

AUTHORITY AND VIOLENCE IN TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONS: AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

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Abstract

This research aims to analyze the dynamics of authority, violence, and Christian values in teacher-student relations through the anthropological perspective of Christian Religious Education (PAK) in Indonesia. The research employs a qualitative approach, drawing on a literature review of theological literature, pedagogy, national education policy, and critical theories of power. Data were analyzed through thematic reduction, content analysis, and hermeneutical-critical interpretation to map the construction of authority, forms of violence, and Christian normative values in educational practice. The results of the study show that theological authority in the PAK is understood as a pastoral call rooted in love, justice, and respect for human dignity. However, in the context of Indonesian education influenced by hierarchical culture, authority has the potential to be distorted into a control mechanism that normalizes physical, verbal, and symbolic violence. Dialogue with power theory and the concept of symbolic violence affirms that pedagogical relations are part of a power network that can reproduce dominance. This research proposes the model of “Love-Based and Anti-Violence Pedagogical Authority” as a conceptual contribution to PAK anthropology, emphasizing the transformation of authority into dialogical, restorative, and inclusive praxis for the formation of humanizing character.

Keywords: Authority, violence, education, Christian education, anthropology, local culture.

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Introduction

The connection between educators and learners is essential to shaping learners' character and spiritual growth. In an educational environment, the interaction between educators (teachers) and students should be grounded in principles such as love, forgiveness, and respect for the dignity of each person. Christian teaching affirms that love should be the primary basis for teaching and guiding others. Thus, Christian education aims to foster relationships that encourage mutual respect and compassion and support students' moral and spiritual progress (Pazmiño, 2008).

In Indonesian education, teachers play a very important role. This position of authority is fundamental to ensuring the classroom arrangement and teaching process. However, this authority is often misused. Some teachers use their power to excessively punish students, which is contrary to the principles of love and forgiveness taught in Christianity. Previous research has shown that the improper use of authority can result in abuse of power, which in turn can lead to violence within the classroom (Jumra *et al.*, 2025; Permatasari, & Azzahro, 2025).

In addition to teacher authority, Indonesia's local culture also plays an important role in shaping teacher-student relations and the practice of violence in schools. Indonesia has a culture that highly values social hierarchy and respect for authority, which often leads to an unequal relationship between teachers and students (Rahman & Mulyadi, 2020; Sutrisno, 2018). In this culture, teachers are often seen as unquestionable figures, and students are expected to be obedient, with no room to criticize or

express opinions. Therefore, it is important to examine how these local values affect patterns of violence in Christian education and how they can be corrected or used to prevent violence in education (Wahyuni & Prasetyo, 2022).

The government also seeks to do this through various policies in the education sector, one of which is implementing a curriculum that supports character-based education. Policies such as the Independent Curriculum and the Character Education Strengthening Program aim to create a more inclusive and violence-free environment and to introduce more humanist values in education. Although this policy is very positive, the challenge is consistent implementation and acceptance by all parties involved, especially by teachers who are familiar with traditional ways of educating students (Wibowo, 2022). A central aspect of this study is the identification of different forms of violence that may arise, including physical, verbal, or psychological violence, as well as how educational authorities can influence the existence of such acts of violence. In addition, this study investigates how Indonesia's local culture, which has a strong appreciation of social hierarchy and respect for authority, can influence patterns of violence in Christian formation. The goal is to deepen understanding of how local social and cultural norms can increase or decrease violence in the context of Christian education.

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of educator authority in the dynamics between teachers and students, and how this affects violence in

Christian education in Indonesia. By analyzing the influence of Indonesian culture on the practice of violence in Christian schools, this study aims to provide a deeper understanding of how cultural values and social hierarchies influence patterns of violence.

This study will also present recommendations to improve the relationship between educators and students, grounded in data analysis and Christian principles, thereby reducing violence in educational institutions. One of the gaps found in this study is the lack of studies that incorporate Christian faith values, educator authority, and local culture in the analysis of violence in Christian schools. Most previous research has focused on aspects of physical or verbal violence in general, without considering religious or cultural perspectives in Christian education. The authenticity of this study lies in its combination of the theory of educator authority in Christian education with an analysis of local Indonesian culture, thereby enabling a more comprehensive understanding of patterns of violence in the relationship between educators and students.

