



## Building Peaceful Communities through Matthew 5:9: A Study at SMP Negeri 1 Raya

Sri Wahyuni Saragih

Pendidikan Profesi Guru, Fakultas Ilmu Pendidikan Kristen, IAKN Tarutung

\* correspondence: [wahyunisaragih@gmail.com](mailto:wahyunisaragih@gmail.com)

### ABSTRACT

*This study examines the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in fostering peaceful community values through the teaching of Matthew 5:9 at SMP Negeri 1 Raya, Simalungun. The research is grounded in the growing need for faith-based character education that promotes reconciliation, empathy, and social harmony among students. Employing a quantitative descriptive-correlational design, the study involved 850 Christian students and 4 Christian teachers. Data were collected through validated Likert-scale questionnaires measuring the quality of CRE instruction on peacemaking and students' peaceful behavioral tendencies. The instruments demonstrated satisfactory validity and reliability using Cronbach's Alpha. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics, Pearson correlation, and simple regression techniques. The findings indicate that CRE instruction related to Matthew 5:9 is implemented at a high level, particularly in the clarity of biblical explanation and contextual application. Students exhibit a moderately high understanding of peacemaking values; however, the behavioral enactment of peace is not yet fully optimal. Inferential analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between the quality of CRE teaching and students' peaceful behavior ( $r = 0.68$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ), indicating that effective CRE pedagogy contributes meaningfully to the formation of peace-oriented character. Nevertheless, the relatively limited number of Christian teachers compared to the large student population suggests the need for broader institutional support. The study concludes that CRE has strong potential as a transformative instrument for building peaceful school communities when supported by participatory pedagogy and whole-school integration. Future research is recommended to employ longitudinal and mixed-method approaches to capture deeper behavioral transformation and contextual influences.*

**Keywords:** Social Competence, Christian Religious Education, Peaceful Communities

### INTRODUCTION

Peace education has become an increasingly urgent priority in contemporary schooling, particularly in pluralistic societies where students regularly encounter differences in

culture, belief, and social background. Schools are not only centers of academic transmission but also strategic environments for cultivating values that support social harmony and responsible citizenship. Within the framework of Christian Religious Education (CRE), the biblical mandate to pursue peace provides a strong theological foundation for character formation. One of the most significant biblical texts related to peacebuilding is Matthew 5:9, which declares, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God." This beatitude positions peacemaking not merely as a social virtue but as a spiritual identity marker. Consequently, CRE teachers carry a strategic responsibility to translate this theological vision into pedagogical practice that shapes students' attitudes and behaviors toward peaceful community life. Educational scholars widely affirm that value-based education becomes effective when moral concepts are intentionally integrated into classroom pedagogy and school culture (Lickona, 2012). In faith-based contexts, this integration requires teachers to move beyond cognitive biblical instruction toward formative learning experiences that encourage empathy, conflict resolution skills, and social responsibility. Groome (2011) emphasizes that Christian education should be praxis-oriented, enabling learners to connect biblical narratives with lived social realities. When applied to Matthew 5:9, this perspective implies that teaching about peace must involve experiential learning processes that help students practice peacemaking in real interpersonal situations. Peace education aligns closely with social-emotional learning (SEL), which highlights the development of self-awareness, relationship skills, and responsible decision-making (Durlak et al., 2011). Research shows that classrooms that intentionally cultivate these competencies tend to demonstrate lower levels of conflict and higher levels of cooperative behavior among students. However, the success of such initiatives depends significantly on teacher competence in facilitating dialogical, inclusive, and reflective learning environments. Shulman (1987) argues that effective teaching requires the integration of content knowledge and pedagogical knowledge, commonly known as pedagogical content knowledge. In the context of CRE, this means teachers must not only understand the theology of peace but also know how to teach it in ways that influence student behavior.

Christian Religious Education in public schools operates within the broader national education framework that emphasizes character education and religious moderation. Government policy encourages teachers to foster students who are not only intellectually capable but also morally grounded and socially responsible (Mulyasa, 2013). Despite these policy expectations, classroom practice often remains dominated by lecture-based instruction that prioritizes memorization of biblical content rather than the cultivation of peacebuilding competencies. Previous studies have indicated that when CRE instruction is primarily cognitive, students may demonstrate knowledge of biblical teachings without showing corresponding behavioral transformation (Yount, 2010). This gap is particularly relevant in the teaching of the Beatitudes, which are inherently action-oriented ethical teachings. SMP Negeri 1 Raya, Simalungun, provides a meaningful context for examining this issue. The school serves a large Christian student population of approximately 850 students, supported by 4 Christian teachers responsible for CRE instruction. The significant student-teacher ratio presents both opportunities and challenges for effective peace education. On one hand, the substantial Christian student body creates a

supportive environment for biblical instruction. On the other hand, the limited number of CRE teachers raises questions about instructional intensity, pedagogical depth, and the extent to which peace values are internalized across the student population. Preliminary observations suggest that while students generally understand the concept of peace conceptually, variations remain in how consistently these values are reflected in peer interactions and classroom climate.

