

# Reconceptualization of Education in Plural Society: Embracing Cultural Diversity in Christian Teaching in Indonesia



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## ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore how Christian education can navigate the challenges and opportunities of a pluralistic society. The article investigates how Christian educators can foster national unity whilst respecting cultural and religious diversity. The method used in writing this article is a literature review. Christian education in a pluralistic society poses both challenges and opportunities. Challenges arise as Christian educators must embrace the cultural and religious diversity in society. However, there is an opportunity for Christian education to serve as a means to foster national unity. Based on the results of the analysis, it was found that Christian educators need to recognize the significance of social and cultural contexts in the educational process. Each individual comes from a distinct cultural background, influencing their worldview and understanding of truth. Christian educators must respect and appreciate these cultural differences, employing a contextual educational approach. Emphasizing values of inclusivity and tolerance is crucial for building a peaceful and united society. Christian educators can impart these values through various activities such as discussions, project-based learning, and social service initiatives. This article recommends the incorporation of cultural sensitivity in education; it promotes inclusive teaching practices, provides professional development for educators, fosters intercultural dialogue, supports community engagement, and promotes cross-cultural understanding.

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## INTRODUCTION

According to the 1945 Constitution, all Indonesian citizens without exception, including children and persons with physical disabilities, have been granted special rights in the form of equal rights to receive adequate education. Even Pancasila has become the fundamental philosophy for the development of cultural diversity as the uniqueness of the Indonesian nation compared to other countries in the world.<sup>1</sup> However, in recent decades, this philosophy has not been deeply rooted in educational practices

<sup>1</sup> Noh I. Boiliu et al., "Human Rights: The Convergence of the Second Sila of Pancasila and Hans Kung's Global Ethics in Indonesia," *HTS Theologese Studies/Theological Studies* 78, no. 4 (2022): 6933.

because the prevailing supra system always demands uniformity framed within a centralized education curriculum. If this philosophy is truly implemented well, where every child has equal rights in education, then there will be no inequality.<sup>2</sup>

Along with the rapid flow of globalization, demand and challenges of life are increasing, including in the field of education which is also experiencing new developments. Unfortunately, educational reform in Indonesia is progressing slowly due to the presence of a centralized system whilst the process of globalization continues. Tradition, religion, and culture must be integrated into the process of internalizing education and globalization to achieve educational system targets. However, our society cannot think globally and shows insufficient concern towards global issues. Now, schools are beginning to reach national and global standards, requiring students to adapt to these systems. Therefore, starting from primary education, there is a need for preparation to enter the era of internalization without neglecting the authenticity of local backgrounds.<sup>3</sup>

Indonesia is a diverse country, both in terms of religion, ethnicity, race, and culture. This diversity is the wealth of the Indonesian nation but also poses challenges in the provision of education. Christian education in Indonesia needs to be re-conceptualized to embrace cultural diversity.<sup>4</sup>

Christian education aims to shape individuals to be faithful, knowledgeable, and have good character. In the context of a pluralistic society, Christian education needs to be directed toward developing attitudes of tolerance, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among people of different religions and cultures.<sup>5</sup>

Cultural diversity in Christian education in Indonesia can be realized in several ways, including, using various learning resources originating from different cultures. Learning resources can include books, articles, videos, and guest speakers; teaching universal Christian values can also be implemented in various cultures.<sup>6</sup> Universal Christian values, such as love, forgiveness, and justice; provide opportunities for students to learn about other cultures. This can be done through learning activities, such as visits to places of worship or cultural museums. Reconceptualizing Christian education in a pluralistic society is important and urgent. This needs to be done so that Christian education can become a means to strengthen the unity and integrity of the Indonesian nation. To address these challenges, cooperation is needed from various parties, namely the government, churches, educational institutions, and society. This collaboration is necessary to develop curricula and learning materials that can embrace cultural diversity.<sup>7</sup>

The main topic of the case study in the context of multicultural education is the author referring to the case of the Role of Social and Cultural Contexts in Javanese Speech Acts. This case is the result of research by Rohmadi, Muhammad and Saddhono, Kundharu and Hastuti, and Sri. Based on this case, the author will analyze it theoretically from the perspective of Christian religious education.