Methods

This research uses a qualitative, bibliographic study design (library research) to analyze the dynamics of authority, violence, and Christian values in teacher-student relations through the anthropological perspective of Christian religious education (PAK). Data sources consist of relevant primary and secondary literature, including theoretical works on power and authority such as Foucault (1977), Bourdieu (1991), and Gramsci (1971), as well as theological literature on Christian education such as Pazmiño (2008) and Palmer (2017). In addition, this study examines national and international newspaper articles related to violence in schools, hierarchical culture, character education, and education policy in Indonesia. The criteria for selecting sources are based on the relevance of the theme, academic reputation (indexed journals and academic publishers), and the novelty of the publication (especially for empirical studies in the last 10 years). Data is collected through documentation techniques and analyzed systematically.

The data analysis technique uses content analysis and hermeneutical-critical analysis with the following steps: (1) identification and classification of the main themes (authority, physical/verbal/symbolic violence, Christian values, hierarchical culture); (2) data reduction and categorization; (3) intertextual interpretation between sources; and (4) conceptual synthesis in the perspective of educational anthropology. The validity of the data is maintained through triangulation of sources, contextual readings of national policies, and critical dialogue between social theory and Christian theology. The results of the research are expected to produce a transformative, non-violent, and value-based framework for pedagogical authority.

Results and Discussion

A. *Mapping the theory of authority and power in Christian education*

1. *The concept of authority in Christian educational theology*

The analysis of the relationship between students and teachers highlights the importance of authority and power in education. These two elements are essential to

understanding how interactions occur within the classroom. According to the hegemony theory of Gramsci (1971), Power is not limited to physical or legal power but also includes the ability to shape how people see things and to create consensus in society. This hegemony creates a context in which the people accept the power structure without realizing that it is a form of oppression. In the school environment, teachers' authority can use this hegemony to influence students' thinking and behavior, who often accept it as a legitimate educational norm. This has become especially important in Christian education, where teachers are often seen as moral and spiritual authorities.

Bourdieu in his theory of symbolic power, said that power in education is often symbolic and not easily visible. The teacher's position in the classroom is a form of symbolic power that shapes the social structure of the space. According to Bourdieu (1991), this symbolic power is manifested in the way teachers influence students, not only through their academic knowledge but also through moral and social influences considered legitimate by both parties. In Christian education, educators are often seen as figures of authority who convey religious values, thereby exerting a strong influence on students' attitudes and behaviors.

Foucault presents a new perspective on power through his panoptic concept, which describes how control can operate silently yet be highly effective in directing individual actions. Foucault (1977) noted that, in education, the influence of power is not only exercised through physical punishment or aggression but also through constant supervision and the normalization of behavior. In the case of Christian education, the teacher plays the role of moral guardian, constantly observing the student, which can create a climate of fear or limit freedom during the learning process. Excessive control on the part of educators can result in acts of violence, both physical and psychological, due to fear of reprisals or possible punishment.

2. *Authority as a pastoral and pedagogical call*

From the perspective of Christian education, authority is a pastoral and pedagogical calling, not just a structural legitimacy in regulating and disciplining students. The authority of educators is rooted in the moral and spiritual responsibility to guide, protect, and cultivate students as dignified individuals. Thus, authority is not an instrument of domination, but a form of service oriented to the formation of character and maturity of faith (Pazmiño, 2008; Palmer, 2017).

Pedagogically, authority functions to create order and direction in the learning process. However, in a pastoral framework, authority extends beyond administrative functions; it also encompasses the relational dimension, which requires empathy, patience, and sensitivity to students' inner states. In line with Pazmiño's thinking, Christian education is understood as participation in God's work that restores and shapes man as a whole. Therefore, the use of authority must reflect Christ's guiding love without being oppressive.

Awareness of power dynamics as analyzed by Foucault (1977) also helps educators to be reflective. Authority always has the potential to produce inequality in

relations; Therefore, teachers are called to manage it ethically and transparently. In the context of an Indonesian culture that upholds hierarchy, this pastoral call becomes increasingly relevant so that authority does not turn into the practice of symbolic or physical violence.

Thus, authority, as a pastoral and pedagogical vocation, demands an integration of professional competence and spiritual maturity. Teachers are present not as rulers of the classroom, but as shepherds who guide with love, firmness, and a commitment to the holistic growth of students (Zebua & Sutrisna, 2026; Anthak, 2024).

