

THE POWER OF LISTENING: EXPLORING EFFECTIVE TEACHING BY CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHERS

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Abstract

This study examines the role of listening in the pedagogical practices of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers with an emphasis on the function and strategy of listening as a holistic and relational approach. Through observation of narrative literature on various educational literature, this study identified four main functions of listening, namely: building trust relationships, upholding equality, being a means of assessment, and as a relational pedagogical tool. In addition, four main strategies were found that can be applied by CRE teachers, namely: listening in three stages (pre, during, and post), metacognitive and critical strategy, a holistic approach, and listening attentively. This study also revealed the contradiction between the function of listening as an evaluative versus relational tool, as well as research related to the quantitative influence of listening on student learning outcomes. These results indicate the importance of listening as a form of professional ethics, an expression of love, and a means to explore spiritual meaning in the relationship between teachers and students. This study recommends strengthening CRE teacher training in developing listening competencies as an integral part of transformative teaching.

Keywords: Listening, Christian Religious Education, relational pedagogy, teaching strategies, professional ethics.

Introduction

Teacher-student relationships play a critical role in effective pedagogy, student engagement, and academic success (Hattie, 2008; Pianta, 2004). Although much research has focused on communication strategies such as questioning, feedback, and verbal instruction, “listening” remains an under-discussed yet important dimension of teacher-student interactions. Active listening by teachers fosters trust, emotional support, and belonging, which are key factors in student motivation and learning (Cornelius-White, 2007). Effective teachers are teachers who listen, typically described as those who develop relationships with students who are emotionally close, safe, and trusting, who provide

access to instrumental support, and who foster a more general ethos of community and caring in the classroom (Wentzel, 2012). Active listening is a critical skill in education, fostering meaningful communication between teachers and students (Paramole et al., 2024).

The concept of listening in education is not limited to auditory reception—it involves attention, empathy, and response to students’ verbal and nonverbal cues (CARRIER, 2004; Schultz, 2003). When teachers listen effectively, they create a dialogic classroom environment where students feel heard and valued (Mercer et al., 2019). The best way to understand students is to listen to them. This, in turn, promotes participation, critical thinking, and social-emotional development.

However, the practical application of listening in teaching by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers is still unclear. How do teachers use “listening” as a pedagogical tool? Is listening primarily used for classroom management, formative assessment, or building rapport? Some studies suggest that listening helps teachers adapt instruction to students’ needs (Black & Wiliam, 2010), , while others highlight its role in fostering an inclusive and democratic classroom (Rudduck & McIntyre, 2007). In addition, for Christians, listening is essential for collaboration in mission because it reveals the ways and means of God’s work on earth (Campbell & Inguagiato, 1994). Three interesting “listening” modalities are explored that form the basis for exploring the power and possibilities of “listening”: living a true presence, participating in the counseling process, and engaging in strategic questions (Bunkers, 2010). Christian CRE teachers must apply “listening” in their teaching in order to introduce God’s Love to humanity through God’s Word (the Bible). CRE teachers who listen mean being fully present for their students. CRE teachers should be good listeners, not just good teachers.

Despite the current research, a systematic exploration of how Catholic Religious Education teachers operationalize “listening” in their teaching practices is still lacking. Given this gap, this study seeks to investigate whether listening is an important dimension of Catholic Religious Education teachers’ relationships with their students and how teachers use “listening” as a pedagogical strategy in the classroom environment. By reviewing the existing literature, this study aims to clarify the functions and strategy of listening in education, offering insights for teacher training and classroom practice.

Method

This study used a narrative literature review approach to explore the role of listening in teacher-student relationships and its pedagogical applications. Unlike systematic reviews, this method allows for thematic and critical synthesis of existing literature without strict inclusion/exclusion protocols. Data collection was conducted by searching articles from Google Scholar, SAGE Journal, Taylor & Francis, and Springer searches. The keywords used were “listening by teacher, active listening, listen to student, listening strategies in teaching.” Literature analysis was conducted by: 1) skimming abstracts and introductions to identify relevant literature; 2) grouping the literature into

key themes (the concept of “listening” in educational contexts, empirical evidence on how “listening” affects teacher-student relationships, and practical strategies teachers use to implement “listening”); 3) critically evaluating by comparing findings, identifying contradictions, and highlighting gaps.

Result and Discussion

The following are the results of a search for articles on the role of listening in teacher-student relationships, excluding journal articles related to Language or Music learning; researchers found several articles that showed that “listening” is an effective teaching function. (Table 1). “Listening” has four functions, namely to: 1) build a relationship of trust, 2) equality, 3) assessment, and 4) a relational pedagogical tool (Table 1). Listening also has several strategies to produce effective learning. Some listening strategies explored by researchers are the following three stages of listening strategies: using critical metacognition, a holistic approach, and being attentive (Table 2).

