



Beyond the Classroom: A Kirkpatrick Evaluation of Pedagogical Competencies in Catholic Religious Education

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Abstract :

This study aims to evaluate Catholic Religious Education (CRE) teachers' pedagogical and professional competencies in supporting meaningful, inclusive, and student-centered learning through the Kirkpatrick Model. The study employed a qualitative evaluation research design to examine four evaluation levels: reaction, learning, behavior, and results. Data were collected through observations, interviews, and documentation, then analyzed using data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation of techniques and sources. The findings show that students responded positively to interactive and contextual CRE learning at the reaction level. At the learning level, teachers showed competence in designing instructional activities based on students' needs through diagnostic assessment. At the behavior level, teachers consistently implemented adaptive, inclusive, and student-centered teaching strategies that reflected effective pedagogical and professional practices. At the results level, students showed improved engagement, participation, and understanding during learning. The study concludes that CRE teachers effectively applied their competencies to enhance the quality of learning. The implications highlight the importance of continuous professional development, instructional innovation, and process-based assessment to strengthen responsive religious education and sustain student engagement.

INTRODUCTION

Catholic Religious Education (CRE) has an important role in developing students as whole persons by connecting knowledge, character, social participation, and religious formation. Its significance extends beyond academic achievement because classroom experiences can influence how students understand values and participate responsibly in their communities. Effective religious education therefore requires teachers who can create supportive learning environments, facilitate meaningful participation, and translate subject knowledge into accessible learning experiences. Research on constructivist learning environments emphasizes that supportive interaction can strengthen motivation and learning strategies, while contemporary studies of teacher competence highlight the importance of integrating pedagogical knowledge with classroom practice (Do et al., 2023; Star, 2023; Wahyudin et al., 2024). Thus, examining how CRE teachers enact pedagogical and professional competencies is important for understanding how religious learning can contribute to students' broader educational development.

A major challenge in education is ensuring that teacher competence is translated consistently into effective classroom practice. Teachers are expected to understand diverse learners, select appropriate instructional strategies, assess learning continuously, and adapt instruction to curricular demands. However, these responsibilities require more than knowledge of teaching principles because teachers must make contextual decisions during actual classroom interactions. Studies of differentiated instruction show that responding to students' readiness, interests, and learning needs requires substantial pedagogical judgment (Hu, 2024; Tajik et al., 2024; Hidayah et al., 2024). Similarly, formative assessment research emphasizes that assessment and feedback should become part of the learning process rather than function only as final evaluation (Trujillo et al., 2025; Töllner et al., 2025; Dina & Lama, 2025). These challenges make systematic examination of teacher competence particularly important.

The need to examine these issues is also evident in the classroom context of CRE at SMP Fransiskus Xaverius Namorambe. Initial classroom observations showed that learning conditions were not immediately conducive, with students talking, moving between seats, and showing limited focus. The teacher responded by using greetings, clear directions, students' names, light humor, questioning, and interpersonal communication to establish a more orderly environment gradually. Instruction subsequently involved lectures, discussions, question-and-answer activities, contextual examples, continuous assessment, and immediate feedback. The teacher also adapted explanations, instructional pace, and methods according to students' characteristics. These observed practices indicate that pedagogical and professional competence was enacted through interconnected classroom-management, instructional, assessment, curriculum, and reflective practices rather than through isolated teaching skills.

Previous research provides several perspectives for understanding these practices. Constructivist research emphasizes active participation and meaningful interaction, while studies of differentiated instruction highlight teachers' adaptation to learner diversity (Arega & Hunde, 2025; Wibowo et al., 2025; Hu, 2024). Research on pedagogical content knowledge similarly shows that effective teaching requires integrating subject knowledge and pedagogical reasoning (Star, 2023; Kong, 2024; Hamdanah et al., 2025). Formative assessment studies further show the importance of feedback for improving learning processes (Trujillo et al., 2025; Töllner et al., 2025). Nevertheless, these strands of literature generally examine particular dimensions of teaching separately. They provide limited explanation of how classroom management, student-centered instruction, assessment, content delivery, differentiation, and curriculum use operate together within CRE.

