

Open Ended Religious Literacy Post-Interreligious Conflicts

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Religious literacy is a program of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia aimed at the Nation-building and church also supports this program through Christian faith perspectives. Post-interreligious conflicts in Maluku and North Maluku, the Protestant Church of Maluku faces dynamic of relationship in the society that has been damaged by ideological propagandas and radical, intolerant, and violent interpretations of sacred texts. Therefore, this research aims to respond the needs of the church's calling to keep spreading goodness that upholds humanity through religious literacy that restores the wounded memories of the post-interreligious conflicts. The data collection techniques for this study are observation, interview, and literature study. By using a qualitative method, a phenomenological approach is applied to the dialogue of some concepts, namely: (1) the perspective of religious literacy from Choirul Fuad Yusuf; (2) the attitudes and theological ideas of GPM regarding involvement of the church in post-interreligious conflicts in a pluralistic society; (3) Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan's perspective on bringing theology of memory post-conflict; and (4) concept of complete pastoral care post-interreligious conflicts from Rouli Retta Trifena Sinaga. The finding of this research is that the Protestant Church of Maluku has supported the Indonesian Government's program of religious literacy. It also needs to be developed to be an open-ended religious literacy by adding theological approach through doing theologically meaning making of the various wounded narratives of post-interreligious conflicts as an effort to uphold unity, justice, and preventing recurring of the interreligious conflicts in the victims' and communal lives.

Contribution: This article contributes by offering an open-ended religious literacy of post-interreligious conflicts to support the Indonesian Nation's welfare through development of peaceful and sustainable communal lives.

Keywords: religious literacy; wounded memories; post-interreligious conflicts; theology of memory; Nation-building

Introduction

Religious literacy is a program of the Government of the Republic of Indonesia aimed at nation-building and church also supports this program through Christian faith perspectives. This is important, because religion is a determining factor in Indonesian society's development and progress (Yusuf, 2021, p. 1). Therefore, church needs a model of religious literacy that is relevant in post-conflict areas between religious communities to keep building relationship among people of different faiths around its areas of ministry in order to support a harmonious and tolerant national life. This cannot be ignored, because now conflicts between religious communities still happen repeatedly in areas that have experienced religious conflicts, like in Maluku and North Maluku, Indonesia.

Written texts or printed texts, such as: books, articles, and social media have become effective tools to spread hoaxes and encourage extremism and religious intolerance. Church's presence in the context of post-conflict between religious communities is hoped to act as agent of peace. In fact, the church is called to keep spreading goodness that upholds humanity through religious literacy that restores relationship that has been damaged by ideological propagandas and radical, intolerant, and violent interpretations of sacred texts. A.A. Yewangoe believes that the church, as religious institution, is responsible for defending the lives of Indonesian society from hegemony of primordialism, dehumanization, and politicization of religions (Yewangoe, 2018, pp. 59-60). Religious claims that tend to be absolutized and marginalize dignity of human beings as God's creations should be transformed by the church as contribution to the Indonesian Nation. In the context of Indonesia that is vulnerable to various interreligious conflicts, religious literacy is needed to prevent interreligious conflicts and other complex issues (Schumann, 2011). This emphasizes that religious illiteracy has potential to damage conduciveness and reciprocity of social relationship, which can lead to social conflicts in various ways (Yusuf, 2021, p. 3).

This research is innovative. On one hand, it confirms importance of strengthening religious literacy and uses it to analyze the church's religious literacy in Maluku and North Maluku, Indonesia, post-interreligious conflicts. On the other hand, this study offers a model of open-ended religious literacy to maintain national integration in the long term post-interreligious conflicts. Therefore, this study will explain the reality of religious literacy developed by the Protestant Church of Maluku (Gereja Protestan Maluku/GPM) in Maluku and North Maluku, Indonesia, and its impacts on the local society.

Then, this study will discuss several perspectives that mutually enrich each other as well as context of this research, namely: (1) the perspective of religious literacy from Choirul Fuad Yusuf; (2) the attitudes and theological ideas of GPM regarding involvement of the church in post-interreligious conflicts in a pluralistic society; (3) Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan's perspective on bringing theology of memory post-conflict; and (4) concept of complete pastoral care post-interreligious conflicts in Ambon, Indonesian, from Rouli Retta Trifena Sinaga. In the end, a model of open-ended religious literacy is designed. This research aims to offer this model to support the Indonesian Nation's welfare through development of peaceful and sustainable communal lives.