3. *The tension between love, discipline, and control*

In the context of Christian education, teacher authority is a very important aspect in creating order and discipline in the classroom. This authority serves to guide students in achieving their learning goals and to educate them to become virtuous individuals. However, this legitimate authority is often abused and leads to violence, both physical, verbal, and psychological, which not only harms students but also damages the relationship between teacher and student (Prasetiawati, 2025; Sigad, et al., 2024).

The authority of educators or teachers in Christian education, in essence, must be rooted in the values of love and forgiveness taught in Christianity (Pazmiño, 2008). However, excessive use of authority, such as the application of authority without empathy, can lead to abuse of power, which often leads to violence. For example, in many cases, teachers who feel their authority is questioned or threatened by student behavior may use physical or verbal violence as a way to control the classroom (Jumra et al., 2025). This kind of violence not only physically harms students but also interferes with their psychological development, affects their confidence, and undermines a healthy learning climate.

Excessive teacher authority, especially when enforced harshly, creates fear among students and reduces active participation in learning (Karlau, 2020). This hinders students' social and emotional development, a crucial aspect of Christian education, as it is contrary to the principles of love and restoration. Research shows that the wrong authoritative approach can suppress creativity and foster negative emotional dependence (Agusta, 2024).

Conversely, if teacher authority is used with a love- and understanding-based approach, it can strengthen the relationship between teacher and student, create a sense of safety and comfort in the classroom, and reduce the risk of violence.

The value of love and human dignity demands the practice of inclusive education. Agustina et al.'s research shows that the Christian theological perspective opens up great opportunities for inclusive education because every individual is seen as valuable before God. This principle aligns with the child-friendly school and violence-prevention policies developed in the Indonesian context (Mutaqin et al., 2025). This approach places the teacher's authority as a companion that creates a safe space for dialogue, reflection, and growth. Inclusive authority means recognizing learners' voices as the subject of learning rather than the object of control.

B. *Violence in education*

1. *Physical, verbal, and symbolic violence in education units*

Violence in education includes physical, verbal, and psychological forms, all of which hurt students (Ministry of Education and Culture, 2025). Physical violence in schools is often considered a legitimate form of punishment, even though it has a great negative impact on students' emotional and psychological development. Verbal abuse, such as insults, ridicule, or bullying, is often considered part of legitimate discipline, although it can also damage students' self-esteem and mental health. Psychological violence, which involves threats, insults, or ostracization, is often more difficult to detect but has a more severe long-term impact (Pratama et al., 2025).

Tensions in authority relationships often trigger violence committed by teachers against students. Teachers who feel their authority is questioned or threatened may use violence as a way to control student behavior (Jumra et al., 2025). On the other hand, the research of Kadafi et al. (2023) shows that teachers who use a love-based approach are better able to foster more positive relationships with students, which, in turn, reduces violence in the classroom. This approach emphasizes empathy, tolerance, and emotional support, which have been shown to improve students' understanding of violence prevention through psychoeducation and character education (see Figure 1).

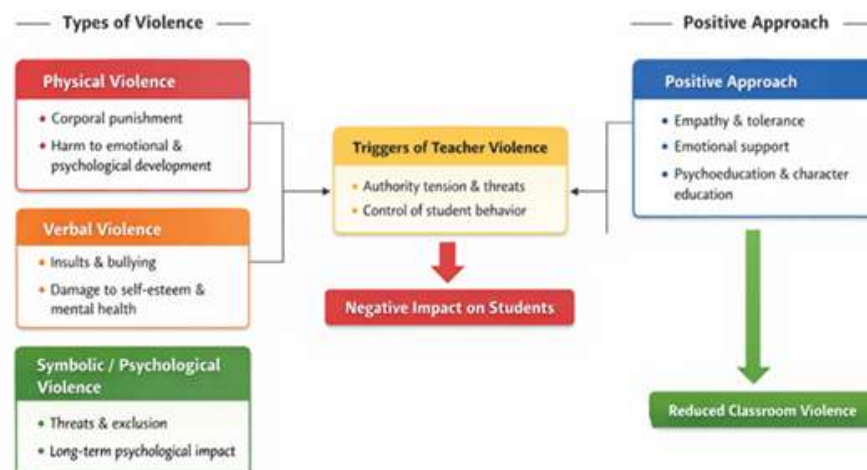


Figure 1. Physical, verbal and symbolic violence in educational settings.