Research on religious education also indicates the importance of teachers' diagnostic competencies and their ability to respond to students' learning conditions (Sieveke, 2024; Nasrullah et al., 2026; Harianto et al., 2026). Meanwhile, the Kirkpatrick Model provides a framework for examining educational effectiveness through reaction, learning, behavior, and results (Anderson & Merkebu, 2024; Andini et al., 2025). Recent applications demonstrate that the model can support multi-level evaluation of teacher development and educational programs (Herawati et al., 2026; Wulandari et al., 2026). However, limited attention has focused on applying this framework to the integrated examination of pedagogical and professional competencies among CRE teachers. The existing literature therefore leaves a contextual and analytical gap in how these competencies manifest in everyday religious education and how their effectiveness can be interpreted across multiple evaluative levels.

This study's novelty lies in integrating pedagogical and professional competence into a single evaluation of Catholic Religious Education at the school level. Rather than examining competence as separate technical components, the study traces how classroom management, student-centered learning, assessment and feedback, content delivery, responsiveness to student characteristics, curriculum implementation, and reflection function as an interconnected instructional process. The study also applies the Kirkpatrick Model to organize these practices across reaction, learning, behavior, and results. This approach provides a more comprehensive picture of teacher competence by linking classroom events to students' responses, learning processes, behavioral participation, and educational outcomes. Such an integrated perspective is important for identifying how CRE teaching can become more adaptive, reflective, and responsive to students' needs.

Accordingly, this study examines how Catholic Religious Education teachers implement and reflect on their pedagogical and professional competencies in their teaching. It argues that teacher competence should be understood not merely through mastery of teaching requirements but through the capacity to connect classroom management, instructional adaptation, assessment, curriculum use, and reflective improvement. The study therefore aims to analyze these competencies using the Kirkpatrick Model as an evaluative framework. By examining evidence from classroom observations, interviews, and documentation, the study contributes an empirically grounded account of CRE teacher competence in an actual school context. The findings are expected to provide a basis for strengthening instructional practices that are supportive, student-centered, contextually responsive, and continuously improved through assessment and reflection.

RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design to examine the pedagogical and professional competencies of Catholic Religious Education (CRE) teachers as manifested in classroom practice. A qualitative approach was selected because it enables researchers to describe participants' experiences, instructional practices, and classroom interactions in their natural context (Stanley, 2023; Villamin et al., 2025). The design was appropriate for capturing how competencies were implemented through classroom management, student-centered instruction, assessment, content delivery, differentiation, curriculum implementation, and reflective practices. Rather than measuring competence numerically, the study sought to provide a contextual description of these practices based on multiple sources of evidence. The Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model served as an analytical framework for interpreting the findings across reaction, learning, behavior, and results levels.

The research was conducted at SMP Fransiskus Xaverius Namorambe, Deli Serdang Regency, North Sumatra, Indonesia. The school was selected because the study focused specifically on examining the implementation of pedagogical and professional competencies of a CRE teacher within an actual school learning context. The participants comprised one CRE teacher as the primary informant, one principal, and five students as supporting informants. Participants were selected through purposive sampling because they were directly involved in, experienced, or had relevant knowledge of the CRE learning process. Purposive sampling enables researchers to select information-rich participants who are relevant to the research questions and study objectives (Nyimbili & Nyimbili, 2024; Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025; Zaini & Maulidi, 2025). This selection also allowed the study to obtain perspectives from teachers, school management, and students.

The study collected data through observation, semi-structured interviews, and documentation. The researchers conducted classroom observations during CRE instruction to examine classroom management, student participation, instructional methods, teacher–student interactions, assessment, feedback, and curriculum implementation. Observation was particularly important for identifying how participants enacted pedagogical and professional competencies, rather than relying solely on their accounts (Da Costa et al., 2024; Elhamma, 2024). The study conducted semi-structured interviews with the CRE teacher, principal, and five students to explore their experiences and perceptions of the learning process. Documentation complemented observational and interview data through relevant materials, including lesson modules, instructional plans, assessment records, and school documents. Together, these techniques enabled methodological triangulation of the findings (Chand, 2025; Elhamma, 2024).

