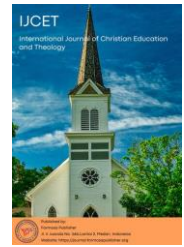




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Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics in Christian Religious Education: Textual, Cultural, and Social Science Perspectives in Indonesia

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia is a country that has a very high level of social and cultural diversity. The Christian Religious Education (CRE) curriculum in Indonesia faces challenges in bridging the gap between biblical texts, local culture, and dynamic social realities. This study uses a descriptive qualitative approach based on literature review to construct an interdisciplinary hermeneutics model in PAK. Analysis of theoretical and empirical literature shows that the integration of theology, culture, and social sciences is still partial. This article offers a conceptual model of Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics of the PAK Curriculum (HIK-PAK) that combines theological interpretation, cultural contextualization, and social approaches. This model is expected to enrich the practice of PAK curriculum and learning that is relevant to the plurality of Indonesian society.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is a country that has a very high level of social and cultural diversity. With more than 1,300 ethnic groups and six state-recognized official religions (Central Statistics Agency, 2023), Indonesia presents a unique and complex plurality reality to the world of education. In this context, Christian Religious Education (PAK) has a strategic position not only as a vehicle for faith formation, but also as a means of forming moral, social, and spiritual consciousness rooted in gospel values. PAK should play a role as a faith interpretation process that leads students to understand the meaning of life through dialogue between the text of the Bible, faith traditions, and its social context (Waruwu, 2025, p. 19).

Unfortunately, various studies indicate that the PAK curriculum in Indonesia is still dominated by cognitive and doctrinal approaches that are less sensitive to the social and cultural context of students. Waruwu, Shindi, and Tfukani (2025) found that the PAK theological curriculum is still top-down and formalistic, not yet integrated with actual issues such as social justice, ecological crises, or digital ethical challenges (Waruwu et al., 2025, pp. 22-23). Purba, et al. corroborate these findings by showing that the application of the Independent Curriculum in PAK learning in secondary schools often stops at the administrative level and has not touched on reflective and dialogical aspects. This causes PAK to tend to be informative, not transformational; teaching the content of faith without fostering the ability to interpret faith in the context of life (Purba et al., 2024, p. 116).

In a theoretical perspective, hermeneutics offers an important foundation for bridging text and context. Gadamer, in *Truth and Method*, explains that every understanding is the result of a dialogue between the reader's horizon and the text's horizon, where meaning is born from the fusion of horizons that are dynamic (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, pp. 302-304). He asserts that the process of understanding is never neutral, but is always influenced by pre-understanding and tradition (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, pp. 275-276).

In this framework, religious learning activities are actually hermeneutic actions: the process of re-reading the text of revelation through human life experience (Widodo, 2012, p. 118). Ricoeur complements this view by asserting that true interpretation is not merely a reproduction of literal meaning, but an ethical action that changes the way humans live and relate to others (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 74-76).

Hermeneutics in Christian education demands openness to other disciplines. Thiselton states that a contextual interpretation of the Bible must be interdisciplinary, because faith is always related to the historical, sociological, and psychological dimensions of humans (Thiselton, 2009, pp. 45-46). The interdisciplinary hermeneutic approach therefore places the dialogue between theology, culture, and the social sciences as the epistemological basis for Christian religious education. Through this approach, texts are no longer understood in a closed manner, but are read in interaction with the social and cultural realities of students, so that the learning process becomes reflective and transformational.

In the context of modern Indonesia, this kind of approach is becoming increasingly relevant. The era of the 21st century is marked by changes in values and patterns of interaction due to globalization and digital technology. Asbanu and Bara Pa emphasized that the 21st century PAK curriculum needs to be designed to be able to foster critical thinking, collaboration, and digital literacy skills without losing the basis of faith (Asbanu & Bara Pa, 2025, p. 129). Meanwhile, Tanama, Pakpahan, and Purnama emphasized that contextual learning rooted in local culture can foster a more authentic and social awareness of faith (Tanama et al., 2022, pp. 212-214). Thus, the PAK curriculum should not only contain a theological dimension, but also accommodate the rich local culture and evolving social dynamics.

