addition to the SLR, the study incorporated a simple semi-structured interview with two Christian teachers at SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, Seruyan, including the CRE teacher. The school context includes 26 Christian students and five Christian teachers, making it a focused and meaningful setting for examining empathy cultivation within a minority religious group in a public school. The interview was designed

as a supplementary component to enrich the literature-based findings with contextual insights from educational practitioners. Interview questions focused on teachers' experiences in teaching empathy, their approaches to discussing sensitive biblical narratives, perceived challenges in fostering empathetic attitudes among students, and the role of teacher-student relationships in moral formation. Interviews were conducted informally, either in person or online, and verbal consent was obtained from participants. The data from the interviews were not treated as standalone empirical evidence but were used to triangulate and contextualize themes emerging from the SLR. This approach ensured that theoretical insights from the literature resonated with the lived realities of CRE teaching in SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas. By combining a rigorous SLR with limited practitioner input, this methodological design maintains analytical depth while remaining sensitive to the specific educational and cultural context of the research site. The integration of biblical exegesis, educational theory, and teacher experience provides a comprehensive framework for understanding how empathy can be nurtured through Christian social pedagogy in contemporary school settings.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study, derived from a synthesis of the Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and contextual insights from simple interviews with Christian teachers at SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, Seruyan, reveal that the cultivation of students' empathy in Christian Religious Education (CRE) is deeply influenced by the social competence of teachers and the pedagogical mediation of biblical narratives. Genesis 34:1-2, which recounts the vulnerable experience of Dinah, functions as a powerful ethical text that invites reflection on empathy, human dignity, and relational responsibility. When interpreted through a Christian social pedagogical lens, this narrative provides more than historical information; it becomes a formative medium through which students are guided to recognize emotional suffering, moral boundaries, and compassionate responses within social relationships. The SLR demonstrates a strong consensus that empathy is not an innate trait that automatically develops with age, but a moral capacity that must be intentionally nurtured through relational interaction, narrative engagement, and ethical modeling. Educational studies emphasize that empathy formation in adolescents requires exposure to moral stories that evoke emotional awareness, combined with guided reflection facilitated by socially competent teachers. Within Christian pedagogy, empathy is further grounded in theological anthropology, which affirms the inherent dignity of every human being as created in the image of God. Genesis 34:1-2 presents a narrative context in which dignity is violated, silence is imposed on the victim, and moral disorder unfolds through the absence of empathetic restraint. This narrative, when responsibly mediated, allows students to confront uncomfortable realities about suffering and injustice, fostering moral sensitivity rather than moral indifference.

In the context of SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, where 26 Christian students are taught by five Christian teachers in a public-school environment, the teachers' social competence plays a decisive role in shaping how such a sensitive biblical text is received. Interview data reveal that students initially approach the Dinah narrative with confusion or emotional distance, often perceiving it as an ancient story disconnected from their daily experiences.

However, when teachers employ relational pedagogy, using empathetic language, attentive listening, and contextual analogies, students begin to recognize parallels between the biblical narrative and contemporary social realities such as bullying, peer pressure, emotional neglect, and gender-based vulnerability. This pedagogical process transforms the text from a distant narrative into a mirror that reflects students' own relational environments. The SLR indicates that teacher social competence consists of several interconnected dimensions: emotional awareness, respectful communication, ethical sensitivity, and the ability to create a psychologically safe learning environment. These competencies are essential when teaching narratives that involve trauma or moral violation. Teachers who lack social competence risk either trivializing the narrative or presenting it in a way that reinforces fear or moral confusion. In contrast, socially competent teachers guide students through reflective dialogue, helping them articulate feelings of sadness, injustice, anger, or compassion evoked by the text. At SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, teachers reported that when students were invited to express how they would feel if they were in Dinah's position, or how they might respond if a friend experienced similar harm, classroom discussions became more emotionally engaged and morally reflective.

A key finding from both the literature and interviews is that empathy is most effectively cultivated when students are encouraged to move beyond cognitive understanding toward affective and behavioral awareness. Genesis 34:1-2 does not explicitly command empathy, but it implicitly demands moral response by exposing the consequences of disregarded dignity. Teachers who highlight this implicit ethical demand help students develop moral imagination, the ability to perceive another person's suffering and respond with compassion. Interviewed teachers noted that students began to demonstrate greater sensitivity in peer interactions after such lessons, showing increased awareness of emotional boundaries and a greater willingness to listen to classmates who appeared withdrawn or distressed. While these changes are subtle and gradual, they reflect the internalization of empathetic values rather than mere compliance with behavioral rules. The SLR further reveals that empathy education in Christian contexts must balance emotional engagement with theological clarity. Genesis 34:1-2 must be interpreted carefully to avoid misplacing blame or normalizing injustice. Teachers' social competence becomes critical in framing the narrative in a way that affirms the victim's dignity and condemns exploitation without resorting to moral sensationalism. At SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, teachers emphasized the importance of affirming that suffering is never divinely sanctioned and that empathy involves standing with those who are harmed. This theological framing aligns with broader biblical ethics that emphasize justice, compassion, and protection of the vulnerable, reinforcing empathy as a core Christian virtue rather than an optional emotional response. Another significant result concerns the relational impact of teacher modeling on empathy formation. The SLR consistently highlights that students learn empathy not only through what teachers say, but through how teachers relate to them. Teachers who demonstrate patience, fairness, and attentiveness provide living examples of empathetic behavior. Interviews confirm that students at SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas are highly observant of teachers' interactions, noting whether teachers listen respectfully, respond calmly to mistakes, and treat all students with dignity. When teachers embody empathy in their daily conduct, students are more receptive to

