

IMPLEMENTING THE VALUE OF LOVE IN CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TO FOSTER TOLERANCE AMONG STUDENTS AT SMP GPID SUMBERSARI

Putu Desiana Erniati

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi GKST Tentena
desianaerniati@gmail.com

Abstract

This study examines how Christian Religious Education (CRE) can cultivate tolerance at SMP GPID Summersari, a school characterized by religious diversity. Employing a qualitative design, data were generated through in-depth interviews with one CRE teacher and three students from Christian and Muslim backgrounds, supplemented by participant observation. The data were analyzed inductively and validated through triangulation. The findings reveal concrete patterns of social exclusivity: restricted peer interaction during recess, cynical remarks about the religious practices of others, and emotional distance arising from the school's perceived identity as a "Christian school." These dynamics produce reciprocal forms of withdrawal and rejection between Christian and non-Christian students. The study argues that cognitively oriented CRE has not yet translated adequately into transformed social conduct. CRE therefore needs to move beyond predominantly theoretical instruction toward contextual, dialogical, and encounter-based pedagogies, including interfaith dialogue, structured cross-religious encounters, and collaborative projects. Such practices can create safer relational spaces, deepen empathy, and shift tolerance from passive coexistence to an actively embodied ethic of love.

Keywords: Love; Christian Religious Education (CRE); Tolerance; Religious Diversity

INTRODUCTION

SMP GPID Summersari is an educational institution administered by the Gereja Protestan di Indonesia Donggala (GPID) and situated within a highly plural social environment. Although the school has a strong Christian religious identity, its student body is heterogeneous, comprising both Christian and Muslim students. The presence of

students from different faith traditions within the same school should make the institution a social laboratory for learning peaceful coexistence. Field realities, however, indicate that this diversity has not yet been managed adequately; differences in religious background often become boundaries that inhibit close and open social relationships among students. Indonesia's ethnic,

religious, and cultural plurality requires individuals to develop the capacity to live together peacefully. Without mutual respect, differences can become a source of misunderstanding and even conflict. Tolerance therefore needs to be cultivated from the earliest stages of formal education. Schools occupy a strategic position in shaping students' character and habituating them to respect the differences around them. Education concerns not only the acquisition of knowledge but also the formation of dispositions that sustain harmonious common life (Tilaar 2004). When students learn to respect peers who differ in faith, language, or custom, they are being formed into socially mature citizens. This process is essential to sustaining unity amid the diversity that characterizes Indonesian society.

A concrete problem observed at SMP GPID Summersari is the emergence of social exclusivity in everyday interaction. Preliminary data indicate that students tend to restrict their friendship circles to peers of the same religion, particularly during recess and when choosing partners for group work. Emotional distance also arises from the perception that the institution is a 'Christian school,' a perception that can leave non-Christian students feeling only partially accepted or hesitant to participate fully. This reciprocal dynamic—Christian students closing themselves off and non-Christian students withdrawing—suggests that tolerance

remains largely passive rather than an intentionally embodied social value. Previous studies have underscored the importance of Christian Religious Education in cultivating tolerance in plural educational settings. Simanjuntak argues that CRE centered on love as a core Christian commitment can strengthen students' awareness of the need to respect difference in multicultural schools (Adu et al. 2025, 41). Toding similarly finds that students' understanding of love within Christian teaching positively shapes their social attitudes toward peers of other faiths (Manurung et al. 2025, 441). Manulang and Sihombing likewise emphasize that the deliberate integration of tolerant values into CRE can foster openness and reduce discriminatory attitudes toward other groups (Arifin and Yani 2020, 977). Meanwhile, Sarira highlights the difficulty CRE teachers face in presenting contextually relevant material to students from different backgrounds and stresses the need for creative, dialogical pedagogies if the language of tolerance is to be understood and practiced rather than merely repeated (Dethan et al. 2026, 3404). Taken together, these studies show that strengthening love and tolerance through CRE has considerable potential to nurture a harmonious school culture and provides an important frame for examining the practices found at SMP GPID Summersari more closely.