Table 1. Listening Functions for Teachers

Author	Function	Findings
Allen et al. (2023)	Equality	Listening wholeheartedly helps bridge cultural, political, and religious gaps by emphasizing understanding and unfamiliar voices.
Mekonnen & Yigezu (2022)	Building trust relationships	Listening is a primary and very important task for Christian religious education teachers.
Gilson & Sauder (2021)	Relational pedagogical tools	Teachers who are active listeners demonstrate positive character traits and use listening as a pedagogical tool. Listening influences students’ sense of connectedness and motivation to learn.
Comber & Hayes (2023)	Relational pedagogical tools	Teachers who listen to students in the context of their communities can support responsive pedagogy and creative curriculum design, which in turn can enable students to construct a complex repertoire of communication practices for representation, participation, and action.
Itzchakov et al. (2023)	Building trust relationships	Listening is associated with increased autonomy, psychological safety, and a positive relational climate.
Martín de Hijas-Larrea et al. (2025)	Building trust relationships	Listening fosters a safe environment where students feel free to be themselves and express themselves, helping them navigate everyday situations.
Flores & Ahn (2024)	Equality	Listening to students means recognizing their capacity to enact institutional change.

Ying & Briffett-Aktaş (2024)	Equality	Listening to and valuing students' views about their learning experiences promotes student empowerment and equitable teacher-student relationships.
Gez-Langerman (2024)	Assessment	Listening is one of the assessment formats for attitudes and skills that early childhood teachers must have.
Kalinec-Craig (2017)	Assessment	Active listening is one aspect of teacher professional assessment.

Table 2. Effective “listening” strategies for teaching

Author	Strategy	Findings
Kurudayıoğlu et al. (2021)	Three stages of strategic listening	The three main themes of listening strategies are listening before listening, listening during listening, and listening after listening.
Polatcan et al. (2025)	Metacognitive and critical	Metacognitive listening strategies are predictive of academic listening skills, and critical listening attitudes mediate this.
Amanvermez Incirkus (2025)	Holistic approach	Listening using a holistic approach.
Meyers et al. (2019)	Full of attention	Teachers are expected to “listen attentively.”

Listening is not just a technical issue but also a relational and emotional commitment of teachers in order to build a healthy learning climate. Listening has a function to build a relationship of trust between students and teachers. Listening is the main task of CRE teachers (Mekonnen & Yigezu, 2022). Listening is related to teacher autonomy, psychological safety, and positive relationships between teachers and students (Itzchakov et al., 2023). Listening with empathy creates a safe space for students where they can express themselves and be themselves (Martín de Hijas-Larrea et al., 2025). CRE teachers who listen sincerely will strengthen a supportive emotional climate, foster trust, and create an open and psychologically safe space for all students. This means that the sincerity of CRE teachers in listening to students with everything they say is based on full acceptance of students as subjects who have the potential to develop in a better direction. This openness can often help students express themselves and even be creative so that they ultimately achieve in learning (both academic and non-academic).

Several studies have shown that listening also has an equalizing function. Listening can bridge cultural, political, and religious differences (Allen et al., 2023). Teachers must be able to listen to students who have different cultural, political, and religious backgrounds from themselves. CRE teachers who listen must eliminate discrimination and uphold equality. Students are subjects of education and not objects. Listening to the subject of education is a form of recognition of the capacity to influence institutions (Flores & Ahn, 2024); encourage empowerment, and create equal relationships between teachers and students (Ying & Briffett-Aktaş, 2024). CRE teachers who listen must shift power relations in the classroom and respect the diversity of students' identities and experiences. This is in line with Martin Buber's thinking about "*I-Thou*," which emphasizes that intersubjective relations are the true nature of humans, so there are no hierarchical relations. Buber's concept underlines that I am me because of you, and vice versa. Human relations consist of *I-It*, *I-He* relations, and *I-Thou* relations. In the *I-Thou* relationship, the relationship between humans is intersubjective. In contrast to the *I-It* relationship, in the *I-Thou* relationship, the other person is positioned as a subject so that they treat and are treated according to what they want for themselves (Santmire, 1968).

Teachers are a profession that requires a professional assessment based on several aspects. Two aspects of teacher professionalism assessment are attitude and skills. Listening attitude and listening skills are important competencies that teachers must have (Gez-Langerman, 2024). Teachers must be sensitive and empathetic when listening to students. Kalinec-Craig (2017) also said that active listening is an indicator of teacher professionalism. Effective CRE teachers will be able to respond to students not only through teaching but also through being fully present. Teachers are active listeners who not only convey material but also build positive emotional relationships and student learning motivation (Gilson & Sauder, 2021). CRE teachers need to be aware of and self-control when listening to students. By listening to students, teachers can also design a responsive and inclusive curriculum (Comber & Hayes, 2023) because listening is an ethical and professional responsibility of teachers. Thus, CRE teachers can understand four functions: listening functions to 1) build relationships of trust, 2) equality, 3) assess, and 4) use relational pedagogical tools (Figure 1).

