From Global Diversity to Local Harmony: Christian Education Theology and Cultivating Religious Moderation among High School Students

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ABSTRACT

Harmony among different religions is something that the Indonesian government continues to strive for, as there are still many conflicts of intolerance in Indonesia. This is especially true for children still in secondary school and, sadly, it occurs within the educational environment. A curriculum grounded in religious moderation is an absolute necessity in Indonesia's education system. The global diversity dimension is one of the dimensions in the Merdeka Curriculum. By using a descriptive qualitative research method in high schools in Tahuna City—where the majority of the population is Christian and which is located on a border island in northern Indonesia. This is the novelty of this study: examining the strengthening of religious moderation in a predominantly Christian border region based on Christian educational theology. This was achieved through direct interviews with students and teachers, as well as direct observation of school activities,it was found that the cultivation of Religious Moderation Through the Global Diversity Dimension of the Merdeka Curriculum at Tahuna High School is achieved through: First, the community with no partition; students encounter religious and cultural diversity; Second, local culture as a space for encounter, the cultural wisdom of Sangihe as the host serves as a meeting point for students to foster cross-religious and cross-cultural interactions. Third, the teaching of impactful love, a characteristic of Christianity, supports cultivating religious moderation in schools. It is hoped that the findings of this study will contribute to educational institutions' stakeholders in their efforts to promote the values of religious moderation among students

Keywords : theology of education, Religious moderation; tolerance; Global diversity; Culture

INTRODUCTION

Interfaith harmony is one of the priority programs for Indonesia. The government has made efforts to realize the national motto, *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. However, these efforts still face challenges due to ongoing acts of intolerance within society and even in educational settings, such as the forced disruption of a student retreat in Cidahu, Sukabumi(Hadi, 2025), cases of bullying due to religious and ethnic differences against elementary school students in Riau(Maulida, 2025), and forcing Elementary School Students in Karawang to wear the Hijab(Hasan & Naipospos, 2023). The disruptive impact of digital technology accelerates the spread of extremist ideologies through social media and online platforms, creating complex challenges for the state, educational institutions, religious leaders, and civil society (Fariduddin et al., 2025), In response to this, Gus Mus, a Muslim cleric, wrote a poem titled "When Religion Loses God." The satirical poem reveals how religion has undergone a shift: whereas religion once destroyed idols, it has now become an idol itself (Nasrulloh, 2024). This situation is certainly a cause for concern for the education sector in Indonesia. The role of religious education in universities, in terms of fostering respect for plurality and nurturing positive attitudes among students towards plurality, was of very high quality(Rukiyanto et al., 2025). Therefore, educational institutions serve as effective spaces for instilling knowledge that fosters values of harmony across differences from the school environment to the community and the nation. The curriculum is one of the elements of education that has the potential to realize this goal. A curriculum grounded in the dimension of global diversity within a sound theological

framework can produce students whose knowledge, morals, and behavior reflect the national identity of Indonesia.

Research on this topic is generally conducted within Islamic educational settings and focuses on the process of promoting religious moderation (Bisri et al., 2023)(Masru'ah et al., 2025), learning strategies at an Islamic boarding school (Asrori et al., 2025) Islamic Education Curriculum Based on Religious Moderation (Mukhibat et al., 2024) whereas research in Christian universities also founded intolerant, racist, and skeptical attitudes persist among students(Sianipar & Kolibu, 2025), In this research, theology of religious moderation is urgently needed to strengthen students' understanding, attitudes, and constructive engagement in a pluralistic society. Thus, the novelty of this study lies not only in its examination within the context of Christian religious education grounded in Christian theology, but also within the context of the secondary education environment at schools in the archipelago which is implementing a diversity-based curriculum.