Table 1. Informant Coding

No.	Informant Category	Role/Position	Number	Code
1	Primary Informant	Catholic Religious Education (CRE) Teacher	1	T1
2	Supporting Informant	Principal	1	P1
3	Supporting Informants	Students	2	S1–S2
Total			4	

Data analysis followed an interactive qualitative process involving data condensation, data display, and verification. Data condensation involved selecting, focusing, simplifying, and organizing information relevant to the research objectives, particularly evidence concerning pedagogical and professional competencies. The team then displayed the condensed data in descriptive and thematic narratives to identify patterns across observations, interviews, and documents. The team then verified data by comparing information across sources and methods to establish consistency and identify meaningful differences. The analysis followed the study focus and used the Kirkpatrick framework to link evidence to reaction, learning, behavior, and results. This process supported systematic interpretation while maintaining the contextual characteristics of qualitative data (Miller et al., 2023; Alam, 2021; Prahasti et al., 2026).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

Responsive Classroom Management and Student-Centered Instruction

Responsive classroom management and student-centered instruction refer to the teacher’s capacity to create a conducive learning environment, establish clear expectations, understand students’ behavioral and learning characteristics, adapt instructional strategies to students’ needs, and provide opportunities for active participation. In this study, the sub-finding emerged from classroom observations and interviews on classroom management, students’ characteristics, instructional adaptation, and student participation. Within the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model, this finding is particularly related to the reaction and learning dimensions, as the observed practices shaped students’ classroom experiences while supporting their participation and understanding of the learning material. The evidence shows that pedagogical competence was expressed through classroom organization, responsive interaction, instructional flexibility, and attention to students’ learning needs.

Table 2. Interview Evidence on Classroom Management and Student-Centered Learning

Informant Code	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
T1	"As a teacher, the first thing to do is establish clear classroom agreements that must be followed. If students violate them, they are given warnings. However, it is also important to understand why students can't stay focused. Rather than simply labeling them as disruptive, teachers need to explore the underlying reasons. Therefore, maintaining clear rules and understanding students' behavior are both essential in managing the classroom."	Clear classroom expectations and understanding students' behavior
T1	"Teachers need to understand students from a psychological perspective, including their abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds. Based on this mapping, instruction can be differentiated through products, projects, and processes so that various methods can be applied in the teaching and learning process."	Understanding student characteristics and instructional differentiation
S1	"If a student does not understand, the teacher explains the material again more clearly. The teaching method is easy to understand so that we can follow the lesson well."	Repeated explanation and instructional accessibility
S2	"The teacher explains the material in detail using simple language so that we can understand the lesson easily."	Clear explanation and comprehensibility

Table 2 reveals two interconnected dimensions of the teacher's pedagogical competence: responsive classroom management and adaptive instruction. T1 described classroom management as establishing clear agreements while understanding the reasons behind students' behavior. Understanding students' abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds also informed differentiation in learning processes, methods, projects, and products. Student accounts supported these findings: S1 emphasized repeated explanations, while S2 highlighted detailed explanations in simple language. These accounts indicate that responsiveness involved both managing classroom behavior and adapting instruction to students' learning needs.

Observations corroborated the interview findings, showing that the teacher gradually improved classroom order through clear directions, individual reminders, humor, and question-and-answer activities. Instruction followed a structured sequence and incorporated lectures, discussions, real-life examples, and opportunities for students to ask questions and express opinions. The teacher also adjusted explanations, teaching methods, and instructional pace according to students' needs. Overall, the findings demonstrate that clear expectations and instructional adaptability jointly supported student engagement and understanding, connecting students' classroom experiences (reaction) with their learning processes within the Kirkpatrick framework.