There have indeed been some previous studies that research religious literacy in Indonesia. There are studies on moderate teachings from Islamic perspectives in dialogue with Pancasila (Joko Setiyono & Sulaiman Rasyid, 2022); (Moh. Erfan Soebahar, K. Muhajarah, S.S. Suyurno, R.B. Embong & A. Panaemalae, 2023); (Nini Arianti, et al., 2022) (Maghfur Ahmad, A. Aziz, M.N. Afad, S.M. Muniroh & H. Qodim, 2021); (Karin, 2024); (Mulyanto Abdullah Khoir & Muhammad Isa Anshory, 2023). Then, there is a previous study titled "Development of an Inclusive Religious Literacy Model in Local Churches in Maluku and North Maluku" written by Rouli Retta Trifena Sinaga and Johan Robert Saimima (Rouli Retta Trifena Sinaga & Johan Robert Saimima, 2026). The research explores religious literacy, which is in dialogue with various shared resources in the context of local church, particularly GPM in Maluku and North Maluku. However, in this research at the same locus that religious literacy is further examined from the perspective of GPM's attitudes and theological views on interfaith relations, which is then developed into a model that is more open to various wounds of post-interreligious conflicts.

The research method used is a qualitative method, which is developed by Heddy Shri Ahimsa Putra. The interpretive paradigm of this qualitative research serves to provide meaning to the phenomena studied based on the factual reality, so that data quality is maintained (Putra, 2012). Therefore, researcher's awareness to explain the phenomena studied as well as possible is prioritized, that is in line with an openness to understand various views, knowledges, values, norms, rules, relationship, and behaviors of individuals and society collectively as they are (Putra, 2012). In this study, based on data collected by observation, interview, and literature study, religious literacy in the GPM in Maluku and North Maluku will be described, analyzed, and developed into a model of open ended religious literacy.

The GPM's Attitudes towards Religious Literacy

Choirul Fuad Yusuf argues that level of religious literacy, marked by high awareness, knowledge, understanding, and application of religious teachings in a broad context, is an effective asset for reducing various conflicts, tensions, and social prejudices (Yusuf, 2021, p. 3). Religious literacy is ability to understand and analyze differences and intersections of religions, which include beliefs, knowledge, rituals, traditions, expressions, language, and interpretations of religion in social, political, and cultural lives through various perspectives (Yusuf, 2021, pp. 5, 13, 20). Another thing included here is ability to gain its benefits and also put it into practice through collective participation in constructive and broad ways for common good in communities' daily lives (Yusuf, 2021, pp. 5, 13, 20).

In the ministry areas of GPM that spread across Maluku and North Maluku, Indonesian, each congregation has its own unique capital. It contributes to strengthening the relationship of fraternity between religious communities, especially Muslims and Christians in Maluku and North Maluku. The culture of *orang basudara*, inherited from their parents and ancestors, needs to be preserved and passed down from generation to generation. The *Pela-Gandong*, *Jabu*, *Bobaso Se Rasai*, *Saruma*, and *Rasai* cultures strengthen the *orang basudara's* commitment to helping, supporting, and cooperating in both happy and sad situation transcending religious differences between the communities (Rouli Retta Trifena Sinaga & Johan Robert Saimima, 2026). This culture is well-preserved and plays a role in maintaining fraternal relations between Christians and Muslims in Ambon, Piru, Masohi, Dobo, Ternate, Bacan, and Obi.

In that kind of cultural context, there have been many efforts to promote inclusive religious literacy that have been carried out by each congregation within the ministry of GPM. Through appeals and sermons at church pulpit, as well as church bulletins, church members are encouraged to maintain tolerance among people of different religions, especially with Muslims. In addition, during categorical worship services for children, teenagers, youths, men, women, and elderly, the church provides teachings both orally and in writing according to GPM's Church teachings to cooperate with followers of other religions such as Muslims. Even though there are differences in teachings, rituals, and religious practices, and even habits regarding food and clothing with people of other faiths, the church actively sets out its programs in various documents and meeting decisions for both the short term and long term to prioritize a lifestyle of coexistence. These efforts are implemented by the synod, classis, congregations, and individuals in real ways, both in the

daily non-formal life of the church members and in the various formal church activities.