The research conducted by Rohmadi, Muhammad, Saddhono, Kundharu and Hastuti with the title of the research "The Role of Social and Cultural Contexts in Javanese Speech Acts (A Sociopragmatic Study of Pacitan Society, East Java)."<sup>8</sup> From the results of the research, it is evident that there is a role of social and cultural context in Javanese speech acts. "Speech acts" are influenced by the background of social status, economic status, and education of the speakers' community. Speech acts in Pacitan society vary greatly in different situations and conditions according to the speech context. The diversity of speech acts in Pacitan society is influenced by social and cultural factors inherent in the speakers' community. The speech patterns of a village head, a religious leader, a teacher,

<sup>2</sup> Noh Ibrahim Boiliu, Robby Igusti Chandra, and Djoys Anneke Rantung, "Manusia Sebagai Subjek Dalam Merdeka Belajar: Interpretasi Atas Revolusi Kopernikan Immanuel Kant," *KURIOS* 8, no. 2 (October 27, 2022), <https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v8i2.600>.

<sup>3</sup> Otto Gusti Madung, "Martabat Manusia Sebagai Basis Etis Masyarakat Multikultural," *Diskursus - Jurnal Filsafat Dan Teologi Sft Driyarkara* 11, no. 2 (October 15, 2012): 160–73, <https://doi.org/10.36383/diskursus.v11i2.135>.

<sup>4</sup> Bernadetha Nadeak, "Pendidikan Multikultural Menuju Pendidikan Yang Humanis," *Jurnal Pendidikan Dan Teologi Kristen (AREOPAGUS)* 12, no. 1 (2014): 67–75.

<sup>5</sup> Noh Ibrahim, Boiliu and Harun Y. Natonis, *Pengantar Pendidikan Agama Kristen* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Maryam Kurniawati, *Pendidikan Kristiani Multikultural* ( Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2014).

<sup>7</sup> Dirk Roy Kolibu, "Teogogy Nationalistic: An Interaction Model of Christian Religious Education in a Multicultural Society in the Digital Era," *Al-Ishlah: Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 3 (2023): 4203–15.

<sup>8</sup> Kundharu Muhammad Rohmadi and Sri Hastuti, *No Title* (Surakarta: Univesitas Sebelas Maret, 2013).

a merchant, and labourers vary. For example, throwing or hitting (in Javanese: mbandem, mbalang) indicate variations in dialect influenced by social and cultural contexts. This proves that social and cultural contexts play a strong role in the speech of Pacitan society using the Javanese language. These dialectical differences are not only influenced by social and cultural contexts but also by social status. For example, the words "throwing or hitting (in Javanese: mbandem, mbalang)" show that differences in social status are also evident in their dialect. If uneducated, one would use the words "throwing or hitting (in Javanese: mbandem, mbalang)," whereas educated individuals would use the word "throwing (in Javanese: mbandem)."<sup>9</sup>

Based on the above introduction, the article aims to explore how Christian education can handle challenges and opportunities in a pluralistic society, specifically focusing on fostering national unity whilst respecting diversity. Whilst the purpose acknowledges the importance of both unity and diversity, it doesn't mention how Christian educators can achieve them together. This suggests a gap in existing knowledge or practice. The article might address this gap by exploring the specific difficulties Christian educators face when trying to promote both unity and respect for diversity, recommending specific methods and approaches Christian educators can use to achieve national unity whilst valuing cultural and religious differences and analyzing successful programs or approaches used in other settings that promote unity in diverse environments.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *The Need for Reconceptualization of the Education System in a Plural Society*

One fundamental issue in global life is the trend of educational pluralization, where individuals learn values, symbols, and various other components of culture through social systems that carry a culture. The school environment is a combination of several variables and factors, such as culture, regulations, curriculum, and learning objectives. Every child must be able to adapt to these factors. Children come from specific microcultures. They have specific orientations according to each group. Each group has its own culture, beliefs, way of life, symbols, and interpretations, known as microcultures. However, generally, ethnic groups have main cultures originating from different microcultures that form a macroculture.<sup>10</sup>

In the context of Indonesian society, equality in education is the target of the education system itself because the primary goal of multicultural education is to change the approach to teaching and learning where different cultural groups have equal opportunities, not sacrificed for unity. All cultural groups should be able to integrate peacefully, and understand differences yet emphasize the main goal of achieving unity. Therefore, some major changes in concepts, regulations, and teaching must be made. The educational approach needs to be altered because the learning process is not only influenced by what the teacher teaches but also by the environment where social and political aspects surround it. Multicultural education is a process in which each individual develops perspectives and evaluations within a cultural system different from their own. Considering that Indonesia adheres to the philosophy of "unity in diversity," all students, including those with different cultures, should experience the same education, ensuring equality not only through teaching approaches but also curriculum designs that accommodate the diverse cultural lives presently.<sup>11</sup>

According to Robert W. Pazmino, the task of sociology is to analyze the processes by which reality is socially constructed.<sup>12</sup> This task is particularly important to consider for Christian educators, as education fundamentally emphasizes the process of producing and distributing knowledge. In the case of the Christian faith, educators intend to share knowledge about God, as revealed in Christ, and knowledge about the Christian faith itself.