Although previous research consistently affirms the importance of

Christian Religious Education in cultivating love and tolerance, implementation in concrete school settings remains difficult. SMP GPID Summersari continues to face challenges in translating these values into students' everyday interactions. This gap suggests that theoretical understanding acquired through CRE has not yet been fully converted into observable dispositions and practices. Less contextualized teaching methods, limited opportunities to practice tolerance directly, and inadequate modeling within the surrounding environment all reduce the effectiveness of tolerance formation. CRE therefore requires pedagogical strategies that move beyond conceptual instruction and provide students with lived experiences through which love and tolerance can be internalized and enacted. Previous studies, including those by Simanjuntak, Toding, and Manulang and Sihombing, have shown the potential of the Christian value of love to heighten awareness of tolerance. However, such studies remain largely general and theoretical. The distinct contribution of the present study lies in its closer analysis of specific psychosocial barriers—fear, insecurity, and social segregation—within a Christian school that includes Muslim students. Rather than treating CRE simply as moral discourse, this study examines how perceptions of institutional religious identity shape students' psychological readiness to accept

difference, thereby enabling a more contextual and practicable response.

This qualitative study therefore examines how Christian Religious Education can function as a foundation for forming substantive tolerance within the religious diversity of SMP GPID Summersari. It seeks to identify the psychosocial constraints that generate reciprocal rejection among students and to formulate more interactive, experience-based pedagogical strategies. The study ultimately aims to offer practical recommendations that enable educators to move the value of love beyond cognitive comprehension so that it can dismantle social boundaries and contribute to a more inclusive and harmonious school culture.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach to investigate social phenomena in depth within the school environment. Fieldwork was conducted at SMP GPID Summersari in July 2025. Informants were selected through purposive sampling, with the principal criterion being direct involvement in interreligious interaction at school. The participants comprised one Christian Religious Education teacher (Mrs. Nurianti) and three students representing different religious backgrounds: Ayu Desfin and Rasti Karolin (Christian) and Herpina (Muslim). This composition was intended to provide perspectives from both sides of the dynamics of rejection and tolerance. Following

Sugiyono, qualitative inquiry is undertaken in natural settings, with the researcher serving as the primary instrument of data collection and interpretation. Data were triangulated through in-depth interviews, observation, and documentation and were subsequently analyzed inductively to identify the meanings embedded in the empirical material (Sugiyono 2019, 9–17).

The analytical framework draws on Franz Magnis-Suseno, who understands tolerance as an active disposition of respect for diversity and argues that the state must be 'intolerant of intolerance' in order to safeguard social harmony. For Magnis-Suseno, tolerance is a moral commitment to accept difference as a condition of shared life (Magnis-Suseno et al. 2015, 24). Michael Walzer, in turn, conceptualizes toleration as the conscious exercise of restraint: the refusal to impose one's will in a plural society and the willingness to make room for difference so that distinct groups may coexist peacefully, rather than an unconditional endorsement of every difference (Walzer 1999, 123). These concepts provide the interpretive lens for assessing whether student interaction at SMP GPID Summersari has developed into a moral commitment to respect difference or remains at the minimal level of restraint without substantive empathy. Accordingly, interview and observational data are not merely reported descriptively but critically interpreted to identify the

psychosocial roots of the problem within the school.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Christian Religious Education is a formative learning process intended to help students know, understand, and internalize Christian teaching as grounded in Scripture while shaping character in accordance with the example of Christ. CRE therefore extends beyond religious knowledge to the formation of dispositions and practices that embody a living faith within a religiously plural society (Loho et al. 2024, 9–12).

Field findings from SMP GPID Summersari reveal a complex tension between students' stated awareness of tolerance and their everyday social practices. Interviews indicate that students generally possess an initial understanding of the importance of peaceful coexistence in a religiously diverse school. Relations across religious differences function relatively well within academic settings: students are willing to study together and support one another when facing learning difficulties. Tolerance is also expressed through simple but significant practices, such as allowing space and quiet when peers of another religion are worshipping and cooperating in group tasks without making religious difference a barrier. However, closer examination of more intimate social interactions shows that tolerance remains largely superficial and procedural. A key interview finding is that some students have reached only

the level of "simply not disturbing others." They avoid overt conflict and conspicuously harmful conduct, but this restraint has not yet developed into empathy, genuine concern, or emotional support for peers of another faith.

These field realities resonate strongly with Franz Magnis-Suseno's insistence that genuine tolerance cannot end in passivity but must develop into an 'active moral commitment.' At SMP GPID Summersari, such active commitment—a sincere willingness to respect and affirm diversity as a necessary condition of common life—continues to be constrained by social exclusivity. The persistence of insensitive behavior suggests that CRE has largely reached the cognitive domain without sufficiently shaping students' dispositions. It has not yet fully shifted the student paradigm from merely 'tolerating the presence of others' to 'actively respecting and loving one's neighbor.' What is required, therefore, is more than moral exhortation. CRE needs an educational strategy capable of dismantling psychosocial barriers and moving students from detached tolerance toward relationships characterized by empathy, genuine regard, and solidarity (Magnis-Suseno et al. 2015, 24).

