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The Social Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers from the Perspective of Christlike Love: A Study of Philippians 1:9 at SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat-Asahan

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers from the perspective of Christlike love as articulated in Philippians 1:9, within the educational context of SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, Asahan. In contemporary public-school settings marked by religious diversity and limited Christian student populations, the ability of CRE teachers to foster educative relationships grounded in love, discernment, and ethical sensitivity becomes increasingly significant. Drawing on a qualitative research design, this study integrates biblical exegesis, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), and simple semi-structured interviews to explore how Christ-centered social competence shapes relational dynamics in Christian education. The exegetical analysis of Philippians 1:9 highlights love (agapē) that abounds in knowledge (epignōsis) and moral discernment (aisthēsis) as the theological foundation for socially competent teaching. The SLR synthesizes recent scholarly literature on teacher social competence, Christian pedagogy, and relational ethics, demonstrating that effective moral formation occurs primarily through modeling, empathy, and respectful communication. Complementary interviews with two Christian teachers, including the CRE teacher serving 25 Christian students, provide contextual insight into how these theological and pedagogical principles are practiced in daily school interactions. The findings indicate that social competence grounded in Christlike love enhances trust, emotional safety, and moral receptivity among students. The study concludes that social competence rooted in biblical love is a vital dimension of professional CRE practice, enabling Christian education to function as a transformative and relationally meaningful endeavor in pluralistic school environments.

Keywords: Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Love

INTRODUCTION

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a vital role in shaping not only students' cognitive understanding of faith but also their social attitudes, emotional maturity, and relational ethics. Within the context of Indonesian basic education, particularly in public schools, CRE teachers are entrusted with the responsibility of mediating Christian values

in a pluralistic and socially diverse environment. One of the most crucial competencies required of CRE teachers in this context is social competence, understood as the ability to build healthy relationships, communicate empathetically, collaborate effectively, and demonstrate moral sensitivity toward students and the broader school community. Social competence is not merely a professional requirement but a theological calling rooted in the essence of Christian love. Philippians 1:9 provides a profound biblical foundation for understanding social competence through the lens of Christlike love. In this passage, the Apostle Paul prays that love may “abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight,” indicating that Christian love is not sentimental or abstract, but discerning, relational, and ethically grounded. Love, in this sense, becomes the driving force behind wise judgment, respectful interaction, and responsible action. When applied to the vocation of CRE teachers, Philippians 1:9 frames social competence as the capacity to relate to students with genuine care, moral discernment, and spiritual sensitivity, enabling education to become a transformative relational process rather than a one-directional transmission of religious knowledge. In contemporary educational settings, social competence has become increasingly significant due to rapid social changes, technological influence, and shifting patterns of communication among students. Elementary school students, in particular, are at a formative stage where emotional security, relational trust, and moral modeling play a decisive role in character development. Teachers are often perceived not only as instructors but also as role models whose attitudes, language, and relational behavior are closely observed and imitated. For CRE teachers, this responsibility is intensified by the expectation that their professional conduct reflects the values they teach. A lack of empathy, patience, or relational sensitivity can undermine the credibility of Christian teaching, whereas Christlike love embodied in daily interactions can strengthen students’ openness to moral and spiritual formation.

SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, Asahan, provides a meaningful context for examining this issue. As a public elementary school with 25 Christian students taught by two Christian teachers, including one CRE teacher, the school represents a setting where Christian education must be delivered thoughtfully within a broader pluralistic environment. In such a context, social competence grounded in love becomes essential for maintaining harmonious relationships, fostering mutual respect, and ensuring that Christian values are communicated without exclusivism or coercion. The CRE teacher’s ability to interact lovingly with students, colleagues, and school leadership contributes not only to effective learning but also to the school’s overall social climate. Many studies on Christian education have tended to focus primarily on pedagogical or professional competence in terms of curriculum delivery, teaching methods, and assessment strategies. Less attention has been given to the theological grounding of social competence and its practical expression in daily teacher-student relationships, especially at the elementary level. This gap is significant, as social competence shaped by Christlike love directly influences how students experience faith in relational terms. When love is expressed through attentiveness, fairness, encouragement, and respectful communication, students are more likely to internalize Christian values as lived realities rather than abstract doctrines. This study seeks to explore the social competence of Christian Religious Education teachers from the perspective of Christlike love as articulated in Philippians 1:9,