Nonetheless, the reality on the ground shows that such integration has not been effective. Tobing noted that the PAK curriculum still tends to focus on textual and expository studies without considering the social context of students (Tobing, 2020, p. 81). Sirait (2024, p. 77) highlights that the perspective of the sociology of education is still considered secondary in the preparation of the PAK curriculum, even though it should be the main instrument for understanding the life of students' faith in society (Sirait, 2024, pp. 70-83). Furthermore, Pasaribu and Pasaribu (2024, pp. 18–19) find an epistemological tension between a theocentric approach that emphasizes divine revelation and an anthropocentric approach that prioritizes human experience (Pasaribu & Pasaribu, 2024, pp. 18-19). This tension demands a new hermeneutic approach that is able to mediate the two horizons dialogically.

Departing from these realities and gaps, this study seeks to formulate an interdisciplinary hermeneutic framework as a conceptual basis for the development of a contextual PAK curriculum in Indonesia. The focus of this research is directed at efforts to answer three fundamental problems. First, how can interdisciplinary hermeneutics be used as an epistemological foundation in the preparation of the PAK curriculum in the midst of the challenges of plurality and secularization? Second, how do the results of literature review show a form of integration between theology, culture, and social sciences in the practice of Christian religious education in Indonesia? Third, what kind of conceptual models can be developed to apply the principles of interdisciplinary hermeneutics in the context of PAK learning that are relevant to today's digital and multicultural society?

METHODS

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach with a library research method that is oriented towards theoretical and conceptual exploration. This approach was chosen because the main focus of the research is not on empirical hypothesis testing, but on the excavation of meaning and construction of the conceptual framework of interdisciplinary hermeneutics in the context of the Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum in Indonesia. According to Creswell's view, descriptive qualitative research aims to describe social phenomena and scientific ideas in depth based on the interpretation of non-numerical data (Creswell, 2014, p. 185).

Thus, this research relies on theoretical and reflective studies of various literature sources, both in the form of books, scientific articles, and the results of previous research that are relevant to the fields of hermeneutics, educational theology, and cultural contextualization in PAK. The main sources of research include classics such as *Truth and Method* by Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Interpretation Theory* by Paul Ricoeur, and *Hermeneutics: An Introduction* by Anthony Thiselton, which became the epistemological foundation for understanding the relationship between text, reader, and context. In addition, contemporary literature such as Waruwu, Purba et al., and Sirait is used to read the reality of the implementation of the PAK curriculum in Indonesia today.

The data collection process was carried out through a systematic search of academic repositories such as Google Scholar, DOAJ, and Sinta, taking into account thematic relevance, scientific novelty, and source credibility. Each literature data is analyzed through content analysis techniques and reflective hermeneutics, which is to interpret the main ideas in the literature critically to find patterns, relationships, and conceptual synthesis that support the construction of the PAK Curriculum Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics model (HIK-PAK).

Data analysis is carried out in three main stages that take place in a reflective and repetitive manner. The first stage is data reduction, in which various literature is grouped based on the theological, cultural, and social dimensions that are the focus of the research. The second stage is hermeneutic interpretation, in which researchers interpret literary texts using Gadamer's principle of fusion of horizons to find new meanings through dialogue between academic texts and the context of PAK education in Indonesia (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, p. 304). The final stage is conceptual synthesis, which is formulating the relationship between faith, culture, and social sciences in one integrative conceptual model. The validity of the data is maintained through source triangulation and peer debriefing, where the results of the analysis are compared and confirmed with various previous studies to ensure consistency of interpretation. In addition, this study applies the principle of trail audit (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 319) so that the process of tracing and interpreting literature can be tracked transparently. Thus, this research not only produces scientific descriptions, but also creates a new understanding of how interdisciplinary hermeneutic principles can be operationalized in the development of a PAK curriculum that is relevant to a plural and digital Indonesian society.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of the study show that interdisciplinary hermeneutics is an effective conceptual paradigm to integrate theological, cultural, and social dimensions in the development of the Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum. The results of the literature analysis of the thought of Gadamer (1989), Ricoeur (1976), and Thiselton (2009) show that the meaning of faith is always born from the process of dialogue between the text of revelation and human experience. In Gadamer's perspective, understanding is not a passive activity, but rather an active encounter between the reader's horizon and the text's horizon that gives birth to a new meaning (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, P. 304). This principle leads PAK to be

a reflective learning space where learners interpret the Bible in the context of their socio-cultural lives.

While Ricoeur emphasizes that true interpretation must produce an ethical transformation, that is, turning the reader into a doer of love, which in the context of education means forming a spiritual and social character rooted in the values of the Gospel (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 76). Thus, PAK no longer functions just to convey doctrine, but to foster contextual and dialogical awareness of faith. This approach is reinforced by Thiselton who emphasizes the importance of interdisciplinary hermeneutics so that theology can dialogue with the social and cultural sciences (Thiselton, 2009, p. 46). Based on this synthesis, this research develops the PAK Curriculum Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics model (HIK-PAK) that places the learning process as a dynamic hermeneutic cycle starting from the text, moving towards the context, and then returning to the text with renewed understanding.

