



## The Implementation of Immersive Learning in Introducing Christian Catholicism and Hinduism to Early Childhood

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### ABSTRACT

This study examines the application of immersive learning in introducing Christian Catholic and Hindu religions to early childhood students, focusing on fostering tolerance and respect for diversity. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, 10 teachers and 5 students participated as respondents. Results show that immersive methods, such as multimedia storytelling and simulations, enhance engagement and understanding, making religious education more effective and enjoyable. Teachers observed improved value transmission, supporting inclusive education objectives. However, challenges like limited resources and inadequate training hinder broader implementation. The study underscores the importance of immersive learning in shaping early awareness of pluralism and highlights the need for collaborative efforts to integrate this method into educational systems.

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Religious diversity in Indonesia represents one of the nation's unique identities, adding richness to the social fabric of its society (Tiara Fahmiyatul Ulmi et al., 2022). In various regions, including Singkawang City, this diversity not only demands tolerance but also a deeper understanding from an early age. Educational practices introducing religions such as Christian Catholicism and Hinduism to early childhood in multicultural settings aim to shape a generation that respects and understands the values of diversity (Khalifaoui et al., 2021). This education in diversity is crucial, as children's ability to embrace differences in their environment is often shaped by the early experiences they receive. Along with technological advancements, the need for more interactive and effective approaches to introducing religions at an early age is increasingly evident (Goodliff, 2016).

Immersive technology, which combines elements of direct interaction through devices like virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR), has proven to enhance comprehension and learning experiences across various fields (Dotsenko & Van, 2023). However, the application of this technology in religious education, particularly for children, remains underexplored. This study aims to address this gap by implementing immersive learning methods to introduce Christian Catholicism and Hinduism in Singkawang City, known for its high religious diversity.

Specifically, previous research highlights that immersive technology has yet to be optimized for teaching religious diversity in the context of early childhood education. Immersive learning is commonly utilized in science and mathematics education, where abstract concepts require strong visualization for students to comprehend effectively (Soelistya et al., 2023). Therefore, the innovative use of immersive technology to introduce minority religions like Christian Catholicism and Hinduism in the multicultural environment of Singkawang City constitutes a novelty proposed by this research. This effort serves as a foundation for developing educational modules that not only educate but also foster tolerance from an early age.

Prior studies also reveal challenges in employing immersive technology, particularly regarding educators' readiness to adopt this method in teaching. These challenges are relevant to Indonesia's education system, which still faces hurdles in integrating new technologies, especially at the primary school level. Research by Soelistya et al. (2023) identifies that the use of immersive technology in education necessitates practical guidelines for educators to ensure effective learning processes. This study not only evaluates the effectiveness of immersive methods in introducing religion but also provides practical guidelines for teachers to efficiently implement this technology in classrooms.

On the other hand, this study underscores the need to expand research related to immersive technology in non-traditional contexts, particularly in cognitive and social subjects. This research aims to respond to such recommendations by exploring the potential of immersive technology in fostering an early understanding of religious diversity. By immersing children

in virtual experiences that allow them to "experience" diverse religious activities, early childhood learners are expected to understand religious differences as part of the diversity surrounding them (Asghar Abbas & Dr. Asad Abbas Rizvi, 2020). This approach can help children develop empathy and tolerance early on, which will support social harmony in society.

In practical terms, this study is expected to provide new insights for education policymakers in Indonesia on the importance of immersive technology in religious education. By introducing modules based on direct experiences, this research makes a tangible contribution to enhancing the quality of education in religious diversity. Furthermore, the novelty of this study lies in the application of immersive technology, which has rarely been implemented in primary schools, especially in the context of introducing Christian Catholicism and Hinduism. Thus, the findings of this study not only provide empirical insights into the effectiveness of immersive methods but also serve as a reference for the future development of technology-based educational curricula.

The application of this technology is anticipated to captivate students' interest and create a more profound learning experience, enabling them to comprehend religious values in a more interactive and enjoyable manner. Immersive technology also allows students to directly engage with various cultural and traditional aspects associated with each religion, thereby enriching their understanding of diversity (Hyman, 2013). Hence, integrating this technology will not only enrich the learning process but also encourage students to develop empathy and appreciation for the differences present in society.

In conclusion, this study marks an initial step in offering a more effective approach to religious diversity education, particularly for early childhood in multicultural settings. Drawing from prior findings, this research contributes not only to the literature on immersive technology but also to the practical development of social tolerance through religious education. With the proposed method, this study is expected to provide a deeper understanding of the importance of technology in fostering character education and diversity awareness.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Immersive learning has emerged as one of the most innovative approaches in education, particularly with advancements in interactive technology. This approach provides deeper learning experiences through visualization, simulation, and technologies like augmented reality (AR) or virtual reality (VR). A study by Merchant et al., (2014) indicates that immersive learning enhances concept comprehension among learners, particularly in early childhood, as it allows them to directly interact with educational content within a virtually designed environment. In the context of religious education, this method enables children to explore religious and cultural values through engaging and accessible media, making it an effective tool to foster learning engagement.

Religious education in early childhood plays a crucial role in shaping children's character and moral values. This education not only focuses on introducing spiritual teachings but also encourages children to understand social diversity within their environment. As explained by (Wong et al., 2024), young children possess the cognitive capacity to grasp basic concepts of diversity and values of tolerance, making early religious education instrumental in fostering inclusive attitudes. By employing immersive approaches, religious education becomes more relevant in promoting positive values within a multicultural context.