<sup>9</sup> Sutrisno Sastro Utomo, *Kamus Indonesia-Jawa* (Jakarta: Gramedia Pustaka Utama, 2015).

<sup>10</sup> R. P. H. Chang, Jennifer Shanahan, and Matthew Hsu, "Reconceptualization of Education," in *Handbook of Science and Technology Convergence* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2015), 1–18, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-04033-2\\_55-1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-04033-2_55-1).

<sup>11</sup> H.A.R. Tilaar, *Multikulturalisme: Tantangan-Tantangan Global Masa Depan Transformasi Pendidikan Nasional* (Jakarta: Development Studies Foundation, 2004).

<sup>12</sup> Robert W Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili* (STT Bandung dalam kerja sama dengan BPK Gunung Mulia, 2012).

As a social entity, the Christian community manifests various kinds of diversity along with its underlying unity. Practices of Christian education assume the presence of cultural contexts. "God created humans with the capacity to create culture and shape society. Without culture, Christianity is something abstract that does not relate to human life. Related to education, cultural issues become essential, as education is the "entire process by which culture transmits its messages to various generations."<sup>13</sup>

According to Bantock in Pazmino stating that education for different classes will also differ because each class has its own culture.<sup>14</sup> For Christian education, this differentiation can imply differences in educational agendas depending on the participants in their social class. On the contrary, Hirst in Pazmino, "views education in terms of knowledge that is 'free from culture,' which means sharing knowledge interculturally and transculturally."<sup>15</sup> For Hirst, culture is a way of life, separate from the primary task of an educator. From Hirst's perspective, the task of Christian education will remain consistent regardless of the participants' historical, social, and class backgrounds.

Williams in Pazmino, "views culture from its historical setting and investigates cultural changes that occur over various periods. His analysis indicates that changes in education cannot adapt at the same pace as changes in social and cultural aspects."<sup>16</sup> The educator's task is to keep teaching updated and relevant to the cultural context of the students to continue making an impact on learners who live within that culture.

For Christian educators, this task requires them to utilize the latest approaches and technologies whilst considering the developments in research and new trends. Additionally, it requires critical and careful analysis of all cultural contexts before establishing an educational agenda.<sup>17</sup> Educators must consider the ethos and perspectives of the people they will teach. Therefore, distinguishing Christian cultural activities is their commitment, values, and sensitivity that focus on the statements and will of God for human life. In this regard, the potential of Christian culture is embedded amidst pluralistic and multicultural societies.<sup>18</sup>

### ***Christian Education and Cultural Reality***

The thoughts offered by Bantock, Hirst, and William, Bantock identify the existence of social classes and cultural expression differences; the Christian perspective implies the need to share the entire truth of God with all social classes.<sup>19</sup> This does not negate the need for cultural sensitivity in sharing the truth of the Bible and considering the readiness of the participants but suggests a reconciliation in Christ that unites everyone from high culture and low culture in the same community, namely the Church of Christ. Because the all-powerful Christ has destroyed the cultural barriers that separate humans. He also values the different gifts brought by those different cultures. The Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatian church explicitly explains the impact of the wall destroyed by Christ. "In this regard, there is no Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

Pazmino states that there are many cultures, and each culture can be realized within the Christian faith in a way that glorifies God.<sup>20</sup> However, the culture in which one is born provides them with a window to view the world. Nonetheless, this culture can also erect walls that isolate and separate humans. The culture that each person possesses functions as a lens through which they can see and understand others. All information is filtered through this lens - beliefs about the world, humanity, life, God, and ultimate reality. Therefore, regarding social context, culture, social class, and educators must

<sup>13</sup> Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*, 230.

<sup>14</sup> Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*, 232.

<sup>15</sup> Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*, 232.

<sup>16</sup> Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*, 232.

<sup>17</sup> Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*, 232.

<sup>18</sup> Hope S. Antonie., *Pendidikan Kristiani Kontekstual* (Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2010).

<sup>19</sup> DomNwachukwu, *An Introduction to Education Multiculturalism*, 30.

