

Huma Betang Philosophy as A Contextual Theological and Educational Framework in Indonesian Multiculturalism

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ABSTRACT

Indonesia's multicultural context requires theological and educational approaches that can engage cultural diversity while strengthening social harmony, peace, and ecological responsibility. This study examines the Huma Betang philosophy of the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan as a contextual theological and educational framework for Christian education in Indonesia. Specifically, it aims to identify its core ethical and theological values, explore their relevance to Christian theological reflection and educational praxis, and formulate practical implications for multicultural learning. The study employed a qualitative descriptive design using contextual theological inquiry and ethnopedagogical analysis. Secondary data were drawn from theological writings, ethnographic studies, educational literature, journal articles, and relevant reports and were analyzed through hermeneutical and thematic analysis with source triangulation. The findings show that Huma Betang integrates principles of justice, communal solidarity, ethical living, spirituality, consensus, and ecological awareness, which correspond with Christian concepts such as koinonia, diakonia, martyria, reconciliation, and stewardship. It also provides an ethnopedagogical model that supports dialogical learning, character formation, peacebuilding, and ecological discipleship. The study concludes that Huma Betang is a dynamic Indigenous resource for contextualizing Christian theology and education while strengthening multiculturalism, intercultural dialogue, social responsibility, and national unity within Indonesia's culturally plural churches and educational institutions.

INTRODUCTION

Indonesia is known as one of the most pluralistic nations in the world, characterized by its vast ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity. This plurality has been both a blessing and a challenge in sustaining national unity and social harmony (Herman, 2025). Central Kalimantan exemplifies this pluralistic context, serving as a living laboratory for multicultural coexistence and interreligious dialogue. Within this setting, the Dayak philosophy of Huma Betang—originally referring to the traditional longhouse in which multiple families live communally—emerges as a moral, social, and theological paradigm for harmonious communal living (Riwut, 2015; Susanto, 2024).

Huma Betang embodies core principles such as kinship and togetherness (Hapahari), mutual assistance (Handep), ethical or civilized living (Belom Bahadat), and consensus (Hapakat). These principles are more specifically associated with the Huma Betang tradition of the Dayak communities of Central Kalimantan than the expressions Adil Ka' Talino and Basengat Ka' Jubata, which are associated particularly with Dayak Kanayatn tradition. These values mirror the ideals of Pancasila, Indonesia's foundational state ideology, particularly its emphasis on unity, justice, and humanity (Herman, 2025). Historically, Huma Betang has functioned not only as a dwelling place but also as a social institution and moral compass that shapes communal identity. Its egalitarian ethos provides an ethical foundation for interethnic cooperation and peaceful coexistence, closely aligning with the Indonesian national motto *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* ("Unity in Diversity") (Pattiasina, 2025).

From a theological perspective, the Huma Betang philosophy offers fertile ground for contextualizing the Christian faith within the local wisdom of the Dayak people. Contextual theology recognizes that faith must take root in the soil of local cultures to remain both authentic and transformative (Masterinus, 2024). The communal and dialogical nature of Huma Betang resonates with the Christian concepts of *koinonia* (fellowship), *diakonia* (service), and *martyria* (witness), encouraging believers to live out their faith within inclusive communities characterized by mutual responsibility (Susanto, 2024). In this way, Huma Betang becomes not merely a cultural artifact but also a theological and pedagogical framework through which Christian education and ecclesiology can be reinterpreted and revitalized.

The communitarian model of Huma Betang parallels the early Christian communities described in Acts 2:44–47, where believers shared their lives, faith, and resources in unity and simplicity of heart. Such parallels invite a reexamination of the church's role as a "Huma Betang Kristus," a living house of fellowship, reconciliation, and peace (Pattiasina, 2025). This reinterpretation challenges the church in Indonesia to move beyond predominantly Eurocentric theological frameworks and develop an Indigenous theological framework grounded in the narratives and values of local cultures (Herman, 2025).