In Perspective of the theology of Christian Education, religious moderation is one of the topics taught by educators using various strategies and methods. Religious moderation is one of the Indonesian government's priority programs. Religious moderation is a perspective, attitude, and behavior that always takes a middle ground, acts fairly, and avoids extremism in matters of religion(Oskar Gultom, 2022).Reflecting on the life of Jesus, He is said to have been devoted to His Father, so that whatever the Father decided became the basis for His actions; however, Jesus was not excessive in His devotion, because He was willing and able to accept differences and sinfulness (Siahaan, 2022). Based on this, Volf developed the concept of embracing diversity; he said that Christians must learn that salvation comes not only as we are reconciled to God, and not only as we "learn to live with one another," but as we take the dangerous and costly step of opening ourselves to the other, of enfolding him or her in the same embrace with which we have been enfolded by God (Volf, 2010). So in the context of Christian education theology, "embracing" means making sacrifices to bridge differences without losing one's spiritual identity. In His ministry, Jesus sought to moderate the harsh and radical teachings of Judaism toward His followers, one of whom was Paul, who had already been transformed by God on his journey to Damascus to persecute Christians; his harsh and radical attitude was transformed into a moderate and gentle one(Hakh, 2022). Thus, religious moderation leads to changes in the way people think and act in their religious lives. Marpaung and Hwang conclude that spiritual transformation framed by religious moderation consists of three domains: transformation toward a righteous life, transformation toward a life of love, and transformation toward a life as a good citizen(Marpaung & Hwang, 2023). Theologically speaking, a life of moderation is one of the hallmarks of Christian living because it aligns with teachings rooted in the Bible and the examples set by Jesus Christ and the figures in the Bible. Therefore, in an educational setting within a Christian community, education should foster a lifestyle characterized by harmony, mutual respect, and mutual support, without any boundaries or dividing walls. Therefore, theologically, cultivating religious moderation

Global Diversity Dimension is one of dimensions of Merdeka Curricullum which was implemented in high school in Indonesia. It is a dimension that encourages school communities to appreciate and respect cultural diversity, to represent their own cultures, to interact and communicate with individuals from various cultural backgrounds, and to be guided by the values of global diversity—all of which help students ultimately realize the importance of creating a just and harmonious life within a diverse society(Syafrida et al., 2024). Thus this dimension serves as a medium for students to learn about diversity. The dimension of Global Diversity in the context of education teaches that diversity is a treasure that must be cherished(Lina Rahmatika et al., 2025). In other words, this dimension illustrates that interreligious education(Bisri & Karwadi, 2019) and multicultural education(Rohmah et al., 2023) (Sukardi et al., 2025) are applicable in this study. Based on these backgrounds, the question of this research is how the work of global diversity to local wisdom, as the framework of cultivating Religious Moderation based on Christian Education Theology for high school students in Tahuna Indonesia, a city located on the northernmost island of Indonesia, has a population that is predominantly Christian Religion. This is also a unique aspect of this study: in addition to examining areas with a Christian majority, it also examines communities located on islands and in border regions, which naturally have different characteristics from Christian communities in urban areas and those not located in border regions.

METHODOLOGY

This study encompasses the field of theology, Christian education, global diversity dimension and religious moderation in public schools. These four elements are key to cultivating religious moderation for high school students in Tahuna, Sangihe Island, Indonesia. This study employs a qualitative research design; this method was chosen because it is capable of capturing the complexity of the process of global diversity to Local as a way to cultivate religious moderation based on Christian Education Theology among Tahuna High School Students. The researcher acted as the primary instrument for collecting information from primary data sources such as the principal, teachers, and students of Tahuna High School. The academic rationale is as follows: First, because these individuals are directly involved in the study context. Second, the data were collected from representatives of several high schools in Sangihe region, which is one of the outer islands in Northern Indonesia. Third, data selection was conducted systematically by identifying the qualifications of the interviews. Triangulation techniques are used during collecton data such as: observation, interviews, and documentation. Direct observations were conducted to observe the P5 activities at Tahuna High School. Semi-structured interviews were used to gather information from the informants, and documents related to the cultivation of religious moderation. The collected data was analyzed the process of Cultivating Religious education through global diversity dimension based on Christian Education Theology for Tahuna High School students in Indonesia.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the research findings, an educational environment that reflects religious moderation at Tahuna High School is evident in various activities carried out during the learning process. One example is the implementation of Merdeka Curricullum which is one of its dimension is Global Diversity , where a community-based social interaction style without divisions was observed, and Sangihe culture—as a local culture—serves as a space for interfaith and intercultural encounters. These there aspects of cultivating religious moderation

Community Without Partition

Tahuna High School is a school designated by the North Sulawesi Provincial Government as a role-model school for the implementation of the *Merdeka Curriculum* in Sangihe Islands Regency. The majority religion of teachers and students at Tahuna High School are Christian, while others are Moslem and tribe majority is Sangihe among aother tribe such as Minahasa, Gorontalo, Ternate, Bugis, Batak, and others. However, harmonious coexistence amid religious and ethnic diversity is reflected in the school's activities. These differences do not serve as partitions that separate individuals within the school environment. In the Global Diversity dimension activities teachers acted as facilitators, developed a module titled "Effective Ways to Be a Good Citizen in the 21st Century" with the goal of cultivating attitudes of tolerance and non-violence in religious life. Teachers designed virtual field trips to regions and countries with Muslim-majority populations, namely the Province of Nanggroe Aceh Darusalam, Turkey, and Morocco. Here are the results of interviews with teacher dan students about daily activities at school.