<sup>20</sup> Pazmino, *Fondasi Pendidikan Kristen: Sebuah Pengantar Dalam Perspektif Injili*.

be attentive in the context of education distribution or dissemination. Cultural diversity requires educators to design and organize education with contextual pedagogy.<sup>21</sup>

Two questions can be asked. First, why place social and cultural context as an important factor in the distribution of knowledge about God? Second, why should context be considered by distributors (educators) at the distribution site (school)? Distributors as disseminators must be aware of their position and context and also the context (historical) "things brought." The context brought and the bearer has a significant impact on the distribution site. The place or locus of distribution is related to the situation, conditions, and strategies used. The researchers place context as fundamental and must be considered. Misunderstanding the context not only results in failure or achievement of goals but can also lead to social problems. To achieve set goals, the recipient's context must be considered to become a factual context. What this refers to is the social and cultural context of the recipient, which is understood as the customs within the community (social), norms, behaviours, and so on.<sup>22</sup>

Based on the example case above, distributors of Christian knowledge must pay attention to the social and cultural context at the distribution site. Precision and carefulness regarding social and cultural contexts must be the distributor's concern. The social and cultural background of the recipient of "Christian knowledge" is highly influential. In this reception context, schools as social institutions are places where various contexts and cultures of each student converge. When meeting at school, the school certainly already has "patterns of behaviour, roles, and relationships as binding ways to meet basic social needs."<sup>23</sup> Basic needs are not only about clothing, food, and shelter. Education in basic social needs to be included. This can be classified as "mental and spiritual needs."<sup>24</sup> (If education becomes a basic social need, then educators play a crucial role in fulfilling these basic social needs. The fulfillment of these needs certainly occurs in schools as social institutions.

The social classes as proposed by Bantock (elite and common or high and low) inherent in students should not be a marker or social symbol for teachers to make different treatments or at the highest level related to the policy makers (government) making different treatments. Certainly not. Students come with heterogeneous conditions, both culturally and socially. And they are expected to meet in a homogeneous "class."<sup>25</sup>

In the context of Christian education, there is no need to erase the starting point of the social and cultural contexts of the recipients of Christian knowledge, but rather allow them to come and mingle in social interactions (engagement). In this mingling, the role of educators (distributors of Christian knowledge) is important and needed to offer something new that comes from Christ, that the practice is evident with the statement of the Apostle Paul in his letter to the Galatian church explicitly explaining the impact of the wall destroyed by Christ: "In this regard, there is no Jew or Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal. 3:28).

In the process of mingling and sharing knowledge about God, educators play a role as companions so that when recipients (whether students at school or congregation members in church) experience social counter or culture counter, they can receive explanations and support so that if there are certain social conditions or cultures that the recipients feel are not suitable, they can voluntarily change them. This process of replacement is considered social change and cultural change. Puspito says, "The rate of social processes and social changes itself cannot be separated from socio-cultural changes, and even more so because it is directly influenced by socio-cultural factors, especially when native culture encounters foreign culture."<sup>26</sup> The role of educators or distributors of knowledge about God carefully and meticulously ensures the process so that there is no social shock and culture shock.

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<sup>21</sup> Thomas H. Groome, *Pendidikan Agama Kristen: Berbagi Cerita Dan Visi Kita* ( Jakarta: BPK Gunung Mulia, 2011).

<sup>22</sup> DomNwachukwu, *An Introduction to Education Multiculturalism*, 30.

<sup>23</sup> Puspito, *Sosiologi Sistemik*, 63.

<sup>24</sup> Puspito, *Sosiologi Sistemik*, 63.

<sup>25</sup> Hilal Mahmud, *Sosiologi Pendidikan* (Bandung: Pustaka Setia, 2012), 167-168.

<sup>26</sup> Puspito, *Sosiologi Sistemik*, 58.

## **METHODOLOGY**

The method used is qualitative based on a descriptive analysis of literature as relevant sources for writing this article. The first step in this research is to gather literature related to human beings as paradoxical creatures and Christian religious education. The second step is to read the literature and take notes on important matters related to the research topic. The third step is to make notes for data analysis.

## **DISCUSSION**

The need for reconceptualizing the education system in a plural society arises from the complex interplay of cultural diversity and educational processes. In today's global landscape, educational pluralization through which individuals absorb cultural values and symbols through various social systems is a fundamental issue. This diversity is reflected in the school environment, which comprises multiple factors such as culture, regulations, curriculum, and learning objectives. Children, coming from specific microcultures, bring with them unique orientations and beliefs shaped by their cultural backgrounds.

In Indonesian society, the education system strives for equality, aiming to provide all cultural groups with equal opportunities whilst fostering unity. Multicultural education is essential in this regard, necessitating major changes in concepts, regulations, and teaching methods to accommodate diverse cultural perspectives. Christian educators, recognizing the importance of cultural sensitivity, play a crucial role in sharing knowledge about God within diverse contexts, ensuring that Christian cultural activities remain relevant amidst pluralistic societies.

