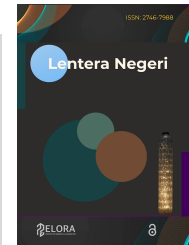




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Mediating national identity through relational spirituality: a framework from christian education in indigenous contexts

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Article Info

Article history:

Received Apr 16th, 2026

Revised May 22th, 2026

Accepted Jun 06th, 2026

Keyword:

Inclusive Nationalism;
Christian Religious Education;
Relational Spirituality;
Indigenous Papuan Students.

ABSTRACT

Nationalism education in Papua as a complex issue shaped by Christianity, Indigenous Papuan identity, multicultural interaction, historical memory, social injustice, and Indonesian citizenship. Methodologically, it uses a qualitative phenomenological design with 15 CRE teachers and 50 Indigenous Papuan students from 7 schools, selected through purposive criterion sampling, with interviews, classroom observations, and document analysis validated through triangulation, member checking, reflexive bracketing, and an audit trail. The results show that CRE supports inclusive nationalism by translating Christian values such as love, justice, care, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity into concrete social practices. Students understood nationalism through lived experiences of solidarity, mutual cooperation, respect for diversity, and awareness of social justice. The article concludes that CRE can mediate Papuan identity and Indonesian citizenship integratively, and it contributes the concept of relational spirituality-based nationalism as a framework for multicultural and humanistic education in Papua.



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Introduction

Nationalism in Indonesia's multicultural society remains a strategic issue in education, particularly in regions marked by complex social identities, historical tensions, and cultural diversity such as Papua. Education is not merely a mechanism for transmitting knowledge, but also a formative space for developing national consciousness, social reconciliation, civic responsibility, and respect for diversity. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) holds an important position because it does not only teach religious doctrine, but also shapes learners' moral character and social orientation. CRE contributes to the formation of Christian character while preparing learners to serve the church, society, nation, and state (Mangaronda, 2022; Nuhamara, 2018). Therefore, nationalism in CRE may be understood not only as obedience to state symbols or formal civic obligations, but also as an expression of lived faith manifested through respect for leaders, fellow citizens, and the broader social order (Santoso & Arifianto, 2021)

The issue becomes more significant in the context of Indigenous Papuan students, whose experiences of identity, citizenship, and belonging are shaped by the intersection of Christianity, local culture, historical memory, social injustice, and Indonesian nation-building. Indigenous Papuan communities inhabit a complex religious and political landscape in which Christianity, Islam, local wisdom, customary norms, and state policies interact in shaping education and identity. Previous studies have shown that Papuan Christian identity cannot be separated from indigenous self-determination, local cultural transformation, and broader

political aspirations (Dale, 2024). At the same time, interreligious relations, local wisdom, and peace-oriented curricula are important for preventing social conflict and strengthening inclusive civic belonging in Papua (Kartika & Hamid, 2020; May, 2010; Pamungkas & Indriasari, 2021). These conditions indicate that nationalism education in Papua requires a contextual and relational approach that respects Papuan cultural identity while strengthening inclusive Indonesian citizenship.

The main research problem addressed in this study concerns how nationalism values can be meaningfully integrated into CRE for Indigenous Papuan students without reducing nationalism to symbolic loyalty, ideological memorization, or uniform national identity. In many multicultural and post-conflict contexts, nationalism education may become ineffective when it ignores students' lived experiences, cultural identity, social wounds, and perceptions of injustice. For Indigenous Papuan students, national belonging cannot be constructed only through abstract civic discourse, because their understanding of the nation is closely related to experiences of recognition, equality, dignity, and reconciliation. Studies on Papuan identity have indicated that stigma, racism, historical violence, and structural discrimination influence how Papuans interpret citizenship and national belonging (Bagus Berlianto, 2023; Kartika & Hamid, 2020; Putra et al., 2024; Uyun, 2023).

