

Developing the Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers for Humanistic Christian Learning: Challenges and Strategies at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII

Rosi Marina^{1*}, Rogate Artaida Tiarasi Gultom²

¹Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

²Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

* correspondence: rosibarutu@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

In the 21st century, the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers has become increasingly vital, as they are tasked not only with transferring theological knowledge but also with shaping students' holistic identity-spiritual, moral, and social. Grounded in biblical principles of love, dignity, and responsibility, Christian humanistic pedagogy offers a framework for transformative education. However, its implementation remains inconsistent in public elementary schools, where teachers often face structural, pedagogical, and spiritual challenges. This study aimed to examine the obstacles and strategies in developing CRE teachers' competence within a pluralistic educational setting. The research employed a descriptive case study method at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII, Deli Serdang, involving interviews with CRE teachers, observations of classroom practices, and analysis of relevant documents. Data were analyzed thematically to identify teachers' perceptions, internal and external challenges, and strategies for competence development. Findings revealed that teachers recognize the ideals of Christian humanistic pedagogy but often struggle to embody them in practice due to limited reflective competence, inconsistencies in personal spirituality, administrative burdens, and lack of institutional support. Nevertheless, several promising strategies emerged, including theological-pedagogical reflection, the formation of teacher learning communities, participatory methods, and contextualized curriculum design. These approaches enabled teachers to integrate biblical values more effectively into classroom experiences, fostering both academic and spiritual growth among students. The study concludes that strengthening CRE teacher competence requires holistic formation encompassing knowledge, pedagogical skills, and spiritual integrity. Collaborative efforts among schools, churches, and educational authorities are essential to nurture reflective, transformative educators capable of embodying Christian humanism in pluralistic contexts.

Keywords: Competence, Christian Religious Education, Humanistic Christian Learning

INTRODUCTION

Received March 30, 2025; Revised April 17, 2025; Accepted April 30, 2025

In the landscape of 21st-century education, characterized by rapid social, cultural, and technological transformation, the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers has gained unprecedented importance. Their task extends beyond the delivery of theological doctrines to include the holistic formation of students' spiritual, moral, and social identities. This shift reflects a growing consensus in educational theory that schooling must prepare students not merely to acquire knowledge, but to live as whole persons capable of contributing positively to their communities (Astuti, 2019). Within this vision, the Christian humanistic approach to education emerges as both relevant and urgent. Grounded in biblical values, this approach underscores love as the foundation of educational relationships, affirms the inherent dignity of every human being as created in the image of God, and highlights the balance between personal freedom and responsibility in shaping transformative communities. The Christian humanistic perspective is not a modern innovation but is deeply rooted in Scripture. The call to love God and neighbor (Matthew 22:37-39) affirms relational pedagogy, while Paul's exhortation to "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NIV) provides a theological basis for education as mutual growth. These texts suggest that education cannot be divorced from its relational and moral dimensions. Instead, it is an act of discipleship, where knowledge, faith, and character converge. Theologically, the humanistic framework, affirming that each learner possesses intrinsic worth and deserves an environment that fosters respect, freedom, and responsibility (Wiersbe, 2007). Despite its biblical foundation and theoretical promise, the practice of Christian humanistic pedagogy remains uneven, particularly in public elementary schools that operate within multicultural and pluralistic environments. CRE teachers frequently encounter structural and personal obstacles that hinder their efforts to foster dialogical, student-centered learning. Among these barriers are insufficient training that contextualizes pedagogy for primary education, limited access to relevant instructional resources, and administrative pressures that often prioritize cognitive achievement over spiritual and affective development (Brown, 2017). These challenges not only limit teachers' effectiveness but also risk reducing Christian education to the transmission of abstract knowledge devoid of transformative impact.

