

## Strategies for Developing the Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers through Narrative Reflection at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo

Ritmis KB Ria Zega<sup>1\*</sup>, Dame Taruli Simamora<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Student, Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

<sup>2</sup>Lecturer, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\*correspondence: [ritmiszega77@gmail.com](mailto:ritmiszega77@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*In the current era of educational transformation, Christian Religious Education teachers play a strategic role in shaping students' moral character and spirituality. Within Indonesia's pluralistic context, CRE teachers are not only expected to deliver biblical and theological knowledge but also to embody professional, pedagogical, social, and personal competencies rooted in Christian values. However, classroom realities reveal that CRE teachers' responsibilities extend beyond technical instruction to include a spiritual vocation that integrates faith with pedagogy. Narrative reflection has emerged as a promising approach to address this challenge, enabling teachers to critically reinterpret teaching experiences while nurturing professional identity and spiritual depth. This study employed a qualitative exploratory-descriptive design to investigate the use of narrative reflection as a strategy for developing teacher competence at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, participant observations, and document analysis from two purposively selected CRE teachers. Thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurring patterns and meanings within teachers' reflective practices, with validity ensured through triangulation and member checking. Findings indicate that narrative reflection significantly enhanced teachers' pedagogical awareness, professional self-understanding, and spiritual formation. Teachers not only refined instructional strategies to be more contextual and student-centered but also redefined their professional identity as spiritual companions to students. The process fostered openness to feedback, empathy toward learners, and renewed vocational commitment. This research concludes that narrative reflection offers a holistic framework for professional development, positioning CRE teachers as lifelong learners who integrate faith, pedagogy, and spirituality in transformative ways.*

**Keywords:** Competence, Christian Religious Education, Narrative Reflection

### INTRODUCTION

In the current era of educational transformation, marked by increasing complexity in students' moral and social challenges, the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE)

teachers has become increasingly strategic in shaping both character and spirituality. Within the Indonesian educational framework, CRE teachers are not only expected to deliver biblical and theological content but also to embody professional, pedagogical, social, and personal competencies that reflect Christian values. National education regulations stipulate that teacher competence must cover pedagogical expertise, professional mastery, social skills, and personal integrity (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2017). However, for CRE teachers, the reality of classroom practice extends beyond technical teaching ability. They are called to interpret their vocation spiritually, discerning how their professional identity as educators is deeply intertwined with their role as witnesses of faith in a rapidly changing and pluralistic society (Simanjuntak, 2020). Amid these challenges, narrative reflection emerges as a promising approach for developing teacher competence holistically. Reflection in education has long been recognized as a means of improving teaching effectiveness by allowing teachers to critically evaluate and refine their practice (Schön, 1983). Yet, narrative reflection extends this practice by situating teachers' experiences within the broader context of their emotional, spiritual, and social lives. Rather than being a purely evaluative exercise, it is a contemplative process through which teachers reinterpret lived experiences and discover new meanings that shape their pedagogical identity. Through narrative, CRE teachers can articulate stories of teaching, confront tensions between ideals and realities, and recognize how God's calling informs their everyday practice. Such an approach underscores the integration of self-awareness, contextual sensitivity, and theological grounding as essential components of professional growth (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Empirical studies highlight the value of narrative reflection in strengthening professional identity and practice. For instance, Dewi (2021) found that reflective storytelling enabled teachers to critically examine their successes and failures, resulting in more adaptive pedagogical strategies. Similarly, Hidayati (2023) emphasizes that narrative reflection nurtures authenticity, helping teachers integrate personal values with professional responsibilities. Within the field of Christian education, this reflective process is particularly vital. It allows CRE teachers to embody biblical values such as humility, patience, and love-values that transcend cognitive instruction and shape students' spiritual formation (Nasution, 2020). By reflecting narratively, teachers move beyond transmitting religious knowledge to becoming role models who embody the Christian calling. Despite these benefits, the use of narrative reflection among CRE teachers in Indonesian public schools remains limited. In contexts such as SMA Negeri 1 Sawo, where diverse student backgrounds present both opportunities and challenges, the practice of reflection has not been systematically cultivated. The school, like many others, faces pressures to prioritize measurable academic outcomes, often at the expense of affective and spiritual dimensions of learning (Brown, 2017). This situation risks reducing Christian Religious Education to a subject focused on doctrinal transmission, disconnected from the lived realities of students. Yet, the complexity of students' social and moral issues—from peer pressure and digital culture to questions of identity and belonging—demands the presence of reflective and spiritually grounded teachers who can guide them with wisdom and sensitivity (Astuti, 2019).

