
HOW A THEOLOGIAN AND A CHILD PRACTITIONER PERCEIVE CHILD RIGHTS

Ridha Mardiani

STKIP Pasundan

ridha_mardiani@stkipasundan.ac.id

Abstract

Christianity has its own unique way in perceiving child rights. This perception has been shaping the form of child education either at Sunday schools or Christian schools. This study tries to depict a comprehensible perspective on child rights in the lenses of Biblical perspectives and Christian theories on education. This study is in the form of descriptive study involving two respondents, a theologian and a child practitioner as participants. The data was mainly obtained from in depth interview with the participants, then analyzed using framework based on the Bible, United Nation convention on child rights and educational theory from Hill (1990). The findings showed that children have rights to be helped, to be loved, to be cared, to be nurtured, to be educated and to be happy. These findings are in line with the UN convention on child rights that categorized into four categories: the right to survival; the right to protection; the right to development; and the right to participation. Thus, the role of parents and teachers are to provide teachable moments through teaching for information, teaching for confirmation and teaching for transformation that will guide the children to fully develop as human being created by God.

Keywords: Christian perspectives, child rights.

INTRODUCTION

We have to acknowledge that children's rights have been argued about centuries, and the concepts touches raw nerves when adult decisions and actions are put to test (Rogers, 2004). Like other human beings, such as adults children are citizens and social participants in their own right. No longer are the children to be thought as the property of their parents, unwarranted of consideration until the attainment of adulthood. Children are human beings and entitled to the same degree of respect as adult human beings. From humanistic point of view children are human beings, who must be treated like human. In several countries, children's rights do not receive widespread public or political support for example in New Zealand or Australia. Likewise in Indonesia, children's right becomes viral in public or in social media if certain group of people are violating the rights and victimizing the children. Thus, we have to clarify our own understanding about children's right and its impact on our education that build children's character in their own lives.

Christian perspective has its own unique way in perceiving child's rights. It is not only based on the Bible, but also its consistency throughout the time changes that keeps its perception remains stable. God has always bestowed an inherent dignity upon children through out the history. Christian perspective would affected on how Christians regards the need for good educaion for children. This study tries to explore deeply on how a theologian and a child practitioner perceive child's rigts.

RESEARCH METHOD

To obtain a deep and comprehensive on the issue and to construct description of total phenomena within the context, the writer implemented a qualitative case study for this study (Maxwell, 1996; Cohen and Manion, 1989; Merriam, 1988); using purposively one research site (Nunan, 1992) and one main instrument for data collection technique that is in depth interview with the participants (Cresswell, 2008; Merriam, 1988; Silverman, 2005).

Participants of this study were a theologian who is actively involved in Christian education and a cild practitioner who is actively involved in the area of teachign children either in churches or non-formal educational context. These two participants of study are purposively chosen because of their deep knowledge about Children education and their teaching contribution to the children world.

Data were collected through face-to-face interview with the participants with the purpose of knowing their understanding of the main subject of this research. After collecting the data, then it was analysed by coding and categorizing the result of the interview into several categories based on the theory of the subject being discussed. Then the result of data analysis presented in the form of tables and would be discussed in the lenses of the theory of child's rights.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The result of this study are presented in the form of tables. There are two tables explaining the data of the participants and the findings based on the categories.

The data displayed in the table showed how the first respondent stated his opinion about child's rights. He based his perception and understanding on the firm foundation, the Bible. Based on his work experience as teacher and lecturer, writer and also Theologian, he stated that the proper perception on child's rights should be based on the view that children are created in the image of God. In biblical view, people are made in the image of God, yet they are sinners. They are capable of great self-sacrifice for others, and yet, apart from Christ, they are unable

to please God fully. This view of human nature has no parallel in secular theories of education. Christian education must be rigorously evangelistic until a child has made a verbal and datable confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Church education programs for children should stress the nurturing of their faith through age-appropriate discipleship. The children must come to understand the joy of living in fellowship with God as well as the agony and aimless that they would have outside Christ (Wilholt, 1986).

Respondent #1	Category of answer
Name	BSS
Profession	Lecturer, Theologian, Dean of Bible College, Christian educator
Work experience	Chemistry teacher in 1980, Doctorate Degree in the Philipines in 1989, Writing books and speaker of seminars
Perspectives on Child's rights	Children are created by God and bear the image of God.
Children's rights	The rights to be nurtured physically, biologically, cognitively, spiritually and socially The rights to speak, to develop their own potential, The need for knowledge, the need to be loved Their rights that their needs should be fulfilled
Children education	Understanding children's rights and its impact on education Education at church: baptism of children and Sunday school Education at schools: children have rights to acknowledge and build competence and another thing facilitated by the curriculum and learning process. Education for children has to understand how children learn, how children learn, how children think and what are the needs of the children. They purpose of education is to make good creation. Three types of education: Information, Conformation (conformed to the tradition or system) and Transformation (the highest one).