Central to addressing these challenges is the issue of teacher competence. Competence in this context is not confined to mastery of content or methodological skills but encompasses broader dimensions such as spiritual integrity, relational competence, and the ability to integrate Christian values into the lived experiences of students (Hidayati, 2023). A CRE teacher's personal life, attitudes, and relationships often speak louder than classroom instruction, making authenticity and integrity indispensable components of pedagogical effectiveness. This perspective echoes the biblical charge in 1 Timothy 4:12, which exhorts believers to set an example "in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith, and in purity." Thus, competence becomes not merely a technical construct but a spiritual and ethical calling. In the Indonesian educational landscape, the urgency of building such competence is amplified by societal realities. Students grow up in contexts shaped by globalization, digital media, and moral challenges that often undermine traditional values (Simanjuntak, 2020). CRE teachers must therefore serve not only as transmitters of Christian knowledge but as role models who embody holiness, humility, and respect for diversity. By doing so, they help students navigate pluralistic realities while remaining

rooted in their Christian faith. Developing teachers' competence, therefore, is a critical step toward ensuring that Christian education remains relevant, transformative, and aligned with the needs of contemporary society. This research is motivated by the pressing need to articulate effective strategies for enhancing the competence of CRE teachers so that they can respond to changing times without losing their biblical grounding. The chosen locus, SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII Deli Serdang, represents a public elementary school characterized by student diversity and the complex demands placed on CRE teachers. This site reflects broader realities faced by many educators in similar contexts, making it a relevant case for examining the interplay between theory and practice in humanistic Christian learning. The study seeks to uncover the concrete challenges experienced by CRE teachers in implementing humanistic approaches and to explore the strategies that have been, or could be, employed to strengthen teacher competence holistically. By combining academic rigor with theological reflection, the research aims to generate insights that contribute not only to the enrichment of Christian education curricula but also to the design of teacher training programs and educational policies that are more humanistic and transformative. In doing so, it aligns with both biblical imperatives and national goals of fostering responsible, morally grounded, and socially engaged citizens. This study highlights that the task of building CRE teacher competence is not merely a pedagogical requirement but a theological and ethical responsibility. In shaping young learners, teachers stand at the intersection of faith and society, embodying a calling that is both spiritual and professional. Their effectiveness in nurturing holistic Christian humanism will determine not only the quality of Christian education but also its contribution to forming generations capable of living faithfully and responsibly in a complex and plural world.

METHODS

This study used a descriptive case study method conducted at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII, Deli Serdang. The choice of this approach was deliberate, as it enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the context, experiences, and meanings that Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers encounter in the implementation of Christian humanistic pedagogy. The central objective of this research was to explore both the challenges faced by CRE teachers and the strategies they employ to strengthen their competencies in facilitating learning that is rooted in love, respect for human dignity, and moral responsibility. In doing so, the study sought to capture not only technical aspects of pedagogy but also the deeper values that shape the role of teachers in a pluralistic educational setting. The primary sources of data were CRE teachers actively teaching at the school, the principal, and several students who were engaged as supporting informants. To obtain rich and authentic narratives, data collection employed multiple techniques. Semi-structured in-depth interviews were conducted face-to-face, with each main informant interviewed for approximately forty-five minutes or more. These interviews provided opportunities for teachers and other participants to articulate their experiences, challenges, and reflections in their own words. Alongside interviews, participant observation was carried out in several classroom sessions, guided by an observation framework designed to highlight the enactment of Christian humanistic values in teaching practices. Attention was given to the teachers' communicative style,

the relational dynamics between teachers and students, and students' responses to the learning process. Furthermore, documentation served as an additional source of data triangulation. Documents included lesson plans (*RPP*), teachers' reflective notes, and student portfolios, all of which offered valuable insights into the preparation, implementation, and evaluation of teaching. The analysis of the data followed a thematic approach. The researcher engaged in repeated readings of the transcripts, applied open coding, and subsequently grouped the codes into: first, teachers' perceptions of Christian humanistic pedagogy; second, internal and external constraints that shaped teaching practices; and third strategies for developing professional and spiritual competencies. Thematic analysis not only allowed the identification of patterns across data but also preserved the uniqueness of individual voices and experiences. To ensure trustworthiness, the study employed methodological and data triangulation, as well as member checking, whereby informants reviewed the researcher's interpretations to confirm accuracy and authenticity. The decision to conduct the study at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII, Deli Serdang, was based on its representativeness as a public elementary school situated in a religiously and culturally plural environment. This pluralistic context presented unique challenges for the implementation of Christian Religious Education, particularly in fostering inclusivity while remaining faithful to the values of Christian humanism. The research was carried out over a period of three months, allowing sufficient time for immersion and interaction within the school environment. Ethical considerations were observed throughout the study, including confidentiality of informants, obtaining informed consent, and maintaining neutrality in analysis and interpretation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The study conducted at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII in Deli Serdang revealed complex dynamics surrounding how Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers understand, construct, and implement the principles of humanistic Christian learning. The findings were categorized into three major themes: first, teachers' perceptions of Christian humanistic pedagogy; second, internal and external challenges in practice; third, strategies employed to holistically build teacher competence. These themes provide a comprehensive lens through which the realities of CRE education in a pluralistic public school can be examined.