Respecting religious differences and seeing followers of other religions as brothers and sisters, not enemies, and even needing each other to build collaboration for common good, are also frequently promoted through worship materials and lessons used in individual and communal services in church members' houses, church, and on social media. Additionally, the emphasis on understanding the church's existence in the world as a shared home for everyone is encouraged through informal verbal messages, so that church members are not easily provoked into interreligious conflicts. Church members as agents of peace are also encouraged to spread messages of peace and togetherness among religious communities rather than spreading hate speech in the name of religion, whether in conversations at houses, church, social media, mass media, offices, or anywhere in society.

This is evident from the church members' openness in welcoming the participation of Mosque Youth to sing Christian spiritual songs with tambourines during the Easter celebration. There are mosque cleaning activities carried out by the local Christians. The constructions of mosques and churches are done with mutual involvement. In addition, religious leaders and community figures often hold various meetings, interfaith dialogue activities, and inherited traditions to strengthen the bonds of fraternity among people of different religions. In fact, everyday when church members meet followers of other religions in public spaces, such as: markets, workplaces, offices, schools, and neighborhoods, they greet, show respect, and cooperate each other. Both Christians and Muslims contribute to maintaining security and enlivening each other's religious celebrations, such as: participating in competitions, having communal meals, and keeping the neighborhood security during Christmas, Easter, *Eid al-Fitr*, *Eid al-Adha*, and fasting periods.

In terms of social care, Christians also accompany members of society from various religious backgrounds without discrimination by sharing love, such as: providing wheelchairs for people with disabilities, conducting eye check-ups for the elderly, offering acts of kindness to widows, and attending birthdays, weddings, and funerals of followers of other religions who have passed away. The church also encourages its members through teaching and program implementation to collaborate with and involve people of other religions in environmental activities, community services, health case management, and disaster responses. The church engages in interfaith dialogues to build church members' harmonious relationship with everyone.

The GPM's Theology of Interfaith Relations

GPM conveys that religion is a belief in a higher power, that is believed to be the source of everything and has power over human life and universe (GPM, 2016, p. 40). Meanwhile, other religions are beliefs that are different from or not Christian beliefs, that other religions are accepted in their existence and recognized as religions that also teach truth and goodness to their followers (GPM, 2016, p. 40). GPM believes that God in Jesus Christ is an Almighty God, so God can work in broad ways, including working and saving humanity and God's creation through other religions (GPM, 2016, p. 41). GPM appreciates and respects other religions, including the differences within them. Those differences are not seen as threats to Christian faith, but as strengths to reinforce it (GPM, 2016, p. 41).

Therefore, interfaith dialogue should always take place. Dialogue is a tool to understand other religions and share the differences each other. GPM emphasizes that to build positive interfaith relationship, the best approach is to develop an open attitude toward people of other religions, willingness to listen, mutual respect, and understanding of each other's differences (GPM, 2016, p. 42). In that dialogue, there is a process of mutual learning between religious communities. Christians learn about and from other religions, and vice versa, other religions learn about and from Christianity. The dialogue must be based on respect for human dignity in all aspects. This dialogue is carried out continuously by people, specifically: dialogue in everyday life (living/heartfelt dialogue) (GPM, 2016, p. 42). This dialogue happens, when people respect each other as humble individuals like the Teacher, and also open, accept, and work together to build a society of love (GPM, 2016, p. 42). Religious differences will not stop the communities from living together and cooperating in various ways.

The basic principle for GPM in building cooperation with other religions is that in carrying out its mission, GPM cannot ignore existence of other religions (GPM, 2016, p. 42). GPM has to work together with other religions, that also have same responsibility to do good things for human life and universe (GPM, 2016, p. 42). Besides that, Christian faith believes that God can work through other religions to help God's people (Ezr. 1); and vice versa, God can also work through God's people to help others (Jonah 3 - 4) (GPM, 2016, p. 42).

GPM works together with other religions in various fields and aspects to strive for well-being and to uphold justice and truth for human beings and God's creation (GPM, 2016, p. 42). Meanwhile, radicalism is driven by excessive fanaticism, that sees followers of other religions as misguided and infidels, so GPM firmly rejects radicalism in religions, including

in Christianity (GPM, 2016, p. 42). For GPM, the differences in each religion are treasures that must be respected and valued, so mocking, ridiculing, or insulting other religions are unacceptable (GPM, 2016, p. 42).