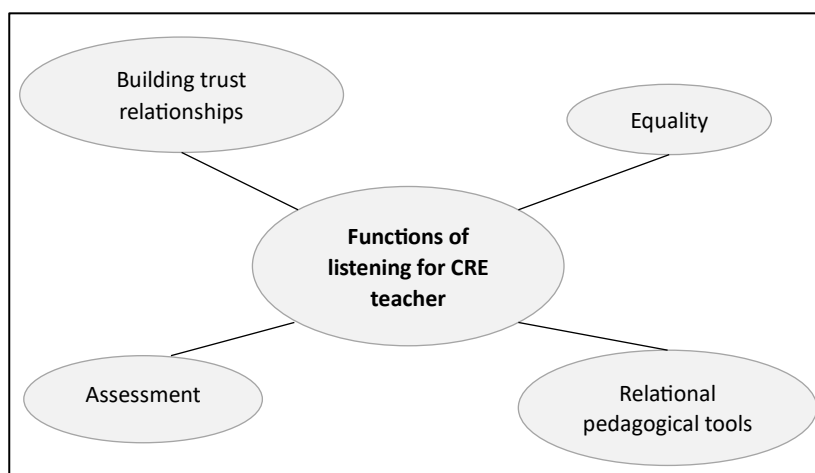


Figure 1. The “Listening” function for CRE teachers for effective teaching

Listening has three stages that need to be followed by teachers, in this case, CRE teachers. The three stages of listening are pre-listening, during listening, and post-listening (Kurudayioğlu et al., 2021). Listening is an active and structured process in the teaching practice of CRE teachers. CRE teachers need to prepare themselves cognitively and effectively before listening to their students. CRE teachers should also not underestimate the skills required when listening, such as the skills of taking notes, concluding, and focusing on what students are saying. CRE teachers can design learning by paying attention to these three stages to improve student understanding and involvement in CRE learning.

Metacognitive listening strategies are also proposed by Polatcan et al. (2025) as listening strategies that require the ability to predict, monitor, and evaluate the content heard. Listening is a bridge of relationships and motivation in learning, so CRE teachers need to be active listeners. In addition, effective listening strategies must pay attention to the overall reality of students. Amanvermez Incirkus (2025) stated that listening strategies are not just about verbal content but also include emotional, social, and contextual aspects. The teacher's job is to understand students as a whole. Teachers are expected to be able to listen attentively (Meyers et al., 2019). CRE teachers must make "listening" a standard of ethics and integrity in the teaching profession. The design of listening strategies by CRE teachers can be seen in Figure 2.

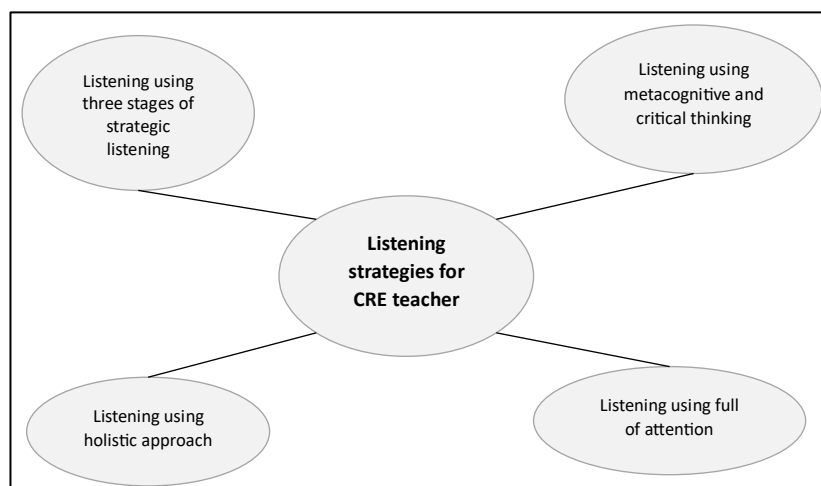


Figure 2. Design of listening strategies for CRE teachers that can be used in teaching.

