

Christian Values for a Just Society: Addressing Discrimination Through Religious Education

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Abstract

Indonesia, with its vast cultural diversity, faces social challenges such as discrimination, often arising from differences in ethnicity, religion, and culture. While this diversity enriches social life, tensions between groups frequently occur, affecting social relations. Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a crucial role in promoting tolerance and respect for differences, which is expected to help reduce discrimination in Indonesia's pluralistic society. This article aims to explore the contribution of CRE in addressing discrimination by instilling values of justice, love, and appreciation for diversity. The research method used is a descriptive qualitative approach, focusing on literature analysis and theoretical studies related to the role of CRE in a multicultural society. The data selected were carefully chosen to ensure relevance to the topic and were analyzed to form a theoretical foundation supporting the development of this article. The research findings indicate that CRE can serve as a means to foster understanding of pluralism and the importance of tolerance in community life. Through Christian teachings on love and justice, CRE encourages individuals to respect human rights and reject discriminatory attitudes. Moreover, CRE also plays a role in educating society to engage in interfaith and intercultural dialogue, contributing to the creation of an inclusive and just community. The contribution of this article is to provide insights into how Christian religious education can be used to build deep social awareness, appreciate differences, and advocate for justice in Indonesia's plural society. Through the teachings of Christian values, CRE can be an effective tool in creating more inclusive social consciousness, strengthening social cohesion, and combating discrimination.

Keywords:

Christian religious education; Discrimination; Pluralistic society; Social cohesion

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is renowned for its extensive cultural diversity, characterized by a wide variety of ethnic groups and traditions. According to a national information portal, the country encompasses approximately 1,340 ethnic groups, highlighting its rich cultural tapestry. Furthermore, data from the Central Statistics Agency (BPS) in 2021 indicates

that Indonesia consists of 34 provinces, each contributing unique cultural elements. This vast diversity influences the way people perceive and approach various aspects of life. Additionally, the dynamics of urbanization, migration, and intercultural marriages have led to the creation of new cultural blends, further enriching the nation's sociocultural landscape. Despite these positive contributions, such diversity often serves as a catalyst for social tensions and challenges within communities (BPS, 2021; Indonesia Information Portal, 2021).

The complex nature of diversity sometimes results in societal disparities, leading to negative consequences. Among these is discrimination, a persistent issue arising from differences in cultural, religious, ethnic, and other social aspects. Marginalized groups, particularly minorities, frequently bear the brunt of such discriminatory practices. This is evident in several notable incidents in Indonesia. For instance, in 2019, the Slamet family faced rejection in Bantul, Yogyakarta, because they were non-Muslims, a violation of local norms that prohibited non-Muslims from residing in the area. Another case in 2019 involved Papuan students in Surabaya, who were subjected to racism and threats following accusations of flag desecration (Yuwono and Belamirrus, 2019). Similarly, in 2020, a Midodareni traditional ceremony in Solo was attacked based on religious bias, while the burning of a church in Central Sulawesi in the same year resulted in criminal acts and the tragic loss of four lives.

These instances represent only a fraction of the discrimination that persists across various domains, such as education, workplaces, and public life. Such actions often stem from a lack of understanding and appreciation of cultural diversity. While differences in behavior and thought are natural outcomes of cultural variation, they should never justify discriminatory practices. Instead, diversity should be embraced as a valuable asset that, when managed effectively, has the potential to strengthen the nation's unity and progress (Hasim et al., 2022). Promoting tolerance requires fostering a mature mindset, enabling individuals to appreciate and respect differences. This necessitates societal efforts to cultivate awareness and acceptance of diversity, transforming it into a positive force for social cohesion.

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a critical role in this context, aiming to embed Christian values that encourage tolerance and respect for others. By nurturing spiritual maturity, CRE empowers individuals to counteract discriminatory attitudes in a multicultural society. Moreover, the challenges posed by contemporary education, which

caters to students from diverse religious backgrounds, call for educators to implement inclusive strategies and policies. These efforts are essential to help students understand, accept, and value religious pluralism (Hull, 1984; UNESCO, 2020).

This article seeks to explore the contribution of CRE in addressing discrimination within Indonesia's pluralistic society. It aims to provide insights that can guide both the general public and the Christian community in fostering a deeper understanding of diversity and a more constructive approach to coexistence.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research method utilized in this article is the descriptive qualitative approach. Qualitative research seeks to understand phenomena experienced by research subjects, including behaviors, perceptions, motivations, and actions. This understanding is achieved holistically through descriptions in the form of words and language, set within specific natural contexts, and employing various naturalistic methods. The data used in this article were carefully selected to align with the article's title, ensuring relevance to the subject matter.