Instructional Planning and the Enactment of Pedagogical and Professional Competence

Instructional planning and the enactment of pedagogical and professional competence refer to the teacher's ability to translate knowledge of students, subject matter, curriculum requirements, and instructional goals into systematic classroom practices. The sub-finding encompasses subject-matter mastery, lesson preparation, adaptation of instructional practices, curriculum implementation, classroom interaction, assessment, and feedback. The evidence indicates that professional competence was demonstrated not only by what the teacher knew but also by how the teacher organized

and enacted that knowledge in the classroom. Within the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model, this finding corresponds primarily to the behavior dimension because it concerns the observable implementation of professional and pedagogical competencies in actual teaching practice.

Table 3. Interview Evidence on Instructional Planning and Professional Competence

Informant Code	Interview Excerpt	Indicator
T1	"Teachers need to understand students from a psychological perspective, including their abilities, learning styles, and backgrounds. Based on this mapping, instruction can be differentiated through products, projects, and processes so that various methods can be applied in the teaching and learning process."	Student characteristics as a basis for instructional decisions
P1	"Before conducting instruction, I direct teachers to prepare lesson plans to ensure that the learning process is systematically designed. Without proper planning, the learning environment tends to become less conducive. Based on my observations, the CRE teacher has implemented instructional planning in accordance with these guidelines."	Instructional planning
P1	"We are currently implementing the national curriculum with a deep learning approach, where students are encouraged to develop awareness in learning, understand learning objectives, and engage in meaningful and enjoyable learning experiences."	Curriculum implementation
P1	"Assessment consists of three stages: initial, process, and final assessment. Based on my observation, the CRE teacher has implemented initial assessment, as reflected in the way the teacher identifies appropriate instructional strategies. Process assessment is conducted through daily assessments, while final assessment is reflected in report card evaluations."	Initial, process, and final assessment
S1	"If a student does not understand, the teacher explains the material again more clearly. The teaching method is easy to understand so that we can follow the lesson well."	Instructional adaptation to learning difficulties
S2	"The teacher explains the material in detail using simple language so that we can understand the lesson easily."	Accessible subject-matter delivery

Table 3 shows interview data revealing an interdependent relationship among student understanding, instructional planning, curriculum implementation, and assessment. T1's statement indicates that knowledge of students' characteristics informed decisions about instructional differentiation. P1's account confirms that these instructional practices were embedded within systematic lesson planning and school-level curriculum implementation. P1 further describes assessment as occurring at initial, process, and final stages, indicating that assessment formed part of the instructional process rather than functioning solely as an endpoint measurement. Meanwhile, S1 and S2 show that students saw these practices in action through repeated explanations, accessible language, and responsiveness to difficulties. The convergence of these perspectives suggests that professional competence emerged through the practical integration of pedagogical knowledge, planning, curriculum, classroom interaction, and assessment.

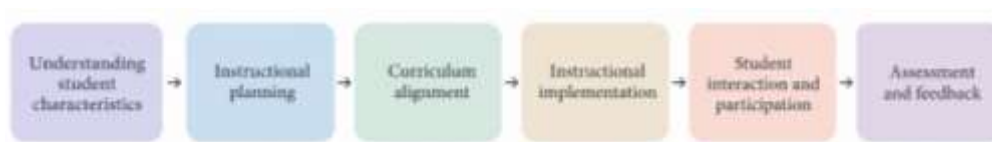


Figure 1. Instructional Planning and Implementation Process

Figure 1 illustrates how pedagogical and professional competence moved from professional understanding to observable classroom behavior. Knowledge of students provided the basis for instructional decisions; planning organized those decisions; curriculum provided the instructional reference; classroom implementation translated them into learning activities; and assessment generated information concerning students' progress. In this sense, competence was enacted through a continuous process rather than through isolated professional actions.

Observation data support this pattern, showing that the teacher delivered materials systematically, used clear language and varied methods, adjusted explanations and instructional pace, encouraged participation, aligned learning activities with curriculum objectives, and used assessment results to respond to students' needs. These practices show that pedagogical and professional competence was enacted through systematic, adaptive day-to-day instruction rather than formal preparation alone. The dominant pattern is competence-to-practice enactment, in which understanding students informed planning, planning structured implementation, and assessment provided feedback for instructional adjustment; within the Kirkpatrick framework, this corresponds to the behavior level.