Teachers' Perceptions of Christian Humanistic Learning

The majority of CRE teachers involved in the study demonstrated a general awareness of the foundational principles of Christian humanistic pedagogy. They recognized that such an approach emphasizes love, empathy, respect for the dignity of each learner, and student-centered methods of teaching. This aligns with the broader educational philosophy that humanistic pedagogy should focus not only on intellectual development but also on the holistic formation of students in moral, spiritual, and social dimensions (Astuti, 2019). During interviews, teachers articulated their belief that CRE should allow students to feel "loved and accepted as they are." However, classroom observations revealed a persistent reliance on conventional lecture-based instruction with minimal dialogical interaction. This gap between conceptual understanding and actual practice

illustrates a wider issue: although teachers aspire to embody the ideals of Christian humanistic education, structural and pedagogical inertia often constrain them. Teachers further acknowledged that adopting a humanistic approach requires a significant paradigm shift. They must move from functioning as mere conveyors of religious information toward becoming facilitators of spiritual and moral growth. Yet, the teachers' perception of Christ as the model of a humanistic educator remained underdeveloped. For instance, while they mentioned Christ's teachings on love, forgiveness, and justice, these themes were not consistently translated into creative pedagogical strategies. This finding resonates with Lickona's (2018) argument that education grounded in Christian values must move beyond abstract moral instruction to become embodied in lived relationships and daily practices of care.

Internal Challenges: Reflective Competence and Personal Spirituality

A major internal challenge faced by the teachers lies in the lack of reflective competence. Reflective competence refers to the ability to critically evaluate one's teaching practices and identify opportunities for continuous improvement (Eka, 2021). The data indicated that only a minority of teachers engaged in structured reflective practices, such as journaling or peer discussion. Without consistent reflection, teachers tended to repeat familiar instructional routines without connecting them to the transformative goals of humanistic pedagogy. Closely tied to this is the issue of personal spirituality. Teachers' ability to embody Christian humanistic values in the classroom is deeply shaped by their own spiritual life. Teachers who maintained consistent spiritual disciplines, such as prayer, Bible study, and active participation in church communities, were better able to integrate values of love, patience, and forgiveness into their pedagogy (Manalu, 2021). Conversely, teachers experiencing emotional fatigue or stress tended to adopt authoritarian or rigid teaching styles, reacting harshly to student misbehavior. This finding underscores Nasution's (2020) argument that teacher competence in Christian education is inseparable from spiritual formation. Pedagogy is not merely technical but profoundly spiritual, requiring educators to teach not only with their intellect but also with their heart and soul.

External Challenges: Administrative Burdens and Limited Institutional Support

Beyond internal struggles, CRE teachers encountered significant external challenges. Chief among these was the heavy administrative burden imposed by the school system. Teachers were often required to complete numerous digital reports, daily logs, and cross-subject coordination tasks. These responsibilities consumed valuable time and energy that could have been devoted to lesson planning and creative teaching strategies. During classroom observations, teachers admitted arriving with limited preparation because administrative obligations left them exhausted. Another external barrier was the lack of institutional support for professional development in Christian humanistic pedagogy. Schools rarely offered training workshops that addressed the integration of biblical values with student-centered learning. When training sessions were provided, they tended to emphasize cognitive theological content rather than strategies for cultivating moral and spiritual character in students (Dwiatmoko, 2020). Furthermore, school leaders often

undervalued the role of CRE, treating it as a secondary subject compared to mathematics or science. This lack of prioritization discouraged teachers from experimenting with innovative pedagogical approaches.