This pattern becomes particularly intelligible through Michael Walzer's notion of 'conscious self-restraint.' Students at SMP GPID Summersari appear to have reached the point at which they can restrain

themselves from imposing their will or disturbing others in order to preserve school order. Although this allows religious differences to coexist peacefully, it has not yet opened into the warmer and more relational space of genuine dialogue. Students themselves report that some peers remain insensitive to the feelings of those from other religious backgrounds, often through jokes or cynical remarks that may appear trivial to one person but cause discomfort and emotional injury to another (Walzer 1999, 123).

Challenges in Cultivating Tolerance amid Religious Diversity

Findings from SMP GPID Summersari show that the principal challenge to cultivating tolerance lies in persistent social segregation and emotional distance among students. Informant G1 (CRE Teacher) reported that, despite the school's plural setting, boundaries in interreligious association remain common: students are often reluctant to sit together during recess and seldom form religiously mixed work groups (Sri Nurianti, interview by author, Summersari, South Parigi, Indonesia, July 3, 2025). Informant S1 (Student) similarly described awkwardness and anxiety about being accepted when attempting to interact with peers from different religious backgrounds. As S1 explained, 'some students still go no further than not disturbing others; they do nothing overtly wrong, but neither do they show genuine concern or empathy'

(Ayu Desfin, interview by author, Summersari, South Parigi, Indonesia, July 3, 2025). This pattern indicates that tolerance remains passive—a form of 'holding back' that, in Walzer's terms, represents the minimal self-restraint required to prevent conflict in a plural society but falls short of secure, relational, and genuinely shared life.

A further challenge is religious insensitivity expressed through jokes or cynical comments about particular religious practices. Although informants generally described interstudent relations as reasonably good, Informant S1 acknowledged that "there are sometimes jokes or remarks that make friends feel uncomfortable." Such behavior reflects both a limited depth of understanding of tolerance and the influence of attitudes acquired in family and external social environments. It also indicates that the value of love taught in CRE has not yet been fully internalized as concrete practice. Reading through Magnis-Suseno, the situation shows that students have not yet reached "active tolerance," understood as a moral commitment to respect diversity sincerely. This deficit of sensitivity creates psychological distance: students fear saying the wrong thing or being rejected by another group and therefore retreat into religiously homogeneous circles.

An additional structural problem is the absence of a systematic school program specifically designed to break down these boundaries.

Teachers have offered advice and modeled fairness in the classroom, but these measures remain insufficient because they do not reach the psychosocial roots of the problem. Without concrete interventions and sustained spaces of encounter, tolerance risks remaining classroom knowledge rather than becoming an inclusive school culture. The central challenge for SMP GPID Summersari, therefore, is to transform CRE from instruction about the theory of love into an interactive and collaborative pedagogy capable of disrupting the social exclusivity that continues to shape students' everyday relationships.

Factors Contributing to Intolerance at SMP GPID Summersari

The roots of intolerance at SMP GPID Summersari arise from several interrelated factors, ranging from institutional identity to students' psychosocial dynamics. The first is the school's strong institutional labeling as a 'Christian school.' This identity is communicated not only through the institution's name but also through everyday culture and the predominance of particular religious symbols, which can cause students from other backgrounds to experience themselves as 'guests' within their own school. Rejection can emerge as a negative response to difference and uncertainty. When individuals or groups encounter what is unfamiliar or divergent from their usual social environment, perceptions of threat

may arise, producing discomfort and a tendency either to avoid or reject those who are different. Such rejection may be behavioral, for example, by avoiding interaction, or verbal, through negative or cynical comments. Identifying the factors that generate these responses is therefore essential to designing educational interventions capable of strengthening tolerance, particularly within school environments (Siregar and Nasution 2024, 332).