No	Source	Statement	Coding
1	JS	"Every morning there is a worship service, with prayers offered according to Christian, Islamic, and other traditions, so there truly is equality in every respect."	all are equal
2	SS	"We're assigned to different classes and groups so we can socialize with friends of different religions and ethnicities. This allows us to share stories with friends of different religions and ethnicities."	exchange friends
3	SL	We are currently holding a Global Diversity event, and we are becoming increasingly aware that we shouldn't be selective about our friends—we need to continue working together because not everyone at SMA 1 is from Sangihe; many are from outside Sangihe.	Making friend to all

4	CA	We had the opportunity to learn and interact with students from other classes, and we were encouraged to work together. When discussing global diversity, we all came to see diversity as a gift from God for which we should be grateful.	Appreciating Diversity
5	MJ	Through this P5 activity, I saw that they were very excited to experience things outside of Sangihe, which encouraged them to appreciate the differences they encountered.	Respecting Differences

Source: Interview Data, 2024

The students' statements elaborated about their activities at school. Through the learning process based Global Diversity dimension, it was found that all students feel a sense of equality as Indonesian citizens, where everyone can practice their religion in accordance with their respective faiths and beliefs. Students are then given the opportunity to make new friends, fostering diverse friendships that are not limited to the same social circle all the time; they do not discriminate when choosing friends, are grateful for diversity, and respect differences. These five points demonstrate that at Tahuna High School has been formed community without any partitions, which a harmonious life that transcends religious and cultural boundaries, thereby fostering a harmonious, family-like atmosphere within the school community.

Based on this pattern, interfaith and intercultural life in schools reflects a community that prioritizes togetherness, a spirit of unity, and mutual support and complementarity. This situation fulfills the indicators of religious moderation which is a spirit of nationalism as Indonesian citizens who uphold the motto "*Bhinneka Tunggal Ika"* (Unity in Diversity). The concept of the Global Diversity dimension stimulates students' thinking about the importance of maintaining harmony among people of different faiths. Students are able to transcend the various dividing lines that typically exist. Theologically, Jesus presence on Earth represents a divine effort that transcends the dividing line between the eternal and the temporal. Siahaan states, "*He is willing and able to accept differences and sinfulness."* Based on Christian Educational Theology, Jesus' presence is a tangible manifestation of contextual learning that transcends the Partition between the eternal and the temporal. Jesus, who dwells in eternal life in heaven, willingly entered the temporal world to carry out divine teaching for the world.

Local Culture as a Space for Encounter

Through Global Diversity dimension activities, local culture can serve as a means of bringing together diverse religious and cultural groups. The traditions of the Sangihe tribe, showcased at Tahuna High School enriched both academic and extracurricular activities through traditional dance, annual traditions, songs, and language. Introducing local culture provides an opportunity for students—whether from the Sangihe tribe or not—to mingle without religious Partitions, as everyone can participate without conflicting with their respective beliefs.The following are some results of interviews about encounters in local wisdom and culture:

No	Source	Statement	Coding
1	JS	My father is of Batak descent, while my mother is of Sangihe descent.We were taught to learn about local culture, such as the masamper dance and Tagonggong music. Although many of us are not native to the Sangihe tribe—myself included—we are united through our culture	United Through Culture
2	CA	"We were guided to learn about the ethnic and religious diversity in Indonesia. And as young people, we were encouraged to continue preserving our culture and to respect the local cultures wherever we are."	Preserving culture
3	SS	Our friends from outside Sangihe aren't familiar with the Tulude culture, so we, who are from Sangihe, are trying to explain it to them so they can learn about Sangihe culture.	Cultural knowledge

4	MJ	Students are innovating by drawing on local cultural wisdom, such as designing sports uniforms with motifs from the Sangihe tribe and using terms or phrases in the Sangihe language as mottos or slogans. Every Tuesday, everyone uses the Sangihe language at least when greeting one another..	Cultural innovation

Source: Interview Data, 2024

These statements from students and teachers show that, through cultural spaces, they can come together regardless of religious differences; in fact, they gain knowledge, preserve, and even develop innovations by incorporating cultural elements. The school's efforts to encourage students to preserve local cultural wisdom are capable of uniting diversity. Theologically, this was exemplified by Jesus, who came into the world to exist in human culture, He is fully integrated into human culture, and thus He experiences all the journey of life, and He sacrificed all His life for all humankind. As Volf said that we take the dangerous and costly step of opening ourselves to the other, of enfolding him or her in the same embrace with which we have been enfolded by God.