Respondent #2	Category of answers
Name	TR
Profession	Teacher, Educational Practitioner, Sunday school teacher
Work experience	Head mistress in a Kinder Garten, Instructtor, Child practitioner since 1988, Teacher Education background.
Perspectives on Child's rights	Basic needs of the children is to be loved by their parents The main roles of parents or adults are to love them, to give love to their children.
Children's rights	The children have rights to be treated according to their age. The children's rights to have education. The children's rights to be happy, truth and support.
Children education	Based on Deutronomy 6: 2-3 the person who have to teach children are adults as Moses said that it is Fathers and elders that should teach children.

The first and foremost bases for the discussion of the result is that our definition of children. Referring to UN article 1 (Definition of the child): the convention defines a child as a person below the age of 18, unless the laws of particular country set the legal age for adulthood younger.

The first finding is the very basic understanding of how Christians see and understand children. Children are created by God and bear the image of God, as it is stated in the Bible, "So God created mankind in his own image, in the image of God he created them; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27). In this case we may see that children have potential to be holy and live gloriously by bearing the image of God. In his image, human beings can give response and have fellowship with God and uniquely reflect his love, glory and holiness. In his image means that human beings have similarity in God's morality, un sinful nature, holy, wise, loving heart and righteous will. They live in a true fellowship with God which include moral obedient (Genesis 2:16-17); b) human being was created in the image of God also means that they have natural similarity with God, because they are created as human beings who have spirit, mind, emotion, self-consciousness, and power to choose; c) in the image of God does not mean that human beings are godly, because they created lower and dependent on GOD.

In addition, Hill (1990) argues that human beings are described in metaphor as creatures made first of dust, into which God has breathed Spirit. The result is a creature with attributes which enable it, potentially, to experience relationship with God. These attributes include self-awareness, reason, creativity, and the ability to relate to other persons in love and dialogue. It appears that this creature may even have greater potential than angels.

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God, the moral similarity with God has been destroyed. Only by God's sacrifice in his own son, Jesus Christ, we are redeemed into his holiness. Although its God-like attributes have not been destroyed, they have been defaced, especially by the loss of the ability to keep them in tune with each other and with God's will. Human beings now belong to a maverick species, still possessing spiritual powers but unable to keep them under control. Thus, in the process of justification, the believer should be made renewed into the same good morality as it is in the time of creation.

This Biblical view helps us to understand the concept of child's rights in the light of the Bible, that children bear the "image" of God in the sense that they are unique, good, holy, wise, loving heart and righteous. In this view, children are made in

the image of God, yet they are sinners. This view of human nature has no parallel in secular theories of education, consequently Christian education must be rigorously evangelistic until a child has made a verbal and database confession of faith in Jesus Christ.

Furthermore Jesus in the New Testament said that children are valuable and are to be treated with love and care. Mark (10:13-16) gives an account on how Jesus blesses little children. "And he took them in his arms, laid his hands on them, and bless them." The second note was when Jesus showed his disciples how they have to behave like children or they must have child-like qualities for the kingdom of God. It is written in Mark 9:37. The third note is when Jesus put a child in the midst of his disciples to teach them a lesson. In this case the child is the symbol of true discipleship and a true representative of himself and God. A child becomes central, not as the object to be educated but as the one whose very presence seems to provide the answer to a lot of questions raised by the discipleship.

The first finding is in line with the second finding that children have rights to be nurtured physically, biologically, cognitively, spiritually and socially. Respondent #1 is able to see the interrelation between the perception of children who were created in the image of God and the perception of how children should be nurtured holistically in the aspects of physical, cognitive, spiritual and social. In other words, this rights has been accommodated in UN Article 6 (Survival and development) in which children have the rights to live. Government should ensure that children survive and develop healthily. Kagan (in Sidjabat, 2008) states that the first four years of children's life is the crucial period in forming their personality by which its results can be seen throughout their lives. The formative years are shaped by their significant person, and they are totally dependent on their parents and nannies.

Children's physical growth grows in the area of their fine motoric skills and gross motoric skills. Ratcliff (1992) states the physical development of children during middle childhood is marked by 1) slow and steady physical growth and 2) increased refinement of motor skills used in games and sport. Children's increased size, strength, and physical coordination contribute to their feelings of physical well-being, self-esteem, self-competence, and to aspects of their cognitive development. Specifically, children's cognitive development refers to the theory of Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development in which children's cognitive development are categorized into four stages: Sensory motoric period (birth – 2 years), Pre-operational period (2-7 years), Concrete

operational period (7-11 years), and Formal operational period (adolsescence – adulthood).