Further discussion emphasized that the application of the HIK-PAK model has direct implications for the learning praxis and spiritual formation of students. This approach places teachers as facilitators of meaning, not just conveyors of teachings (Y. Waruwu et al., 2025, p. 22). In practice, HIK-PAK encourages the curriculum to embrace local cultural values such as mutual cooperation, solidarity, and social justice as contextual horizons that enrich the meaning of the Bible (Tanama et al., 2022, pp. 212-214). Integration with social sciences also allows students to interpret social realities, such as poverty, inequality, or moral change, in the light of the Gospel, so that PAK becomes a vehicle for reflection on faith that is relevant to life. This approach not only deepens theological understanding, but also shapes ethical sensitivity and social empathy. Thus, HIK-PAK presents a holistic and transformative paradigm of Christian religious education: theological in principle, cultural in context, and social in application. These findings show that PAK, which is based on interdisciplinary hermeneutics, is able to respond to the challenges of the digital age and religious plurality by building a

reflective, open, and pragmatic faith dialogue in real life.

Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics Orientation in Christian Religious Education

The results of the literature review show that the renewal of the Christian Religious Education (PAK) curriculum cannot be separated from the epistemological basis of hermeneutics. Hermeneutics, as Gadamer emphasizes in *Truth and Method*, is a dialogical and historical process of understanding, that is, the encounter between the reader's horizon and the text's horizon (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, pp. 302-304). Christian religious education is thus not merely the transmission of doctrine, but an event of understanding involving human existential experience. The hermeneutic learning process allows students to interpret the text of Scripture in the light of their life experiences, as well as interpret their lives in the light of God's revelation. With this approach, faith learning becomes a dynamic interpretive journey, not a static normative repetition.

Ricoeur enriched this view by saying that interpretation always contains an ethical dimension; it must lead human beings to life transformation (Ricoeur, 1976, pp. 74-76). This means that any reading of the Bible in an educational context should result in personal change and social action that reflects the love of Christ. Meanwhile, Thiselton emphasizes that contextual hermeneutics must be interdisciplinary, because faith cannot be understood without considering the social and cultural realities in which it is lived (Thiselton, 2009, pp. 45-46). Thus, the interdisciplinary hermeneutic approach places the PAK teaching and learning process as a dialogue between theology, culture, and social sciences three mutually enriching horizons of understanding. This is where PAK derives its strategic meaning: it becomes a space for the formation of a reflective faith that is not confined by dogma, but open to the world and human life.

Integration of Theology, Culture, and Social Sciences in the PAK Curriculum

The results of the literature analysis confirm that the core of interdisciplinary hermeneutics lies in the integrative effort between theological, cultural, and socio-scientific dimensions. The theological dimension serves as a normative horizon, where the biblical text becomes the main source of value and orientation of faith. However, in a hermeneutic context, texts are not treated dogmatically, but rather read through dialogue with human experience. Waruwu, Shindi, and Tfukani highlight that Christian educational theology needs to move from a paradigm of teaching transmission to reflective dialogue, which provides space for learners to interpret texts personally and socially (Waruwu et al., 2025, pp. 22-23). Thus, the PAK curriculum needs to open up space for the process of finding meaning, not just the delivery of meaning.

The cultural dimension provides a concrete context for the interpretation of faith. Each student is present in a cultural horizon that influences the way he or she understands the text and lives the faith. Gadamer emphasized the importance of *Wirkungsgeschichte* consciousness the history of the effects that shape the human way of looking at truth (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, p. 305). In the Indonesian context, the contextualization of local culture such as the value of mutual cooperation, respect for nature, and communal solidarity can be the entrance to the reflection of the Christian faith. Tanama, Pakpahan, and Purnama's research shows that the integration of local cultural values in PAK learning increases social awareness and spiritual awareness of adolescents (Tanama et al., 2022, pp. 212-214). Thus, culture is not positioned as a threat to theology, but rather as a hermeneutic medium to present faith contextually.

