



Tallu Lolona Philosophy as a Contextual Foundation for Torajan Christian Education in Schools, Churches, and Public Life

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ABSTRACT

This study addresses the critical issue of educational polarization in Indonesia, where Christian education is often fragmented between academic-cognitive learning in schools and spiritual-indoctrination in churches. This dichotomy limits the impact of faith values in the public sphere, particularly in facing contemporary ecological and social challenges. Using an integrative literature review method, this research synthesizes various theological and cultural perspectives to propose a more holistic framework. The study identifies the Torajan philosophy of Tallu Lolona which emphasizes the interconnectedness of humans (*lolo tau*), animals (*lolo patuoan*), and plants (*lolo tananan*) as a vital ethical and pedagogical foundation. The findings suggest that by integrating Tallu Lolona into a collaborative curriculum between schools and churches, Christian education can move beyond descriptive summaries toward an analytical synthesis that promotes transformative praxis. This research offers a novel model of integrative education that empowers students to manifest Christian values as a response to public issues such as environmental degradation and social disharmony. This study contributes to the development of contextual public theology and provides a practical roadmap for educators and religious leaders in pluralistic societies.

ABSTRAK

Penelitian ini mengkaji isu kritis mengenai polarisasi pendidikan Kristen di Indonesia, di mana pendidikan agama sering kali terfragmentasi antara pembelajaran akademik-kognitif di sekolah dan indoktrinasi spiritual di gereja. Dikotomi ini membatasi dampak nilai-nilai iman dalam ruang publik, terutama dalam menghadapi tantangan ekologis dan sosial kontemporer. Dengan menggunakan metode tinjauan pustaka integratif (*integrative literature review*), penelitian ini mensintesis berbagai perspektif teologis dan budaya untuk mengusulkan kerangka kerja yang lebih holistik. Studi ini mengidentifikasi filosofi Toraja, *Tallu Lolona* yang menekankan keterhubungan antara manusia (*lolo tau*), hewan (*lolo patuoan*), dan tumbuhan (*lolo tananan*) sebagai fondasi etis dan pedagogis yang vital. Temuan penelitian menunjukkan bahwa dengan mengintegrasikan *Tallu Lolona* ke dalam kurikulum kolaboratif antara sekolah dan gereja, pendidikan Kristen dapat bergerak melampaui sekadar ringkasan deskriptif menuju sintesis analitis yang mendorong praksis transformatif. Penelitian ini menawarkan model baru pendidikan integratif yang memberdayakan peserta didik untuk memanasifestasikan nilai-nilai Kristiani sebagai respons terhadap isu-isu publik seperti degradasi lingkungan dan disharmoni sosial. Studi ini berkontribusi pada pengembangan teologi publik kontekstual dan memberikan panduan praktis bagi para pendidik serta pemimpin agama dalam masyarakat yang pluralistik.

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Introduction

Indonesia's identity as a vast multicultural nation is defined by its immense religious, ethnic, and cultural diversity, with over 1,340 tribes spread across the archipelago. (Nasution 2019). Among these, the Toraja people of South Sulawesi stand out for their generous and honorable character, rooted in the etymological meaning of "Toraya" (Sumbang and Rumengan 2019). For the Torajans, culture is an integral system that governs harmony with all creation, manifested through thirteen core values such as *kasiuluran* (brotherhood) and *karapasan* (peace) (Kobong 2022; Panggara 2015). These values are encapsulated in the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy, which emphasizes the interrelatedness of three "shoots of life": humans (*lolo tau*), animals (*lolo patuoan*), and plants (*lolo tananan*) (Sandarupa et al. 2016). However, modernization has triggered a shift in these values. Evidence of this includes the severe pollution of rivers in Makale, leading to frequent floods and the rise of divisive identity politics. (Patandean 2024; Desianti 2024; Tempo 2010). This cultural erosion highlights a critical need for a foundation that restores harmony within the Toraja community and its environment.

This situation positions Christian education as a strategic instrument for character formation. Ideally, Christian education should embody the Kingdom of God's values—truth, justice, peace, and love within the public sphere. (Pakpahan 2020; Sasongko 2019). However, Christian education in Indonesia currently faces a serious structural problem: a polarization that segregates education into two disconnected domains. In churches, it is often reduced to Sunday school indoctrination. In contrast, in schools, it is treated as a cognitive-oriented subject that frequently ignores the affective and psychomotor dimensions of faith. (Sasongko 2019). This polarization confines Christian education to private or academic silos, preventing it from addressing real-world issues in the public square.