It is within this gap that narrative reflection holds significant promise. For CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo, engaging in reflective storytelling provides a framework for

integrating pedagogy with spirituality in a manner that is both contextually relevant and transformative. Reflection allows teachers to critically revisit their teaching encounters, discern patterns in student engagement, and reshape their strategies to foster not only intellectual understanding but also holistic growth in faith and character. Moreover, by situating teaching within the broader narrative of God's mission, teachers can rediscover their vocation as a sacred calling rather than a mere professional obligation (Palmer, 1998). The purpose of this study is to explore strategies for developing the competence of CRE teachers through narrative reflection at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo. Specifically, it examines how teachers utilize reflection to deepen their pedagogical awareness, cultivate spiritual integrity, and design teaching practices that are responsive to students' contextual realities. By investigating these dynamics, the research seeks to contribute both theoretically and practically to the discourse on teacher professional development in Christian education. On the theoretical level, it aims to enrich the literature on narrative reflection as an approach to competency development, particularly within the field of religious education in Indonesia. On the practical level, it offers insights that can inform teacher training programs, curriculum design, and institutional policies to better support the holistic formation of CRE teachers. This study underscores that the development of teacher competence is not merely a technical or procedural task but a theological and ethical responsibility. CRE teachers stand at the intersection of faith and education, embodying a vocation that is simultaneously spiritual and professional. By engaging in narrative reflection, they not only enhance their teaching practices but also model the kind of reflective discipleship they seek to cultivate in their students. In doing so, they contribute to the broader mission of Christian education: nurturing generations who are faithful to God, committed to justice, and capable of living responsibly in a pluralistic world (Wiersbe, 2007).

## **METHODS**

A qualitative approach was used with an exploratory descriptive design, aimed at capturing the lived experiences of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in applying narrative reflection as a strategy for professional competence development at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo. The qualitative paradigm was considered appropriate because the research sought to understand the contextual and interpretive dimensions of reflective practice in teaching, rather than measuring variables quantitatively. As Creswell (2018) emphasizes, qualitative inquiry enables researchers to explore meaning-making processes and to construct an in-depth understanding of participants' perspectives within their specific social and cultural contexts. The participants in this research consisted of two CRE teachers who were actively teaching at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo. They were selected through purposive sampling, guided by specific criteria: having at least five years of teaching experience, being actively engaged in professional development activities, and demonstrating openness to reflective pedagogical practices. Purposeful selection was intended to ensure that the participants possessed rich and relevant experiences for generating data aligned with the research focus (Patton, 2015). In-depth interviews were conducted to elicit teachers' personal narratives regarding their teaching practices, reflective processes, and the transformations in thought and action that emerged. Interviews allowed participants to articulate their stories in their own voices, a central aspect of narrative inquiry (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000). Participant observations were

carried out during classroom sessions to record pedagogical strategies, teacher-student interactions, and the integration of reflective insights into practice. The fieldwork was conducted over a three-month period, beginning with a preparatory phase, continuing with intensive data collection, and culminating in detailed analysis. The researcher acted as the primary instrument, directly engaging with participants to interpret their lived realities, consistent with qualitative research traditions that position the researcher as a key interpretive agent (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). By adopting this approach, the study aims to generate an authentic and nuanced understanding of how narrative reflection can serve as a meaningful strategy for enhancing the spiritual and pedagogical competence of CRE teachers.