Assessment, Feedback, and Reflective Instructional Improvement

Assessment, feedback, and reflective instructional improvement refer to the teacher's systematic use of assessment information to monitor students' learning progress, document achievement, communicate results, identify strengths and weaknesses in the learning process, and determine areas requiring instructional improvement. The finding encompasses initial, process, and final assessments; feedback during instruction; assessment reporting; and reflective practice. In the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model, this finding sits primarily at the results level because it concerns the information generated from the learning process and how that information supports subsequent improvement.

Table 4. Interview Evidence on Assessment and Reflective Improvement

Interview Excerpt	Indicator	Informant Code
"Assessment consists of three stages: initial, process, and final assessment. Based on my observation, the CRE teacher has implemented initial assessment, as reflected in the way the teacher identifies appropriate instructional strategies. Process assessment is conducted through daily assessments, while final assessment is reflected in report card evaluations."	Initial, process, and final assessment	P1
"The teacher conducts reflection by asking students about the strengths and weaknesses of the learning process, so that areas for improvement can be identified and addressed."	Reflection and identification of areas for improvement	T1

Table 4 indicates that assessment served both evaluative and developmental functions. P1 described assessment as a three-stage process in which initial assessment

contributed to identifying appropriate instructional strategies, process assessment was conducted through daily learning activities, and final assessment was represented through report card evaluation. This indicates that assessment was distributed across the learning process and connected to instructional decision-making. T1's statement extends this interpretation by showing that the teacher used assessment-related information for reflection. By asking students about the strengths and weaknesses of the learning process, the teacher generated information to identify areas for improvement. The critical significance of these data lies in the shift from measurement to reflection: assessment was not limited to documenting what students had achieved but also provided information to evaluate and improve the instructional process.

Observation and documentation reinforce this interpretation, showing that assessment was conducted continuously through questions and tasks, accompanied by immediate feedback, clear communication of learning outcomes, systematic and objective recording, and transparent reporting to relevant stakeholders. Restated, assessment served three interconnected functions: monitoring learning, documenting achievement, and supporting reflection on instructional quality. Initial assessment informed instructional decisions, process assessment monitored ongoing learning, and final assessment supported reporting. In contrast, I used assessment information and student feedback to identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement. Within the Kirkpatrick framework, assessment results functioned not merely as endpoints but as a basis for sustained improvement in instructional practice.

Discussion

The finding on responsive classroom management and student-centered instruction is consistent with research that conceptualizes instructional quality as an integration of classroom management, student support, and supportive teaching. König et al. (2021) found that pedagogical competence and classroom-management expertise predict instructional quality, supporting this study's observation that clear expectations, responsive interaction, and adaptive explanations reflect competence in action. Hettinger et al. (2021) similarly showed that classroom-management self-efficacy relates to monitoring, relatedness, and students' enjoyment, while Chang et al. (2022) linked teachers' social goals, self-efficacy, and classroom engagement. This study extends that literature by showing how these dimensions operate together in religious education: behavioral responsiveness creates order, while student-centered adaptation converts order into participation and comprehension. Theoretically, competence is relational and context-sensitive; practically, teacher development should integrate management with responsiveness rather than treat discipline and pedagogy separately.

The finding on instructional planning and the enactment of pedagogical and professional competence aligns with research emphasizing the movement from teacher knowledge to instructional practice. Hammer and Ufer (2023) show that lesson-planning competence involves noticing and reasoning about task potential, indicating that planning is more than administrative preparation. Gil López et al. (2023) link teacher competence and classroom planning to student engagement, while Smets et al. (2022) show that differentiated instruction requires teachers to assess learner differences and adjust instructional design. These studies support that knowledge of students, curriculum, and subject matter must be translated into planning, classroom enactment, and adjustment. Theoretically, professional competence is understood as an enactment process linking knowledge, planning, and practice. Practically, schools should strengthen

planning through collaborative review, diagnostic information, and reflection. This contributes a classroom-level account linking competence and enactment through Kirkpatrick's behavior dimension.

