

# The Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Shaping Student Character Through Peace Education and Conflicts Resolution Among Students

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**Abstract.** Peace education has emerged as one of the main factors for reducing conflicts among students, although its implementation in various Indonesian schools was limited. This qualitative study incorporated a literature review and aimed to investigate the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing conflicts among students by integrating peace education into CRE learning. Data were collected through observation and interviews. The results showed that the likelihood of both internal and external conflicts decreased when the teachers played a good role in educating students. Moreover, peace education constituted a long-term, effective effort against a culture of violence, specifically when implemented at an early age. CRE teachers were crucial in mitigating conflicts, making their promotion of peace education highly valuable in reducing such incidents. Furthermore, peace education is one of the solutions for shaping the character of students who embraced a peace-loving life.

**Keywords:** CRE Teachers, Conflict, Students, Peace Education, Student Character

## 1 Introduction

Conflict among students has become a prevalent global issue, occurring both within the same school and among students from different backgrounds. These conflicts include both internal and external, often characterized by physical altercations. However, the failure of schools in addressing conflicts, comprising not only CRE and counseling teachers but also the principal and all other stakeholders, including parents, who have a relationship with the school, can make the issues unlikely to be resolved. Student conflicts typically arise from hostility between parties who perceive each other as obstacles to achieving personal needs and goals. This usually begins with a difference of opinion, which may escalate due to misunderstandings and egocentric responses.

Every student possesses egoism and varying perspectives, making conflicts a common occurrence. When conflicts occur between two individuals, the ripple effect often impact larger groups. The close relationships among students within these groups can lead to more significant conflicts that district the overall harmony of school life. For educated individuals, conflict cannot be resolved by more conflict, as this only begets further strife. Instead, resolution necessitates the implementation of peace-building strategies.[1]

Following World War II, several countries recognized the importance of peace-building and education. Harris and Morrison provided a conceptual explanation that peace education was a commitment to fostering harmony and addressing the culture of violence arising in educational settings. Bar-Tal emphasized that peace education varied greatly in some areas due to real challenges faced.[2] Bar-Tal further elaborated that it aimed to address various societal "ailments" such as injustice, group prejudice, intolerance, pollution, violent conflict, and war, with the ultimate goal of creating a just, egalitarian, and tolerant world. This perspective was in line with the conceptualization of human rights, environmental quality, peace and other positive lifestyles, as well as De Rivera conceptualization of peace education as a means to prevent conflicts.[2]

Peace education has emerged as an essential part of CRE curriculum as it is based on the role of teachers in fostering a harmonious life within the school environment. Implementing a pedagogy centered around peace education can create an atmosphere conducive to harmony within the school, primarily among the students. These students are expected to develop into agents of peace who can influence other schools positively. CRE teachers need to devise strategies and promote peace among students. Therefore, the following study questions are crucial: How can conflict behavior among students be resolved or reduced? Is conflict resolution only limited to counseling provided by CRE teachers? How does the role of CRE teachers educate students about

peace? The implementation of peace education is crucial, particularly in schools, which are expected to recognize its significance as learning material.

To ensure a comprehensive examination, this study conducted observations, interviews, and content analysis of relevant books. The results obtained were similar to some previous studies. For instance, six teenagers lost their lives in student fights in Yogyakarta between 2014 and 2017. These conflicts often begin as individual disputes, escalating to peer groups, and sometimes extending to other schools. This phenomenon predominantly affects groups of male students in various Indonesian cities, each with its unique characteristics and influences [2]. Wahyudin (2018) identified four pressing peace education issues in Indonesia: (1) The pluralistic nature of Indonesia, which can introduce ethnic and religious nuances; (2) Peace education as a powerful alternative tool in trauma management; (3) Peace education fostering discussion and understanding of strategies to address or resolve conflicts and other potential problems; (4) Peace education as a foundation for national solidarity.[3] This also includes preventive activities to avert potential conflicts and violence.[4] The current study offered a unique perspective as it explored the extent to which CRE teachers implemented peace education for students with a Christian Education approach.