A general solution to this problem is to develop a model of nationalism education that is contextual, dialogical, humanistic, and rooted in students' religious and cultural experiences. In CRE, this requires the integration of Christian ethical values such as love, justice, peace, care, forgiveness, and respect for human dignity with the principles of inclusive citizenship. Nationalism should therefore be taught not merely as loyalty to the state, but as a moral responsibility to build justice, reconciliation, solidarity, and peaceful coexistence in a plural society. Such an approach aligns with the view that Christian faith and nationalism can function dialectically, in which Christian ethics strengthen inclusive nationalism, while nationalism becomes a practical arena for embodying faith in social life (Santoso & Arifianto, 2021). Thus, CRE can become a transformative educational space where Papuan identity and Indonesian citizenship are interpreted integratively rather than contradictorily.

Scientific literature provides several foundations for developing this solution. First, the concept of relational spirituality offers a framework for understanding religious education as a process of forming ethical relationships among God, self, others, culture, and society. In the Papuan context, relational spirituality must be grounded in local experiences and indigenous dignity. Dale, (2024) shows that vernacular Christianity in Papua has been transformed by indigenous communities into a resource for cultural identity, political meaning, and self-determination. This suggests that CRE should not be detached from Papuan cultural realities, but should engage local narratives, customary values, and indigenous experiences as meaningful sources for spiritual and civic formation.

Second, literature on peace education and interreligious dialogue emphasizes the importance of local wisdom and inclusive pedagogy in preventing conflict and strengthening social cohesion. Pamungkas and Indriasari, (2021) argue that peacebuilding curricula rooted in local wisdom and interfaith mediation can foster shared belonging among diverse ethnoreligious groups in Papua. Similarly, Ripki et al., (2020) highlights the role of culturally sensitive leadership and multi-track diplomacy in supporting religious harmony, while May, (2010) shows that interreligious dialogue contributes to peaceful coexistence and inclusive national belonging. These studies indicate that CRE in Papua should include dialogical learning, interreligious literacy, local peace practices, and community-based reflection to help students experience nationalism as relational solidarity rather than coercive conformity.

Third, studies on multicultural education and religious pedagogy show that inclusive nationalism is strengthened when education recognizes cultural diversity and challenges discriminatory representations. Al Hakim, (2022) notes that religious and ethnic identities in Papua are often politicized within public discourse and education systems, requiring religious education to navigate competing local and national narratives. Akib et al., (2020) demonstrate that inclusive religious understanding and tolerance can be institutionalized through educational programs in Papua. Setiyawan and Maulida, (2024) further emphasize the importance of avoiding colonial and racialized representations in educational materials. These findings support the need for CRE that integrates Papuan cultural symbols, indigenous languages, communal traditions, and students' lived experiences into nationalism education.

Although previous studies have discussed Christian education, nationalism, multicultural education, interreligious relations, Papuan identity, and local wisdom, several research gaps remain. First, existing studies often examine nationalism and religious education as separate domains, while limited attention has been given to how Christian ethical values are pedagogically internalized as foundations of inclusive

nationalism among Indigenous Papuan students. Second, previous research has addressed Papuan identity, self-determination, and religious contestation, but has not sufficiently explained how students themselves construct national identity through classroom experiences, cultural reflection, and social interaction. Third, studies on peace education and local wisdom in Papua have emphasized conflict mitigation and tolerance, yet there remains limited conceptualization of nationalism as relational spirituality grounded in love, justice, care, reconciliation, and human dignity. Consequently, a theoretical and pedagogical framework is needed to explain how CRE can mediate national identity in indigenous and multicultural contexts.

Based on these gaps, this study aims to examine how nationalism values are integrated into CRE for Indigenous Papuan students in Sentani District, Papua. Specifically, it analyzes how love, justice, peace, care, and respect for cultural identity are internalized through pedagogical practices; explores how students' social experiences shape their construction of nationalism; explains teachers' strategies for developing inclusive nationalism; and formulates a conceptual model of relational spirituality-based nationalism relevant to multicultural education and national life in Papua.

