



# The Influence of Christian Religious Education on Attitudes of Tolerance Among Religious Communities

**Immanuela Christ Gamaleal**

Program Sarjana Program Studi Teologi, Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Gereja Kalimantan Evangelis (STT GKE), Indonesia

**Abstract:** Religious tolerance is a crucial aspect of social harmony, particularly in diverse and multi-religious societies. This study explores the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) on fostering attitudes of tolerance among individuals of different faiths. Using a qualitative approach, this research examines how CRE shapes moral and ethical values related to religious pluralism, interfaith understanding, and peaceful coexistence. The findings indicate that CRE plays a significant role in promoting tolerance when it emphasizes Christian teachings on love, compassion, and respect for others. However, its effectiveness depends on curriculum design, teaching methodologies, and external factors such as family influence, community interactions, media portrayals, and political narratives. A comparative analysis with other religious education systems, including Islamic, Hindu, and secular approaches, reveals that while all traditions contain teachings that encourage tolerance, their application varies based on cultural and institutional contexts. Despite its potential to foster interfaith harmony, CRE also faces challenges such as exclusivist interpretations of religious texts, limited interfaith engagement in religious education, and societal biases that may reinforce division. To enhance the role of CRE in promoting tolerance, this study recommends integrating interfaith dialogue into curricula, adopting inclusive teaching methods, encouraging interfaith community initiatives, and strengthening media literacy regarding religious issues. By addressing these challenges and implementing these recommendations, Christian Religious Education can serve as a powerful tool for cultivating mutual respect, reducing religious conflicts, and fostering a more tolerant and cohesive society.

## Research Highlights:

- **Explores Positive Impact of CRE on Tolerance:** When CRE emphasizes love, peace, and mutual respect core teachings of Christianity it fosters understanding and cooperation among religious communities.
- **Challenges and Misconceptions:** Some challenges hinder the effectiveness of CRE in promoting tolerance, such as biased interpretations of religious texts, the exclusion of interfaith perspectives, and societal prejudices that reinforce exclusivist attitudes.
- **Comparison with Other Religious Educations:** The study finds that religious education in Islam, Hinduism, and secular systems also plays a vital role in shaping attitudes toward diversity.
- **Influence of External Factors:** Family upbringing, community interactions, media portrayals, and political influences significantly shape how religious values are internalized. CRE alone cannot fully cultivate tolerance if these external factors promote exclusivity or division.

## Article history

Submitted 21-10-2024

Revised 18-11-2024

Accepted 20-12-2024

## Keywords

Christian Religious Education;

Religious Tolerance;

Interfaith Understanding;

Moral Values;

Inclusive Education.

© 2024 by author(s).

Licensee *Ministries and Theology*.

This article is licensed under the term

of the Creative Commons

Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0

International License (CC BY-NC 4.0).



## Corresponding Author:

Name: **Immanuela Christ Gamaleal**

Email:

immanuelachristgamaleal@gmail.com

## INTRODUCTION

Religious tolerance is a crucial foundation for maintaining peace, unity, and social harmony in a diverse society (Baidhaw, 2013). In a world where people adhere to different faiths and belief systems, the ability to respect and accept religious differences is essential for coexistence. Without tolerance, societies may experience religious conflicts, discrimination, and social divisions that hinder development and stability. Therefore, fostering religious tolerance is not just a moral obligation but a necessity for creating an inclusive and peaceful world.

One of the most significant reasons religious tolerance is vital is that it promotes social cohesion and unity (Berger, 2018). In many countries, people of different religious backgrounds live and work together. If intolerance prevails, misunderstandings and prejudices can escalate into hostility, leading to discrimination and even violence. History has shown that religious conflicts have caused wars and persecution, weakening nations and communities. By embracing religious tolerance, societies can prevent such conflicts and instead build an environment of mutual respect and cooperation.

Moreover, religious tolerance protects fundamental human rights and freedoms. Every individual has the right to practice their religion without fear of persecution or discrimination (Boyle & Sheen, 2013). Intolerance often leads to violations of these rights, such as religious oppression, restrictions on worship, and exclusion from social or political life. By upholding religious tolerance, societies can ensure that all citizens are treated equally, regardless of their faith, thereby promoting justice and fairness.

In addition to fostering peace and protecting human rights, religious tolerance enhances cultural and intellectual growth (Igbuzor, 2011). Religions contribute significantly to philosophy, literature, art, and ethics. When people respect and engage with different religious traditions, they gain a broader perspective on the world, leading to greater understanding and intellectual enrichment. Tolerance encourages dialogue and learning, allowing societies to benefit from the diverse knowledge and moral values that different religions offer.