It was evident that CRE teachers had not fully maximized the implementation of peace education, resulting in student conflicts. This study aimed to address the fundamental question of how peace education could be applied to mitigate conflicts among students, potentially serving as a foundation for CRE teachers to develop peace education materials. It also provided a potential solution to various problems, specifically students conflicts. The responsibilities of CRE teachers extended to providing guidance and education tailored to individual talents and abilities. CRE teachers serve as human components in the teaching and learning process.[5]

## 2 Method

This study utilized the literature review method, which included qualitatively analyzing relevant books and library sources (references).[6] This method was used for data collection by reviewing various literature on the role of CRE teachers in addressing conflicts among students through peace education. The data collection process was carried out in three main stages, namely the socialization, the search, and the focused analysis. The socialization stage aimed to enhance the understanding of the CRE teachers' role in resolving conflicts. The search stage was related to the data collection process and in line with the study objectives. The focused analysis investigated the primary aim of the study. This was subsequently followed by the data processing and analysis stage.

## 3 Results And Discussion

Conflicts among students, both within and outside school (internally and externally), are no longer a public secret. Among numerous incidents, conflicts exert a significant influence on students, as well as school and living environments, and even the broader community. These conflicts often start with brawls or fights between students within the school environment, which can also extend to other schools due to friendship relationships. Conflicts were also influenced by various factors, such as students' living conditions, closeness to parents, and other family members, as well as relationships with peer groups.

Students are exposed to depictions of violence in visual media, specifically on social media, often accompanied by sarcastic remarks in the form of verbal insinuations or words provoking emotional responses in targeted students. Such remarks may include ridiculing one friend in comparison to another or emphasizing differences in social strata within the family. Other contributing factors include varying levels of intelligence among students, with some being exceptionally smart while others having average IQs. Moreover, the formation of student groups or gangs also played a significant role in conflicts. Addressing these behaviors has emerged as a great concern for CRE teachers who implement peace education to resolve student conflicts.

Several previous studies have focused on student conflicts and their resolution through peace education. This approach aimed to foster human understanding, emphasizing a culture of peace characterized by harmony, tolerance and empathy for others.[7] Verbal attacks have particularly severe consequences, specifically in the educational context, where young minds are in the process of developing the foundation for a harmonious and progressive Indonesia.[8] Peace education encouraged critical thinking and broadened students' perspectives, helping them to adopt a more open and constructive mindset.[4] However, conflicts among students persisted due to the limited implementation of peace education materials in CRE learning.

### 3.1 Peace Education

Education is one of the most crucial preparations for future success in the globalization era. There are various ways to attain education, and one of them is through teaching. The preceding definition of peace education shows that it focuses more on preventing and resolving conflicts that often arise in human relationships.[9] The application of peace education for children can occur in different contexts, such as schools.[10] However, this form of education is still relatively uncommon in Indonesia, in addition to the limited body of literature and books on peace education, which remain abstract. The extensive and multifaceted nature of peace education content, such as definitions, topics, methods, contexts, learning materials and more, adds to its complexity. Several individuals lack a clear understanding of how peace education should be implemented, who is most effective in teaching it, and in what context. Peace education, often perceived as an integral part of Christian teaching, aims to help students understand, think, believe, and make decisions grounded in the teachings of Christian tradition and revelations from God. [11] Therefore, it should be integrated into the teaching of the Christian faith.

Peace education, including Christian faith teaching, should be approached as a program that goes in-depth analysis to prevent controversy and conflict.[12] This form of education includes a fairly complex and comprehensive learning process that encourages, maintains, and develops a sense of peace. This can be carried out through various efforts, such as teaching, sharing skills, specifically regarding issues that pertain to peace and non-peace, critical analysis, and social conflict.[9] Consequently, it is implemented within schools, where the contextual peace education model for students should be described and analyzed. Theoretical studies on peace education models were conducted using various reading sources like books, magazines, online articles, and information from educational institutions.[13] Fell identified Empowerment, communication, cooperation, and conflict resolution as the four essential skills for authentic peace [9], ultimately instilling peaceful attitudes in schools.[10]

### 3.2 Peace Education Shapes Student Character

Peace education is constituted of two critical components, namely articulating principles and commitments as well as equipping students with the knowledge, values, and attitudes necessary for creating harmony, thereby warranting the title of 'peacemakers.' According to the Language Center of the Education and Culture Ministry, this form of education includes character, heart, soul, personality, character, and behavior. Character, in this context, comprises personality, behavior, traits, and disposition. Etymologically, the term 'character' denotes habit, traits, psychological attributes, manners or habits that distinguish one individual from another.[14] Page emphasized two crucial aspects, namely fostering a commitment to always live in harmony and providing information on various aspects conducive to peace [13], thereby making students active agents of peace.