In religious moderation, it is also believed that culture can unite differences. The very nature of humans as social beings encourages efforts to socialize with the local community. An atmosphere of openness toward differences is evident in the interactions among students at First Tahuna High School, where they mingle without distinguishing between religion or ethnicity. They study and play together without any apparent Partitions between one another.

The Impact of the Love's teaching

Teachers and students at First Tahuna High School, the majority of whom are Christian, also contribute to cultivating religious moderation. Christian teachings on love have a significant influence in supporting the success of promoting religious moderation, where the example and commandment of Jesus Christ to love one's neighbor as oneself serve as the primary reason for living in harmony with others without any limitations. The following are some excerpts from interviews about encounters in local culture:

No	Source	Statement	Coding
1	JS	In our Religious Studies class, we are taught not to focus solely on individual activities but to collaborate in building healthy relationships with one another so that religious issues do not become a Partition to our interactions with others.	Religion is not a Partition
2	SL	In our P5 activities, we are also taught to have faith in God according to our respective religions and to put that faith into practice in our daily lives—for example, by loving our friends as we love ourselves.	Practicing Love
3	SS	When it comes to religion, we can share stories with friends who follow different faiths than ours. For example, I asked my friend about Islam, and my friend, in turn, asked me about Christianity. This allows us to respect each other's beliefs.	Religious knowledge
4	MN	We always teach our children to be grateful for the love of Jesus Christ, who has saved us from sin. So, as Christians, we should love our friends, teachers, parents, and others.	Love one another

Source: Interview Data, 2024

These statements from students and teachers show that the Christian teaching about the example set by Jesus—who demonstrated His love for the world—and the Lord Jesus' command to love God and love one's neighbor have had a profound impact. They said that religion is not a Partition to build relationship with others; practicing love is God's command; sharing knowledge with one another fosters mutual respect; and love one another. These

are the central teachings of Christian theology. The presence of the Lord Jesus is the embodiment of God's great love for the world. In John 3:16 it is written, "For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."Based on this love, every Christian is called to love others regardless of their differences. In the concept of religious moderation, every individual needs to understand, believe in, and practice the teachings of their respective religions. It is hoped that, through their individual beliefs, a balance between belief and practice will be achieved. Therefore, the teaching of love is one way for every Christian to live a life of religious moderation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the research findings, it was concluded that "Global Diversity to Local Harmony"—as the framework for the work of fostering religious moderation based on Christian education theology among students at Tahuna High School—has been effective, and that students living on one of Indonesia's northernmost outlying islands continue to demonstrate their identity as Indonesian citizens. This study illustrates how the national curriculum—one of whose objectives is to foster a generation of Indonesians imbued with a spirit of nationalism and diversity—is being realized. The following are the three processes of "Global Diversity to Local Harmony" as an effort to cultivate religious moderation based on Christian education theology among students at Tahuna High School as the representative of an area with a Christian majority located in a border region: First, Community without Partitions, This pattern is very evident in student interactions and school activities; it is also a result of religious teachings that have become ingrained in the students, most of whom are Christian. Second, Second, local culture serves as a space for encounter, Local wisdom of Sangihe acts as a host, providing a space for students to engage with differences. The use of local batik, weekly Sangihe language classes, dance performances, and artwork made from local materials serve as vehicles for fostering a sense of community among students. Third, the impact Love's Teaching, which is one of the characteristics of Christianity that supports the cultivation of religious moderation in schools. The Christian identity has become a source of gratitude and a testimony within the Tahuna High School environment.

Based on the conclusions of this Study, it is hoped that schools will continue to enhance both academic and non-academic activities that support the promotion of religious moderation within the school environment, as this not only creates a harmonious, peaceful, and comfortable educational atmosphere but also produces high-quality human resources necessary for achieving a bright future for Indonesia. This study is still limited to schools in the border islands; therefore, future research could be expanded to regions with different geographic, cultural, and social characteristics.

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