The novelty of this study lies in its formulation of relational spirituality-based nationalism as a framework for mediating national identity through CRE in indigenous contexts. Unlike approaches that understand nationalism mainly as symbolic loyalty, civic obedience, or ideological attachment, this study positions nationalism as a relational, moral, and humanistic responsibility grounded in Christian ethical values and Papuan cultural experiences. The study is based on the hypothesis that CRE can mediate the formation of inclusive nationalism among Indigenous Papuan students when it is grounded in relational spirituality, contextual pedagogy, Christian ethics, and local cultural experience. In this framework, national identity develops through lived experiences of love, justice, care, reconciliation, solidarity, and respect for human dignity.

The scope of this study is limited to CRE learning among Indigenous Papuan students in Sentani District, Papua. The study involves CRE teachers and Indigenous Papuan students as participants and examines the relationship between Christian faith, cultural identity, social justice, multicultural interaction, and national consciousness. It focuses on pedagogical practices such as reflective discussion, roleplay, collaborative learning, biblical storytelling, and the integration of Papuan cultural values. It also considers students' lived experiences of solidarity, reconciliation, discrimination, identity tension, and inclusive citizenship as central elements in understanding how nationalism is constructed through relational spirituality in Christian education.

Method

This study employed a qualitative phenomenological design to examine how Indigenous Papuan students and Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers experience, interpret, and pedagogically mediate the relationship between Christian faith, Papuan cultural identity, and Indonesian nationalism. A phenomenological design was appropriate because the study focused on lived experience, subjective meaning, religious consciousness, and the relational processes through which nationalism is internalized in school life. The analysis was organized using descriptive phenomenological procedure, complemented by hermeneutic interpretation and qualitative validation strategies (Creswell, 2014)

Sentani District, Papua, was selected through criterion-based site selection rather than convenience. The district met four criteria relevant to the research questions: (1) CRE is taught to Indigenous Papuan students in schools located within culturally diverse communities; (2) students encounter everyday interactions among Papuan customary identity, Christian formation, and Indonesian civic discourse; (3) the school context enables direct observation of classroom practices that connect biblical ethics, local wisdom, and national values; and (4) the district represents a setting in which social diversity, historical memory, and identity negotiation are visible in daily educational interaction. These criteria made Sentani District suitable for examining how inclusive nationalism is mediated through relational spirituality in an Indigenous Papuan educational context.

Participants consisted of 15 CRE teachers and 50 Indigenous Papuan students from 7 schools in Sentani District. Participants were recruited through purposive criterion sampling. Teacher participants were selected when they met the following criteria: (1) actively teaching CRE; (2) having experience integrating Christian ethical values with social, cultural, or civic themes; and (3) being willing to participate in interviews and classroom observation. Student participants were selected when they met the following criteria: (1) identifying as Indigenous Papuan; (2) being enrolled in CRE learning during the research period; (3) having

direct experience of multicultural interaction in school; and (4) providing informed consent or assent, with institutional and parental permission where required.

Recruitment continued until meaning saturation was reached. Saturation was defined as the point at which two consecutive interviews and observation cycles no longer produced new meaning units related to love, justice, care, reconciliation, cultural identity, social solidarity, or national belonging. This criterion was used to ensure that the final sample reflected depth of experience rather than numerical representativeness, which is consistent with phenomenological inquiry.

Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, participatory classroom observation, and document analysis between November 2025 to March 2026. Interviews lasted approximately 25–60 minutes and followed an interview guide organized into six domains: (1) participants’ understanding of nationalism; (2) the relationship between Christian faith and national belonging; (3) experiences of Papuan cultural identity in school; (4) classroom practices used to connect biblical values with civic responsibility; (5) experiences of multicultural interaction, discrimination, solidarity, and reconciliation; and (6) participants’ reflections on justice, human dignity, and inclusive citizenship. The interview protocol was reviewed for content clarity and cultural appropriateness by 5 reviewers/validators and refined before field implementation.

Participatory observation was conducted during 15 CRE learning sessions, with a total observation duration of approximately 10 hours. The observation framework focused on teacher explanation, student responses, classroom dialogue, use of biblical narratives, integration of Papuan cultural values, treatment of diversity, references to justice or discrimination, peer interaction, collaborative learning, roleplay, and expressions of care or reconciliation. Field notes distinguished descriptive records of classroom events from reflective memos about emerging meanings.