Previous studies have explored the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy from various angles. Patrecia and Prayuda (2022) used it as a basis for universal ecumenism, while others linked it to ecological crises and social harmony (Masseleng 2023; Sapri 2022). More recently, Claudia et al. (2024) Integrated *Tallu Lolona* into the Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum for Generation Z. However, a significant research gap remains: Caludia's approach reinforces the existing educational polarization by focusing strictly on school-based cognitive development and government involvement, without addressing how these values can be utilized by the church or manifested in the wider public sphere.

This article offers a distinct contribution by breaking the polarization between school-based and church-based Christian education. Unlike previous research, this study argues that *Tallu Lolona* can serve as a holistic pedagogical framework that connects the two institutions. By bridging this gap, *Tallu Lolona*'s values can be more effectively embodied in the public sphere, moving beyond mere classroom knowledge toward concrete social and environmental praxis. This integrative approach constitutes the novelty of this research, positioning Christian education as a unified force for social transformation.

Consequently, this article aims to analyze the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy as a contextual foundation for Torajan Christian education, bridging the divide between schools and churches. The discussion will first examine the role of Christianity in the public sphere and the roots of educational polarization in Indonesia. It will then deconstruct *Tallu Lolona*'s values to formulate a model of integrated Christian education that equips the Toraja people to manifest the signs of God's Kingdom in their communal life.

Methods

This research employs a qualitative approach using the integrative literature review method. This method is utilized to synthesize information and theories from various library materials to create a new conceptual framework for Christian education. The author chose this method because of the extensive availability of scientific sources, such as journal articles and books, that discuss the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy, public theology, and educational theory. The literature used is strictly limited to accountable scientific sources, including journal articles, books, and research reports. (Zaluchu 2020).

To ensure a rigorous and transparent analysis, the author followed several systematic steps. (Zaluchu 2020; Zaluchu 2021):

1. Selection of Relevant Literature: The author identified and gathered literature that is scientifically justifiable from reputable databases. The selection criteria focused on sources that address the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy, educational polarization in Indonesia, and the role of Christianity in the public sphere.
2. Thematic Reading and Documentation: The author performed a deep reading of the selected materials to record specific ideas and theories. This process focused on identifying the gap between school-based and church-based education and how indigenous Torajan values intersect with Christian faith.
3. Variable Coding and Grouping: Based on the recorded ideas, the author determined and categorized the research variables. These categories include: (a) the role of Christianity in the public sphere; (b) the analysis of educational polarization in schools and churches; (c) the core values of the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy; and (d) the synthesis of these values as a basis for Torajan Christian education.
4. Synthesis and Conceptual Drafting: The author organized and synthesized the categorized variables to build a coherent conceptual model. This stage involved mixing ideas from diverse sources to propose a holistic educational design that bridges the gap between academic knowledge and community praxis.

By following these procedures, the author ensures that the study moves beyond descriptive summary and toward an analytical synthesis that provides a novel foundation for contextual Christian education.

Results and Discussion

Result

The Theological Foundation of Christianity in the Public Sphere

The involvement of Christianity in the public sphere is grounded in the framework of public theology, which seeks to engage faith with broader social and political issues. Harold Breitenberg defines public theology as a reflective practice in which Christians participate in public discourse to contribute to the common good, ensuring that religious values are articulated in ways that are accessible to society. (Pakpahan 2020). Elaine Graham expands on this perspective. (2013), who argues that theology must transcend ecclesiastical boundaries to address the multifaceted challenges of modern life. In the Indonesian context, Binsar Pakpahan (2020) asserts that the presence of Christianity in the public sphere is a mandate to manifest the values of the Kingdom of God, specifically truth, justice, peace, and love for all of creation.