Informant S1 (Christian student) acknowledged that the perception of the school as a strong locus of Christian identity indirectly creates psychological boundaries. Among non-Christian students, these boundaries can generate fear and a diminished sense of security (Rhasti Karolin, interview by author, Summersari, South Parigi, Indonesia, July 4, 2025). Informant S2 (Muslim student) described a tendency to withdraw because of feeling less than fully accepted within the school environment (Herpina, interview by author, Summersari, South Parigi, Indonesia, July 4, 2025). The possibility of social rejection drives anxiety about joining groups of another faith, leading some students to feel safer interacting only with same-faith peers. This dynamic produces religious clustering or segregation in everyday social relations. Interviews further show that, beneath an appearance of generally cordial relations, a pattern of 'passive tolerance' persists: students refrain from interference

without necessarily displaying genuine empathy. Informant S2 stated that 'some students still go no further than not disturbing others; they do nothing overtly wrong, but neither do they show genuine concern or empathy.' Emotional distance is intensified by jokes that fail to account for the sensitivities of peers from other religions. As one informant noted, 'excessive joking without considering other people's feelings can create misunderstanding.' Unless addressed, such interactions can harden into attitudes that devalue difference. The rejection observed here is therefore reciprocal and cannot be reduced simply to hostility; it also reflects a failure to build sincere communication under the influence of prejudices carried from family or social environments outside the school (Banks 2015, 120). Within more sustained and constructive interaction, however, tolerant dispositions can develop organically, reducing fear and enabling closer relationships among students.

To date, the internalization of harmonious coexistence has relied largely on verbal counsel and the example of the CRE teacher; it has not yet been extended into sustained, collaborative encounters. The scarcity of intensive dialogical spaces deprives students of opportunities to know one another more deeply and to unsettle stereotypes. Through Walzer's framework, the weakness of both self-restraint and dialogical space signals a failure to construct an

inclusive public sphere within a plural community. Students' withdrawal functions as self-protection in the absence of mutual trust. Magnis-Suseno's perspective likewise underscores how an exclusive institutional identity can obstruct the formation of a "just public space." A school should be more than a site of knowledge transmission; it should operate as a social laboratory in which students learn to move from fear of difference toward a moral commitment to mutual respect. Without pedagogical interventions that create shared interfaith projects, social distance will persist and continue to impede the emergence of genuine common life at SMP GPID Summersari.

CRE Approaches to Addressing Barriers to Tolerance

The implementation of CRE at SMP GPID Summersari is intended to function as a formative force for dismantling social exclusivity through several operational approaches. First, the CRE teacher seeks to internalize values through direct moral guidance and personal example. According to Informant G1 (Mrs. Nurianti), the primary strategy is to insist that students respect one another and refrain unequivocally from denigrating another person's beliefs in the classroom. This approach is reinforced by the teacher's equitable treatment of students regardless of religious background, allowing the teacher to embody the value of love being

taught. The strategy has produced a basic level of awareness: students increasingly respect peers during worship, avoid imposing their own views, and remain willing to cooperate in interfaith group work. Field findings, however, show that verbal instruction and modeling alone are insufficient to move students from passive to active tolerance. Informant S1 observed that, although relationships are generally good, some peers remain at the stage of "simply not disturbing others" without expressing genuine empathy. In response, CRE at SMP GPID Summersari has begun to incorporate more regular and dialogical forms of formation. Teachers periodically create classroom space for students to discuss how they experience insensitive jokes or cynical remarks that generate discomfort. This practice is consistent with Walzer's emphasis on healthy dialogical space as a means of restraining group egoism. Through such discussion, students are invited to recognize that tolerance involves more than permitting others to exist; it requires attentiveness to others' feelings so that careless humor does not become a source of misunderstanding.

A further CRE strategy is to cultivate direct encounters through collaborative activities. As students themselves suggested in the interviews, the school has sought to increase the frequency of mixed-faith group work and interreligious discussion involving the wider student body. The purpose is to build

trust and empathy through sustained face-to-face interaction. Collaboration toward shared school goals can gradually reduce anxiety about saying the wrong thing and uncertainty about being accepted. Through Magnis-Suseno's framework, this strategy represents an enactment of "active moral commitment": the educational institution does not merely prohibit discrimination but actively constructs an inclusive environment. Students therefore encounter love not only as a biblical concept but as a social practice capable of reducing emotional and social distance.