Document analysis was used to contextualize interview and observation data. The documents reviewed included lesson plans, syllabus documents, teaching materials, school policy documents, reflective assignments, and student learning products. These documents were not treated as independent proof of participants’ experiences, but as contextual evidence for understanding how CRE learning materials and institutional practices supported the integration of Christian values and inclusive nationalism.

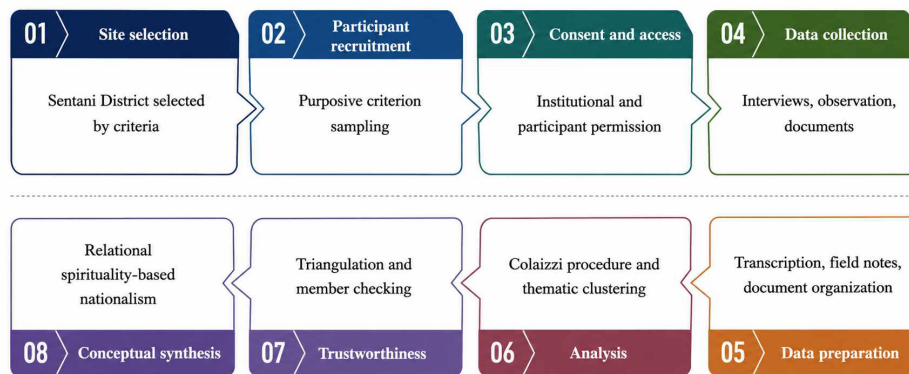


Figure 1. Research design flowchart from participant recruitment to data analysis

Data analysis descriptive phenomenological procedure. First, interview transcripts, field notes, and documents were read repeatedly to obtain a holistic understanding of participants’ experiences. Second, significant statements related to faith, nationalism, cultural identity, social justice, and multicultural interaction were extracted. Third, these statements were formulated into meaning units while maintaining the participants’ original context. Fourth, meaning units were grouped into thematic clusters. Fifth, an exhaustive description of the phenomenon was developed. Sixth, the essential structure of relational spirituality-based nationalism was synthesized. Seventh, the preliminary interpretation was returned to selected participants through member checking to confirm whether the themes reflected their lived experiences.

Coding was conducted in two complementary ways. Inductive coding was used to allow meanings to emerge from participants’ narratives and observed practices. At the same time, sensitizing codes derived from the conceptual focus of the study guided interpretation, including love, justice, care, peace, reconciliation, solidarity, cultural identity, social wounds, human dignity, inclusive citizenship, and relational spirituality.

Codes were then compared across participant groups and data sources to produce broader themes such as inclusive nationalism, justice-oriented citizenship, Papuan cultural recognition, classroom reconciliation, and social solidarity.

Methodological transparency was strengthened through a systematic comparison of interviews, observations, and documents. The comparison process was conducted by constructing a source-convergence matrix. A meaning was considered convergent when it appeared in at least two data sources or participant groups and when no strong negative case contradicted the interpretation. For example, love was interpreted as cross-ethnic respect when teachers described it in interviews and students demonstrated it through peer support during classroom activities. Justice was interpreted as active citizenship when participants linked biblical teaching with experiences of discrimination, equality, and social responsibility. Care was interpreted as relational nationalism when interview narratives, classroom observations, and teaching documents all showed practices of helping peers, respecting cultural difference, and building reconciliation.

The main convergent meanings identified through this process were: (1) nationalism as relational responsibility rather than merely symbolic loyalty; (2) love as the ethical foundation for cross-cultural solidarity; (3) justice as a Christian and civic commitment to equality and human dignity; (4) care as a concrete practice of inclusive citizenship; (5) reconciliation as a response to social wounds and identity tensions; and (6) respect for Papuan cultural identity as a condition for meaningful national belonging. These convergent meanings became the basis for constructing the conceptual framework of relational spirituality-based nationalism.

Table 1. Systematic comparison of data sources and convergent meanings.