The social-scientific dimension emphasizes the need for dialogue between faith and empirical knowledge. Pasaribu writes that critical reflection of faith requires openness to social theory and the humanities so that religious education is able to read the reality of society realistically (Pasaribu & Pasaribu, 2024, pp. 18-19). In this case, the approaches of sociology of education, psychology of faith development, and cultural anthropology can be used to understand the learning situation of students and the challenges of the times. By integrating these three dimensions, the PAK curriculum becomes a forum for the encounter between faith and knowledge, between revelation and culture, between theology and social life.

Conceptual Model of Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics of the PAK Curriculum (HIK-PAK)

From the synthesis of all literature studies, this research gave birth to a conceptual model called Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics of the Christian Religious Education Curriculum (HIK-PAK). This model places the curriculum as a hermeneutic arena a space in which biblical texts, cultural contexts, and social reflections are in constant dialogue. The HIK-PAK model is built on three pillars: (1) theological orientation, (2) cultural contextualization, and (3) socio-scientific analysis. The three interact to form a *hermeneutic circle*, where the process of understanding always starts from the text, moves towards the context, and then returns to the text with a new, more mature understanding.

In practical application, the HIK-PAK model can be realized in three pedagogical stages: *First*, theological reading, which is learning rooted in the text of the Bible with a historical-critical and spiritual-reflective approach. *Second*, cultural reflection, where students are invited to interpret the Bible's message through local cultural experiences, arts, or social practices that they are familiar with. *Third*, social analysis, which is the process of understanding the reality of society using relevant social theories, so that students are able to apply faith in the context of real life. These three stages create a hermeneutic cycle that drives the transformation of

understanding and action. The teacher acts as a facilitator of meaning who mediates the dialogue between faith and life. As Thiselton emphasized, true theological interpretation is a pragmatic interpretation, that is, producing ethical actions that embody love and justice in the real world.

Applicative Implications for PAK Curriculum Development and Learning

Applicatively, the HIK-PAK model offers a new direction in the development of Christian pedagogical curriculum and practices. *First*, in terms of curriculum design, this model encourages the preparation of learning outcomes that integrate faith, culture, and science. Each competency in the curriculum should include three areas of reflection: text (theological basis), context (cultural relevance), and action (social application). This is in line with the spirit of the Independent Curriculum which emphasizes contextual learning and Pancasila student profiles. *Second*, in the learning strategy, Christian teachers are encouraged to become dialogical interpreters. Learning is not only in the form of lectures, but involves participatory methods such as hermeneutic discussions, social case studies, or faith-based cultural projects. Tanama, et al. found that this approach increased the emotional and spiritual engagement of learners, as they found the meaning of faith in daily life (Tanama et al., 2022, p. 213). *Third*, in the formation of students' spirituality, HIK-PAK helps students develop reflective and ethical faith. Through the integration of faith and social context, learners learn that having faith means being responsible for the world. The PAK curriculum based on interdisciplinary hermeneutics thus does not only transfer teachings, but forms Christian human beings who think critically, compassionately, and are oriented towards social transformation.

On a broader level, this model is also relevant to confronting the challenges of the digital age, secularism, and religious plurality. PAK, which is oriented towards interdisciplinary hermeneutics, teaches openness in interpersonal dialogue, digital media literacy, and the ability to interpret gospel values in global reality. Through this approach, the PAK curriculum becomes a vehicle for the formation of faith that is dynamic, reflective, and able to answer the needs of the times without losing its theological roots.

Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics as a Theological-Dialogical Path

Critical reflection on the results of the study shows that interdisciplinary hermeneutics is not only a methodological approach, but also a new theological paradigm for Christian Religious Education (PAK). In the context of a plural and dynamic Indonesia, this approach helps PAK move from an indoctrination model to a dialogical model. Gadamer asserts that true understanding is always born of dialogue, not domination, because meaning grows in the space of encounter between the interpreter and the text (Gadamer & Hans-Georg, 1975, p. 310). This principle challenges the tradition of religious education that tends to be closed and reaffirms the importance of dialogue as the core of the faith learning process. PAK, which is based on interdisciplinary hermeneutics, teaches that faith must not only be "known," but also "interpreted," so that the biblical text does not become a frozen monument, but lives in the midst of the cultural and social context of the learner.

In this sense, interdisciplinary hermeneutics serves as an epistemological bridge between revelation and culture. Theology closed to the world risks becoming exclusive, while social sciences detached from spirituality lose its moral depth. Therefore, the integration of the two is a strategic theological step: presenting a dialogical-critical faith, that is, a faith that dares to hear the world without losing its divine orientation. As Ricoeur said, the meaning of faith has always been open to the world because the language of revelation is the

language that established itself in human history (Ricoeur, 1976, p. 88). Thus, an interdisciplinary hermeneutic approach is not a compromise to truth, but a creative way of reinterpreting truth within the horizon of human culture.

