

Structural Barriers to the Implementation of Christian Religious Education in Indonesian Public Schools: A Policy and Institutional Practice Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesian public schools faces layered and systemic structural barriers. This study aims to analyze these barriers from the perspectives of educational policy and institutional practice. A qualitative approach with literature review and policy document analysis was employed. Data were gathered from academic journals, regulatory documents, government reports, and verified media coverage. The study identifies five primary barriers: (1) educational management dualism between the Ministry of Religious Affairs and Regional Education Offices, generating institutional responsibility ambiguity; (2) a significant CRE teacher deficit with a ratio of 1:8.5 teachers per public school; (3) inadequate learning facilities and infrastructure; (4) structural discrimination against CRE teachers in appointment, certification, and welfare; and (5) discrimination against Christian students in school operational practices. These findings indicate that root causes lie not merely in technical implementation but in flawed policy design and cross-sectoral coordination failure. Comprehensive policy reform is urgently required, including revision of inter-agency coordination mechanisms, strengthening of CRE teacher recruitment and welfare systems, and enforcement of monitoring mechanisms for religious minority students' rights in public schools.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education; Indonesian Public Schools; Policy Analysis; Structural Barriers; Institutional Practice

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INTRODUCTION

Education is a constitutional right of every Indonesian citizen, as guaranteed by the 1945 Constitution and further reinforced through Law Number 20 of 2003 concerning the National Education System. Within this framework, religious education occupies a strategic position as an integral part of the national objective to educate the people while also shaping the character of a generation that is faithful and devoted to Almighty God (Law Number 20, 2003). Nevertheless, this normative guarantee is not always realized proportionally for all religious groups, particularly for Christian students in Indonesian public schools.

Legally, Article 12 Paragraph (1a) of Law Number 20 of 2003 affirms that every student has the right to receive religious education in accordance with his or her own religion and taught by educators of the same faith.

Similar guarantees are also contained in Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 concerning Religious Education and Religious Instruction, as well as Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 16 of 2010 concerning the Management of Religious Education in Schools. This regulatory framework explicitly positions the state as responsible for fulfilling the right to religious education for all citizens without discrimination.

However, realities in the field reveal a picture that contrasts sharply with this legal framework. Data from the Basic Education Database of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek) in 2020 revealed that the ratio of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in public schools was only 1:8.5, meaning that one CRE teacher was required to serve eight to nine public schools (Gultom, as cited in CNN Indonesia, 2022). This condition places Christian students in a vulnerable educational position and reflects a form of structural inequality that requires serious academic examination.

Nuryatno (2014) notes that Indonesia is one of the few countries that officially mandates religious education as part of the public school curriculum, a policy that reflects the unique position of the Pancasila state, which is neither secular nor religious in nature. However, this unique position also creates its own complexities in implementation, particularly in relation to the religious plurality of students. Utami et al. (2022) demonstrate that obstacles to equitable access to religious education for students from minority religions in public schools are not singular in nature; rather, they consist of interconnected layers of structural barriers.

Research on Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesia remains relatively limited compared to studies on Islamic religious education, and most existing studies focus more on theological or pedagogical dimensions than on policy and institutional dimensions. This research gap has encouraged the present study to contribute an analytical perspective from the standpoint of public policy and institutional studies. This study aims to identify and analyze the structural barriers faced in the implementation of Christian Religious Education in Indonesian public schools, including aspects of regulation, institutional coordination, human resource provision, learning infrastructure, and the protection of students' rights.

The research question addressed in this study is: What structural barriers are encountered in the implementation of Christian Religious Education in Indonesian public schools, and how can these barriers be analyzed from the perspectives of policy and institutional practice? The findings of this study are expected to provide valuable insights for policymakers, church stakeholders, and educational scholars in efforts to achieve systemic improvements in the implementation of Christian Religious Education in public schools.

RESEARCH METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a library research method and policy document analysis. The selection of this method is based on the consideration that the issue under investigation constitutes a socio-institutional phenomenon that requires in-depth understanding through the interpretation of texts, documents, and publicly available secondary data (Creswell, 2018).

The sources of data in this study consist of four categories: (1) primary regulatory documents, including laws, government regulations, and ministerial regulations directly related to religious education; (2) academic literature in the form of national and international journal articles discussing religious education in Indonesia, particularly Christian Religious Education (CRE) and its institutional issues; (3) institutional research reports from government agencies such as the Research and Development Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs and the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology; and (4) verified mass media sources documenting events and official statements by public officials concerning issues related to CRE in public schools.

The data analysis process follows three stages: data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing (Miles et al., 2014). During the reduction stage, data collected from various sources were selected and organized based on their relevance to the theme of structural barriers in CRE. In the presentation stage, the findings were categorized into analytical themes reflecting the dimensions of barriers identified in the study. In the conclusion-drawing stage, interpretations were developed by relating the empirical findings to the theoretical frameworks of public policy and institutional studies. The validity of the data was maintained through source triangulation, namely by confirming findings from one source with other independent sources.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of various data sources resulted in the identification of five major structural barriers in the implementation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesian public schools. These five barriers are interconnected and collectively form a complex system of obstacles, as described below.