Source compared	Systematic comparison process	Convergent meanings identified
Interviews with CRE teachers	Compared teacher explanations of pedagogy with classroom events and learning documents.	Love, justice, care, reconciliation, and civic responsibility as Christian ethical foundations.
Interviews with Indigenous Papuan students	Compared students' narratives of identity, belonging, discrimination, solidarity, and classroom experience with observed peer interaction.	Nationalism as relational responsibility, cultural dignity, and inclusive belonging.
Participatory observation	Observed whether reported values appeared in classroom dialogue, roleplay, collaborative learning, biblical storytelling, and peer support.	Care as helping behavior; solidarity across ethnic groups; reconciliation through respectful dialogue.
Documentation	Examined whether lesson plans, teaching materials, and institutional documents supported themes emerging from interviews and observations.	Integration of biblical values, Papuan cultural experience, and national values in CRE learning.

Trustworthiness was maintained through triangulation, member checking, reflexive bracketing, and an audit trail. Triangulation was performed by comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents. Member checking was conducted by presenting summarized interpretations and theme statements to selected participants and asking them to confirm, correct, or clarify the researcher's interpretation. Reflexive bracketing was applied through field memos written before and after interviews and observations to identify the researcher's prior assumptions about nationalism, CRE, Papuan identity, and multicultural education. The audit trail consisted of interview guides, field notes, coding records, theme-development notes, convergence matrices, and member-checking summaries.

Results and Discussions

Love as the Ethical Foundation of Inclusive Nationalism

The findings demonstrate that love constitutes the central ethical foundation connecting Christian values and inclusive nationalism in CRE. Teachers and students consistently interpreted love not merely as a religious

doctrine, but as a universal moral principle that enables respect for diversity and strengthens social unity. In this perspective, love becomes the ethical basis for building harmonious relations within Indonesia’s multicultural society. The integration of love, justice, and peace in CRE aligns with the values of Pancasila and the broader project of inclusive Indonesian nationalism (Aritonang, 2019; Lumantow, 2025; Widjaja, 2021). Furthermore, students understood that loving God necessarily implies loving fellow human beings and the nation. This relational understanding of faith encourages solidarity across ethnic, cultural, and religious boundaries, thereby reinforcing inclusive citizenship in a plural society (Hadsell, 2020; Raulina, 2025).

The teachings of Jesus concerning compassion, sacrifice, and justice were translated into concrete civic attitudes such as mutual respect, social solidarity, and peaceful coexistence. Jesus emphasized the inherent dignity and worth of every individual, advocating for the treatment of all people as fully human, regardless of their social standing or actions. This principle fosters mutual respect and challenges dehumanizing attitudes (Gosnell, 2025; Lyle Story, 2018). His teachings on forgiveness, generosity, and the “Golden Rule” (treating others as one wishes to be treated) further reinforce the importance of respectful and harmonious relationships (Beed & Beed, 2015; Issa & Issa, 2013). Teachers also emphasized that all human beings are equal before God, so ethnic and cultural differences should never become a basis for exclusion.

The idea that all human beings are equal before God aligns with theological and philosophical principles emphasizing universal human dignity and equality. This concept is deeply rooted in various religious traditions, including Christianity, which asserts that distinctions such as ethnicity, gender, or social status should not undermine the fundamental equality of individuals in the eyes of God (Greenawalt, 2010). In the Papuan context, this understanding contributes to the development of nationalism that values humanity, reconciliation, and unity in diversity rather than symbolic or coercive loyalty.

Furthermore, figure 2 illustrates the conceptual integration of Christian values and inclusive nationalism in CRE learning for Indigenous Papuan students. The figure demonstrates that love, justice, and care function as the central pillars that bridge Christian teachings with the development of inclusive national consciousness. Love is positioned as a universal ethical foundation that encourages respect for diversity and strengthens unity within multicultural society. Justice is understood as an active principle of citizenship oriented toward equality, social responsibility, and the pursuit of social justice. Meanwhile, care is expressed through concrete moral actions that support solidarity, reconciliation, and harmonious coexistence.

The figure further reflects the study’s finding that nationalism in the Papuan context is not merely symbolic loyalty to the state, but a relational and humanistic commitment grounded in ethical responsibility, respect for human dignity, and peaceful coexistence. Through this integrative framework, CRE becomes a transformative pedagogical space where students internalize both religious and national values simultaneously within their social and cultural experiences.