Educationally, the Huma Betang philosophy serves as an ethnopedagogical foundation that integrates moral formation, ecological awareness, and social responsibility into Christian education. Its emphasis on Handep (mutual assistance and cooperation) and Belom Bahadat (ethical or civilized living) aligns with contemporary approaches to character education and peace education that promote social justice and ecological stewardship (Siregar et al., 2025). Through this synthesis, Huma Betang offers not only theological but also pedagogical insights for forming students into responsible, compassionate, and inclusive citizens in a multicultural society (Krisdiantoro et al., 2022).

However, previous research often treats Huma Betang merely as an emblem of Dayak identity or as a moral slogan without examining its deeper theological and pedagogical potential (Rahmawati, 2019). This study addresses that gap by positioning Huma Betang within the broader discourse of contextual theology and Christian education in Indonesia. It proposes that Huma Betang is a dynamic theological and educational resource capable of shaping Christian pedagogy, ecclesial praxis, and intercultural dialogue (Hwang, 2024; Pangondian & Nainggolan, n.d.; Sirait & Womsiwor, n.d.; Wan, 2019).

Theologically, this study builds on the premise that contextual theology is not a secondary or peripheral enterprise but a core expression of the principle of incarnation: God's Word becomes flesh within each culture (Pieris, 1988, as cited in Susanto, 2024). Thus, the indigenization of theology within the Dayak context reflects the ongoing embodiment of the gospel within local narratives. Pedagogically, the integration of Huma Betang principles into Christian education aligns with the paradigm of transformative learning (Freire, 1970), in which knowledge is rooted in lived experience, critical reflection, and communal praxis.

In this regard, the Huma Betang philosophy can be understood as an educational theology—one that unites the head (knowledge), heart (faith), and hands (action). It embodies what Zaluchu (2020) terms the fusion of theology and pedagogy, in which faith formation and cultural learning mutually enrich one another. Such an approach promotes what Nugroho (2014) describes as Christian education for peace in a multicultural society—an educational approach that fosters empathy, dialogue, and reconciliation rather than division or exclusion.

Therefore, this paper aims to (1) analyze the core ethical and theological values of the Huma Betang philosophy; (2) explore its relevance to Christian theological reflection and educational praxis; and (3) propose practical implications for the church and Christian education in cultivating multiculturalism, peace, and ecological responsibility in Indonesia. By integrating local wisdom with Christian theological and educational frameworks, this study contributes to the development of a contextual theology of education that upholds both the integrity of faith and the richness of Indonesia's cultural diversity.

METHOD

Study Design

This study employed a qualitative descriptive design grounded in contextual theological inquiry and ethnopedagogical analysis. It explored the theological, philosophical, and educational meanings embedded in the Huma Betang philosophy and examined its potential as a contextual framework for Christian theology and education in Indonesia. The qualitative approach enabled an in-depth interpretation of cultural values, social practices, and theological perspectives associated with Huma Betang (Creswell, 2002; Zaluchu, 2020). The study integrated theological reflection, hermeneutical interpretation of local wisdom, and educational contextualization to examine Huma Betang as both a sociocultural tradition and a contextual theological resource for Indonesian Christian theology and pedagogy (Masterinus, 2024; Susanto, 2024).

Setting

The research setting is Central Kalimantan, particularly among the Dayak Ngaju communities, whose worldview is most strongly represented through the *Huma Betang* philosophy. This geographical and cultural setting is vital for understanding the intersection of theology, culture, and education in Indonesia's plural context. Central Kalimantan is not only home to the physical manifestation of *Huma Betang*—the longhouse—but also to its spiritual and communal ethos that undergirds the social relationships of its people (Riwut, 2015; Herman, 2025). The region's pluralism, characterized by the coexistence of diverse ethnicities and faiths (Dayak, Banjar, Javanese, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Kaharingan adherents), provides a microcosm for theological reflection on multiculturalism and religious

harmony (Pattiasina, 2025). Thus, the study's setting exemplifies a fertile context for the development of contextual theology and peace education.