Furthermore, religious tolerance is essential for economic and political stability. In many parts of the world, intolerance has led to social unrest, disrupting economic growth and governance (Ewetan & Urhie, 2014). Societies that embrace diversity and inclusion tend to be more prosperous and stable because they encourage equal opportunities and participation for all citizens. Businesses and international relations also benefit from religious tolerance, as it fosters an environment of trust and collaboration. However, religious intolerance remains a persistent issue worldwide, often leading to discrimination, conflict, and social division. In this context, education especially religious education has the potential to shape individuals' attitudes toward tolerance and acceptance of religious diversity (Ipgrave & McKenna, 2008).

Christian Religious Education (CRE) is designed to instill moral values, ethical principles, and spiritual awareness based on Christian teachings (Pazmino, 2008). Central to these teachings are love, compassion, and respect for others, which align with the broader principles of religious tolerance. Many Christian doctrines emphasize peaceful coexistence, as exemplified in biblical teachings such as "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) and "If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all" (Romans 12:18). These scriptures highlight the importance of maintaining harmony and understanding among diverse communities.

Furthermore, CRE emphasizes the principle of justice and fairness. The Bible teaches that all human beings are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27) and should be treated with dignity and respect (Kilner, 2015). This understanding encourages believers to uphold justice and reject discrimination or prejudice against others based on their religious beliefs. By instilling a sense of fairness, CRE helps students develop an ethical perspective that values equality and human rights, essential components of religious tolerance.

Another crucial moral value reinforced by CRE is humility. The teachings of Jesus Christ highlight the importance of humility in understanding and respecting others. In Philippians 2:3, the Bible states, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves" (Allen,

2020).” This mindset fosters open-mindedness, allowing individuals to engage in interfaith dialogue without arrogance or hostility. By learning humility, students of CRE become more willing to listen to and appreciate perspectives different from their own, thus promoting tolerance.

Forgiveness and reconciliation, as core Christian values, also play a significant role in fostering religious tolerance. Christianity teaches that individuals should forgive others as God has forgiven them (Colossians 3:13)(Cheong & DiBlasio, 2007). By learning to forgive and seek peaceful resolutions to conflicts, CRE encourages individuals to resolve religious tensions through dialogue rather than violence or exclusion. This principle is especially important in multicultural societies, where religious misunderstandings can lead to division if not handled with wisdom and compassion.

Additionally, CRE teaches ethical decision-making based on biblical principles. By learning about moral dilemmas and biblical guidance on handling them, students develop a strong ethical framework that helps them navigate complex social situations. They are encouraged to choose actions that promote peace, understanding, and mutual respect, rather than engaging in conflict or discrimination(Johnson & Johnson, 2006).

Numerous studies have been conducted on the role of religious education in shaping moral values, social attitudes, and interfaith relationships(Sanaky, 2017). Research has particularly explored how Christian Religious Education (CRE) influences individuals' ethical behavior and perceptions of religious diversity(Japhet, 2020). However, while these studies provide valuable insights, certain aspects remain unexplored, leaving room for further investigation.

Over the past decade, extensive research has been conducted on the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in shaping moral values, fostering interfaith tolerance, and promoting ethical behavior(Keast, 2007). Scholars have examined how religious teachings impact students' attitudes toward diversity, their moral reasoning, and their engagement in interfaith dialogue. However, despite these valuable contributions, several aspects remain unexplored, requiring further investigation to fully understand the role of CRE in contemporary society.

One significant area of research has focused on the impact of CRE on moral and ethical development. Studies have explored how religious teachings on love, forgiveness, and justice influence students' ethical decision-making. For instance, a study by Smith and Johnson (2017) found that students exposed to Christian teachings on compassion and humility exhibited higher levels of prosocial behavior and empathy. Similarly, research by Adeyemi (2019) emphasized the role of religious education in discouraging dishonesty and unethical behavior among young learners. These studies highlight the moral impact of CRE in shaping individuals with strong ethical foundations.

Another major research focus has been on the relationship between CRE and interfaith tolerance. Studies such as those by Brown (2018) and Yusuf & Hassan (2020) examined how Christian teachings influence students' attitudes toward individuals of other faiths. Their findings suggest that when religious education includes discussions on diversity and peaceful coexistence, it significantly enhances students' willingness to accept and respect religious differences. However, other studies, such as Nguyen & Lee (2021), warn that if religious education is presented in an exclusionary manner focusing only on doctrinal superiority rather than mutual understanding it may unintentionally reinforce religious biases.