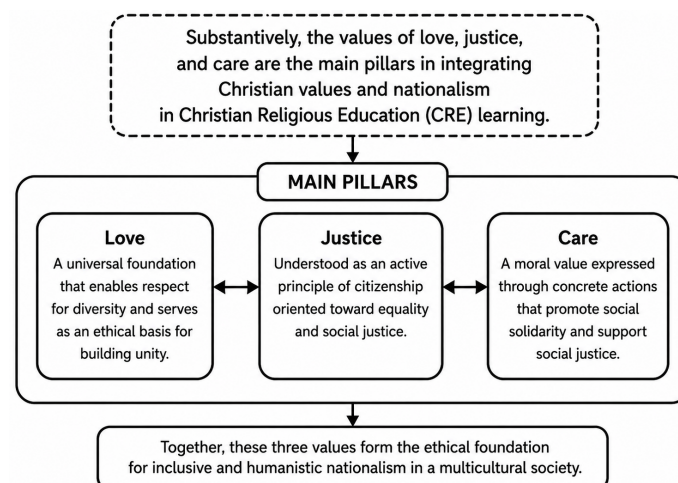


Figure 2. Conceptual integration of Christian values and inclusive nationalism in CRE learning for Indigenous Papuan students

Justice emerged as another major dimension bridging Christian values and nationalism within CRE learning. The study found that nationalism among Indigenous Papuan students was not interpreted as formal

loyalty to the state, but as a moral commitment to creating a just and dignified society. Teachers linked biblical teachings about justice with social realities experienced by Indigenous Papuans, including discrimination, marginalization, and unequal treatment. Indigenous Papuans experience systemic discrimination, marginalization, and unequal treatment in Indonesia. This includes racism, stigmatization, and slower development compared to other regions, despite being part of Indonesia since 1963 (Putra et al., 2024). The Bible emphasizes justice as a central tenet of religious life, focusing on issues such as equity, power, and the rights of marginalized groups. It challenges individuals and communities to address social wrongs and uphold fairness (Marshall, 2006). Biblical justice provides a moral foundation for social cohesion by encouraging responsibility, solidarity, and the pursuit of the common good across diverse communities.

Consequently, nationalism was taught as a struggle for social justice and reconciliation rather than merely obedience to state symbols. Schools have traditionally been used to instill nationalist sentiment, often through curricula and symbols that reinforce a specific national identity. However, this approach can limit the potential for fostering global citizenship and inclusivity (Smith, 2021). This perspective reflects previous studies indicating that Indigenous Papuans often experience stigma, racism, and historical violence that shape their perceptions of citizenship and national belonging (Putra et al., 2024). Teachers therefore shifted from doctrinal approaches toward empathetic and contextual pedagogies that encourage students to critically reflect on justice, equality, and human dignity.

The findings also reveal that students interpreted Christian teachings on justice as guidance for active civic participation and ethical responsibility. Justice was not viewed solely as a theological concept, but also as an essential principle of democratic citizenship oriented toward equality and social harmony. Such integration confirms that faith and nationalism function dialectically, where Christian ethics strengthen inclusive nationalism while nationalism becomes a practical arena for embodying faith values in everyday social life (Santoso & Arifianto, 2021). Christian nationalism often integrates Christian faith with national identity, emphasizing the role of Christianity in shaping a nation's political and cultural life (Miller, 2021; Saiya, 2024; Saiya & Manchanda, 2025). This suggests that nationalism can serve as a platform for expressing and enacting Christian values in public life.

Care and Relational Spirituality in Multicultural Education

The findings further indicate that care functions as a practical manifestation of relational spirituality and inclusive nationalism in CRE learning. Care was expressed through concrete actions such as helping peers from different ethnic groups, maintaining harmonious relationships, participating in mutual cooperation, and respecting cultural differences. These practices demonstrate that nationalism among Indigenous Papuan students develops organically through relational and emotional experiences rather than abstract ideological instruction.