The role of parents are very important in children's development. This is strengthened by Article 5 from UN about Parental guidance: Governments should respect the rights and responsibilities of families to direct and guide their children so that, as they grow, they learn to use their rights properly. In addition, Eliot (in Sidjabat 2008) emphasized the importance of mother's love for the baby. This loving touch would help the growth of baby's brain and mind development and also emotion from the prenatal until the first five years of the children's lives. Seeing from Erik Erikson's theory of socioemotional development, the period of the formative years help the babies to develop basic trust or mistrust from the parents. The way how parents nurture the babies will help them develop basic trust and hopes as the bases for intimate relationship with God.

This is also closely related to the first finding from the second respondent who stated that basic need of the children is to be loved by their parents. UN Article on Child's rights has been formulated parental responsibilities in Article 18: Both parents share responsibility for bringing up their children and should always consider what is best for each child. \government must respect the responsibility of parents for providing appropriate guidance to their children. In line with this, the love of father and mother experienced by the children would help them to know and understand the love of God. Believe in God is a must for every human being. We do not want to see our children growing become atheists. LOVE as the basis foundation in the relation of parents and children is the basic element for children to trust God. As it is stated in Proverbs 3:5-6, "Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight."

Developing basic trust to their parents would help the children to also trust their friends and surroundings. Trust help them to firmly believe in all good things God has provided for them. This foundation should be developed in the formative years which later will influence the whole of their lives. Simultaneously the love of parents and the basic trust of the children develop one component of the wholeness of human being that is spiritual growth.

This also confirmed another finding from Respondent #1 that children need to be loved. As it is stated in the Bible Col 3:21, "Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged." Children need to be loved and protected; this is

one right that should be attached to children's right. Similarly in Eph 6:4, "Fathers do not exasperate your children, instead bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord. Christopher (2002) confirmed that children also have rights of from their parents just as adults do from their neighbour.

Sidjabat (2008) said that parents and family play important roles in developing children's spiritual growth. There are three main reasons why parents and family have this important role: 1) sociologically and culturally parents are the significant person for children in their daily lives. Family is the primary group for children to interact with warmly and openly; 2) psychologically, family is a place for children to develop. In this context parents can help their children to fulfil their physical, emotional, spiritual and mental needs. It is from their parents that children get love, protection, honor, encouragement, security and self identity; 3) Theologically, the Bible has taught us that family is God's plan (Genesis 2:18; Psalm 127:1-2). Family has important role in reflecting the relationship between Christ and his churches (Ephesians 5:22-23). Not only to have spiritual unity but also to show God's image (Genesis 1:26-27); to manage his creation (Genesis 1:26-28); to communicate with him and others (Genesis 2:20-24; 3:8-9), sexual relation (Genesis 2:24-25), and to give birth and nurture their descendants to glorify God (Genesis 1:28).

In line with this, it is God's will that parents and family are the channel of God's love and mercy for others and to transmit the values and godly character. If children are in the family, it means that God wants parents to guide their children to know God. Closely interconnected to this is the role of parents in giving proper education to their children. In Deutonomy 6:6-9, "These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates." These verses showed the roles of parents and family to educate their children. This is also the finding from Respondent #2 who said that based on Deutonomy 6: 2-3 the person who have to teach children are adults as Moses said that it is Fathers and elders that should teach children. Parents are called by God to teach their children to learn to know him earnestly in love and faithfulness. They are called to worship God, the creator and redeemer. This love of God then should be talked, taught and exemplified to their children in any various ways in any chances they have got. This should be a life

style of the family either at home or outside. Parents should grab every chance to demonstrate attitude and behaviour in honoring God. The role of a man as a husband or father is the leader and the “priest” in the family. Fathers do not embitter their children by not making them disappointed, authoritative, lied, and abusive. In reverse, they have to teach and educate their children in God’s teaching as it is stated in the Bible.

In helping the children grow spiritually, according to Sidjabat (2008) fathers or parents have roles to a) maintain good relationship with children; b) build openness between parents and children, c) guide the children to know more about Jesus as personal saviour; d) use the Bible in family altar; e) provide music or religious books at home; f) go church with all family members; g) encourage their children to play with their Christian friends; h) midweek children fellowship; i) understand the impact of Christian schools for spiritual growth of the children; and j) show godly life to the children.

This kind of understanding will also lead us to think and consider children education either in Sunday school or formal school. Christian education must be rigorously evangelistic until a child has made a verbal and datable confession of faith in Jesus Christ. Church education programs for children should stress the nurturing of their faith through age-appropriate discipleship. The children must come to understand the joy of living in fellowship with God as well as the agony and aimless that they would have outside Christ (Wilholt, 1986). As it is stated in the Bible Matthew 18:10, “See that you do not despise one of those little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven.” Children can believe in Jesus Christ if they are guided well. “

UN Article 28 (Rights to education): All children have the right to a primary education, which should be free. Wealthy countries should help poorer countries achieve this right. Discipline in schools should respect children’s dignity. For children to benefit from education, schools must be run in an orderly way – without the use of violence.... Young people should be encouraged to reach the highest level of education of which they are capable.