empathetic lessons derived from biblical narratives. This reinforces the notion that teacher social competence functions as a moral curriculum that operates alongside formal instruction. The study also reveals contextual challenges that shape empathy education in a rural Indonesian setting. Teachers reported that some students come from family environments where emotional expression is limited, and authority structures discourage open discussion of feelings. In such contexts, empathy may be undervalued or misunderstood as weakness. The SLR supports this observation, noting that cultural norms significantly influence how empathy is expressed and interpreted. Christian social pedagogy must therefore be culturally sensitive, affirming empathy as a strength that enhances relational harmony rather than undermining respect or discipline. Genesis 34:1-2 provides an opportunity to challenge harmful cultural assumptions by demonstrating the consequences of ignoring emotional and moral boundaries. The findings indicate that empathy cultivation is closely linked to students' moral agency. When students are encouraged to reflect on how empathy might guide their actions, such as speaking up for a friend, refusing to participate in harmful gossip, or offering support to those who are marginalized, they begin to see themselves as active moral agents rather than passive observers. Teachers at SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas noted that students who engaged deeply with the Dinah narrative became more reflective about their own responsibilities within peer relationships. This aligns with SLR findings that narrative-based moral education enhances students' capacity for ethical decision-making by situating moral values within lived experiences.

The discussion also highlights the importance of dialogical pedagogy in empathy education. Rather than delivering moral conclusions, teachers who ask open-ended questions and facilitate discussion enable students to explore multiple perspectives. This approach fosters cognitive empathy, the ability to understand others' viewpoints, as well as affective empathy. Interview data suggest that students responded positively to dialogical methods, expressing appreciation for being heard and respected. Such pedagogical practices reflect the social competence of teachers who value relational engagement over authoritarian instruction. It becomes evident that Genesis 34:1-2 serves as a pedagogical catalyst rather than a prescriptive moral code. Its power lies in its ability to provoke ethical reflection when mediated through socially competent teaching. The convergence of exegetical insight, educational theory, and classroom practice demonstrates that empathy formation is a dynamic process shaped by narrative engagement, relational modeling, and contextual sensitivity. At SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, the small number of Christian students and teachers creates an intimate learning environment where relational pedagogy can flourish. This setting allows teachers to closely observe students' emotional development and respond with intentional guidance. The results affirm that cultivating students' empathy through Christian social pedagogy requires more than curricular inclusion of biblical texts. It demands teachers who possess social competence grounded in empathy themselves, teachers who can interpret Scripture with ethical sensitivity, engage students relationally, and model compassion in everyday interactions. Genesis 34:1-2, when approached with pedagogical wisdom, becomes a transformative narrative that shapes students' moral awareness and relational responsibility. The study thus contributes to a deeper understanding of how biblical

narratives can be responsibly integrated into contemporary education to foster empathy, dignity, and social harmony among students.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that cultivating students' empathy through Christian social pedagogy is deeply dependent on the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers and their ability to mediate biblical narratives with ethical sensitivity. By examining Genesis 34:1-2 within the educational context of SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, Seruyan, the research demonstrates that biblical texts addressing vulnerability and moral failure can become powerful instruments for empathy formation when approached through relational and context-aware pedagogy. The narrative of Dinah, rather than serving as a distant historical account, functions as a moral lens that enables students to recognize human suffering, affirm dignity, and reflect on responsible social behavior. The findings indicate that empathy is not developed through cognitive instruction alone but through a combination of narrative engagement, emotional reflection, and ethical modeling. Genesis 34:1-2 exposes the consequences of ignoring emotional boundaries and human dignity, thereby inviting students to confront the moral implications of their actions toward others. When CRE teachers demonstrate strong social competence, expressed through respectful communication, emotional attentiveness, fairness, and relational consistency, students become more receptive to empathetic values embedded within biblical narratives. Teachers thus function as living interpreters of Scripture, translating theological principles into relational practices that students can observe and imitate. Within the specific context of SMP Eka Tjipta Tasik Mas, where Christian students form a small minority, the role of CRE teachers as empathetic role models becomes particularly significant. The study reveals that students' understanding of empathy deepens when teachers create a psychologically safe classroom environment that encourages dialogue, reflection, and emotional expression. Such an environment allows students to explore sensitive issues without fear of judgment, enabling empathy to grow as a moral disposition rather than a prescribed behavior. This approach aligns with contemporary Christian educational theory, which emphasizes holistic character formation grounded in relational engagement. The integration of Systematic Literature Review (SLR) and simple interviews confirms that teacher social competence is central to effective empathy education. Teachers who interpret Genesis 34:1-2 with theological clarity and pedagogical care help students develop moral imagination, the capacity to perceive the emotional experiences of others and respond with compassion. This capacity is essential in addressing contemporary social challenges such as bullying, emotional neglect, and relational insensitivity among adolescents. The study also highlights the importance of cultural awareness, as empathy must be framed in ways that resonate with local values while challenging norms that may inhibit emotional responsiveness. This research affirms that Christian social pedagogy grounded in Scripture can meaningfully contribute to the cultivation of empathy among students when supported by socially competent teaching. Genesis 34:1-2 provides a valuable ethical narrative that, when responsibly mediated, fosters students' awareness of vulnerability, justice, and compassion. The study recommends that CRE teachers engage in continuous professional development focused on social competence, narrative pedagogy, and contextual theological reflection. By doing so, Christian education can play a transformative role in

shaping empathetic, morally sensitive, and socially responsible students who embody compassion in their relationships within and beyond the classroom.

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