Dualism in Educational Governance and the Ambiguity of Institutional Responsibility

The first and most fundamental structural barrier is the dualism in the governance of religious education in Indonesia. Institutionally, the management of national education is divided between the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), which administers public schools, and the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), which is responsible for religious aspects of education, including religious teachers and religious curricula. Although this division of authority has been normatively regulated through various legal frameworks, in practice it has created significant ambiguity in institutional responsibility (Sakban et al., 2025).

Based on Ministry of Religious Affairs Regulation Number 16 of 2010, Kemenag holds authority over the appointment of religious education teachers in schools. However, since 2006, substantive authority for appointing religious teachers has largely shifted to Regional Governments through the mechanism of regional autonomy, while Kemenag continues to manage matters related to professional allowances and teacher certification. This condition creates what Widyawati and Lon (2020) describe as a “coordination vacuum,” in which no institution assumes full responsibility for ensuring the availability of religious education teachers, particularly CRE teachers, in public schools.

A research report conducted by the Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs in four provinces East Kalimantan, Gorontalo, North Sulawesi, and Southeast Sulawesi found that the absence of regulations governing cross-sectoral coordination between Kemenag, Provincial/District/City Education Offices, and Regional Civil Service Agencies (BKD) resulted in invalid data regarding the demand for religious teachers, limited teacher capacity-building programs, and uncertainty concerning the welfare guarantees of CRE teachers (Simlitbangdiklat Kemenag, 2022). Similar conditions have also been experienced by Islamic Religious Education teachers, as reported by the Subject Teachers’ Forum for Islamic Religious Education (MGMP PAI) of North Sumatra, which complained about bureaucratic dualism that left teachers feeling “neglected” by both institutions simultaneously (pojoksatu.id, 2022).

This problem is further exacerbated by inconsistent practices in personnel administration management. In terms of professional allowance payments, certified religious teachers in public schools often experience delays or uncertainty in payment due to unclear funding mechanisms between Kemenag and the Education Offices

(Kompas, 2009, as cited in this study). This condition directly contributes to the declining interest of prospective CRE teachers in pursuing careers in public schools, thereby worsening the shortage of CRE teachers.

Deficit of Christian Religious Education Teachers

The second and most visible structural barrier is the significant shortage of CRE teachers in public schools. Data from the Basic Education Database of Kemendikbudristek in 2020 showed that the ratio of CRE teachers in public schools was only 1:8.5, meaning that one CRE teacher was responsible for serving eight to nine public schools. Thomas Pentury, Director General of Christian Community Guidance at Kemenag, stated during a webinar organized by the Christian Alumni Communication Forum of the University of Indonesia (Forkom AKUI) in August 2021 that the availability of CRE teachers in schools remained extremely limited, and that this situation had compelled several schools to delegate the assessment of Christian religious subjects to churches or non-educational institutions (Kemenag, 2022).

This shortage originates from at least three interrelated structural factors. First, there is a lack of recruitment of CRE teachers as State Civil Apparatus (ASN) or Civil Servants (PNS). Law Number 14 of 2005 concerning Teachers and Lecturers, Article 24 Paragraph (1), obliges the government to fulfill teacher needs in terms of quantity, academic qualifications, and competencies in an equitable manner. However, in practice, recruitment openings for CRE teachers are rarely provided, unlike positions for Islamic Religious Education teachers, which are relatively more available. Second, most CRE teachers with honorary status face inadequate and uncertain income conditions, encouraging them to move to private Christian schools that offer better welfare guarantees (Noriyanto, 2025). Third, there is a mismatch between the supply of graduates from theological colleges majoring in CRE and the demand in public schools, as most graduates prefer careers in Christian schools that provide more stable financial prospects.

Nuhamara (2009) warned that since the implementation of the national education system with an emphasis on regional autonomy, the disparity in the need for CRE educators has continued to widen. This condition would become even more critical if regulations regarding students' rights to receive religious instruction from teachers of the same faith were consistently enforced, as it would reveal the massive shortage of CRE teachers throughout public schools in Indonesia. Lumban Tobing (2020) also notes that the discontinuity of CRE curriculum policies over time has further weakened the ecosystem for providing an adequate number of CRE teachers.

Lack of Learning Facilities and Infrastructure

The third barrier concerns the inadequate availability of learning facilities and infrastructure for CRE in public schools. Law Number 20 of 2003 and Government Regulation Number 55 of 2007 implicitly mandate the government to provide conditions that enable the implementation of religious education for all students. However, research findings from the Research and Development and Training Agency of the Ministry of Religious Affairs (2017) concluded that facilities and infrastructure services for CRE teaching and learning activities in public educational institutions were still under development and far from adequate (Cabdindikwil1.com, 2022).

Field reports illustrate alarming conditions: CRE classes are conducted under trees, in school storage rooms, in corners of libraries, or in narrow laboratory spaces due to the absence of dedicated classrooms (Anthony, 2012). The availability of Bibles as the primary learning resource, textbooks, and supplementary learning materials is also extremely limited. This condition creates a clear disparity in learning experiences between Christian

students and students from majority religious groups, who generally enjoy more complete educational facilities and infrastructure. Utami et al. (2022) emphasize that limited school budgets allocated to CRE needs constitute one of the main structural factors behind unequal access to religious education in Indonesia's multireligious public schools.