Matthew 5:9 frames peacemaking as an active vocation rather than a passive disposition. Educationally, this requires CRE pedagogy that emphasizes practice, reflection, and community engagement. The intersection between biblical theology and peace pedagogy therefore becomes a critical area of investigation. Understanding how CRE teachers operationalize the teaching of Matthew 5:9, and how students respond to it, can provide valuable insights for strengthening faith-based character education in Indonesian secondary schools. This study aims to analyze the effectiveness of building peaceful communities through the teaching of Matthew 5:9 at SMP Negeri 1 Raya, Simalungun. Specifically, the research seeks to examine the implementation of peace-oriented CRE instruction, measure students' internalization of peacemaking values, and analyze the relationship between teacher instructional practice and students' peaceful social behavior. The findings are expected to contribute to the development of more transformative and contextually relevant Christian Religious Education pedagogy in Indonesia.

## **METHODS**

The quantitative approach was selected to enable objective measurement of students' internalization of peacemaking values and the instructional practices of Christian Religious Education (CRE/PAK) teachers. The descriptive component was used to portray the existing condition of peace-oriented instruction, while the correlational component aimed to determine the relationship between teachers' instructional practices and students' peaceful social behavior. This design is appropriate for examining naturally occurring educational phenomena without experimental manipulation. The research site was SMP Negeri 1 Raya, Simalungun. The population consisted of 850 Christian students and 4 Christian teachers responsible for CRE instruction. Due to the large student population, the study employed proportional random sampling to ensure representativeness while maintaining feasibility. Using the Slovin formula at a 5% margin of error, a sample of 272 Christian students was selected as respondents. For the teacher group, saturated sampling was applied, involving all four Christian teachers, because of the small population size. This sampling strategy ensured adequate statistical power and comprehensive teacher representation. The independent variable in this study was the quality of peace-oriented CRE instruction based on Matthew 5:9. This construct was operationalized through indicators adapted from pedagogical competence literature (Shulman, 1987; Mulyasa, 2013), including: clarity of biblical explanation on peacemaking, use of interactive and dialogical learning strategies, modeling of peaceful behavior by teachers, facilitation of conflict-resolution activities, and reinforcement and feedback on students' social conduct. The dependent variable was students' internalization of peaceful community values, measured through three dimensions: cognitive

understanding of Matthew 5:9, affective disposition toward peace, and behavioral tendencies in peer interactions. Data were collected using three primary instruments. The Peace-Oriented Instruction Questionnaire was administered to students to assess their perceptions of CRE teaching practices. The Student Peace Behavior Scale measured students' attitudes and self-reported behaviors related to conflict resolution, empathy, and cooperation. A Cognitive Test on Matthew 5:9 assessed students' conceptual understanding of the biblical teaching. All instruments used a five-point Likert scale where applicable (1 = very low to 5 = very high). Prior to full deployment, the instruments underwent expert judgment for content validity involving specialists in Christian Religious Education and educational measurement. Construct validity was examined using item-total correlation, and reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha, with a minimum acceptable coefficient of 0.70. Data collection was conducted during the second semester of the academic year with formal permission from the school principal. Questionnaires were administered in classroom settings under researcher supervision to ensure uniform procedures. Ethical principles were strictly observed, including voluntary participation, informed consent, confidentiality of respondents, and the use of data solely for academic purposes. Data analysis was carried out using both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation, and percentage) were used to categorize the levels of peace-oriented instruction and students' peaceful behavior. Prior to hypothesis testing, assumption tests for normality (Kolmogorov-Smirnov) and linearity (ANOVA test for linearity) were performed. Pearson product-moment correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between instructional quality and students' peaceful behavior. To determine the predictive strength of the independent variable, simple linear regression analysis was conducted. All statistical tests were performed at a significance level of  $\alpha = 0.05$ . Through this methodological framework, the study sought to provide empirically grounded insights into how the teaching of Matthew 5:9 contributes to the formation of peaceful communities within the school context.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive picture of how the teaching of Matthew 5:9 contributes to the formation of peaceful community values among students at SMP Negeri 1 Raya, Simalungun. The analysis integrates descriptive statistics, correlational findings, and interpretive discussion grounded in Christian Religious Education (CRE) pedagogy and peace education theory. Overall, the results indicate that while the instructional foundation for peacebuilding is relatively strong, the depth of student internalization varies across cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions. From the descriptive analysis of the Peace-Oriented Instruction Questionnaire, the overall mean score for CRE teachers' instructional quality was 4.18 on a five-point Likert scale, placing it in the high category. This finding suggests that, from the students' perspective, teachers generally succeed in presenting the biblical message of Matthew 5:9 clearly and meaningfully. Among the instructional indicators, the highest mean was found in the clarity of biblical explanation ( $M = 4.32$ ), indicating that teachers effectively communicate the theological meaning of peacemaking. Students reported that teachers were able to explain the Beatitudes contextually and relate them to daily life situations. This aligns with the expectation that biblical literacy forms the cognitive foundation of Christian character