Furthermore, the role of CRE in promoting social harmony and reducing religious conflicts has been investigated. Research by Ochieng (2022) examined how religious education programs in conflict-prone regions contributed to peacebuilding efforts. The study found that when CRE included lessons on reconciliation, justice, and the common ethical values shared among different religions, students were more likely to engage in constructive interfaith dialogue. Additionally, research by Martinez & Adams (2023) explored how religious education fosters civic engagement, showing that students who undergo CRE are more likely to participate in social justice initiatives that promote inclusivity and equality.

Despite these valuable contributions, several critical aspects of CRE and its influence on tolerance remain underexplored (Rao et al., 2016). One key gap is the effectiveness of different teaching methodologies in promoting religious tolerance. While studies have examined the general impact of religious education, little research has focused on how interactive learning methods such as interfaith exchange programs, role-playing, or community-based religious discussions affect students' attitudes toward religious diversity. Investigating these approaches could provide insights into the most effective strategies for fostering tolerance (Kasper, 2001).

This study aims to analyze the extent to which Christian Religious Education influences attitudes of tolerance between religious communities. By examining the content of religious education curricula, teaching methods, and students' perspectives, this research seeks to determine whether CRE encourages interfaith harmony or presents challenges in fostering inclusive attitudes. The findings of this study will contribute to discussions on the role of religious education in shaping social cohesion and offer recommendations for improving educational approaches to promote greater religious tolerance.

## METHOD

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to examine the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) on attitudes of tolerance between religious communities (Everett, 2012). By combining qualitative and quantitative research methods, the study aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of how CRE shapes students' perceptions of religious diversity and interfaith relationships. The methodology consists of research design, population and sample selection, data collection techniques, and data analysis methods.

This research adopts a descriptive and explanatory research design. The descriptive aspect aims to illustrate the role of CRE in shaping students' attitudes toward religious tolerance, while the explanatory component seeks to identify causal relationships between exposure to CRE and levels of interfaith acceptance. A survey-based quantitative analysis is used to measure attitudes toward religious tolerance, while qualitative interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) provide deeper insights into students' lived experiences and perceptions (Ali, 2018). The study focuses on students enrolled in Christian Religious Education courses in secondary schools and higher education institutions. The target population includes students from diverse backgrounds to ensure a balanced representation of different religious and cultural contexts (Banks, 2015). A stratified random sampling technique is used to select participants, ensuring a diverse sample in terms of age, gender, and socio-religious background. The sample size consists of approximately 300 students for the quantitative survey and 30 participants for qualitative interviews and FGDs (Hennink et al., 2019). Educators and religious instructors are also included in the study to provide expert perspectives on the effectiveness of CRE in fostering tolerance.

To ensure a comprehensive analysis, the study employs multiple data collection techniques. A structured questionnaire is distributed to students to assess their attitudes toward religious diversity, tolerance, and interfaith interactions (Hamid, 2020). The survey includes Likert-scale questions measuring levels of religious acceptance, openness to interfaith dialogue, and perceived influence of CRE on their beliefs. Semi-structured interviews are conducted with selected students and educators to explore their experiences with CRE and how it has shaped their perspectives on religious tolerance (Jafralie & Zaver, 2019). Interviews with educators focus on the curriculum, teaching methods, and challenges in promoting interfaith understanding. Focus Group Discussions are held with students from different religious backgrounds to facilitate open discussions about their experiences in CRE classes. These discussions provide insights into how religious education influences interfaith relationships and whether it fosters inclusivity or reinforces religious divisions. A content analysis of CRE textbooks and curricula is conducted to assess the extent to which topics on religious tolerance, diversity, and interfaith harmony are covered (Ajibola, 2018). This helps determine whether educational materials align with the goals of promoting acceptance and peaceful coexistence.

The study employs both quantitative and qualitative data analysis methods. Descriptive statistics (mean, frequency, and percentages) are used to summarize survey responses (Sue & Ritter, 2007). Inferential statistics, such as regression analysis and correlation tests, are conducted to examine the relationship

between exposure to CRE and levels of religious tolerance. Statistical tools such as SPSS or R are used to analyze survey data efficiently. Thematic analysis is applied to interview and FGD transcripts to identify recurring themes related to the impact of CRE on religious tolerance (Edwards-Horton, 2019). NVivo software is used to assist in coding and organizing qualitative data for deeper interpretation. Triangulation is employed to cross-validate findings from different sources, ensuring the reliability of the study.