The selected data were then analyzed to form a theoretical foundation that supports the article's development. This process involved an in-depth examination of the data to ensure coherence and logical consistency in drawing conclusions. Ultimately, the findings and conclusions presented are based on a thorough and integrative understanding of the analyzed data (Creswell, 2014; Miles & Huberman, 1994).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Christian Religious Education (CRE)

Reformers of the Christian faith, such as Martin Luther (1483–1548), argued that Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a pivotal role in guiding congregants toward regular and disciplined learning. This process aims to deepen their awareness of sin and instill joy in the liberating Word of Jesus Christ. According to Christian education experts Homrighausen and Enklaar, as elaborated in their book *Christian Religious Education in Schools*, while many nations uphold religious tolerance, not all governments facilitate the integration of religious education into school curricula. CRE is designed to mentor and support youth in cultivating positive behaviors and fostering respect for others. Through their teachings, CRE educators are tasked with introducing students to Jesus Christ,

guiding them toward spiritual growth that emphasizes loving God and their neighbors (Homrighausen and Enklaar, 1966).

CRE further equips learners with faith-building tools, including prayer practices, Biblical teachings, and cultural understanding. These resources prepare students to serve others effectively, contribute to society, and participate responsibly in Christian fellowship. The broader goal of religious education, including CRE, is to impart knowledge, attitudes, moral values, and skills that shape well-rounded individuals. CRE, as a Christ-centered and Scripture-based learning process, depends on the Holy Spirit to guide individuals of all ages in understanding God's purpose and will. It fosters holistic growth, preparing individuals for effective ministry centered on Jesus as the Great Teacher (Nainggolan, 2008).

According to John M. Nainggolan (2008), the primary objectives of CRE include teaching God's Word, facilitating encounters with Christ, promoting communal living, and nurturing spiritual growth to align with Christ's character. The Bible serves as the central instructional material, as it is regarded as God's written Word. Learning from Scripture enables individuals to encounter Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, which leads to fundamental changes in character. Such transformation influences relationships with others, aligning individuals with Christ-like qualities. Ultimately, the goal of CRE is to develop Christ-like character in its learners. Both teachers and students engaged in CRE must adopt a Biblical perspective on pluralism, promoting tolerance in a diverse society. This responsibility extends to fostering understanding and respectful behavior, both in daily life and in the digital realm, grounded in Biblical teachings on pluralism.

Mary Moore and Mann (2015) emphasizes the Christian mandate for social justice, advocating for a collective struggle to liberate all humanity. She underscores the role of Christian educators in ensuring freedom and peace for everyone, highlighting the interdependence of one group's freedom on another's. Consequently, Christian education in the realm of social justice seeks to promote human liberation and the fullness of life.

Pluralistic Society

John Sydenham Furnivall defines a pluralistic society as one that embraces various social groups, each with its own value systems, which results in diminished collective loyalty and cultural homogeneity. According to Furnivall, such societies consist of groups

coexisting within the same geographic area but remaining separate based on distinct cultural lines (Furnivall, 1948).

Pierre L. Van Den Berghe (1970) outlines the characteristics of pluralistic societies as follows:

1. Segmentation into distinct subcultural groups.
2. A structure composed of non-complementary institutions.
3. Limited consensus among members on fundamental values.
4. Social integration based on coercion and economic interdependence.
5. Political domination by one group over others.

A pluralistic society is characterized by a natural coexistence of diverse social groups differentiated by strata, economic status, race, ethnicity, religion, and culture. Multiculturalism, as an ideology, complements the democratic processes that emphasize equality among individuals and their communities. In Indonesia, the dissemination and application of multiculturalism must work in tandem with the promotion of democratic and nationalistic ideologies. Such efforts aim to ensure that every Indonesian develops a sense of responsibility as a citizen, a member of a specific ethnic group, a gender, and an age category, fostering mutual respect across these diversities.

In a pluralistic society, individuals learn to reject acts of discrimination or arbitrary treatment from dominant groups. This understanding requires a genuine reorientation of human consciousness to accept the inevitability of "the Other" and their aspirations to coexist. Conflicts may arise due to differences in beliefs, values, and practices, but peaceful coexistence necessitates a recalibration of societal awareness to embrace diversity (Nuhamara & Tabita, 2008). In spiritually plural societies, opinions on integrating spiritual care into broader contexts like healthcare vary. Different perspectives influence how spiritual caregivers' roles—whether professional, personal, or conventional—are recognized. Moreover, the ability of minorities to withstand the dominance of the majority and assess their potential for integration into mainstream politics can be evaluated through institutional measures, such as the representation and impact of minority voices in electoral and legislative frameworks (Neelam Bano et al., 2021).