2. Culture-Based Violence and Religious Legitimacy

Indonesian culture, which prioritizes social hierarchy and respect for authority, plays a significant role in shaping teacher-student relationships. These social norms emphasize absolute respect for teachers, which can exacerbate the practice of violence in the classroom because students feel compelled to submit without question (Abiyu *et al.*, 2025). A culture of absolute authority often validates teacher violence against students, where teachers exploit hierarchical positions to dominate and oppress.

In some Christian school contexts, religious legitimacy can be used to reinforce obedience without critical dialogue. A culture that respects authority gives birth to obedience, which is narrowly interpreted as absolute submission (Wahyuni, & Prasetyo, 2022). Obedience squanders the opportunity to think and reflect on why it is necessary to obey or submit to the teacher in the relevant situation.

Various Bible texts about obedience and discipline are often interpreted literally from the context of their writing. These things ultimately lead to justifications for violence against students, such as corporal punishment. This shows how religious authority can be a tool for the legitimacy of repressive actions if it is not read in the light of evangelical love and justice (Karlau, 2020).

Ironically, lately, violence in the school environment is not only carried out by teachers against students, but also the opposite. For example, in Trenggalek, a student's older brother named Awang Krishna beat and strangled the teacher of SMP Negeri 1, Eko Praitno, for reprimanding his younger brother, who played with his cell phone during lessons, causing an injury to the victim's right cheek (Kompas TV, 2025).

Violence perpetrated by students against teachers often arises in response to unbalanced power relations, in which students feel pressured by rigid teacher authority. When students feel unfairly treated or punished in an inhumane way, such as rude reprimands or seizures without empathy, they may respond with resistance, whether in the form of physical violence (*e.g.*, hitting), verbal (ridicule or threats), including through social media, or other aggressive behaviors such as abandonment of authority.

Factors that drive student-on-teacher violence include unfair treatment, insults, and frustration stemming from perceived authority. In many cases, this violence occurs because students feel unappreciated or not allowed to speak up and express their opinions. This is especially true in schools with highly hierarchical power structures, where students are not given the space to criticize or ask questions about decisions made by teachers or the school. Students who frequently experience insults (verbal abuse) or physical violence from teachers tend to develop feelings of frustration and anger, which can eventually lead them to resist the teacher. Therefore, teachers need to understand the dynamics of power relations in the classroom and ensure that their authority is exercised fairly and humanely.

C. Christian values as criticism and transformation of authority

1. Love, justice, and human dignity in PAK

Authority is inseparable from the theological foundation of human love, justice, and dignity as *imago Dei*. Pazmiño views Christian authority as participatory and relational because Christian education seeks to form a Christlike person through relationships in love and truth. The authority of the teacher, therefore, is present to facilitate the growth of faith and character, not domination. Within that framework, discipline is considered an act of restoration rather than punishment. The value of fairness requires that he treat students appropriately, taking into account differences and life contexts. Therefore, Christian authority is ideally a liberating and humanistic environment (Pazmiño, 2008).

The practice of love in the implementation of education is at the heart of Christian education (Matthew 22:37-40). In love, there is justice. Love and justice are like a coin with both sides, inseparable. Both are human components as the image of God (Genesis 1:26) of dignity that is continually restored in Christ through education. These values and overall love-centered Bible teaching are a means to reduce violence in schools. Pazmiño, in his work *Foundations of Christian Education* (Pazmiño, 2008) emphasizes the importance of a love-based approach in Christian education as the basis for a Christian education that prioritizes not only the transfer of knowledge but also the cultivation of character, grounded in the moral values embedded in Christ's teachings. The value of love directs teachers to educate students with appreciation, understanding, and compassion, and to avoid acts of violence.

According to Pazmiño (2008), the principle of teaching based on love encourages educators to express compassion for students and influences how they apply punishment. In Christian education, sanctions should be educational and constructive, avoiding destructive or degrading qualities of the student. These principles aim to create a healthier, safer, and more welcoming learning environment and to reduce tensions between educators and students, which can often lead to violence.

It is undeniable that various forms of violence in the name of discipline occur because of the confusion in the meaning of love. Punishment, as a form of discipline, is inevitable, but without love, discipline is no longer the pastoral part that restores and leads students to be better.

Ironically, when teachers commit violence against students in the name of discipline, they become a bad example for their students, so that in the future, students will actually become perpetrators of violence against others, including teachers, as has happened in society. Therefore, it becomes an important reflection, do Christian values such as love and justice, really function as a critique of power, or actually legitimize power?