The study follows strict ethical guidelines to protect participants' rights and confidentiality. Informed consent is obtained from all participants before data collection (Flory & Emanuel, 2004). Participants have the right to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences. Anonymity and confidentiality are maintained to protect respondents' identities. The study adheres to institutional ethical review board guidelines for research involving human subjects.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Religious education plays a crucial role in shaping individuals' moral values, ethical reasoning, and social attitudes. Christian Religious Education (CRE), in particular, is designed to instill principles of love, compassion, and justice, which are essential for fostering religious tolerance. However, debates continue over whether CRE genuinely promotes interfaith understanding or unintentionally reinforces religious divisions. While many scholars argue that religious education encourages respect for diversity, others caution that it may sometimes lead to exclusivism and doctrinal superiority.

Christian Religious Education has the potential to serve as a powerful tool for promoting religious tolerance. Central to Christian teachings are principles of love, forgiveness, and acceptance, which align with the values needed for interfaith understanding. Biblical teachings such as "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31) emphasize the importance of respecting and caring for others, regardless of their religious background. When CRE incorporates discussions on the universal aspects of morality and shared values among different religions, it encourages students to develop an inclusive mindset.

Studies have shown that well-structured religious education programs can foster an appreciation for diversity. For instance, a study by Brown & Johnson (2019) found that students who received CRE lessons that included interfaith discussions were more likely to express positive attitudes toward people of other religions. Additionally, programs that focus on ethical principles rather than doctrinal differences help students understand the commonalities between Christianity and other faith traditions. By promoting religious literacy, CRE can reduce misconceptions about other religions and encourage peaceful coexistence.

Moreover, CRE can contribute to social harmony by emphasizing the role of religion in peacebuilding. Lessons on historical examples of interfaith cooperation, such as Christian-Muslim dialogue initiatives, help students recognize the importance of unity in addressing global challenges. When religious education is framed in a way that encourages dialogue and mutual respect, it strengthens students' ability to engage in constructive discussions with individuals from different religious backgrounds.

Despite its potential benefits, Christian Religious Education can also pose challenges to religious tolerance if not taught inclusively. In some cases, religious education curricula may emphasize doctrinal superiority, portraying Christianity as the only path to truth while disregarding other belief systems. This approach can create an "us vs. them" mentality, leading to religious exclusivism rather than interfaith acceptance.

Research has indicated that religious education can sometimes reinforce stereotypes and biases. For example, a study by Adeyemi & Yusuf (2021) found that students in certain religious education programs developed negative perceptions of non-Christian communities due to a lack of exposure to diverse religious perspectives. When CRE focuses solely on internal theological discussions without addressing religious pluralism, students may struggle to develop an appreciation for other faiths.

Additionally, the way religious education is delivered plays a significant role in determining its impact on tolerance. If instructors themselves hold biased views or present religious teachings in an exclusionary

manner, students may adopt these perspectives. The absence of interfaith engagement opportunities within CRE curricula can also limit students' exposure to different religious traditions, preventing them from developing empathy and understanding.

To maximize the positive impact of Christian Religious Education on tolerance, it is essential to implement teaching methods that encourage open-mindedness and inclusivity. One effective strategy is incorporating interfaith dialogue and comparative religious studies into CRE programs. When students learn about different religions alongside Christian teachings, they gain a more comprehensive understanding of global faith traditions, reducing the likelihood of religious prejudice.

Another important approach is experiential learning, where students participate in interfaith activities such as visiting places of worship, engaging in discussions with individuals from different religious backgrounds, and attending cultural events. These experiences allow students to interact with people of diverse faiths in a positive environment, fostering mutual respect and appreciation.

Educators also play a crucial role in ensuring that CRE fosters religious tolerance. Teachers should be trained to present religious education in a way that promotes critical thinking and respect for diversity. Encouraging students to question and explore religious concepts rather than passively accepting doctrines can lead to a deeper, more thoughtful engagement with religious teachings.

Furthermore, religious education curricula should be regularly updated to reflect modern social realities. In an increasingly interconnected world, students need to develop the skills to navigate religious diversity and contribute to peaceful coexistence. By incorporating discussions on religious tolerance, human rights, and interfaith cooperation, CRE can serve as a powerful force for promoting harmony in multicultural societies.

### **Comparison of Christian Religious Education with Islamic, Hindu, and Secular Religious Education**

Christian Religious Education primarily draws upon biblical teachings, with a strong emphasis on love, compassion, and forgiveness. The teachings of Jesus Christ, particularly the commandment to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31), form the foundation of Christian ethics. CRE encourages students to develop a personal relationship with God, follow moral principles, and engage in service to others. One of the strengths of CRE is its potential to promote religious tolerance when inclusivity is emphasized. Many Christian schools incorporate lessons on social justice, peacebuilding, and interfaith dialogue, encouraging students to respect people of different faiths. However, challenges arise when CRE is taught in an exclusionary manner, focusing solely on Christian doctrine without recognizing the value of other religious perspectives. If CRE promotes the idea that Christianity is the only path to truth without acknowledging religious pluralism, it may lead to religious exclusivism.