Davidson et al. (2024) emphasize that listening is a core principle of teaching carried out by teachers. Listening is the key to a successful and effective learning process. This is shown through previous studies, which state that listening is the basis for: 1) healthy and trusting relationships (Itzchakov et al., 2023; Martín de Hijas-Larrea et al., 2025; Mekonnen & Yigezu, 2022); 2) respect for student dignity and autonomy (Allen et al., 2023; Flores & Ahn, 2024; Ying & Briffett-Aktaş, 2024); 3) part of pedagogical competence and formal

assessment (Gez-Langerman, 2024; Kalinec-Craig, 2017); 4) metacognitive awareness and reflective strategies (Kurudayıoğlu et al., 2021; Polatcan et al., 2025); 5) holistic pedagogical tools (Amanvermez Incirkus, 2025; Comber & Hayes, 2023; Gilson & Sauder, 2021); dan 6) ethical responsibility (Meyers et al., 2019). CRE teachers who have these six principles will be able to appreciate, guide, and empower students as a whole. Listening in Catholic Religious Education practice cannot be seen as a passive activity but rather as an active action, which contains relational, ethical, and pedagogical meanings. When teachers truly listen to students, it creates a safe space for students to share and express their thoughts and feelings and even their experiences in relation to their daily faith life. Listening is a reflection of the Catholic Religious Education teacher's commitment to the principles of justice, empathy, and moral responsibility in accompanying students' learning development. Thus, listening is the main foundation that integrates the affective, cognitive, and ethical aspects of meaningful Catholic Religious Education practice.

Listening is a reflection of pastoral attitudes, love, and acceptance. Listening and relating well to others is an important insight contained in the Book of Psalms. This means that listening has pedagogical and psychological dimensions as well as spiritual and theological aspects, especially in the context of Christian faith. In a pastoral sense, listening reflects the attitude of a shepherd who is present, caring, and open to the needs and voices of his people. This attitude is in line with active love, which does not only speak but also provides space to listen with empathy and without judgment because of someone's limitations or shortcomings or because of a certain status. True acceptance begins with the willingness to listen to others as they are, not truly. Therefore, in the light of the spirituality of the Psalms, listening is an act of love that reflects the character of God himself, who is attentive, patient, and understanding. CRE teachers who listen sincerely not only carry out ethical and professional actions but also emulate God, who hears His people.

As Christians, CRE teachers who have a pastoral attitude, the most important thing is to listen well to others and create meaningful and positive relationships with others, which requires social awareness and relational skills with self-awareness and self-management (Massey & Gentry, 2024). Listening is also a form of love shown by CRE teachers. Most of the New Testament preaches and corrects knowledge of God's grace, love, and purpose in Christ so that we gain an increasingly accurate and comprehensive understanding of God (Porter, 2024). CRE teachers who listen to their students with love mean helping their students know the loving Jesus. In addition to love, listening is also a form of full acceptance of the teacher. As God listens to us through prayer, God accepts all our prayers, although he does not always answer our prayers. Professional CRE teachers are teachers who accept diversity (Madden, 2017). CRE teachers are God's instruments, and they are expected to be able to listen with curiosity. Listening becomes a means to explore spiritual meaning in students' lives. Listening can also mean changing or transforming life, just like Jesus' encounter or conversation with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's Well, who was present as a means of revelation, love, and transformation (John 4:

1-42). Jesus listened very sympathetically to the woman's existence, which eventually led to the woman's life being restored and transformed, and many others listened to her testimony about Jesus who heard. Thus, such an example is a communication pattern that CRE teachers must always build if CRE learning wants to transform students' lives.

The findings of this narrative literature study prove that there is a contradiction in the function of listening, namely as an assessment and as a relationship. On the one hand, listening is seen as a professional assessment tool; on the other hand, listening is seen as a more humanistic relational tool. The question that may arise is whether listening should be seen as an objective evaluation tool or a subjective relational approach. Another question arises about the listening strategies found: Which strategy is more effective than metacognitive and attentive? Previous research has also not shown quantitative exploration of the effectiveness of listening on student learning outcomes. Longitudinal research is needed to see the impact of teacher listening practices on student development over time and the boundaries that teachers need to place on listening practices.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the importance of listening as not just a technical skill but an expression of love, pastoral attitude, and ethical responsibility inherent in the pedagogical practice of CRE teachers. The functions of listening to achieve effective teaching consist of building trust, upholding equality and professional values, and forming healthy pedagogical relationships. Effective listening strategies for CRE teachers can use four strategies, namely a three-stage approach, the use of metacognition and critical thinking, mindfulness, and a holistic approach to student reality. This literature study also highlights the conceptual contradiction between listening as an evaluation tool versus a humanistic relational approach. In addition, empirical gaps were found, especially the lack of longitudinal and quantitative research that discusses the impact of listening on student learning outcomes measurably. Therefore, it is necessary to develop further research that is more in-depth and contextual, as well as the integration of listening training in the CRE curriculum. In the context of Christian education, listening is a spiritual and pedagogical act that connects teachers with their students more completely—not only as teachers but as servants and witnesses of God's love.

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