In some practices, religious language can be used to degrade dignity and silence criticism in order to maintain a hierarchical structure, yet still hide in the word 'love'. If so, Christian values lose their prophetic power. The Anthropology of Christian Education needs to offer a transformative, non-violent model of authority rooted in the love of Christ. In love, there is dialogue and respect for human dignity that is necessary in the educational process.

This model places teachers as servant leaders (servant leadership), develops critical awareness, and rejects all forms of physical and symbolic violence. In this way, Christian values do not become tools of domination, but rather a transformative force that restores the teacher-student relationship in a just and humane manner.

2. *Integration of local cultural values and evangelical values*

Local culture-based education, grounded in the principle of kinship, is effective in reducing violence in schools and improving teacher-student relations, for example through psychoeducation and by empowering students to respect one another. The integration of cooperation values into the curriculum strengthens cooperation and tolerance among students (Agusta, 2024). In Christian schools with an inclusive approach, a local culture that prioritizes respect for individuals can reduce violent practices and improve the quality of teacher-student interaction (Agustina *et al.*, 2024).

These cultural values are important for building an organized social structure, but they can also exacerbate violent practices in schools. The application of teacher authority without restrictions and supervision will create an imbalance in the relationship between teachers and students. The essence of humanity, teachers and disciples are sinful human beings who are still being restored and formed by God as a form of justification in Christ (Romans 3:23, Romans 5:12-21). The hegemony of colonial culture has historically influenced Christian Religious Education (PAK) that reinforces this hierarchy, contrary to the principle of love (Lauterboom, 2019). Evangelical values should serve as a correction to a culture that normalizes violence, not the other way around.

The integration of local cultural values with evangelical values is both a challenge and an opportunity that must be addressed to sustain education. Contextualizing learning within local culture to make it relevant and meaningful is very important. However, in the process, it requires critical reflection so that hierarchical cultural values are not necessarily theologically legitimized (Sumarni, *et al.*, 2024).

According to Bourdieu (1991), a culture that values authority without giving room for question or criticism can reinforce patterns of violence in teacher-student relationships. In this context, teachers in positions of high authority often do not realize that acts of violence, even if considered legitimate by the local culture, can damage the relationship between teacher and student and violate the principle of love in Christian teaching. Physical, verbal, or psychological violence that occurs in Christian education, which is often justified on the grounds of “discipline,” is contrary to the values of love taught by Christianity.

3. *Independent curriculum and character education*

Education policies implemented in Indonesia, such as the Independent Curriculum and the Character Education Strengthening Program, significantly impact power dynamics in the classroom and influence the relationship between teachers and students. The initiative aims to reduce violence in schools and to encourage a healthier, more inclusive learning environment. The Independent Curriculum, for example, gives teachers greater autonomy to structure teaching, which allows for a

more flexible and personalized approach according to the needs of each student (Mutaqin *et al.*, 2025).

However, while this policy has the potential to reduce violence, the biggest challenge is its implementation on the ground. Teachers who are used to rigid learning methods and harsh discipline may find it difficult to adapt to policies that are more grounded in a loving, understanding approach. In this case, policies that prioritize character-based education and strengthen moral values are essential to reducing violence in the classroom.

D. *Synthesis anthropologis*

From the perspective of educational anthropology, the relationship between teacher and student is a social arena in which power, values, and identity are negotiated. School is not only a space for the transmission of knowledge, but also a field in which dispositions or habitus are formed. Bourdieu (1991) explains that habitus is formed through the internalization of repetitive social structures, so that everyday pedagogical practices—the way of speaking, sanctioning, or judging—gradually shape students’ ways of thinking and attitudes. In this context, teacher authority serves as a source of symbolic capital that significantly influences the reproduction or transformation of school culture.

Meanwhile, Foucault (1977) saw the school as a disciplinary space that regulates the body and behavior through mechanisms of supervision and normalization. The teacher-student relationship, therefore, is always included in a productive network of power, forming an obedient subject while keeping the possibility of resistance open. Thus, the pedagogical relationship in PAK needs to be understood as a power dynamic that is neither neutral nor devoid of theological and cultural meaning.