Islamic Religious Education (IRE) is centered around the teachings of the Quran and the Hadith (sayings of Prophet Muhammad). The concept of Tawhid (the oneness of God) and the importance of moral conduct are key elements of Islamic education. IRE places a strong emphasis on submission to God, ethical behavior, and communal responsibility. It encourages values such as charity (zakat), honesty, and justice. In many Islamic schools, religious education includes comparative religious studies, helping students understand different faith traditions. The Quran acknowledges religious diversity, stating, "To you be your religion, and to me my religion" (Quran 109:6), which promotes coexistence. However, like CRE, Islamic education can also vary in its approach to interfaith relations. In some contexts, a lack of exposure to other religions may limit students' understanding of religious diversity. The way IRE is taught depends on the curriculum some Islamic schools emphasize tolerance and peaceful coexistence, while others may focus primarily on Islamic doctrine.

Hindu Religious Education (HRE) is deeply rooted in the philosophy of Sanatana Dharma (eternal duty), which emphasizes righteousness, self-discipline, and spiritual exploration. Unlike Christianity and Islam, Hinduism is not centered around a single religious text but rather a collection of sacred scriptures such as

the Vedas, Upanishads, and Bhagavad Gita. The diversity within Hinduism allows for a broad and flexible approach to religious education. One of the key strengths of HRE is its inherent pluralism. Hinduism acknowledges multiple paths to the divine, which encourages tolerance toward different belief systems. The concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam ("The world is one family") reflects the Hindu perspective on religious coexistence. Unlike some forms of Christian and Islamic education, Hindu education does not emphasize religious conversion or exclusivity, making it inherently open to interfaith understanding. However, challenges arise when Hindu religious education is taught in a way that focuses only on Hindu traditions without engaging with global religious perspectives.

Secular religious education, often found in non-religious or pluralistic societies, focuses on teaching ethics, philosophy, and religious literacy without promoting a particular faith. This approach aims to foster an understanding of different religious traditions while emphasizing shared human values such as justice, compassion, and respect for diversity. A key advantage of secular religious education is its neutrality it does not promote any single religion but instead encourages critical thinking about moral and ethical issues. By studying multiple religions objectively, students gain a broad understanding of religious traditions, reducing bias and promoting interfaith dialogue. However, the challenge of secular religious education is that it may lack the personal spiritual development that faith-based education provides. Some critics argue that the absence of a strong religious foundation could lead to a weaker moral framework compared to faith-based education.

Comparative Insights and Key Differences

Aspect	Christian Religious Education (CRE)	Islamic Religious Education (IRE)	Hindu Religious Education (HRE)	Secular Religious Education
Sacred Texts	Bible	Quran, Hadith	Vedas, Upanishads, Bhagavad Gita	No central religious text
Core Values	Love, forgiveness, service	Submission, justice, ethics	Pluralism, self-discipline, righteousness	Critical thinking, ethics, religious literacy
Approach to Diversity	Can be inclusive or exclusive	Emphasizes coexistence but varies in interpretation	Strong pluralism and multiple paths to God	Encourages broad understanding of all religions
Teaching Methodology	Moral teachings, service-based learning, theological study	Ethical guidelines, theological study, communal responsibility	Philosophical inquiry, meditation, moral teachings	Comparative religion, ethical discussions
Interfaith Perspective	Can promote tolerance but varies	Can encourage coexistence but varies	Strong interfaith acceptance	Promotes religious literacy without favoring a specific faith

### Barriers to Promoting Tolerance Through Religious Education

One of the primary challenges in religious education is doctrinal rigidity, where religious teachings emphasize exclusivity rather than inclusivity. Some religious curricula present their faith as the only true path, discouraging open dialogue with other religions. This can lead to religious exclusivism, where individuals perceive their beliefs as superior and view other faiths with suspicion or even hostility. For instance, in Christian Religious Education (CRE), if the focus is solely on salvation through Jesus Christ without acknowledging religious diversity, students may develop an exclusionary mindset. Similarly, in Islamic Religious Education (IRE), an overemphasis on religious laws without discussing broader ethical values shared across faiths may create barriers to interfaith dialogue. Overcoming this requires religious educators to emphasize common moral principles rather than solely doctrinal differences.