Rentzi (2024) emphasizes the role of religious education in creating a more just and equitable pluralistic society. She highlights how students from low-income families often face systemic barriers to success, including a lack of access to quality religious

education, resources, and opportunities. Religious education can serve as a pathway to greater social mobility and a means to escape poverty. However, its absence may contribute to increased marginalization and discrimination.

Discrimination in Society

Discrimination is a pervasive issue affecting individuals and groups based on attributes such as race, gender, religion, age, disability, sexual orientation, or socioeconomic status. It manifests in various forms, including systemic bias and unequal treatment in employment, education, and access to resources. One prevalent form is gender discrimination against women. Research by George Peter Murdock highlights historical gender roles, where men typically engaged in labor-intensive tasks like hunting, carpentry, and metallurgy, while women were relegated to domestic tasks such as cooking, gathering fuel, and childcare. This division of labor, deeply rooted in patriarchal cultures, has perpetuated unequal perceptions of women's work as less productive or valuable compared to men's roles. Gender-based discrimination in the workforce persists even today, reflecting these entrenched societal norms (Murdock, 1949).

Indonesia, as a pluralistic society, inherently features diversity in ethnicity, religion, and culture. These differences, while enriching, also lead to societal challenges, including intergroup tension. Misunderstandings or biases often create discomfort among various ethnic groups, resulting in fragmentation, isolation, and even conflict. A notable example is the marginalization of minority religious communities. Incidents such as the burning of places of worship or prohibitions against constructing religious buildings in minority areas illustrate how religious differences can escalate into discrimination and violence.

A survey conducted by Wicaksono involving 38 Christian teachers from Jakarta, Bogor, Depok, Tangerang, and Bekasi revealed that 47.1% reported Christian students experiencing discrimination in educational settings (Wicaksono, 2022). Such findings underscore the prevalence of bias, even in environments intended for learning and development.

The Role of Christian Education in Combating Discrimination

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a pivotal role in addressing societal discrimination by fostering equality, justice, and compassion. Rooted in biblical principles of love and respect, CRE emphasizes the importance of understanding and embracing diversity. Teaching tolerance is a critical step in combating discrimination, as it nurtures mutual respect and acceptance of differences (Greenway, 2022). CRE seeks to instill values that encourage individuals to reject discrimination in all forms and advocate for inclusivity. By teaching the importance of dialogue and understanding, Christian education can promote harmony in diverse societies. Biblical exploration of diversity and justice equips learners with the moral and ethical framework necessary to challenge biases and foster a culture of inclusivity.

Furthermore, CRE engages with social justice, highlighting its theological roots. Through practical applications, such as community service and interfaith dialogue, CRE actively contributes to creating a more accepting society. It emphasizes that diversity is a reflection of God's creation and should be celebrated rather than feared or marginalized (Danz, 2020). Christian education has the potential to shape individuals who actively contribute to building a society that values the richness of human diversity. By instilling values of tolerance and understanding, CRE empowers students and communities to embrace pluralism and work toward a just and equitable world (Moore and Mann, 2015).

The Teachings of Love and Compassion

Christianity emphasizes the commandment to love others and treat them with compassion. Christian education reinforces these teachings by helping individuals understand the intrinsic value and dignity of every person, regardless of differences. By instilling love and compassion as core values, Christian education encourages embracing diversity and extending kindness to all (Tandana et al., 2022). Christian education plays a vital role in combating discrimination by promoting the principles of love and compassion found in Christian teachings. These principles inspire individuals to challenge discriminatory practices and work towards a more inclusive and just society. This discussion explores how Christian education can address discrimination and foster a culture rooted in love and compassion.

Christian teachings strongly emphasize loving one's neighbor as oneself. Through education, individuals are encouraged to extend kindness, love, and acceptance to

everyone, transcending differences. By emphasizing the inherent worth of every individual as a cherished creation of God, Christian education helps dismantle discrimination and cultivates environments of understanding and mutual respect (Ndolu et al., 2022). Ndhlovu (2017) highlights the theological foundation of Christian education, advocating for a framework called "SEE" (Self-reflection, Embrace, and Ecological transformation). This approach enables Christians to reflect on their own identities, recognize and respect the cultures of others, and actively engage in transformative actions that foster ecological and social harmony.