In the Indonesian context, a hierarchical educational structure (Sutrisno, 2018) interacts with local culture and religious values. Social norms often legitimize teacher authority regarding respect for older or powerful figures. It is often placed in a superior position that is difficult to criticize. This structure has the potential to perpetuate the pattern of one-way relationships. However, Christian theological values such as love, justice, and respect for human dignity can serve as a critique of oppressive structures. This dialectic shows that theology is not separate from culture, but rather meets and negotiates with it. As stated by Pazmiño (2008), Christian education must constantly reflect on its social context so as not to be tied to the legitimacy of power that is not evangelical. It is in this space that the anthropology of Christian Education (PAK) plays a role in critically reading the interaction between institutional structures, local cultures, and theological views.

The results of this study formulated a conceptual model called Compassion-Based and Anti-Violent Pedagogical Authority (Figure 2). This model was born from the synthesis of theoretical analysis, theological reflection, and critical reading of Christian educational practices in the context of hierarchical Indonesian culture. The findings suggest that violence in the classroom often does not stand alone, but rather has to do with the way authority is understood and executed.

First, this model is relational and dialogical. In Foucault’s analysis of power, authority is understood not

simply as individual ownership but as a relationship that operates through practice and discourse. Therefore, teachers are called to build mutual communication that gives space to students' voices, without losing their leadership role.

Secondly, the model is formative and restorative.

Instead of emphasizing repressive punishment, discipline focuses on restoring relationships and fostering character growth. This approach is in harmony with Pazmiño's theological commitment to the love of Christ, as affirmed, namely, that Christian education aims to form a morally and spiritually wholesome person.

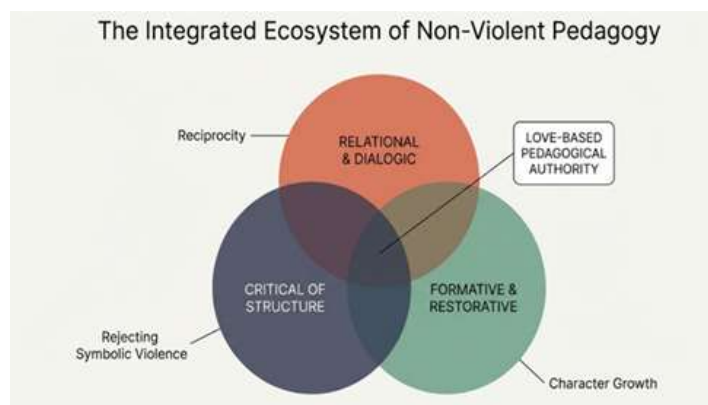


Figure 2. Love-based pedagogical authority.

Third, this model is critical to the structure. By drawing on Pierre Bourdieu's concept of symbolic dominance, teachers are invited to recognize the potential to reproduce inequality in daily practice. This reflective consciousness encourages a rejection of physical and symbolic violence that is often normalized by hierarchical cultures. Thus, this model does not negate authority but transforms it into a means of building a just, inclusive, and humane character, so that the teacher-student relationship becomes a space for growth in harmony with the values of Christian love.

Conclusions

This study emphasizes that the relationship between teachers and students in Christian education in Indonesia is a theological and cultural space that shapes students' character and spiritual growth. Teacher authority is structurally necessary to maintain the order of learning, but it is ambivalent, ranging from a loving means of coaching to an instrument of domination. The principles of love, forgiveness, and respect for human dignity, as emphasized by Pazmiño, serve as the safety nets for the exercise of authority. The findings show that violence in Christian education is not merely an individual problem, but the

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Conflicts of Interest

The authors have no conflict of interests related to this publication.

result of an interaction between authority structures, hierarchical cultures, and inherited educational practices. A culture that places teachers as figures who are almost unquestionable has the potential to normalize physical, verbal, and psychological violence. On the other hand, policies such as the Independent Curriculum and the Character Education Strengthening Program create opportunities for a more humanist and dialogical education. However, their implementation depends on educators' critical reflection.

The integration of Christian educational theology, authority theory, and local cultural contexts broadens the understanding of violence as a relational, cultural, and spiritual issue. The study recommends a transformative model of authority rooted in Christian love, equal dialogue, and respect for human dignity as the image of God. Authority in Christian education should not be interpreted as a power to control, but rather as a pastoral responsibility to guide, restore, and empower. Thus, Christian education in Indonesia can move towards a more reflective, contextual, and violence-free praxis while remaining faithful to the values of faith that underpin it.

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