The finding on assessment, feedback, and reflective improvement is consistent with assessment scholarship while also extending it. Yan and Pastore (2022) conceptualize formative assessment literacy through conceptual, practical, and socio-emotional dimensions, supporting the evidence that assessment informs instructional decisions rather than merely records achievement. Pastore (2023) emphasizes responsive classroom assessment, while Morris et al. (2021) note that feedback benefits depend on how it is implemented. Veugen et al. (2024) show that formative assessment can stimulate co-regulated and self-regulated learning through instructional adaptation. The study contributes by connecting initial, process, and final assessment with teacher reflection within one instructional cycle. The theoretical implication is a shift from assessment-as-measurement toward assessment-as-improvement. Practically, teachers need routines for feedback, documentation, student voice, and reflective review so evidence informs teaching decisions. The impact is a more adaptive instructional process in which assessment improves teaching rather than certifying learning.

A theoretical contribution of this study is the contextual use of the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model at the classroom level. Although the model is applied to training through reaction, learning, behavior, and results, these findings adapt its logic to trace micro-processes in teaching. The first finding captures students' classroom experiences and understanding; the second emphasizes teaching behavior; and the third connects assessment evidence with instructional improvement. This interpretation is compatible with research showing that classroom management relates to students' school attitudes through social relationships (Obermeier et al., 2024) and that formative assessment can support teacher reflection and professional learning (Linden et al., 2023). The novelty lies in integrating teacher competence, classroom responsiveness, planning, and assessment within one evaluative sequence. The theoretical impact is a competence-to-practice-to-improvement pathway, while the practical impact is an integrated framework for instructional monitoring and professional development.

Taken together, the findings indicate that effective Catholic Religious Education teaching emerges through relationships among responsive management, adaptive planning, professional enactment, assessment, and reflection. This synthesis aligns with research linking pedagogical competence to instructional quality and student learning (König et al., 2021), while adding contextual depth by showing how these processes unfold within religious education. The study's contribution is therefore an integrated explanation of competence as a cyclical process rather than a fixed set of teacher attributes. Practically, teacher evaluation should examine not only lesson preparation and final scores, but also responsiveness, instructional adaptation, feedback, and reflection. This perspective can strengthen competency-oriented supervision, professional development, and continuous instructional improvement in other values-oriented educational settings. The resulting conceptualization advances the literature by connecting pedagogical competence with classroom responsiveness and assessment through an evaluative framework.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that Catholic Religious Education teachers implement pedagogical and professional competence not as separate technical skills but as an interconnected and adaptive process linking responsive classroom management,

student-centered instruction, instructional planning, content delivery, assessment, curriculum implementation, and reflective improvement. The most important lesson is that teacher competence becomes meaningful when teachers continuously translate professional knowledge into responsive classroom action and refine it through assessment and reflection, enabling them to maintain curricular direction while adapting instruction to students' characteristics and learning needs. Scientifically, the study contributes an integrated classroom-level conceptualization of teacher competence by extending the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model beyond conventional program evaluation to trace the relationship among students' classroom experiences, learning, observable teaching behavior, and instructional improvement in Catholic Religious Education. The research implication is that teacher development and instructional supervision should evaluate competence as a continuous competence-to-practice-to-improvement process rather than as a collection of isolated competencies. Nevertheless, the study is limited by its qualitative descriptive design, single-school context, and small number of informants, which constrain the findings' transferability to other religious education settings. Future research should examine the proposed competence-to-practice-to-improvement pathway across multiple schools, teachers, and educational contexts. It may employ longitudinal or mixed-method designs to investigate how these competencies develop over time and how their implementation relates to measurable student learning and engagement outcomes.

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CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no known financial, personal, or professional conflicts of interest that could have influenced the conduct of the research, the analysis or interpretation of the findings, or the preparation and publication of this manuscript.

USE OF ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)-ASSISTED TECHNOLOGY

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