Furthermore, this theological stance is officially supported by the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI) through the *Dokumen Keesaan Gereja* (DKG), which emphasizes the church's collective responsibility toward social justice and environmental integrity. This mandate informs the fundamental purpose of Christian education. According to Sasongko (2019), Christian education is designed to form individuals whose

spiritual maturity is reflected in their ability to manifest Christian values within society. Therefore, the literature indicates that the role of Christianity in the public sphere is not merely a social activity but a theological necessity rooted in the mission to bring transformative peace and justice to the entire creation.

The Reality of Educational Polarization in Indonesian Christian Education

Contemporary Christian education in Indonesia faces a systemic challenge characterized by a deep-seated polarization between formal and non-formal learning spaces. Literature suggests a distinct functional divide in which Christian education in schools is often reduced to a mere academic subject oriented toward cognitive development and administrative compliance. In this context, the curriculum tends to prioritize the transfer of knowledge and legalistic requirements, frequently neglecting the psychomotor and affective dimensions of faith. (Sasongko 2019). Conversely, in the church environment, Christian education is predominantly identified with Sunday school or catechesis, which often focuses on spiritual indoctrination and personal piety without a strong connection to academic or social realities.

This dichotomy creates a gap in which Christian education appears confined to specific, isolated areas rather than acting as a holistic, transformative force. According to Sasongko (2019) Christian education in schools and churches should ideally be inseparable, as both serve as integral learning spaces that complement each other. However, the current reality shows that this polarization prevents students and congregants from manifesting their faith values in the public sphere. The lack of synergy between these two institutions results in an educational output that is intellectually grounded in the classroom but practically disengaged from society's social and ecological challenges. Consequently, this structural divide necessitates a new framework that can bridge these learning spaces to fulfill the true purpose of Christian education in Indonesia.

The Values of Tallu Lolona Philosophy as Ecological and Social Ethics

The *Tallu Lolona* philosophy represents the core ontological framework of the Toraja people in maintaining the harmony of all creation. Etymologically derived from the words *tallu* (three) and *lolona* (shoots of life), this philosophy posits three interconnected shoots of life: *lolo tau* (humans), *lolo patuoan* (animals), and *lolo tananan* (plants). Within this worldview, these three elements are seen as an interrelated unity where the well-being of one is contingent upon the respect and care shown to the others. Consequently, *Tallu Lolona* functions as an indigenous ethical system that governs how Torajans interact with their natural and social environment. (Sandarupa et al. 2016).

This ethical framework is manifested through thirteen cultural values that guide the Toraja community toward *karapasan* (peace and harmony). These include *kasiuluran* (brotherhood), *kasianggaran* (mutual respect), *kamarurusan* (honesty), and *kasiturusan* (unity) (Panggara 2015). In traditional practice, these values are deeply embedded in the rhythm of life, emphasizing that culture is not separate from nature. However, contemporary data indicate significant erosion of these values due to modernization, as evidenced by environmental degradation, such as river pollution in Makale, and the rise of divisive identity politics in local competition. (Patandean 2024). Thus, the literature highlights that, while Tallu Lolona provides a robust foundation for ecological and social ethics, its practical application currently faces a crisis that calls for a renewed pedagogical approach.

Discussion

Bridging the Dichotomy through Tallu Lolona Philosophy

The polarization of Christian education in Indonesia, which segregates the school as a cognitive-academic space and the church as a spiritual-indoctrination space, has limited the impact of faith in the public sphere (Hattu 2019). This research argues that the *Tallu Lolona* philosophy can serve as a vital "bridge" to overcome this dichotomy. By integrating the three shoots of life *lolo tau* (humans), *lolo patuoan* (animals), and *lolo tananan* (plants), Christian education moves beyond a narrow focus on individual salvation or academic grades. (Sandarupa et al. 2016). Instead, it creates a unified learning trajectory where both schools and churches direct students toward a single goal: maintaining the harmony of God's creation in the public square.

When schools and churches adopt *Tallu Lolona* as a shared framework, the values of *kasiuluran* (brotherhood) and *karapasan* (peace) are no longer just abstract cultural concepts, but become pedagogical indicators. (Kobong 2022; Rerung 2024). For example, the cognitive knowledge of ecology taught in schools (cognitive) finds its spiritual justification and communal practice in the church's teaching (affective and psychomotor). This integration addresses the concern raised by Binsar Pakpahan. (2020) that public theology must be manifested in truth and love for all creation. By breaking the walls of polarization, Christian education transforms from a "cloistered" subject into a public praxis that directly responds to modern challenges, such as river pollution in Makale and identity politics. (Desianti 2024).