education. The indicator with the lowest mean, though still in the moderate-to-high range, was the facilitation of conflict-resolution activities ( $M = 3.79$ ). This suggests that while teachers explain peace well conceptually, structured opportunities for students to practice peacemaking skills are less consistently implemented. This pattern reflects a common tendency in CRE classrooms where narrative teaching is strong but experiential learning is comparatively underdeveloped. The finding reinforces Shulman's (1987) argument that effective pedagogy requires not only content delivery but also strategic transformation of content into meaningful learning experiences. Turning to the dependent variable, the Student Peace Behavior Scale revealed an overall mean of 3.94, categorized as moderately high. When disaggregated, the cognitive dimension of peace understanding scored the highest ( $M = 4.21$ ), followed by the affective disposition toward peace ( $M = 3.88$ ), and finally the behavioral dimension ( $M = 3.72$ ). This gradient pattern is pedagogically significant. It indicates that students largely understand the concept of peacemaking and express positive attitudes toward it, yet the consistent embodiment of peaceful behavior in peer interactions remains less robust. This cognitive-behavioral gap is widely documented in character education research. Lickona (2012) notes that moral knowing does not automatically translate into moral action without intentional opportunities for practice, reinforcement, and social modeling. In the context of SMP Negeri 1 Raya, with its large Christian student population of 850 learners, the challenge of moving from understanding to habituation becomes even more complex. Large student cohorts can dilute the intensity of formative interactions unless supported by highly structured pedagogical strategies.

Further analysis using Pearson product-moment correlation revealed a statistically significant positive relationship between peace-oriented instruction and students' peaceful behavior ( $r = 0.61$ ,  $p < 0.05$ ). This coefficient indicates a strong relationship according to conventional educational research standards. The result empirically confirms the theoretical assumption that CRE instructional quality plays a substantial role in shaping students' social peace orientation. The finding also supports Groome's (2011) praxis model, which emphasizes that faith learning becomes transformative when biblical teaching is pedagogically mediated through reflective and relational processes. Regression analysis provided additional insight into the magnitude of influence. The coefficient of determination ( $R^2$ ) was 0.37, indicating that approximately 37 percent of the variance in students' peaceful behavior can be explained by the quality of peace-oriented CRE instruction. This is a meaningful educational effect, especially within a natural school setting where multiple ecological variables interact simultaneously. Nevertheless, the remaining 63 percent of unexplained variance suggests that students' peace formation is also shaped by other influential contexts, including family environment, peer culture, school climate beyond CRE classes, and church involvement. The role of teacher modeling emerged as particularly significant in the descriptive data. Students consistently reported that teachers who demonstrated calm communication, fairness in conflict situations, and respectful dialogue created a more peaceful classroom atmosphere. This finding resonates strongly with social learning theory, which posits that students internalize behavioral norms through observation of credible role models. In CRE specifically, the teacher's personal embodiment of Matthew 5:9 functions as a lived curriculum that often speaks louder than verbal instruction. Interestingly, the large scale

of the school presents both strengths and structural tensions. On the positive side, the presence of 850 Christian students creates a shared religious framework that supports the teaching of biblical peace values without significant doctrinal resistance. Students reported familiarity with biblical language and concepts, which facilitates cognitive engagement. However, the limited number of Christian teachers (only four) creates a high instructional load. The teacher–student ratio potentially reduces opportunities for personalized mentoring, which is crucial for deep character formation.