The Challenges of Hermeneutics in the Digital Age, Secularism, and Religious Plurality

Interdisciplinary hermeneutics finds its urgency precisely in the midst of the global challenges of the 21st century. The digital world, secularization, and religious plurality present a new context for faith education. The digital age has changed the way humans understand reality: knowledge is now instantaneous, algorithmic, and visual. On the one hand, digitalization opens up opportunities for the widespread spread of faith values, but on the other hand, it creates a culture of distraction that weakens deep reflection (Asbanu & Bara Pa, 2025, p. 129). This is where PAK must come with a new face: not just as dogmatic teaching, but as a reflective space that trains learners to interpret the flow of digital information through gospel values. Interdisciplinary hermeneutics helps students develop *digital discernment*, which is the spiritual ability to sort out meaning in the midst of a flood of data and media narratives.

Secularism also challenges the theological foundations of religious education. While the modern world separates faith from rationality, interdisciplinary hermeneutics offers an integrative path: faith and reason are not opposites, but rather two horizons that meet in human experience. Through the dialogue between theology and the social sciences, students learn to see that faith does not reject science, and science does not erase faith. Similarly, in the context of religious plurality, interdisciplinary hermeneutics affirms the PAK approach that respects differences without losing faith identity. The hermeneutic PAK teaches that the truth of faith is not monopolized, but is proclaimed through dialogue, testimony, and acts of love (Waruwu, 2025, p. 27). Thus, this approach reinforces the relevance of PAK as a vehicle for

open, critical, and responsible faith formation in a plural and multicultural society.

Theological-Educational Reflection: PAK as a Space for Faith Interpretation

Theologically, interdisciplinary hermeneutics returns PAK to its essence as a process of interpreting God's work in the history of human life. Religious education is not merely the transmission of teachings, but participation in the dialogue between God, the text, and man. In this framework, the teacher functions not as a sole authority on knowledge, but as *an understanding facilitator* who helps students cross the bridge between text and context. This process requires a hermeneutic attitude of humility, that is, a willingness to continue learning, listening, and dialogue.

Educationally, this approach expands the horizon of PAK learning into a humanistic and contextual praxis. Students are not only required to know what is true, but also to live that truth in social relationships. The education of the faith does not stop in the classroom, but continues in acts of love in society. Thus, interdisciplinary hermeneutic reflection takes PAK beyond the boundaries of the classroom into a living praxis that establishes the gospel in the midst of the real world.

CONCLUSION

The results of the study show that interdisciplinary hermeneutics is a relevant, dynamic, and contextual conceptual framework for the development of the Christian Religious Education curriculum in Indonesia. This approach brings together three epistemic horizons, namely theology, culture, and social sciences, into a mutually enriching dialogue. Through this approach, PAK can bridge the dichotomy between revelation and reality, between faith and knowledge, and between text and context. In the context of a plural and digital Indonesian society, the PAK Curriculum Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics model (HIK-PAK) is able to direct Christian religious education to be more reflective, inclusive, and preliminary. Theoretically, this research contributes to the

expansion of the epistemological discourse of theological education in Indonesia by offering a model that is not only rooted in biblical interpretation, but also open to social and cultural dynamics. Practically, the results of this study provide concrete direction for curriculum developers and Christian educators to design an integrative learning process that connects the text of the Bible with the context of students' lives. Teachers are expected not only to be the presenters of doctrine, but also facilitators of meaning that leads students to read their lives as a text of faith.

Based on the results of the analysis and conceptual synthesis of this research, there are several recommendations that can be applied by Christian educational institutions, curriculum developers, and educators who play a direct role in PAK learning. First, Christian religious education needs to be designed with a dialogical and reflective hermeneutic paradigm. The curriculum should not only present teaching materials, but also open up a space of interpretation where students can discover the meaning of faith through their own life experiences. Second, Christian educational institutions need to conduct training for educators to understand and apply the PAK Curriculum Interdisciplinary Hermeneutics model (HIK-PAK). Third, there needs to be a real integration between the values of faith and contemporary social issues. PAK should not be separated from the dynamics of people's lives, but become a forum for reflection on social realities such as economic justice, digital ethics, climate change, and religious plurality. Such integration can be realized through community-based learning projects, social case studies, or small research that engages students in the context of service and social justice.

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