GPM's attitudes towards conflicts between religious communities are to strive for peace. This peace is based on the reconciliation that God has already done in human life through the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, His Son (1 John. 4:10) (GPM, 2016, p. 43). The church is called to first give itself to be reconciled with God (2 Cor. 5:20). Then, GPM emphasizes that church members have responsibility to strive for peace with one another by making sure that, in addition to the rights of nature, human rights are guaranteed and upheld (GPM, 2016, p. 43).

Besides the church, government institutions are also assigned by God to enforce peace. In the Christian faith, community leaders like kings are people chosen and appointed by God to ensure that peace and prosperity can be enjoyed to the end of earth (Psalm 72:6-7) (GPM, 2016, p. 44). If community leaders don't do their jobs to enforce peace within the communities, then church and fellowships of people who believe in God are responsible for demanding that the jobs be done, so that the peace destroyed by oppressive and unjust governments can be restored (GPM, 2016, p. 44).

Then, the church needs to collaborate with government institutions, other religions, as well as private organizations and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) to develop culture of peace in society. The church is also realistically called to support all efforts made by government and other organizations in fostering culture of peace. However, the church must also be critical of various approaches and inspire peace in communal lives. The church should encourage the awareness that regions or Country of Indonesian must become a shared home for all their citizens. In sharing a common home, everyone treats each other as brothers and sisters who care for and support one another, including sharing the resources that God has granted to all the inhabitants of the home (GPM, 2016, p. 44).

Efforts to build peace aren't a one-time process. In reality, human weakness and sin often disrupt the peace that has been established, such as: conflicts within families and communities, riots, extortion, oppression, violence, and environmental destruction. Therefore, maintaining peace and responsibility of the church and its people is important. In other words, the task of serving peace that God has entrusted to the church (2 Cor. 5:18b) also includes responsibility to continuously nurture communal lives in order to sustain peace toward its fulfillment and perfection at the coming (*parousia*) of Jesus Christ (GPM, 2016, p. 45).

The entire process of peace that the church undertakes must start with the following ways:

- a) The church makes peace with God first;
- b) The church examines itself to see whether the peace that it seeks is motivated by self-interest rather than the interest of salvation;
- c) The church examines matters that cause the breakdown of fair and peaceful relationship from various perspectives and opinions;
- d) The church listens to what others say (criticism) and to the church's own conscience (self-criticism) in order to come up with plans that are effective, efficient, and suitable for building fair and peaceful relationship;
- e) The church builds networks of cooperation to pave the ways toward creating fair and peaceful relationship in addressing the root causing of every hostility, violence, source of grief, suffering, death, poverty, and ignorance that are harmful or unhelpful to humanity and environment in the areas where the church is present and serves. This is done both through peace education and reconciliation, as well as through other concrete peace and reconciliation actions; and
- f) The church uses non-violent methods, including: having dialogues and cooperating in many activities, as well as rejecting violent and oppressive ways (GPM, 2016, p. 45).

In order to educate church members and ministers, what is needed is the creation of symbols that remind many parties about how important it is to strive for and live out peace within oneself, family, church, and society (GPM, 2016, p. 45). For examples: Cross, Miniature of Peace *Gong*, Bracelet, Ring, Peace Stone, Peace and Reconciliation Day Celebration, *Panas Pela*, *Panas Gandong*, *Emblem*, badge, and billboard (GPM, 2016, p. 45). This is done by the church so that awareness of importance of peace continues to be kept for the realization of complete, comprehensive, and sustainable peace (GPM, 2016, p. 45).

Integral Approach of Religious Literacy

Yusuf explains that religious literacy can be realized concretely through several approaches that match the available potential and proper environmental conditioning, so that there is an increase in awareness, knowledge, understanding, and application of religious teachings in a broad social context using various approaches in integrative, integral, and comprehensive ways. *First*, the cultural approach is carried out through multicultural education, which includes: knowledge and recognition of diversity, the development of human values, and the reduction of religious behavior that is full of discrimination and fanaticism (Yusuf 2021, 20-22). *Second*, the educational approach is carried out to promote social change that depends on awareness, understanding, and achievement needs of society (Yusuf 2021, 22). The principles referred include: (1) development of critical thinking and

affectional sensitivity; (2) core competencies in social piety, namely being a good religious follower and citizen in the context of developing nationalism and humanity; (3) religious educators who have the ability to teach and implement interreligious competencies in the broader social context; and (4) real behavioral changes in students' daily lives in actual social settings (Yusuf 2021, 20-23).