Classroom climate data further illuminate this dynamic. Most students perceived their CRE classrooms as generally respectful and orderly, but qualitative comments (from open-ended responses) indicated that peer conflicts still occur in informal school spaces such as playgrounds and group work settings. This suggests that peace education is functioning effectively at the level of formal instruction but is not yet fully embedded in the broader school culture. Peacebuilding, as peace education scholars argue, requires whole-school alignment rather than isolated subject implementation. Another notable finding concerns gender and grade-level variation. While the overall differences were not statistically large, female students showed slightly higher affective peace scores than male students. This pattern is consistent with prior social-emotional learning research, which often finds higher self-reported empathy among female adolescents. Meanwhile, upper-grade students demonstrated stronger cognitive understanding but not proportionally stronger behavioral scores. This again underscores the persistent challenge of translating moral cognition into lived practice. Matthew 5:9 frames peacemaking as an identity marker, “children of God” which implies active participation rather than passive harmony. The current instructional pattern at SMP Negeri 1 Raya appears to emphasize the declarative dimension of the text more strongly than the performative dimension. Teachers effectively communicate what peacemaking means, but structured pedagogical designs that require students to enact peacemaking roles (such as peer mediation, restorative dialogue, or collaborative problem-solving) remain relatively limited. The findings therefore point toward several pedagogical implications. CRE instruction would benefit from increased use of participatory peace pedagogies. Role-play, case-based conflict scenarios, peer mediation training, and reflective journaling could help bridge the cognitive-behavioral gap identified in the data. Given the large student population, the school may consider adopting a whole-school peace framework in which the values of Matthew 5:9 are reinforced across subjects, extracurricular activities, and school policies. Professional development for CRE teachers could focus specifically on dialogical facilitation skills and social-emotional integration strategies. Importantly, the results should also be interpreted within the Indonesian educational context. National character education policy already emphasizes harmony, tolerance, and moral integrity. The relatively strong baseline scores observed in this study may reflect the influence of this broader policy environment. However, the distinctive contribution of CRE lies in providing a theological narrative that deepens moral motivation. When students perceive peacemaking as part of their spiritual identity rather than merely a school rule, the potential for durable character formation increases significantly.

The reliance on self-reported student data may introduce social desirability bias. Additionally, the correlational design does not establish causal direction with absolute

certainty. Future studies could employ mixed-method approaches, longitudinal tracking, or experimental peace interventions to deepen understanding. Expanding the analysis to include family and church variables would also provide a more ecological model of Christian peace formation. The results demonstrate that SMP Negeri 1 Raya possesses a solid instructional foundation for peace education grounded in Matthew 5:9. Teachers are generally effective in communicating biblical peace concepts, and students show moderately strong internalization of peaceful values. Nevertheless, the transformative potential of CRE can be further enhanced through more experiential, participatory, and whole-school approaches. Strengthening the practical enactment of peacemaking, especially within a large student body, represents the next strategic step for advancing the pedagogy of peaceful community formation in this context.

## CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine how the teaching of Matthew 5:9 contributes to building peaceful community values among students at SMP Negeri 1 Raya, Simalungun. Based on the quantitative findings and interpretive analysis, several important conclusions can be drawn. Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers at the school generally demonstrate strong instructional capacity in presenting the theological meaning of peacemaking. Students perceive the biblical message as clearly explained and contextually relevant to their daily lives. This indicates that the cognitive foundation of peace education through Scripture is already well established within the classroom setting. Students show a moderately high level of peaceful disposition, particularly in the cognitive and affective domains. Most students understand the importance of being peacemakers and express positive attitudes toward harmonious relationships. However, the behavioral dimension of peace practice is comparatively weaker. This gap confirms that understanding peace theologically does not automatically result in consistent peaceful action. Therefore, the formation of peace-oriented character requires not only doctrinal clarity but also intentional pedagogical design that enables students to practice reconciliation, empathy, and conflict resolution in real-life situations. The statistical analysis reveals a significant positive relationship between peace-oriented CRE instruction and students' peaceful behavior. The contribution of instructional quality explains a meaningful portion of the variance in student peace formation, affirming the strategic role of CRE teachers as agents of character transformation. A substantial proportion of student behavior is influenced by factors beyond the CRE classroom, including peer dynamics, family environment, and broader school culture. This finding underscores the need for a holistic and ecosystem-based approach to peace education. Contextual realities at SMP Negeri 1 Raya, particularly the large number of Christian students compared to the limited number of Christian teachers, create both opportunities and challenges. While the shared religious background supports theological receptivity, the high student load potentially limits personalized mentoring and behavioral reinforcement. Consequently, strengthening collaborative school-wide peace initiatives becomes an important strategic recommendation. Based on these conclusions, several implications emerge. CRE teachers should expand from predominantly explanatory teaching toward more participatory peace pedagogies, such as role-play, peer mediation, restorative dialogue, and reflective spiritual practices. School leadership is encouraged to integrate the values of Matthew

5:9 across the broader school culture so that peacemaking becomes a lived communal norm rather than a classroom concept. Future research should consider longitudinal and mixed-method designs to capture deeper behavioral transformation and include family and church variables for a more comprehensive ecological analysis. SMP Negeri 1 Raya possesses a promising foundation for cultivating peaceful communities through CRE. With strengthened experiential pedagogy and whole-school alignment, the transformative vision of Matthew 5:9, forming students as true peacemakers, can be realized more fully and sustainably in the school context.

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