Students need to understand that creating peace is mainly based on two concepts. Firstly, there is a need to proactively address conflicts. Peace does not merely signify the absence of conflict but is rooted in self-awareness as human beings, nurturing healthy relationships with others. It also thrives on mutual respect, appreciation, and love, fostering personalities that consistently embrace harmonious living. Secondly, there is a need to provide students with information about various aspects of peace, enabling them to seek and explore knowledge regarding its concepts. Students can also promote peaceful coexistence among their peers, or become agents of peace, a role that requires the cultivation of character. Harris and Synott formulated the concept of peace education as a set of lessons aimed at instilling in people a desire for harmony and guidance to effectively resolve conflicts. Critical analysis of structural specifications that reproduce and legitimize injustice clarifies that student character can be formed through peace education.[13]

Character can be defined as the attitudes, thoughts and behaviors that describe an individual. Kindness, honesty, discipline, hard work, respect, loyalty, fairness, care, compassion, humility, and cooperation are examples of noble character or virtues to be encouraged. Conversely, negative traits like rudeness, lying, dishonesty, arrogance, anger, jealousy, and selfishness are vices to be discouraged. Character is a combination of learning and genetic factors that an individual possesses and is deeply rooted in their life experiences. Therefore, whether evident or not, individuals need to consistently exhibit traits like honesty, discipline, hard work, and responsibility, as these qualities define their identity.[15]

### 3.3 CRE Teachers Role in Educating Students

What role do CRE teachers play in shaping students' character through peace education? CRE teachers held a crucial role in conveying the values of peace education to students. Every teacher should embody a sense of peace to create a conducive atmosphere in the classroom.[16] The role of the teachers exemplified the improvement of students' spirituality and character, particularly when teaching peace education as a means of

instilling affective values.[9] The consistent cultivation of peaceful thoughts and attitudes could profoundly influence students' character, although many still failed to grasp the true essence of peace education.[10]

How can students apply peace education in their daily lives, specifically at school, when they do not understand its principles? The recent increase in conflicts among students within school environment was likely a result of their inadequate knowledge and understanding of how to live harmoniously. CRE teachers should perceive this situation not merely as a trend, since the main priority was the formation of spirituality, faith, attitude and character of students in response to conflicts. Therefore, the teachers needed to provide effective solutions to address these issues. Do students view life as an opportunity for togetherness without incidents or acts of violence, marred by various conflicts among peers that disrupt this harmony? It was imperative that peace education garnered attention from all stakeholders within the educational community.

Peace education, including learning materials focused on fostering peace-loving attitudes, respect, and love values, could shape students' character toward people. Establishing peace with everyone could be achieved through the practice of mutual respect, appreciation of differences, and the creation of unity among students, guided by CRE teachers and school principals. This could also be accomplished by offering appropriate praise to those who deserved it, particularly students who exhibited commendable behavior. Teachers should also educate on how to love and care for others without discrimination.

Fostering love and care for others, without distinguishing among individuals, instilled substantial values in students. Teachers could serve as role models for students, as they impacted peace education with values and promoted harmony among students, even in the face of differences. The role of teachers was essential in enhancing spirituality and character of students, shaping a generation devoted to God and enriched with faith, love, and knowledge for a better nation.[9] When CRE teachers effectively conveyed peace education, students were encouraged to follow suit.

The teachings of CRE teachers could serve as motivation for students to emulate. This extended beyond merely addressing conflicts between students with phrases like "The problem is resolved, and it should not be repeated," followed by a handshake as a sign of problem-solving. Conflict cannot be resolved through such simple gestures, instead, CRE teachers should engage in educating and analyzing the conditions that lead to conflicts among students, necessitating an appropriate approach. Therefore, when providing instruction, teachers need to go beyond cognitive enrichment and address various issues within the school context. Peace education, as a teaching material for Christian Religious Education, was an appropriate subject for resolving conflicts and preventing their recurrence.

As part of the CRE curriculum, peace education is needed to garner the attention of all stakeholders within the educational community. The teachers were also expected to incorporate this form of education, covering not only the concept but also the nurturing of spiritual faith and student character. By offering peace education, students could reduce the occurrence of conflicts, potentially eliminating them. Despite the valuable insights provided in this study, there were still certain limitations. Therefore, further analysis was recommended to incorporate additional references.

## 4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this study investigated the role of CRE teachers in shaping student character through the integration of peace education and CRE learning. The results showed that CRE teachers had a crucial role in implementing peace education to shape student character and address potential conflicts.

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