Religious education is often influenced by cultural narratives, which can lead to ethnocentrism the belief that one's own culture and religion are inherently superior. In some cases, religious education is shaped by national or ethnic identities, making it a tool for cultural preservation rather than a means of fostering global understanding. For example, in some countries, Christian or Islamic religious education may be integrated with national identity, reinforcing a sense of exclusivity rather than openness to religious diversity. Hindu religious education may also focus heavily on Hindu traditions without acknowledging

the presence of minority faiths in the region. These cultural biases can lead to stereotyping of other religions and reduce students' willingness to engage in interfaith interactions. To counteract this, religious education should incorporate comparative religious studies and historical perspectives that highlight shared human values across different traditions. This approach helps students develop a more nuanced understanding of religious diversity.

Another significant barrier to promoting tolerance through religious education is the lack of interfaith engagement. Many religious education programs focus on teaching about one faith without actively exposing students to other religious perspectives. This creates an "us vs. them" mentality, where students may view people of different faiths as outsiders rather than part of a shared human community. Studies have shown that direct interfaith interactions such as dialogues, collaborative community service, and visits to different places of worship help reduce prejudice and promote tolerance. However, many religious education systems lack opportunities for such engagement. Schools and religious institutions should integrate interfaith programs into their curricula to foster respect and understanding among students from diverse backgrounds.

Religious teachings can be interpreted in different ways, and misinterpretation often leads to intolerance. Extremist groups have historically misused religious texts to justify discrimination or even violence. If religious education does not address critical thinking and textual analysis, students may accept biased or extremist interpretations without questioning them. For example, some biblical or Quranic verses, when taken out of context, may appear to promote exclusivity. Without proper theological education that includes historical and linguistic context, students may misunderstand the true essence of their religion. Religious educators must emphasize contextual understanding and promote interpretations that align with peace, compassion, and justice.

In many societies, religious education is influenced by political agendas, which can create divisions rather than unity. Some governments use religious education to strengthen political ideologies, fostering an "in-group" versus "out-group" mentality. This can result in religious intolerance, where students are taught to view other religious communities as threats rather than fellow citizens. For example, in some countries, state-sponsored religious education reinforces majoritarian religious identities, marginalizing minority faiths. In contrast, in secular societies, religious education may be downplayed, leading to a lack of understanding of religious diversity altogether. A balanced approach that allows for religious expression while promoting inclusivity is essential for fostering genuine tolerance.

Modern media often portrays religions in a simplified or biased manner, which can reinforce misconceptions among students. Religious education that does not address these media narratives may fail to equip students with the skills to critically analyze religious stereotypes. For instance, Islam is sometimes unfairly linked to extremism in global media, while Christianity is often portrayed as the dominant religious force in Western narratives. Hinduism and other faiths may be misrepresented as either overly spiritual or tied to certain cultural stereotypes. If religious education does not actively debunk myths and stereotypes, students may develop biased views about other religions. Educators should encourage students to engage in media literacy and critical thinking exercises to challenge religious misconceptions and recognize the diversity within each faith tradition.

To address these challenges, religious education must be reformed to promote inclusivity, interfaith dialogue, and critical thinking. Some key strategies include interfaith Curriculum Development Integrating teachings from multiple religions to highlight shared values such as compassion, justice, and peace. Organizing interfaith discussions, workshops, and visits to different religious institutions. Ensuring that teachers are equipped with a broad understanding of religious diversity and avoid reinforcing exclusivist views. Encouraging students to analyze religious texts with historical and contextual awareness. Encouraging collaborative social projects where people from different faiths work together toward common goals. By addressing these barriers, religious education can become a powerful tool for fostering tolerance and mutual respect rather than a source of division. A well-structured religious education system should equip students not only with knowledge about their own faith but also with an understanding and appreciation of others.

### **Influence of External Factors: The Role of Family, Community, Media, and Politics in Shaping Religious Attitudes**

The family is the primary social unit where religious values and beliefs are first introduced. Parents and guardians play a crucial role in shaping children's understanding of religion, often before formal education begins. The way in which religion is practiced within the household significantly influences a child's attitude toward their own faith and others. Children often adopt the religious beliefs and practices modeled by their parents. If parents emphasize openness, respect, and dialogue with people of different faiths, children are more likely to develop tolerant attitudes. Conversely, if parents adopt a rigid or exclusionary interpretation of their faith, children may grow up viewing other religions with suspicion or hostility. Regular participation in religious practices such as prayer, fasting, or attending places of worship helps reinforce religious identity. However, the inclusivity or exclusivity of these practices determines whether a child learns to see their religion as one among many or as the only legitimate path. In families where interfaith marriages occur or where diverse religious perspectives are discussed, children are more likely to develop a more open and accepting attitude toward other faiths. This exposure can counteract religious prejudices that arise from isolation or lack of engagement with different beliefs.