In this regard, care is not limited to religious morality but also represents an active civic responsibility directed toward social justice and communal wellbeing (Lazzari et al., 2026). Likewise, care becomes meaningful when embodied in concrete actions that support reconciliation, solidarity, and restorative social relations (Rye et al., 2018). Teachers applied contextual and participatory pedagogical strategies, including reflective discussions, roleplay, service projects, and the integration of biblical narratives with Papuan cultural experiences.

Local wisdom such as mutual cooperation, storytelling traditions, and communal solidarity became important instruments for internalizing nationalism within students' everyday lives. Religious narratives were considered effective because they enabled students to internalize intrinsic values through emotional and relational experiences instead of purely abstract teaching (Neal-Stanley & Bridges, 2025). Consequently, CRE classrooms functioned as dialogical and transformative spaces where students experienced acceptance, reconciliation, and respect for their cultural identities.

This relational spirituality-based nationalism ultimately shaped students' ethical behavior, social responsibility, and commitment to peaceful coexistence in multicultural Papua. The strengthening of nationalism values in CRE is not limited to teaching state symbols, formal loyalty, or normative memorization. In the Sentani school context, nationalism develops through students' relational experiences in everyday school life. The CRE classroom functions as a social laboratory where students learn togetherness, solidarity, respect for difference, and cross-cultural interaction.

This finding is consistent with the view that CRE can serve as community-based learning that strengthens togetherness, communal life, and social cohesion in plural societies (Ruata, 2025; Yuel, 2025). Papuan students understand nationalism through practical experiences such as helping friends from different ethnic groups, participating in communal cooperation, respecting Indigenous Papuan identity, and applying the

value of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* in social interaction. Therefore, nationalism in Papua appears as a relational and humanistic practice rather than merely a formal state ideology.

Figure 3 illustrates the construction of nationalism within the lived experiences of Indigenous Papuan students in the context of CRE. The figure demonstrates that students' understanding of nationalism develops through concrete social experiences, such as helping peers from different ethnic groups, participating in communal cooperation, and advocating for social justice while rejecting discrimination. These experiences shape students' reflections that Papuan nationalism is fundamentally relational, placing human relationships and social solidarity at the center of national life. The figure further shows that the practice of nationalism cannot be separated from the broader social realities of Papuan society, including social wounds, identity tensions, experiences of injustice, and multicultural social dynamics.

Rather than producing exclusive or ethnic-based nationalism, these experiences contribute to the formation of critical consciousness and inclusive nationalism grounded in justice, reconciliation, and respect for human dignity. In this framework, CRE functions as a transformative pedagogical space where students interpret nationalism not merely as symbolic loyalty to the state, but as an ethical commitment to peaceful coexistence, cultural recognition, and social justice within a multicultural Indonesian society.