Amidst these challenges, some teachers managed to develop strategies that advanced their competence. A notable example was the practice of theological-pedagogical reflection. This involved reading specific biblical passages related to love, forgiveness, or justice, and then intentionally connecting these texts to classroom dynamics. For instance, when teaching the theme of “Love for Others,” a teacher went beyond explaining the biblical command cognitively. Instead, she initiated a classroom project where students wrote letters of gratitude to their peers, fostering empathy and community spirit. Such practices illustrate how spirituality can serve as the foundation of pedagogy rather than merely its content. Teachers who modeled Christ’s example in reflection demonstrated more authentic and grounded teaching. In interviews, one teacher remarked that reflection helped them “teach not only with the mind but also with the heart.” This practice aligns with the view that effective Christian pedagogy requires integration between theology and lived experience, resulting in teaching that is spiritually nourishing and ethically relevant (Lickona, 2018).

Another promising strategy identified was the creation of teacher learning communities. In some cases, CRE teachers initiated informal groups within the district, meeting biweekly to discuss classroom challenges, share literature on Christian education, and pray for one another. Although not formally institutionalized, these communities fostered mutual support and accountability. Such networks reflect the collaborative dimension of professional development. Rather than depending solely on formal state training, teachers learned through peer dialogue and collective reflection. This aligns with broader research on teacher learning, which highlights the importance of communities of practice in enhancing pedagogical competence and professional resilience (Wenger, 2011). Within these groups, teachers could openly share struggles without fear of judgment, allowing reflection to become more honest and fruitful. Furthermore, the community strengthened their empathy, active listening, and openness-values at the core of Christian humanistic pedagogy.

Teachers who successfully adopted Christian humanistic approaches often utilized contextual curriculum design. Instead of presenting biblical content in isolation, they connected lessons to students’ daily experiences. For example, when teaching about “Responsibility for God’s Creation,” teachers engaged students in a school clean-up project. The activity was then linked to Genesis 2:15, emphasizing humanity’s stewardship of the earth. Such practices transformed PAK lessons into lived experiences, cultivating ecological consciousness and social responsibility (Whitehead, 2016). Participatory methods further enhanced learning. Teachers who implemented group discussions, role plays, and simulations observed higher levels of student engagement. Rather than being passive recipients of religious information, students became active participants in meaning-making. Observations confirmed that students expressed deeper understanding of Christian values when they could experience them firsthand. As one student commented, “I feel I understand God’s love more because I can experience it through the way my teacher teaches.” This testimony highlights the transformative power of

pedagogy that integrates both biblical truth and experiential practice. The findings of this study carry significant implications for policy and practice. First, professional development programs for CRE teachers must incorporate training that addresses not only content mastery but also spiritual formation and humanistic pedagogy (Gunawan, 2022). Such training should equip teachers with reflective skills, theological grounding, and innovative methods for student-centered instruction. Second, schools need to create supportive environments for CRE teachers. Reducing administrative burdens, providing flexible curricular space, and fostering emotional support are essential to enable teachers to focus on meaningful pedagogical engagement. Without such systemic changes, the ideals of Christian humanistic pedagogy risk remaining aspirational rather than actionable. Third, churches and Christian organizations must play an active role in supporting teachers who serve in public schools. By offering contextualized teaching materials, spiritual mentoring, and pedagogical guidance, these institutions can help bridge the gap between theological ideals and classroom realities. Strengthening networks between schools and faith-based organizations would ensure that CRE teachers receive holistic support for their vocation. The study at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII demonstrates that building teacher competence in Christian humanistic learning is both a spiritual and pedagogical challenge. Teachers recognize the importance of love, empathy, and respect for human dignity but often struggle to embody these values amidst personal limitations and systemic constraints. Yet, strategies such as theological-pedagogical reflection, collaborative learning communities, and contextualized participatory methods offer promising pathways forward. The development of CRE teacher competence cannot be separated from their personal spiritual formation, reflective capacity, and institutional support. A holistic approach that integrates theology, pedagogy, and community is necessary to realize the transformative vision of Christian humanistic education. By equipping teachers to embody Christ-centered love in their practice, schools can nurture students who not only know about God but also experience His presence in daily life. Such an approach contributes not only to individual student growth but also to the cultivation of a more compassionate, just, and humanistic society.