This condition affects not only the quality of learning but also reflects the low policy priority given to the religious educational needs of minority students. When CRE does not receive adequate allocation of space and budget within school planning, it indirectly conveys an institutional message that the spiritual and religious educational needs of Christian students are not considered a priority within public school institutions.

Structural Discrimination against Christian Religious Education Teachers

The fourth barrier is the structural discrimination experienced by Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers within public school environments. This discrimination does not always take the form of officially discriminatory policies; rather, it is more frequently manifested through informal institutional practices that systematically place CRE teachers in marginalized positions. Anthony (2012) notes that facilities provided for minority religious education teachers are often inadequate or receive less attention compared to those provided for their counterparts from majority religious groups.

The forms of structural discrimination identified include: first, the lack of equal access to professional development opportunities, in which teacher capacity-building programs organized by the Education Offices generally do not include CRE teachers; second, practices by school principals that limit the professional space of CRE teachers by creating non-conducive conditions, including repeated relocation of classrooms, excessive searches for administrative errors, and minimal support for the implementation of CRE subjects; third, obstacles in the teacher certification process that are more complicated compared to those faced by teachers of other subjects (Kompas, 2009 in Ohira, 2023).

In a broader context, Widyawati and Lon (2020) argue that discrimination against minority religious teachers reflects the political dynamics of religious education in Indonesia, which historically have been more accommodating toward Islamic religious education as the majority religion. This condition has produced an institutional imbalance embedded within the structure of educational bureaucracy. Consequently, the problem cannot be resolved merely through individual interventions, but requires systemic policy reform.

Discrimination against Christian Students

The fifth barrier is the discrimination experienced by Christian students within public school environments. A case that attracted widespread public attention was the incident at State Senior High School 2 Depok, West Java, in October 2022, where students belonging to the Christian Fellowship organization (Rohkris) were prohibited from using classrooms for prayer activities, and the school was reportedly planning to dissolve the organization. The Chairman of the Communion of Churches in Indonesia (PGI), Gomar Gultom, stated that the incident was part of a "long list of highly discriminatory treatment toward non-Muslim students" and was contrary to the spirit of the National Education System Law (CNN Indonesia, 2022).

Parker (2014), in his study on religious education and peaceful coexistence in Indonesia, warns that unequal treatment toward students from minority religious groups not only harms the individuals concerned, but also undermines the foundations of inclusive citizenship education. Idris et al. (2022) found similar conditions in a different context: in North Sulawesi, Muslim students studying in areas dominated by non-Muslim communities

also experienced challenges in accessing their religious education. This finding demonstrates that the issue of access to religious education for minority groups is a structural challenge that transcends religious boundaries.

Sumiyatiningsih (2006) emphasizes that the role of CRE within the context of national education is not merely the transmission of religious values, but also a contribution to the formation of holistic Indonesian human development. When access to CRE is obstructed through various forms of discrimination whether direct or indirect it results in educational deprivation that not only disadvantages individual Christian students, but also weakens the ideals of an inclusive national education system. Groome (2011) further adds that CRE is essentially an activity of a faith community that requires supportive institutional space and conducive conditions in order for its formative goals to be achieved optimally.

CONCLUSION

This study has identified and analyzed five major structural barriers in the implementation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in Indonesian public schools: the dualism of educational governance that creates ambiguity in institutional responsibility; the significant shortage of CRE teachers; the lack of adequate learning facilities and infrastructure; structural discrimination against CRE teachers; and discrimination against Christian students. These five barriers are interconnected and form a system of obstacles that cannot be resolved through partial interventions alone.

The findings of this study affirm that the problems surrounding the implementation of CRE in public schools are not merely matters of technical administration, but stem from weaknesses in policy design and failures in cross-sectoral coordination that are structural in nature. As long as these root problems are not addressed systematically, various improvement efforts at the implementation level will continue to encounter fundamental limitations.

Based on these findings, this study proposes four urgent policy reform measures. First, the issuance of regulations that explicitly govern cross-sectoral coordination mechanisms among the Ministry of Religious Affairs (Kemenag), the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology (Kemendikbudristek), and Regional Governments in the provision and management of religious education teachers in all public schools. Second, the establishment of proportional and sustainable recruitment quotas for CRE teachers as State Civil Apparatus (ASN), accompanied by adequate incentive systems to attract qualified graduates from theological education institutions. Third, the allocation of sufficient budgets for the provision of CRE learning facilities and infrastructure in public schools, including classrooms, textbooks, and other learning resources. Fourth, the establishment of effective monitoring and reporting mechanisms to prevent and address discrimination against Christian teachers and students in public schools.

Further research is needed to explore more deeply the best practices implemented in regions that have successfully overcome these structural barriers, as well as to evaluate the impact of various policies that have been implemented on a broader scale. Comparative studies involving other minority religious groups within the context of religious education in public schools would also enrich our understanding of the dynamics of religious pluralism within Indonesia's national education system.

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