## **RESULT AND DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study indicate that the implementation of narrative reflection as a strategy for developing the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo has produced significant impacts in three interrelated domains: the quality of teaching, professional self-awareness, and the spiritual formation of teachers. Data collected through interviews, observations, and document analysis converged to reveal the themes: narrative reflection as a means of evaluating teaching experiences, narrative reflection in shaping the professional identity of teachers, and the implications of narrative reflection for enhancing pedagogical competence and spiritual growth.

### ***Narrative Reflection as a Means of Evaluating Teaching Experiences***

The CRE teachers who participated in this research consistently employed narrative reflection as a central tool for evaluating their teaching practices. Such reflection was carried out both personally, through the writing of reflective journals, and collectively, through discussions with colleagues. In their journals, teachers documented significant events that occurred during the teaching-learning process, including classroom challenges, the dynamics of student participation, and the responses of students to the subject matter. One of the journals contained a poignant entry in which a teacher confessed feeling “unsuccessful” in generating student enthusiasm when teaching a lesson about love in the Gospels. Rather than ending in frustration, this sense of failure became an entry point into deeper awareness of the importance of contextualizing biblical teachings in ways that connect with students’ real-life situations. The teacher realized that abstract theological language did not resonate effectively, and thus began experimenting with narratives and examples drawn from the students’ own cultural and social contexts. This narrative demonstrates that reflection is not merely a rational evaluation of teaching techniques but involves emotional, spiritual, and existential dimensions. Teachers were not only assessing the effectiveness of instructional methods but were also grappling with how these moments touched their own sense of calling and faith. As Zeichner and Liston (2014) argue, reflective practice is transformative when it engages not only the “what” of teaching but also the “why” and “how,” allowing teachers to situate their experiences within broader frameworks of meaning and values. This practice aligns with Dewey’s (1933) concept of reflection as the “active, persistent, and careful consideration” of beliefs and actions in light of their consequences. By using

narrative reflection, teachers move beyond superficial evaluation into a process of inquiry that reconfigures their pedagogical strategies. Thus, teaching becomes not a static performance but a dynamic cycle of experimentation, evaluation, and renewal. Beyond self-criticism, teachers also used narrative reflection to celebrate small successes, such as when students displayed unexpected empathy toward their peers or when classroom discussions opened pathways to explore deeper moral issues. These moments, when captured in reflective writing, strengthened teachers' sense of efficacy and reminded them of the spiritual dimension of their vocation. This echoes Van Manen's (1991) argument that reflection involves not only critique but also appreciation for the lived meaning of educational experiences.

### ***Narrative Reflection and the Formation of Professional Identity***

A second major theme that emerged from the data is the role of narrative reflection in shaping the professional identity of CRE teachers. Observations and interviews revealed that teachers increasingly viewed their role not merely as transmitters of theological knowledge but as spiritual companions who journey alongside students in the quest for meaning. This shift in perspective represents a deepening of professional consciousness. One participant articulated this clearly by stating that through reflection, he had come to understand his role as that of a spiritual guide who supports students struggling with family pressures and emotional challenges. Such realizations were catalyzed by reflecting on classroom encounters in which students' personal struggles surfaced, making the teacher aware that biblical instruction could provide both comfort and hope. In this way, narrative reflection became a mechanism for reframing teaching not only as an academic task but as a form of spiritual accompaniment. This redefinition of identity echoes Mezirow's (2012) transformative learning theory, which emphasizes the role of critical reflection in restructuring frames of reference. Teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo, by narrating and revisiting their experiences, engaged in perspective transformation that reoriented their professional selves toward a holistic, spiritually grounded vision of education. Professional identity formation was also reinforced through collective reflective practices such as peer discussions and learning communities. By sharing stories of successes, struggles, and dilemmas, teachers discovered solidarity with their colleagues and cultivated a sense of shared mission. Such communities of practice, as Wenger (1998) describes, are vital for sustaining professional growth because they provide relational contexts where meaning is co-constructed. These spaces allowed teachers to reinterpret their roles not in isolation but in dialogue, thereby strengthening their commitment to the vocation of CRE. The study revealed that teachers experienced narrative reflection as a form of vocational renewal. They reported that the process helped them reconnect with their original calling to teach as a response to God's mission. This sense of renewal prevented burnout and enhanced resilience in facing the daily challenges of teaching. Palmer (1998) highlights that teaching from a place of wholeness requires the integration of identity and integrity. The teachers' narratives demonstrated that reflection provided a pathway for integrating personal faith with professional responsibilities.