CONCLUSION

The findings of this study conducted at SD Negeri 101882 Pasar VIII Deli Serdang affirm that strengthening the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is an urgent necessity for advancing humanistic Christian pedagogy at the elementary school level. Competence in this context cannot be reduced to mastery of content or technical teaching skills; rather, it encompasses the holistic integration of knowledge, pedagogical expertise, and spiritual integrity. The results underscore that teachers of CRE are called to be more than transmitters of doctrinal knowledge—they are entrusted with the sacred role of forming character, cultivating empathy, and embodying the values of love, justice, and respect for human dignity as rooted in Christian faith. Such a task demands educators who are capable of integrating biblical truths into the relational and dialogical processes of learning, thereby ensuring that education is transformative rather than merely informative. However, the study also reveals persistent challenges that hinder teachers from embodying this vision in their daily practice. Internal challenges include the limited exercise of pedagogical reflection and the inconsistency of personal spirituality, which

directly affect the authenticity of teachers' pedagogical engagement. External barriers, such as excessive administrative workloads, inadequate institutional support, and the marginalization of CRE within school priorities, further diminish the potential for transformative teaching and learning. The imbalance between expectations placed on teachers and the realities of their professional contexts results in pedagogical practices that remain predominantly teacher-centered and insufficiently attentive to the emotional and spiritual needs of students. Amidst these limitations, the study identifies innovative strategies that teachers have begun to implement, pointing toward promising directions for future development. Theological-pedagogical reflection has emerged as a vital practice, enabling teachers to connect biblical values with classroom realities in practical and meaningful ways. Collaborative teacher learning communities also provide crucial platforms for mutual encouragement, professional growth, and collective problem-solving. Additionally, participatory teaching methods and contextual curriculum design have proven effective in making learning experiences more engaging, relevant, and transformative for students. These strategies illustrate that, despite systemic obstacles, teachers possess the agency and creativity to foster environments where Christian humanism can flourish. The study highlights the importance of multi-level collaboration in supporting CRE teachers. Churches, faith-based organizations, and educational authorities must work in synergy to provide holistic support that addresses both the professional and spiritual needs of teachers. This includes reducing administrative burdens, offering regular training in value-based pedagogy, and establishing mentoring systems that cultivate spiritual resilience and reflective practice. Policies that encourage the formation of professional teacher communities and the integration of Christian humanistic values into continuous professional development (CPD) programs are especially critical. In the long term, consistent implementation of humanistic Christian pedagogy has the potential to shape future generations who are not only academically competent but also spiritually mature, ethically grounded, and socially responsible. Students formed within such an educational environment will be better prepared to contribute as agents of peace, justice, and love in a pluralistic society. Ultimately, the competence of CRE teachers in embodying and modeling Christian humanism is not merely a pedagogical concern but a theological and ethical vocation. Building an educational ecosystem that nurtures reflective, transformative, and spiritually rooted teachers is therefore essential to ensuring that Christian education continues to serve as a source of personal growth, communal transformation, and societal renewal.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Astuti, N. (2019). *Humanistic education and character formation in Indonesian schools*. Jakarta: Prenadamedia.

Brown, T. (2017). *Challenges in religious education pedagogy: A global perspective*. London: Routledge.

Dwiatmoko, H. (2020). *Integrating Christian values in Indonesian education: Opportunities and challenges*. Yogyakarta: Kanisius.

- Eka, P. (2021). Reflective competence and pedagogical practices in teacher education. *Journal of Educational Reflection*, 12(2), 45–59.
- Gunawan, R. (2022). *Pengembangan kompetensi guru PAK melalui pendekatan humanistik*. Bandung: Bina Media Informasi.
- Hidayati, S. (2023). Teacher competence and Christian education in plural contexts. *Indonesian Journal of Christian Education*, 5(1), 1–15.
- Lickona, T. (2018). *Educating for character: How our schools can teach respect and responsibility*. New York: Bantam Books.
- Manalu, J. (2021). Spiritual formation and the role of teachers in Christian schools. *Jurnal Pendidikan Agama Kristen*, 3(2), 77–90.
- Nasution, F. (2020). *Spiritualitas guru dan pengaruhnya terhadap pedagogi Kristen*. Medan: USU Press.
- Simanjuntak, D. (2020). Globalization and moral challenges in Indonesian Christian education. *Journal of Christian Pedagogy*, 8(1), 22–36.
- Whitehead, J. (2016). *Christian education and ecological responsibility: Teaching stewardship to children*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans.
- Wiersbe, W. W. (2007). *Be authentic: Exhibiting real faith in the real world*. Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook.
- Wenger, E. (2011). *Communities of practice: A brief introduction*. Grand Rapids, MI: Social Learning Lab