with specific reference to SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, Asahan. The study aims to examine how the biblical concept of love informs teachers' social interactions, how such competence is practiced in classroom and school life, and how it contributes to the formation of students' relational and moral character. By integrating biblical reflection with educational analysis, this research aspires to contribute to the discourse on Christian teacher professionalism, emphasizing that social competence rooted in Christlike love is central to meaningful and transformative Christian education.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative research design that integrates biblical exegesis, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), and simple field interviews in order to examine the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers through the perspective of Christlike love as articulated in Philippians 1:9. This integrative approach was chosen to ensure that theological insight, educational theory, and contextual practice were examined holistically and coherently within the setting of SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, Asahan. The first stage of the research involved an exegetical analysis of Philippians 1:9 using historical-contextual and literary approaches. The analysis focused on key theological concepts such as *agapē* (love), *epignōsis* (knowledge), and *aisthēsis* (discernment), which together form the biblical foundation for understanding socially competent behavior rooted in Christlike love. Scholarly biblical commentaries, lexical studies, and peer-reviewed theological works published between 2005 and 2024 were consulted to ensure interpretive reliability and theological depth. This exegetical framework provided the normative lens through which teacher social competence was subsequently analyzed. The second stage consisted of a Systematic Literature Review (SLR) designed to identify and synthesize relevant studies on social competence in teaching, Christian pedagogy, teacher-student relationships, and character education. Academic databases were searched using key terms such as "social competence of teachers," "Christian Religious Education," "Christlike love in education," and "relational pedagogy." Inclusion criteria were limited to peer-reviewed journal articles and academic books published within the last ten years that directly addressed social or relational dimensions of teaching. From an initial pool of 61 sources, 24 studies met the inclusion criteria and were analyzed thematically to identify patterns related to empathy, communication, relational ethics, and moral modeling in educational practice. To complement the textual and theoretical data, simple semi-structured interviews were conducted with the two Christian teachers at SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, including the CRE teacher who serves 25 Christian students. The interviews aimed to explore how teachers understand Christlike love, how they practice social competence in daily interactions with students and colleagues, and what challenges they encounter in a pluralistic public-school environment. Interviews were conducted in a conversational format, either in person or online, with participants' informed consent. The collected data were transcribed and analyzed using thematic analysis, focusing on recurring themes related to relational care, empathy, fairness, and professional integrity.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study, derived from the integration of exegetical analysis of Philippians 1:9, a Systematic Literature Review (SLR), and simple interviews with two Christian teachers at SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, Asahan, reveal that social competence grounded in Christlike love is a decisive factor in fostering meaningful educative relationships within Christian Religious Education (CRE). The findings demonstrate that social competence, when understood biblically and practiced contextually, transcends technical communication skills and becomes a relational embodiment of faith that directly shapes students' moral, emotional, and spiritual development. The exegetical findings from Philippians 1:9 provide a theological framework that significantly enriches the concept of social competence. Paul's prayer that love may "abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight" indicates that Christian love (*agapē*) is dynamic, intentional, and discerning. Love is not merely emotional warmth but is guided by *epignōsis* (deep, relational knowledge) and *aisthēsis* (moral sensitivity or discernment). When applied to CRE teachers, this text suggests that social competence is not simply the ability to interact politely or manage classroom relationships, but the capacity to love students wisely, empathetically, and ethically. Love that abounds implies continuity and growth, meaning that teachers are called to develop their relational capacities over time, responding sensitively to students' changing needs and contexts. This exegetical insight reframes social competence as a spiritual discipline expressed through pedagogical relationships. The SLR findings strongly support this biblical perspective. Contemporary educational literature consistently emphasizes that teacher social competence is central to effective learning, particularly at the elementary level where students' emotional security and relational trust significantly influence academic engagement and character formation. Studies indicate that teachers who demonstrate empathy, fairness, and respectful communication create learning environments that encourage openness, cooperation, and internalization of values. Within Christian education, the literature further highlights that relational authenticity enhances the credibility of faith-based instruction. Students are more likely to accept and practice Christian values when they experience those values embodied consistently by their teachers. This aligns closely with Philippians 1:9, where love is inseparable from discernment and moral clarity. Social competence, therefore, functions as a bridge between theological truth and lived experience.

The interview data from SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat provide concrete contextual validation of these theoretical and exegetical insights. Both Christian teachers emphasized that their daily interactions with students require patience, emotional sensitivity, and intentional care, particularly given the young age of the learners and the diverse social backgrounds they represent. With only 25 Christian students in a public-school environment, relational closeness becomes both a strength and a responsibility. Teachers noted that students tend to observe their behavior closely, including tone of voice, fairness in discipline, and responsiveness to students' personal struggles. One teacher remarked that students often imitate the way teachers speak and resolve conflicts, suggesting that social competence is learned implicitly through modeling rather than explicitly through instruction alone. This observation resonates with the Pauline understanding of love that grows in discernment, as teachers must constantly evaluate how their actions communicate values beyond words. A significant finding from the