Third, the political approach is as a way to solve problems through the use of political authority by government or institutions that grant legitimacy to religious community members, such as: control policies, setting an example, consistent rule enforcement, and functionalizing religious organizations (Yusuf 2021, 24). *Fourth*, the economic approach related to basic human needs aims to strengthening society bonds while also reducing social class barriers and human sufferings that often trigger social conflicts (Yusuf 2021, 25). *Fifth*, the environmental approach constructed creates a conducive environment and a peaceful social life, especially agendas of the sustainable development goals (SDGs), such as: interfaith dialogues and partnership programs for joint problem-solving to reduce global political tensions (Yusuf 2021, 25-27).

Referring to Yusuf's idea in that way, GPM can be said to have implemented all five approaches in its religious literacy, which are reflected in its attitudes, teachings, and programs. GPM elaborates on local wisdoms through various efforts in socialization, education, and practical applications in education, politics, and economy, as well as environmental initiatives that involve various parties both inside and outside GPM to embrace interfaith relationship in the society of Maluku and North Maluku. The religious literacy being developed is not only in spoken form but also in writing and lifestyle that humanizes human beings and loves universe.

Post-interreligious conflicts in Maluku and North Maluku, as the context for the GPM's ministry, religious literacy developed with an integral approach actually cannot ignore the shared wounds and its constructive theological meaning. This goes beyond Paul Knitter's concept of liberative interfaith dialogue, that hasn't provided space to discuss the destructive impacts of post-interreligious conflicts (Knitter, 2019). Moreover, in acknowledging the reality of historically wounds in the context of diversity in Indonesian, church that is inclusive toward adherents of other religions and beliefs should consistently be aware of its responsibility to support national development that improves the lives of Indonesian people in accordance with Pancasila values. Thus, both Yusuf and GPM's integral approaches related to religious literacy need to be reconstructed to include the sad

stories that happened 20 years ago and reinterpret them in a new and theological way, which will be discussed in the next section.

Open Ended Religious Literacy Model Based on Theology of Wounded Memory of Post-Interreligious Conflicts

This part is also further explored and developed by Rouli Retta Trifena Sinaga in her dissertation titled *Pendampingan Pastoral Kompletif bagi Pemulihan Pelbagai Ingatan yang Menyakitkan dari Warga Jemaat Akibat Konflik Komunal antara Masyarakat Kristen dan Muslim di Ambon Tahun 1999-2004* (Sinaga, 2022). However, before that, this part is important to first place Binsar Jonathan Pakpahan's view on bringing the theology of memory post-conflict into the concept of religious literacy in Indonesia. According to Pakpahan, remembering negative or painful memories related to past communal conflict events among Christian communities is important to be restored by transforming them into redemptive memories that no longer carry pain if understood in a new theological way (Pakpahan, 2017, p. 362). Some reasons for that for Pakpahan are: (1) unity in the church is not threatened; (2) the passing down of stories that perpetuate wounds is stopped; (3) justice for the victims is upheld; and (4) similar conflict events do not happen again (Pakpahan, 2017, pp. 109, 362-363). Pakpahan's view shows that Christian theology can contribute to stopping communal conflicts in the church, which can be developed for the church's existence in the context of post-interreligious conflicts and encourages concern for similar issues in society.

In Pakpahan's way of thinking, remembering God is the right theological foundation to restore the negative memories of both victims and perpetrators of past conflicts, targeting their reflection and actions together in integrative, transformative, and liberating ways. The existence of God, victims, and perpetrators are not denied in the communal memories at church, that are remembered honestly and brought to God as part of healing process from pain in God's presence (Pakpahan, 2017, pp. 243, 246, 368). Pakpahan also mentions that church is asked to remember sufferings in the world, especially the voices of victims that are heard through their stories, that are acknowledged as an enactment of justice and solidarity for them, so that their negative memories are restored (Pakpahan, 2017, pp. 295, 368, 371). In other words, this emphasizes that church that remembers God also remembers to bring the voices of suffering of victims outside the church's community into the church, so that they are remembered, spoken out, and constructively understood to be restored by God, both

through the mystery of God's presence and the church's work that stands with the victims together with the society.