The perspectives of scholars like Bantock, Hirst, and William offer insights into the intersection of social classes, cultural diversity, and Christian education. Whilst differences in social class and cultural expression exist, the Christian perspective emphasizes the unity of all individuals in Christ, transcending cultural barriers. Educators must navigate these complexities by employing contextual pedagogy and considering the social and cultural backgrounds of their students.

Furthermore, educators must be attentive to the social and cultural context at the distribution site, such as schools, where various cultural backgrounds converge. By fostering social interactions and offering guidance, educators facilitate cultural integration and voluntary cultural change among students. This process aligns with the Christian principle of unity in diversity, ensuring that education fulfils not only academic but also mental and spiritual needs within a pluralistic society

The reconceptualization of the education system in a plural society requires a holistic approach that acknowledges and embraces cultural diversity whilst promoting unity and inclusivity. Christian educators, in particular, have a vital role in navigating these complexities and fostering meaningful learning experiences that transcend cultural boundaries.

Scholars such as Bantock, Hirst, and William provide insights into how social class and cultural diversity intersect with educational practices. Whilst differences in social backgrounds and cultural expressions exist, the Christian perspective emphasizes the unity of all individuals in Christ, which can serve as a unifying principle amidst cultural diversity. Agree with the scholars that reconceptualizing the education system in a plural society demands a comprehensive approach that acknowledges and embraces cultural diversity whilst promoting unity and inclusivity. Christian educators, guided by their faith and principles, are uniquely positioned to navigate these complexities and foster meaningful educational experiences that transcend cultural boundaries, contributing to a more harmonious and inclusive society.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The authors recommend the following from the study:

- 1) Incorporate Cultural Sensitivity in Education: Educational institutions, especially in pluralistic societies, should integrate cultural sensitivity into their curriculum and teaching methods. Educators need training and resources to understand and respect the diverse cultural backgrounds of their students.

- 2) Promote Inclusive Teaching Practices: Teachers should adopt inclusive teaching practices that cater to the diverse needs and learning styles of students from various cultural backgrounds. This may include incorporating multicultural literature, diverse perspectives, and culturally relevant examples in lesson plans.
- 3) Provide Professional Development for Educators: Schools should invest in professional development programs for educators to enhance their cultural competence and teaching effectiveness in multicultural settings. This may involve workshops, seminars, and ongoing training sessions focused on multicultural education.
- 4) Foster Intercultural Dialogue: Educational institutions should promote intercultural dialogue and collaboration among students from different cultural backgrounds. This can be facilitated through multicultural clubs, exchange programs, and cross-cultural activities that encourage understanding, empathy, and mutual respect.
- 5) Support Community Engagement: Schools should actively engage with the local community to understand and address the cultural needs and priorities of students and their families. Building partnerships with community organizations, cultural institutions, and religious groups can enhance the cultural responsiveness of the school environment.
- 6) Promote Cross-Cultural Understanding: Educators should actively promote cross-cultural understanding and appreciation among students through classroom discussions, projects, and activities that explore cultural similarities and differences respectfully and constructively.

## CONCLUSION

The necessity of reconceptualizing the education system in pluralistic societies is imperative considering the complexity and cultural diversity within the school environment. The educational environment must be able to accommodate cultural diversity, orientations, and micro-cultural values held by each individual. In Indonesia, with the philosophy of "unity in diversity," multicultural education becomes a necessity to create equality without sacrificing diversity.

Christian education also faces challenges in integrating religious values with diverse social and cultural contexts. Christian educators need to understand that education is a process that is inseparable from the influence of cultural contexts, and they must pay attention to social class differences as well as cultural changes that occur in society.

In Christian education, unity in diversity must be the main focus, where the teaching of the Bible and Christian values is conveyed whilst considering cultural diversity. Christian education must also recognize the existence of social class differences and react contextually to maintain relevance and a positive impact on learners.

The importance of understanding social and cultural contexts also emerges in the distribution of knowledge about God. Distributors of Christian knowledge must consider the recipient's context, as errors in understanding the context can fail to achieve goals and even lead to social problems. Christian education must involve educators as companions in the process of assimilation so that recipients can understand and imbibe Christian values without experiencing cultural shock.

Thus, the reconceptualization of the education system, especially in the context of Christian education, needs to be based on a deep understanding of culture and social contexts, as well as an awareness of existing differences. Only with a contextual and inclusive approach can the education system sustain a positive impact in pluralistic societies.

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