The Holistic-Integrative Model of Torajan Christian Education

To bridge the gap between schools and churches, this study proposes a holistic-integrative model that utilizes *Tallu Lolona* as the core curriculum framework. This model shifts Christian education from a fragmented approach to a collaborative praxis involving three main arenas: the classroom, the faith community, and the public square. In this framework, *lolo tau* (human life) is not educated in isolation but is inextricably linked to the preservation of *lolo patuoan* (animals) and *lolo tananan* (plants) as a manifestation of the Kingdom of God. (Sandarupa et al. 2016).

In the school context, teachers can integrate *Tallu Lolona* through cross-curricular projects that move beyond cognitive testing. For instance, the values of *kamarurusan* (honesty) and *kasianggaran* (mutual respect) can be taught through environmental stewardship programs, where students analyze the ecological impact of local pollution. (Panggara 2015). Simultaneously, the church must transform its Sunday school and youth catechesis from passive indoctrination into "eco-spiritual" labs. By using *Tallu Lolona*, the church teaches that caring for the environment and promoting social peace (*karapasan*) are essential spiritual disciplines, not just secular activities. (Kobong 2022).

The integration of these two institutions culminates in the public sphere. This study suggests a collaborative "Public Praxis Program" where schools and churches co-organize community actions, such as the rehabilitation of the Makale River or inter-faith dialogues, to mitigate identity politics. (Desianti 2024). This model ensures that the education provided in schools and churches is validated by its psychomotor impact on society. By doing so, Christian education fulfills its purpose of forming souls that manifest Christian values in a tangible, socially responsible manner, thereby solving the polarization that has long characterized the Indonesian educational landscape.

Theoretical and Practical Implications: Beyond School-Centric Education

The proposed model of Torajan Christian education based on *Tallu Lolona* offers significant theoretical and practical implications that distinguish it from previous studies. While the research by Etni Caludia et al. (2024) made a valuable contribution by integrating *Tallu Lolona* into the Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum for Generation Z, but it remained primarily "school-centric." That study focused on cognitive development within the formal education system and relied heavily on government involvement, which inadvertently reinforced the existing polarization between schools and religious institutions. In contrast, this research breaks that dichotomy by positioning the church and the public sphere as equal and inseparable learning spaces.

Theoretically, this study expands the scope of public theology from abstract discourse into a concrete pedagogical framework. By treating the school, church, and public square as a single ecosystem of learning, the values of *Tallu Lolona* such as *kasiuluran* (brotherhood) and *karapasan* (peace) are transformed from local wisdom into a universal Christian praxis that addresses modern crises. (Kobong 2022). Practically, this model provides a roadmap for educators and church leaders in Toraja to collaborate on social and ecological issues, ensuring that Christian education is no longer confined to academic grades or private spiritualism but becomes a transformative force in the public sphere. (Sasongko 2019). This shift from a "curriculum-focused" to a "praxis-focused" integration represents the core novelty of this work, offering a sustainable solution to the long-standing problem of educational polarization in Indonesia.

Conclusion

This research concludes that Tallu Lolona's philosophy provides a robust, contextual foundation for bridging the long-standing polarization in Christian education in Indonesia, particularly within the Toraja community. By integrating the three shoots of life humans (*lolo tau*), animals (*lolo patuoan*), and plants (*lolo tananan*) into a unified pedagogical framework, Christian education can transcend the dichotomy between school-based cognitive learning and church-based spiritual indoctrination. This integration ensures that the values of faith are not only understood academically but are also manifested as a transformative praxis in the public sphere to address ecological crises and social disharmony.

In practice, this study suggests that educational stakeholders and church leaders in Toraja should collaborate to design a holistic-integrative curriculum that positions the public square as a shared learning laboratory. This model empowers students and congregants to live out the values of *karapasan* (peace) and *kasiuluran* (brotherhood) through concrete actions, such as environmental preservation and social mediation. Future research is encouraged to explore the empirical implementation of this *Tallu Lolona*-based model across diverse educational settings to assess its long-term impact on the social and spiritual character of younger generations.

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