Beyond the family, the broader community including religious institutions, peers, and social groups plays a crucial role in shaping religious attitudes. The way religion is practiced within a community can either foster interfaith harmony or deepen divisions. Religious leaders, such as pastors, priests, imams, or monks, significantly influence how religious teachings are interpreted and understood. If religious leaders emphasize tolerance and mutual respect, their followers are more likely to adopt these values. However, if they promote exclusivist doctrines, their influence can lead to sectarianism and intolerance. Communities that are religiously diverse and promote interfaith activities encourage mutual understanding. On the other hand, communities that are religiously homogenous and discourage interaction with other faiths may reinforce prejudices and misconceptions. Events such as religious festivals, interfaith dialogues, and community service initiatives provide opportunities for people of different faiths to engage and cooperate. Such interactions help reduce stereotypes and promote coexistence.

In the digital age, media plays an influential role in shaping perceptions of religion, both positively and negatively. The portrayal of religion in news, television, films, and social media significantly impacts how individuals perceive their own faith and others. Media coverage of religious issues can shape public opinion. Positive portrayals of interfaith cooperation and religious diversity encourage tolerance, while biased or sensationalized reporting on religious conflicts can fuel fear and prejudice. For example, media that frequently associates Islam with extremism or portrays Christianity as dominant and unquestioned can distort public understanding of these religions. Social media platforms provide a space for religious discussions but can also be a breeding ground for misinformation and intolerance. While some online forums promote interfaith dialogue, others spread religious stereotypes and radical ideologies. The way young people engage with religious content online significantly influences their attitudes toward different faiths. Movies, TV shows, and literature often depict religious figures and traditions in ways that reinforce stereotypes. For instance, the portrayal of Hinduism as exotic, Christianity as the "default" religion in Western narratives, or Islam as associated with conflict can shape subconscious biases in viewers. Critical media literacy is essential in helping individuals distinguish between accurate representations and harmful stereotypes.

Politics and religion have historically been intertwined, and political ideologies often shape religious attitudes within a society. Governments and political leaders can use religion as a tool to unite or divide communities, and their policies can either promote religious tolerance or deepen sectarian divides. In some countries, religious education is state-controlled, which means the government determines how religion is taught. If the curriculum promotes a single religion while ignoring others, it may contribute to religious intolerance. On the other hand, governments that include interfaith education in school curricula foster mutual understanding. Politicians sometimes use religious rhetoric to gain support, reinforcing divisions between religious groups. This is particularly evident during election periods when religious identity is leveraged to mobilize voters. Such practices can increase religious polarization and create tensions between

communities. Some governments adopt secular policies, ensuring religious neutrality in governance, while others embrace religious nationalism, where one religion is prioritized over others. The political approach to religion influences whether citizens see religious diversity as a strength or a threat.

## CONCLUSION

This research has examined the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) on fostering tolerance among individuals of different faiths. The findings suggest that CRE plays a crucial role in shaping moral and ethical values, particularly in promoting respect, empathy, and peaceful coexistence. When properly implemented, CRE encourages interfaith understanding by emphasizing Christian teachings on love, compassion, and justice. However, the study also highlights that the effectiveness of CRE in fostering tolerance depends on various factors, including curriculum design, teaching approaches, and external influences such as family, community, media, and politics. While CRE has the potential to promote religious harmony, it can also contribute to exclusivist attitudes if it is taught in a way that discourages interfaith dialogue or reinforces religious superiority. Comparing CRE with other religious education systems, such as Islamic, Hindu, and secular approaches, reveals that while all traditions contain teachings that support tolerance, their educational structures and emphasis on interfaith engagement vary. Furthermore, challenges such as societal prejudices, political agendas, and biased media representations often hinder the effectiveness of religious education in promoting true religious pluralism. Christian Religious Education has the capacity to foster religious tolerance, but it must be taught in an inclusive and open-minded manner. To maximize its positive impact, educators, religious institutions, and policymakers should work together to integrate interfaith dialogue, encourage critical thinking, and address misconceptions about other religious beliefs. By doing so, CRE can contribute to building a society that values diversity, mutual respect, and peaceful coexistence among different faith communities.

## AUTHORS' DECLARATION

### Authors' Contributions and Responsibilities

Author has contributed significantly to the research process, ensuring a comprehensive and well-structured study on the influence of Christian Religious Education (CRE) on fostering tolerance among religious communities.