Emphasizing the Parable of the Good Samaritan

The Parable of the Good Samaritan teaches the importance of compassion and care for others, regardless of differences. Christian education can delve into this parable, highlighting its message about helping and supporting those in need, even when they belong to different social, cultural, or religious groups. By embracing and applying the lessons of the Good Samaritan, individuals are encouraged to break down barriers and show kindness to those who differ from them (Siswanto et al., 2022).

Christian education underscores the relevance of this parable in combating discrimination. It challenges individuals to extend love, compassion, and practical assistance to those facing marginalization or bias. Lessons drawn from the Good Samaritan equip learners to actively counter discrimination, fostering communities characterized by empathy, inclusivity, and justice.

The parable confronts prejudice by showcasing the unexpected kindness of a despised Samaritan toward an injured stranger. Christian education leverages this narrative to help individuals identify and challenge their biases, encouraging a rejection of discriminatory mindsets and promoting respect for the inherent value of all people. Moreover, it emphasizes translating compassion into tangible actions by reaching out to marginalized and oppressed individuals (Farmer, 1996).

The Role of Religious Education in Promoting Justice

The Importance of Religious Education in Promoting Justice

The role of religious education in shaping students' understanding of faith and justice is pivotal in creating empathetic, respectful individuals. In diverse societies, such as Indonesia, where multiple ethnicities, religions, and cultures coexist, religious

education can address societal issues like discrimination by fostering an understanding of justice, equality, and inclusivity. This highlights how education in religious values can help nurture tolerance and social harmony (Widjaja et al., 2023a).

Christian Education: Integrating Faith with Social Activism

Christian education often emphasizes both the spiritual and social dimensions of justice, where students learn about justice not only through theological principles but also through active social engagement. The concept of "inner conviction and social activism" involves students internalizing values of justice while being encouraged to participate in practical social action. Practices such as prayer, worship, and meditation are used to deepen faith, while community involvement cultivates active engagement with social issues and a commitment to dismantling oppression. This integrated approach fosters holistic development—spiritually, intellectually, and socially (Gulo & Sugiri, 2020).

Faith and Social Action as a Path to Justice

By combining spiritual growth with active involvement in social causes, Christian education empowers students to challenge discriminatory practices and work toward a just society. The relationship between faith and action in this context is designed to instill a sense of responsibility toward creating equitable communities. This dual focus—spiritual and social—aims to build a society where justice, diversity, and inclusivity are central values, ensuring that faith contributes directly to societal transformation (Johnson-Miller & Pazmiño, 2020).

Christian religious education plays a crucial role in fighting discrimination within the context of Indonesia's pluralistic society. Discrimination based on factors such as ethnicity, religion, and socio-economic status continues to be a significant challenge in Indonesia. In this regard, Christian religious education can serve as a powerful tool for promoting tolerance, respect, and inclusivity. The teachings of Christianity, particularly those on equality, justice, and love for one's neighbor, provide a strong foundation for challenging discriminatory attitudes and behaviors. By emphasizing values such as empathy, compassion, and acceptance, Christian education can help individuals develop a profound understanding of the inherent dignity and worth of every person, regardless of their background (Edlin, 2015).

Another essential aspect is the promotion of interfaith dialogue and collaboration in combating discrimination. Christian religious education should encourage dialogue and cooperation among different religious communities, fostering mutual understanding and breaking down barriers. By emphasizing respect for each other and learning from one another, Christian education can contribute to building bridges of understanding and cooperation in Indonesia's diverse society (Morris, 2006; Widjaja et al., 2023b).

CONCLUSION

To maximize its impact, it is crucial to integrate Christian religious education effectively into Indonesia's educational system. This may involve developing a curriculum that incorporates teachings on tolerance, diversity, and respect for all individuals. Additionally, teacher training programs could equip educators with the necessary knowledge and skills to foster an inclusive and non-discriminatory environment in schools. By nurturing a spirit of inclusivity and instilling values that reject discrimination, Christian religious education can play a key role in creating a more harmonious and just society in Indonesia. This approach can empower individuals to challenge discriminatory practices, embrace diversity, and work towards a society where everyone is treated with dignity and respect. Through its teachings and principles, Christian religious education has the potential to make a significant contribution in combating discrimination and realizing a more just and inclusive Indonesian society.

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