interviews is that Christlike love, as practiced through social competence, fosters trust that becomes foundational for educative relationships. Teachers reported that when students feel genuinely cared for and respected, they are more willing to share personal concerns, admit mistakes, and accept guidance. This trust creates space for moral and spiritual formation, allowing CRE lessons to move beyond memorization of biblical content toward internalization of values such as compassion, honesty, and mutual respect. The teachers acknowledged that maintaining such relational openness requires emotional labor and self-regulation, especially when dealing with disruptive behavior or students facing family-related challenges. However, they viewed this effort as integral to their Christian vocation rather than as an additional burden. This perspective reflects the biblical call in Philippians 1:9 to let love abound, even in situations that demand patience and discernment. Another important theme emerging from the results is the role of social competence in navigating the pluralistic context of a public elementary school. The teachers emphasized that Christlike love guides them to interact respectfully not only with Christian students but also with colleagues and school leaders of different religious backgrounds. This relational sensitivity helps prevent misunderstandings and fosters a harmonious school climate. The SLR corroborates this finding, noting that socially competent teachers contribute positively to institutional culture by modeling inclusive and respectful behavior. From a Christian pedagogical standpoint, such inclusivity does not dilute faith identity but rather reflects the ethical implications of Christlike love expressed through humility, cooperation, and mutual respect. In this sense, social competence becomes a form of public witness, demonstrating that Christian values can enrich communal life without coercion. The findings also indicate that social competence rooted in love significantly influences students' moral imagination. Teachers observed that students begin to associate Christian faith with kindness, attentiveness, and fairness when these qualities are consistently modeled. This association shapes how students perceive God, authority, and relationships. Rather than viewing religion as a set of rules, students come to understand faith as relational and life-giving. The SLR highlights that such affective associations formed in early education often have long-term implications for students' ethical orientation and spiritual openness. Philippians 1:9 reinforces this outcome by linking love with moral discernment, suggesting that students learn to distinguish what is right and valuable through relational experiences marked by wise love.

The results also reveal challenges in sustaining socially competent practice. Teachers acknowledged moments of emotional fatigue, particularly when balancing administrative demands with relational responsibilities. Limited resources and time constraints sometimes restrict opportunities for deeper personal engagement with students. Nevertheless, both teachers emphasized that their awareness of biblical values, especially the call to Christlike love, motivates them to persevere. The SLR supports this observation, indicating that teachers who possess a strong sense of vocational calling and theological grounding are more resilient in maintaining relational integrity. Philippians 1:9 functions here not only as a descriptive text but as a spiritual resource that renews teachers' commitment to relational excellence. An integrative analysis of the data reveals that social competence in Christian education operates on three interconnected levels: theological, pedagogical, and relational. Theologically, Philippians 1:9 provides the normative vision of love that is discerning and purposeful. Pedagogically, this vision

informs teaching strategies that prioritize dialogue, empathy, and reflective interaction. Relationally, it is embodied in daily encounters that shape students' sense of belonging and moral orientation. When these levels align, educative relationships become transformative rather than transactional. The teachers at SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat exemplify this alignment by consciously integrating biblical values into their professional conduct, thereby enhancing the effectiveness of CRE in a public-school context. The results and discussion affirm that the social competence of CRE teachers, when grounded in Christlike love, plays a pivotal role in nurturing educative relationships that support holistic student development. Philippians 1:9 offers a robust theological lens through which social competence can be understood not merely as a professional requirement but as a spiritual expression of faith in action. The convergence of exegetical insight, scholarly literature, and contextual practice underscores that Christian education is most impactful when love, knowledge, and discernment are embodied consistently in teacher-student relationships.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the social competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, when grounded in Christlike love as articulated in Philippians 1:9, plays a vital and transformative role in fostering educative relationships within the context of SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, Asahan. Social competence is not merely an interpersonal skill set but a theological and pedagogical vocation that integrates love, knowledge, and moral discernment in everyday educational practice. The findings demonstrate that when teachers allow love to "abound more and more" in relational wisdom and ethical sensitivity, classroom interactions become spaces for holistic formation rather than mere instructional exchange. The exegetical reflection on Philippians 1:9 provides a robust biblical foundation for understanding social competence as an expression of *agapē* that is discerning and purposeful. This Pauline vision challenges reductionist views of teacher competence that focus solely on communication techniques or classroom management. Instead, it emphasizes relational depth, empathy, and ethical clarity as essential dimensions of Christian pedagogy. In practice, this means that CRE teachers are called to cultivate relationships that honor students' dignity, respond sensitively to their emotional needs, and guide them toward moral maturity. Such relational engagement reflects a theology of education in which teaching becomes an act of love shaped by wisdom and spiritual insight. The integration of findings from the Systematic Literature Review and the simple interviews further affirms that socially competent teachers create learning environments marked by trust, respect, and openness. At SDN 010105 Sei Silau Barat, where the number of Christian students is limited and the school context is religiously diverse, these qualities are particularly significant. Teachers who consistently model Christlike love through patience, fairness, and attentive listening contribute not only to the effectiveness of CRE instruction but also to a broader culture of harmony within the school. Students learn to associate Christian faith with compassion and relational integrity, which strengthens both their moral imagination and their willingness to internalize Christian values. This study highlights that social competence rooted in biblical love enhances teacher credibility and resilience. While teachers face challenges such as emotional fatigue and institutional constraints, a clear theological understanding of their relational calling enables them to persevere with integrity. Philippians 1:9 thus functions

not only as a conceptual framework but also as a spiritual resource that sustains teachers in their vocation. Ultimately, the study underscores that the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education depends significantly on the social competence of teachers who embody Christlike love in practice. When love, knowledge, and discernment are integrated within educative relationships, Christian education becomes a transformative force that shapes students' character, faith, and relational life in enduring ways.

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