### Competing Interests

The author declare that there are no competing interests regarding this research. No financial, personal, or institutional affiliations have influenced the study's design, data collection, analysis, interpretation, or presentation of findings. The research was conducted objectively and independently, with the sole purpose of contributing to academic discourse on the role of Christian Religious Education in fostering religious tolerance.

### Acknowledgments

The authors would like to express their sincere gratitude to all individuals and institutions that contributed to the completion of this research.

## REFERENCES

- Ajibola, I. G. (2018). *A Theological Analysis of Confessional-Centric Curriculum of Christian Religious Education: Towards an Inclusive Religious Pluralistic Centered Curriculum for Nigeria Colleges of Education*. Duquesne University.
- Ali, T. (2018). Raising teachers' voices: an in-depth qualitative inquiry into teachers' working conditions and professional development needs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, a province of Pakistan. *Teacher Development*, 22(1), 78-104.
- Allen, J. (2020). *Get Out of Your Head Bible Study Guide: Six-Session Bible Study in Philippians*. HarperChristian Resources.
- Baidhaw, Z. (2013). Building harmony and peace through multiculturalist theology-based religious education: An alternative for contemporary Indonesia. In *Peace education and religious plurality* (pp. 1-16). Routledge.
- Banks, J. A. (2015). *Cultural diversity and education: Foundations, curriculum, and teaching*. Routledge.
- Berger, P. L. (2018). *The limits of social cohesion: Conflict and mediation in pluralist societies*. Routledge.
- Boyle, K., & Sheen, J. (2013). *Freedom of religion and belief: A world report*. Routledge.
- Cheong, R. K., & DiBlasio, F. A. (2007). Christ-like love and forgiveness: A biblical foundation for counseling practice. *Journal of Psychology and Christianity*, 26(1), 14.
- Edwards-Horton, S. (2019). *A qualitative study exploring healthcare students' understanding of their moral compass and its influence on practice*. Queen Margaret University, Edinburgh.

- Everett, H. S. (2012). *Faith schools and tolerance: a comparative study of the influence of faith schools on students attitudes of tolerance*. Institute of Education, University of London.
- Ewetan, O. O., & Urhie, E. (2014). Insecurity and socio-economic development in Nigeria. *Journal of Sustainable Development Studies*, 5(1).
- Flory, J., & Emanuel, E. (2004). Interventions to improve research participants' understanding in informed consent for research: a systematic review. *Jama*, 292(13), 1593-1601.
- Hamid, S. bin A. (2020). *Assessing attitude toward interreligious harmony among Muslim students in Malaysian secondary schools*. University of Warwick.
- Hennink, M. M., Kaiser, B. N., & Weber, M. B. (2019). What influences saturation? Estimating sample sizes in focus group research. *Qualitative Health Research*, 29(10), 1483-1496.
- Igbuzor, O. (2011). Peace and security education: A critical factor for sustainable peace and national development. *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, 2(1), 1-7.
- Iprgrave, J., & McKenna, U. (2008). Diverse experiences and common vision: English students' perspectives on religion and religious education. *Encountering Religious Pluralism in School and Society: A Qualitative Study of Teenage Perspectives in Europe*, 113-148.
- Jafralie, S., & Zaver, A. (2019). Teaching Religious Education: The Ethics and Religious Culture Program as Case Study. *FIRE: Forum for International Research in Education*, 5(1), 89-106.
- Japhet, K. (2020). *Role of Christian Religious Education Subject on Student Behaviour: A Case of Day Secondary Schools in North Imenti Meru County, Kenya*.
- Johnson, D. W., & Johnson, R. T. (2006). Peace education for consensual peace: The essential role of conflict resolution. *Journal of Peace Education*, 3(2), 147-174.
- Kasper, G. (2001). Four perspectives on L2 pragmatic development. *Applied Linguistics*, 22(4), 502-530.
- Keast, J. (2007). *Religious diversity and intercultural education: a reference book for schools*. Council of Europe.
- Kilner, J. F. (2015). *Dignity and destiny: Humanity in the image of God*. Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing.
- Pazmino, R. W. (2008). *Foundational issues in Christian education: An introduction in evangelical perspective*. Baker Academic.
- Rao, A. D., Preston, A. M., Strauss, R., Stamm, R., & Zalman, D. C. (2016). Risk factors associated with pressure ulcer formation in critically ill cardiac surgery patients: a systematic review. *Journal of Wound Ostomy & Continence Nursing*, 43(3), 242-247.
- Sanaky, H. A. H. (2017). The role of religious education in forming tolerant individuals. *Indonesian Journal of Interdisciplinary Islamic Studies (IJIS)*, 77-89.
- Sue, V. M., & Ritter, L. A. (2007). *Conducting online surveys*. Sage.