Then, Sinaga proposes the idea of comprehensive caring from a pastoral perspective to end the suffering of church members who experience various painful memories post-interreligious conflicts (Sinaga, 2022, p. 181). Ending the suffering of church members, who are accompanied in complete pastoral care, means: (1) healing of these church members, namely various memories of the 1999-2004 interreligious conflicts that they still remember until today (Sinaga, 2022, p. 181). However, they no longer hold onto negative emotions of post-interreligious conflicts; and/or (2) readiness to leaving the past behind without hiding it, while moving on to a better life, especially physically, mentally, spiritually, and socially (Sinaga, 2022, p. 181). Then, Sinaga offers complete pastoral care, which is the embodiment of God's care, remembering the suffering of church members who have experienced various painful memories post-interreligious conflicts, so that they can find healing through the presence of faith communities in church working together with government, other faith communities, and NGOs in the society (Sinaga, 2022, pp. 182-183). By sharing those life stories together through communal actions, the truth being sought and the impacts of past interreligious conflicts experienced are meant to be shared widely with others without any doubt about denial or negative reactions from others, while also accompanied by the willingness to acknowledge and help to heal others who experience suffering similarly.

Therefore, a theologically open approach, both from the conceptual systematic side and the practical side, is needed in religious literacy in addressing various narratives of wounds caused by interreligious conflicts in society, like in Maluku and North Maluku. This approach can be called "open ended religious literacy," because theologically meaning making of the various wounded narratives of post-interreligious conflicts are also used an effort to uphold unity, justice, and preventing recurring of the interreligious conflicts in the victims' and communal lives. This process can continue with new goals, environments, skills, or strategies to tackle complex problems that arise later without forgetting the various bad experiences that happened in previous religious civilization. Whether through their spoken style, written style, or lifestyle, the church members must build commitment to open ended religious literacy to learn from the past and strive not to let it happen again, no matter when or under what circumstances for the common good of Indonesian Nation.

Open ended religious literacy is a priority agenda for Indonesian's sustainable development. It can be a significant factor in accelerating handling interreligious conflicts

that endanger development of society globally. It fosters opposition to polarization and triggers of political tensions and conflicts in various aspects in this Country based on Pancasila. Conversely, exclusive religious literacy is a threatening factor for the Nation's development, because it hinders the realization of safe, peaceful, and balanced ways of lives, which is the essence of development itself (Yusuf, 2021, p. 2). Therefore, strengthening open ended religious literacy is a basic need for the Indonesian's national development that is a "condicio sine non" for the realization of balanced, harmonious, and peaceful world orders, which is essential for development of a multicultural society. It connects differences in religions and cultures, also constructs social cohesion in communities of different religions. It can be a fundamental and strategic necessity in creating a conducive structure for the Republic of Indonesia, because it can strengthen social conformity and cohesiveness in relations between groups, religions, races, ethnicities, and cultural backgrounds. Open ended religious literacy, characterized by a high level of awareness, knowledge, understanding, and application of religious values in a broad context, is the most effective psychological capital for reducing conflicts, social tensions, social prejudices, and various other sources of social conflicts (Yusuf, 2021, p. 3).

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to acknowledge the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia and UKIM as the fasilitators and the financial supports of this research.

Competing interests

The authors reported that they received funding from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia and UKIM, that may be affected by the research reported in the enclosed publication. The authors have disclosed those interests fully and have implemented an approved plan for managing any potential conflicts arising from their involvement. The terms of these funding arrangements have been reviewed and approved by the affiliated university in accordance with its policy on objectivity in research.

Authors' contributions

R.R.T.S., J.R.S., D.S.N., and C.G.L. conceived the central idea for the research collaboratively. R.R.T.S. and J.R.S. contributed the conception of the research from the

beginning to the completion of the final article besides conducted, analyzed, and finalized the research and the article submission. D.S.N. and C.G.L. contributed the conception of the research from the beginning to the completion of the final article. Then, R.R.T.S. contributed the conception of the research from the beginning to the completion of the final article, besides edited, reviewed, and finalized the article for submission.

Ethical considerations

This article follows all ethical standards for research without direct contact with human and animal subjects.

Funding information

This research received grant from the Ministry of Education, Culture, Research, and Technology of the Republic of Indonesia and UKIM, not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

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