### ***Implications of Narrative Reflection for Pedagogical and Spiritual Competence***

The third theme highlights the practical and spiritual outcomes of engaging in narrative reflection. Pedagogically, teachers demonstrated notable improvements in lesson planning, instructional design, and classroom strategies. Reflections revealed that teachers became more adept at crafting lesson plans that were contextually relevant, adopting participatory learning methods, and embedding reflective practices into classroom activities. For instance, one teacher integrated project-based learning that invited students to articulate their faith through creative outputs such as spiritual poetry, reflective journals, and devotional videos. These activities not only enhanced student engagement but also facilitated deeper integration of Christian values into the learning process. This innovation aligns with Freire's (1998) call for dialogical pedagogy, where learners actively construct meaning in partnership with teachers. Narrative reflection also heightened teachers' sensitivity to the diverse needs and learning styles of students. One reflective entry highlighted the realization that visual and kinesthetic learners were disadvantaged when lessons relied exclusively on verbal explanations. In response, the teacher diversified instructional methods, incorporating visuals, role-plays, and hands-on activities. Such adaptations signify an expansion of pedagogical competence driven by reflective insights. On a spiritual level, narrative reflection enabled teachers to reconcile tensions between idealism and reality in their profession. Teachers reported becoming more capable of embracing teaching challenges as opportunities for spiritual growth rather than as failures. In interviews, one teacher described how reflection allowed him to "forgive himself" when lessons fell short of expectations, recognizing that teaching is part of an ongoing vocational journey shaped by divine grace. This resonates with Palmer's (1998) notion of teaching as a spiritual practice rooted in the integration of identity, integrity, and vocation. Reflective practice contributed to the development of humility and openness in teachers' spiritual lives. Instead of perceiving themselves as sole authorities, teachers began to see the classroom as a space where God's Spirit works through both teacher and students. Such a perspective shifts the pedagogical paradigm from control to collaboration, from performance to participation, echoing biblical principles of mutual edification (Romans 12:4-6).

The findings of this study align with broader literature on teacher education, which emphasizes reflection as central to professional growth. Brookfield (2017) argues that critical reflection helps teachers uncover assumptions and adapt their practice more effectively. However, the contribution of this study lies in demonstrating that narrative reflection, when contextualized in Christian education, extends beyond technical or cognitive learning-it encompasses moral, spiritual, and existential dimensions. Integrating narrative reflection into professional development programs for CRE teachers could involve structured journaling practices, storytelling workshops, or spiritual retreats. Schools might establish reflective learning communities where teachers share their narratives and explore biblical perspectives on teaching. Such initiatives would foster not only professional competence but also spiritual vitality. This study challenges conventional professional development models that often focus narrowly on technical skills or administrative efficiency. Instead, it advocates for a more holistic approach that honors the complexity of teachers as reflective practitioners and spiritual beings. Such an approach is particularly crucial for CRE teachers, whose vocation involves embodying Christian values as living witnesses to their students.