Ultimately, CRE at SMP GPID Summersari places increasing emphasis on strengthening literacy concerning religious diversity across both family and school contexts. Because rejection is often shaped by attitudes imported from outside the school, the CRE teacher consistently stresses that harmonious coexistence is not optional but fundamental to life in a diverse educational community. Although some students have not yet reached a deeper level of understanding, the sustained use of interactive and encounter-based pedagogy is crucial if tolerance is to move beyond a normative ideal and become a school culture genuinely embodied by the entire student community.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the primary obstacle to the formation of tolerance at SMP GPID Summersari lies in an

exclusivist perception of the school's identity as a "Christian school," which generates social and emotional distance between Christian and non-Christian students. Concrete findings include religiously based social clustering, insecurity in interfaith interaction, and insensitive conduct expressed through cynical joking. These patterns demonstrate that CRE has remained largely at the theoretical-cognitive level and has not yet translated optimally into transformed social behavior. The study's principal contribution is to show that the Christian value of love can sustain tolerance only when it is embodied through pedagogies that challenge institutional exclusivity and create safe spaces of encounter for all students.

To foster a more inclusive and harmonious school environment, SMP GPID Summersari should consider the following strategic measures: (i) Develop CRE learning models centered on interactive dialogue and cross-religious collaborative projects in order to cultivate substantive empathy; (ii) Establish safe spaces for minority students through inclusive school policies and consistent attention to even subtle forms of discriminatory speech; (iii) Provide teachers with training in the educational management of religious diversity so that they can serve as facilitators of social reconciliation in the classroom; (iv) Design shared extracurricular programs centered on direct

encounter in order to weaken prejudice and strengthen mutual trust. When CRE is strengthened contextually in these ways, the value of love ceases to be material for memorization and becomes a lived foundation for sincere coexistence amid diversity.

REFERENCES

- Adu, M., Dethan, Y. D., Nggeong, F. Y., Purnomo, C. P., & Heknenno, R. C. (2025). *Dampak Pendidikan Agama Kristen Terhadap Sikap Toleransi dan Kepedulian Sosial Siswa*. Prima Magistra: Jurnal Ilmiah Kependidikan, 6(1), 41-49.
- Arifin, Samsul, and Muhammad Turhan Yani. 2020. *Peran Guru Pendidikan Pancasila dan Kewarganegaraan dalam Membentuk Karakter Toleransi Antar Umat Beragama kepada Siswa di SMPN 1 Jabon Sidoarjo*. Kajian Moral dan Kewarganegaraan. vol. 8, no. 3: 977-991
- Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural Diversity and Education: Foundations, Curriculum, and Teaching* (6th ed.). Routledge.
- Dethan, Yandry Diana, et al. 2026. *Peran Pendidikan Agama Kristen Berbasis Nilai Kasih dalam Pembentukan Toleransi Peserta Didik di Sekolah Multikultural*. JIIP (Jurnal Ilmiah Ilmu Pendidikan). vol. 9, no. 3: 3404-3414.
- Loho, Albert, Jonathan Gamaliel Gratia Loho, and May. 2024. *Dasar-Dasar Pendidikan Agama Kristen*. Yogyakarta: Jejak Pustaka.
- Magnis-Suseno, F., Sumaktoyo, N. G., Kolimon, M., Pasiak, T., Wahid, A., Mufid, A. S., Imanulhaq, M., & Sciortino, R. (2015). *Agama, Keterbukaan, dan Demokrasi*. (A. Mellisa & H. Mubarak, Eds.). PUSAD Paramadina.
- Manurung, P. T., Bangun, & Sinurat, H. (2025). Implementasi Spiritualitas Guru Pendidikan Agama Kristen terhadap Peningkatan Perilaku Siswa. *Jurnal Ilmu Pendidikan dan Sosial (JIPSI)*, 4(3), 438-446.
- Siregar, Siti Masdelina, and Inom Nasution. 2024. *Peran Kepala*

*Sekolah dalam Pendidikan
Multikultural pada
Pengembangan Sikap
Toleransi. MODELING:
Jurnal Program Studi PGMI.
vol. 11, no. 2: 336-347.*

Sugiyono. (2019). *Metode Penelitian
Kuantitatif, Kualitatif, dan R
dan D*. Alfabeta.

Tilaar, H. A. R. (2004).
*Multikulturalisme:
Tantangan-tantangan Global
Masa Depan dalam
Transformasi Pendidikan
Nasional*. Grasindo.

Tilaar, H. A. R. (2004).
*Multikulturalisme:
Tantangan-tantangan Global
Masa Depan dalam
Transformasi Pendidikan
Nasional*. Jakarta: Grasindo.

Walzer, M. (1997). *On Toleration*.
Yale University Press.