There is one the foremost important thing in Christian perspectives about children’s education. It should be started from the parents and family. Deuteronomy 6:6-9, “These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads.

Write them on your doorframes of your houses and on your gates.” The Love of God should be discussed among parents and children. Parents should have effort to ask their children to know God, and this must be their way of life. Parents should demonstrate attitudes and behaviour that glorify God. Description of God as being close, real, caring, and forgiving are related to a close, positive relationship with parents. Whether as parents, pastors, or teachers, we may be so desirous of bringing our children to faith that we try to make their decisions for them, and that must necessarily involve overriding the right to choose for themselves on the best information available.

Hill (1990) proposed three kinds of teaching children: 1) Teaching for information; b) Teaching for Transformation and 3) Teaching for confirmation. Teaching for information means how a teacher teach and a student learn to gain information about the subject matter. When human beings claim themselves as knowers, they are reacting purely as creatures who are aware of the world. The children receive information through senses. Our knowledge is affected by our feeling tone. They influence what the children attend to and how they sum up the whole of which specific ideas and hypotheses are but parts. The ways of learning are multiple, and so are the way how teachers teach. 2) Teaching for conformation, in this case conform to the tradition or system; and 3) Teaching for transformation by which through education children’s heart could be transformed to have renewal. Transformation help children develop their knowledge, and making adjustment to the system. On the other hand teaching for conformation help children to adjust to various different kinds of situation.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Though children are born free and equal as an adult created in God’s image, they are the most vulnerable in society whose rights are denied often. Many suffer injustice at the hand of adults and are becoming casualties all over the world. The need to promote a public ethos of ‘**child first**’ should be an obligation of every adult. Jesus Christ proved himself to be the ‘**supreme advocate**’ of children’s rights. His disciples promoted the same value in the Christian Church through the ages. The Christian perspective is rooted in the biblical teachings of worth and dignity for human rights. A rights-based approach sees the child in the context of the social structure allowing him/her to participate fully in the development of society.

The findings from the two participants of this study could be related to Christopher (2002) who states that the UN Convention on the rights

of the child, in 1989, was a means of empowering the child and creating a conducive atmosphere in which all children will be able to live securely and realize their full potential in life. The centrality is to protect and promote children globally which needs to be supported by all. There are forty articles addressed in this convention which could be classified under four categories, namely, 1)The right to survival (Survival rights) - right to life, health, name, nationality; 2)The right to protection (Protection rights) - freedom from all forms of exploitation; 3)The right to development (Development rights) - right to development, education, social security; and 4)The right to participation (Participation rights) - respect for personal views, freedom of thought and expression.

The result from this study are as meaningful contribution to widen our understanding about child's right from Christian perspectives. A theologian and a child practitioner shared same opinion about children's rights seeing from the very source, the Bible. Since only two participants involved in this study, and the method of the research is a case study, so the result of this study is restrictedly bounded to the context. Thus, it would be recommended for other researchers to elaborate deeper investigation in children's rights particularly the case of violation of children's rights and its solution in Indonesian context.

REFERENCES

- Biblica, Inc. 2011. *HOLY BIBLE. NIV*. Biblica, Inc.
- Christopher, K. (2002) *Christian Perspectives of Children's Right*.
- Gill, D.W. (2000). *Becoming Good. Building Moral Character*. IL: P.O Box 1400.
- Hill, B.V. 1990. *That They May Learn. Towards a Christian view of Education*. NWS: The Paternoster Press.
- Losoncy, L. 1977. *Religious Education and The life Cycle*. Betlehem: Booksellers of Betlehem, Inc.
- Ratcliff, D. 1992. *Handbook of Children's Religious Education*. Alabama: Religious Education Press.
- Sidjabat, B.S. 2008. *Membesarkan Anak dengan Kreatif*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Andi.
- Sidjabat, B.S. 1996. *Strategi Pendidikan Kristen Suatu Tinjauan Teologis – Filosofis*. Yogyakarta: Penerbit Yayasan ANDI.
- Wilholt, J. 1986. *Christian Education The Search For Meaning*. Michigan: Grand Rapids.
- UNICEF. *A Summary of the rights under the*

Convention on the Rights of the Child. Available at Rights_overview.pdf on line: <https://www.unicef.org>.

UN. *The United Nations Convention on the rights of the Child (UNCRC)*. Available at www.childrenrights.ie

Valdez, E.ed. (2002). *Protecting Children . A Biblical Perspectives on Child's Rights*. California: World Vision International.