Indonesia, with its remarkable religious diversity, provides a unique context for education on diversity. Cities like Singkawang are known for communities that reflect religious pluralism, including Christian Catholicism, Hinduism, and other faiths. Religious education that emphasizes respect for diversity plays a critical role in fostering social harmony. According to research by Knoblauch (2023), introducing religious diversity in schools helps instill values of tolerance from an early age, preparing the younger generation to thrive in inclusive societies. By integrating immersive learning into religious education, children are expected to develop a deeper understanding of the religious diversity surrounding them (Arizandy, (2020).

## **METHODOLOGY**

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach to explore the implementation of immersive learning in introducing Christian Catholicism and Hinduism to early childhood learners. The research subjects include 10 teachers who have adopted immersive learning methods and 5 students from three early childhood education institutions in Singkawang City. Participants were selected using purposive sampling, based on criteria such as direct experience with the immersive learning approach and student involvement in relevant learning activities. Data were collected through classroom observations, in-depth interviews, and analyses of instructional documents used during the introduction of religious concepts.

The data analysis process follows the steps of data reduction, data presentation, and conclusion drawing, as outlined by (Miles et al., 2014). Data triangulation was conducted by comparing information obtained from observations, interviews, and analyzed documents to ensure the accuracy and validity of the findings. This combination of approaches provides a comprehensive understanding of the effectiveness of immersive learning and the challenges encountered in fostering an appreciation for religious diversity among early childhood learners within the context of formal education.

## **RESEARCH RESULT**

This study reveals that the implementation of immersive learning in introducing Christian Catholicism and Hinduism to early childhood learners positively impacts children's understanding of religious diversity. Based on observations conducted in three early childhood education institutions in Singkawang City, this method was applied through interactive simulations, technology-based visual media, and hands-on activities such as role-playing.

Teachers created learning experiences that allowed children to directly experience religious diversity through narratives, images, and teaching aids.

Interviews with 10 teachers indicated that the immersive approach made it easier for children to understand the concept of religious diversity in a fun and engaging manner. The majority of teachers (80%) acknowledged that students demonstrated improvements in mastering values such as tolerance, respect for differences, and inclusivity. Additionally, interviews with five students showed that they were more enthusiastic and interested in learning when the teaching materials used were interactive.

However, challenges in applying this method were also identified. Some teachers reported limitations in facilities, such as a lack of technological devices supporting immersive learning, as well as the need for intensive training for teachers to optimize the implementation of this method. Document analysis revealed that the learning materials designed were not yet fully integrated with the immersive approach, highlighting the need for further development to ensure the consistency of this method in the early childhood education curriculum.

## DISCUSSION

The results of the study indicate that immersive learning is an effective approach to introducing Catholic Christianity and Hinduism to early childhood students. This finding supports the constructivist theory of education, wherein children learn best through direct experiences that allow them to build understanding from active interactions with their environment (Wu et al., 2013). In this context, immersive methods such as interactive simulations and role-playing successfully create a learning atmosphere that is enjoyable and stimulates children's curiosity. This approach also facilitates students' comprehension of abstract concepts such as religious diversity through visualization and experiences that are relevant to their daily lives.

Teachers play a crucial role in optimizing immersive learning. According to interviews, 80% of teachers reported that this method helps them convey material more effectively, especially in instilling values such as tolerance and respect for diversity. This aligns with previous research emphasizing the importance of teacher involvement in facilitating meaningful learning experiences (Benassi et al., 2019). However, limitations in facilities and the lack of specialized training present challenges that need to be addressed promptly to ensure that this approach can be implemented consistently and maximally across early childhood education institutions.

The success of immersive learning in enhancing students' enthusiasm demonstrates the great potential of this method for widespread application. The positive responses from students toward interactive learning media indicate that this approach meets the cognitive and emotional developmental needs of children. Furthermore, these findings highlight the importance of developing curricula that support technology-based learning methods to instill values of diversity from an early age. Additionally, students' active involvement in learning can increase their sensitivity to cultural and religious differences.

However, this study also reveals several shortcomings that require further attention. The limitations of digital teaching aids and technology-based learning media are major barriers to the implementation of immersive learning (Urano et al., 2022). This highlights the need for greater investment in the provision of resources and teacher training to ensure the optimal application of this method. Moreover, the study found that the integration of immersive methods into the curriculum has not been fully consistent, which necessitates a comprehensive evaluation to ensure this approach is systematically applied.

This research makes an important contribution to early childhood education in Indonesia, particularly in promoting tolerance and inclusivity through religious education. However, further research is needed to explore the long-term impacts of this method on children's social and emotional development. A collaborative approach between the government, educators, and the community is also essential to support the successful and sustainable implementation of immersive learning (Callaway-Cole & Drescher, 2023). Therefore, efforts to introduce religious diversity at an early age can serve as a strong foundation for the creation of a harmonious society in the future..

## **CONCLUSIONS**

The findings of this study indicate that immersive learning is an effective approach for introducing Christian Catholicism and Hinduism to early childhood learners, particularly in instilling values of tolerance and respect for religious diversity. This method not only enhances students' enthusiasm and engagement through interactive learning experiences but also assists teachers in delivering material in a more engaging and comprehensible manner. However, challenges such as limited facilities and insufficient teacher training remain significant obstacles that need to be addressed promptly. The study emphasizes the importance of integrating immersive methods into the early childhood education curriculum to support the holistic development of children's social, cognitive, and emotional skills while laying the foundation for an inclusive and harmonious society. Collaborative efforts among the government, educators, and the community are essential to optimize the sustainable implementation of this method.

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