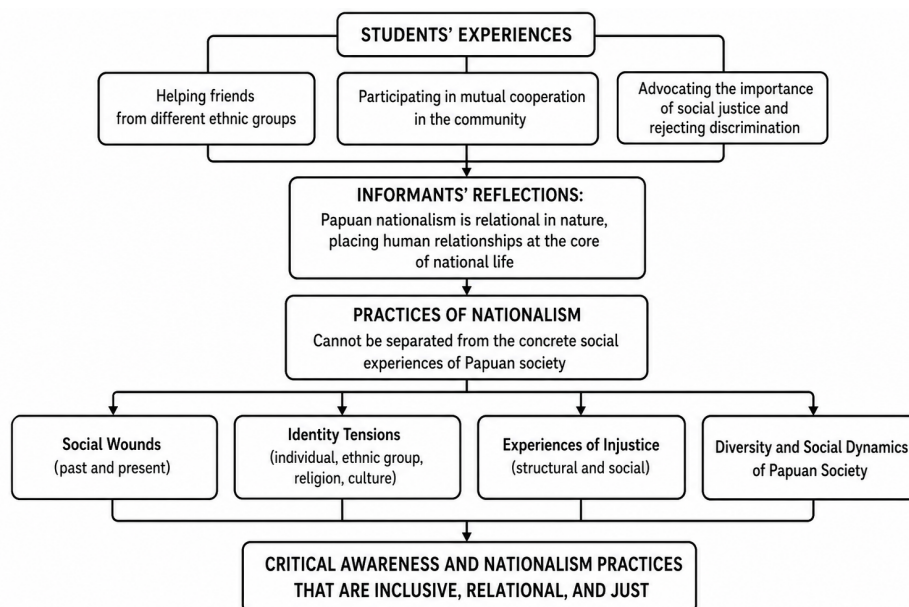


Figure 3. Construction of nationalism within the lived experiences of Indigenous Papuan students in the context of CRE

The findings show that Papuan students' experiences of nationalism are inseparable from social wounds, identity tensions, structural injustice, and the broader dynamics of Papuan society. Nationalism is understood not as identity uniformity, but as a space for social reconciliation where diversity can exist equally and with dignity. This means that true nationalism must be grounded in justice so that all members of society can experience humane and equal coexistence, while discrimination based on ethnicity, religion, or social group must be eliminated (Widjaja, 2021). Many studies indicate that violence, impunity for human rights violations, and legal discrimination against Indigenous Papuans deepen the feeling of being unrecognized as human beings and citizens (Bagus Berlianto, 2023; Kartika & Hamid, 2020; Uyun, 2023). In this context, CRE becomes a moral voice that reminds students and society that nationalism must be rooted in humanity, peace, justice, and respect for local identity.

CRE contributes to transformative nationalism by connecting faith, cultural experience, and civic responsibility. Teachers stated that nationalism grows more effectively when students experience acceptance, affection, respect, and reconciliation in the classroom, rather than when nationalism is taught only as cognitive material. In this sense, CRE functions as an agent of educational restoration that builds harmonious, dialogical, inclusive, and moderate religious life in schools (Kristianus Bayu Pranata & Nehemia Nome, 2023). Such an approach enables students to internalize national values as lived ethical

commitments, fostering empathy, mutual understanding, and active participation in promoting social cohesion within a pluralistic society.

Local culture and wisdom also support the formation of civic character and national identity through values such as mutual cooperation, deliberation, kinship, justice, and unity (Ataupah & Parhan, 2025; Temon & Ni Wayan Sukerti, 2022; Varelaswi, 2023). Simple school practices listening to students' cultural stories, praying for the nation, singing spiritual songs alongside national songs, and linking biblical teaching with Papuan social realities help students understand nationalism as a liberating and reconciliatory force. This perspective aligns with civic nationalism in Papua, where living together across religious and ethnic differences supports the ideal of Papua as a land of peace (Handoko & Hasirun, 2019). It also reflects humanistic nationalism, which emphasizes shared values, social justice, and inclusive community rather than ethnic ancestry (Clott, 2017; Sandelind, 2022). This form of nationalism fosters mutual respect, collective responsibility, and civic solidarity among diverse groups, enabling individuals to maintain their cultural identities while contributing to the common good and national unity.

Conclusions

Christian Religious Education (CRE) can mediate inclusive nationalism among Indigenous Papuan students by connecting Christian ethical values with students' lived cultural and social experiences. Nationalism in this context is not limited to symbolic loyalty to the state, but is understood as a relational and moral responsibility grounded in love, justice, peace, care, reconciliation, respect for human dignity, and recognition of Papuan cultural identity. CRE classrooms function as dialogical and restorative spaces where students can interpret Papuan identity and Indonesian citizenship as complementary rather than contradictory. The study also contributes the concept of relational spirituality-based nationalism, which explains how inclusive citizenship can be shaped through contextual and participatory pedagogies such as reflective dialogue, roleplay, biblical storytelling, communal activities, and the integration of local cultural experiences. However, the conclusions should be read within methodological limits: the qualitative phenomenological design, purposive sampling in seven schools in Sentani District, possible social desirability bias, and the absence of causal or longitudinal measurement limit generalizability. Future research should validate this framework quantitatively and longitudinally, especially by examining how love, justice, care, reconciliation, cultural identity recognition, and inclusive citizenship influence students' national consciousness over time.

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