From a theological perspective, narrative reflection can be understood as a practice of *metanoia* - ongoing conversion of heart and mind. By revisiting their experiences in light of Scripture and prayer, teachers undergo continuous renewal, aligning their pedagogical actions with the Gospel. Reflection thus becomes a spiritual discipline that nurtures both teacher and students in faith formation. The findings affirm that CRE is not merely the transfer of religious knowledge but a transformative practice that engages the whole person. When teachers reflect narratively, they integrate cognitive, affective, and spiritual dimensions of learning. This holistic integration mirrors the biblical vision of education as discipleship, where wisdom is lived out in community and oriented toward love and justice (Micah 6:8; Matthew 22:37-39). This study at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo demonstrates that narrative reflection is a powerful strategy for enhancing the competence of CRE teachers. By evaluating their experiences, teachers develop deeper awareness of their pedagogical practices, reframe their professional identity as spiritual companions, and cultivate both pedagogical and spiritual competence. Narrative reflection transforms teaching into a process of vocational renewal, integrating faith with professional responsibility. Narrative reflection reflects the Christian call to ongoing transformation and discipleship. Educationally, it offers a holistic framework for professional development that honors the complexity of teaching as both an art and a ministry. Practically, it provides concrete pathways for schools and teacher-training programs to nurture reflective, spiritually grounded educators who can guide students in navigating the challenges of contemporary life with wisdom and faith. Narrative reflection enables CRE teachers to embody the Gospel in their vocation, shaping not only their own lives but also the lives of their students, and contributing to the broader mission of Christian education in Indonesia.

## CONCLUSION

Based on the findings and discussion presented, it can be concluded that narrative reflection emerges as a highly effective strategy for developing the competence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo. Rather than functioning merely as a tool for self-evaluation, narrative reflection serves as a transformative medium that enriches teachers' professional, spiritual, and pedagogical awareness. Within the context of CRE instruction, narrative reflection enables teachers to revisit the meaning of every interaction with students, reinterpret teaching experiences, and cultivate a more authentic relationship between faith and pedagogical practice. Through a systematic reflective process, CRE teachers at SMA Negeri 1 Sawo demonstrated significant improvement in designing learning that is more contextual, adaptive, and inspiring. Teachers became more open to feedback, more critical in reviewing their own practices, and more empathetic in understanding the psychological and spiritual dynamics of their students. Consequently, their professional identity shifted from being merely knowledge transmitters to becoming spiritual companions who accompany students in their journey of faith. This finding illustrates how narrative reflection can expand teachers' horizons of meaning and deepen their sense of vocation in the field of education. At the institutional level, the results suggest the necessity of structural support from schools to integrate narrative reflection into continuous professional development programs. Schools can foster reflective communities, organize spiritual formation workshops, and provide spaces for teachers to regularly write and

share their teaching narratives. Such efforts align with the holistic education paradigm that values teachers' lived experiences as essential sources of learning and growth. Narrative reflection is not only a method but a culture of thinking and acting that positions teachers as lifelong learners. This strategy proves particularly relevant in addressing the challenges of contemporary education, which demand teachers to be not only academically competent but also spiritually resilient, pedagogically adaptive, and relationally humanistic. Therefore, narrative reflection should be developed as an integral component of authentic, contextual, and transformative Christian education.

### **BIBLIOGRAPHY**

- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77-101.
- Brookfield, S. (2017). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher* (2nd ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Clandinin, D. J., & Connelly, F. M. (2000). *Narrative inquiry: Experience and story in qualitative research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Creswell, J. W. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Dewey, J. (1933). *How we think*. D.C. Heath & Company.
- Freire, P. (1998). *Pedagogy of freedom: Ethics, democracy, and civic courage*. Rowman & Littlefield.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Sage.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2016). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Mezirow, J. (2012). *Learning as transformation: Critical perspectives on a theory in progress*. Jossey-Bass.
- Palmer, P. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. Q. (2015). *Qualitative research & evaluation methods* (4th ed.). Sage.
- Van Manen, M. (1991). *The tact of teaching: The meaning of pedagogical thoughtfulness*. SUNY Press.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. Cambridge University Press.
- Zeichner, K., & Liston, D. (2014). *Reflective teaching: An introduction*. Routledge.