Data Sources and Collection

The study relied on secondary qualitative data derived from theological writings, ethnographic studies, and educational literature. Sources included both classical and contemporary works by scholars of theology, anthropology, and Christian education. These included writings from Nila Riwut (2015) on Dayak philosophy, Susanto (2024) on theological reflections on *Huma Betang*, Masterinus (2024) on contextual theology in Indonesia, and Pattiasina (2025) on interreligious harmony based on Dayak religiosity. In addition, relevant journal articles and government reports on cultural education, social harmony, and ecological awareness in Central Kalimantan were analyzed to provide contextual grounding (Herman, 2025; Siregar et al., 2025). The selection of sources followed the principle of theoretical saturation, ensuring that the data comprehensively represented both theological and pedagogical perspectives (Creswell, 2002).

The data collection process followed three sequential stages. First, a literature review and document analysis were conducted to identify key themes related to *Huma Betang*, contextual theology, and ethnopedagogical education. This phase involved mapping theoretical frameworks and tracing theological discourses that connect local wisdom and Christian education. Second, a process of theological reflection and hermeneutical reading was undertaken to reinterpret the values of *Huma Betang*—such as *Adil ka' Talino*, *Handep Hapakat*, and *Basengat ka' Jubata* through biblical and theological lenses, particularly in relation to *Koinonia*, *Diakonia*, and *Martyria* (Masterinus, 2024; Susanto, 2024). This stage emphasized the dialogical encounter between Scripture and culture as the foundation of contextual theology. Third, the phase of synthesis and model construction integrated the findings into a conceptual framework that articulates the theological and educational implications of *Huma Betang* for Christian education in Indonesia. This synthesis yielded a contextual model illustrating how indigenous wisdom can inform theological reflection and pedagogical praxis within multicultural settings.

Data Analysis

The study used hermeneutical and thematic analysis to interpret data. Hermeneutical analysis was applied to reveal theological meanings embedded in *Huma Betang*, viewing it as a “text of lived theology” (Pieris, 1988, as cited in Susanto, 2024). Thematic analysis identified recurring patterns such as communality, justice, ecological spirituality, and hospitality—values that resonate with biblical principles and Christian pedagogy (Yusuf et al., 2021). Analytical rigor was ensured through triangulation of sources cross-referencing theological literature, cultural studies, and educational frameworks (Creswell, 2002). The process followed an iterative cycle of reading, reflection, coding, and interpretation, consistent with qualitative theological research methodology (Zaluchu, 2020). The outcome was a conceptual synthesis illustrating how *Huma Betang* functions as both a theological metaphor and an educational praxis within the Indonesian context.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were upheld by ensuring accurate representation of indigenous perspectives and respect for Dayak cultural and spiritual traditions. All interpretations were conducted within a framework of cultural sensitivity, acknowledging the community's

intellectual and spiritual ownership of the *Huma Betang* heritage (Rahmawati, 2019). Since the study utilized secondary data, no direct human participation occurred, and formal institutional ethics approval was not required. However, theological and cultural respect principles guided the entire research process, ensuring the integrity and authenticity of representation (Zaluchu, 2020).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Huma Betang as a Cosmological and Ethical System

The findings reveal that the Huma Betang philosophy deeply rooted in the worldview of the Dayak people of Central Kalimantan constitutes not merely a cultural construct but a comprehensive theological and pedagogical worldview. The philosophy articulates a cosmological harmony that connects God (Jubata), human beings (Talino), and nature (Saruga), forming a triadic ethic that mirrors Christian theological anthropology. In this worldview, life is perceived as sacred, communal, and interdependent, establishing an ethical order that unites spirituality, social justice, and ecological awareness (Riwut, 2015; Yusuf et al., 2020). At the core of Huma Betang lie three foundational principles: Adil ka' Talino (justice toward others), Bacuramin ka' Saruga (living as a reflection of heaven), and Basengat ka' Jubata (breathing through God). These principles emphasize that true justice is relational; it embraces the divine, the human, and the ecological. This triadic understanding of justice resonates with the biblical vision of stewardship in Genesis 1:28 and with the Trinitarian notion of relationality, where divine communion becomes the model for human coexistence (Masterinus, 2024).

Relational Justice and Communal Solidarity in Dayak Thought

The principle of Adil ka' Talino represents the Dayak understanding of social righteousness: justice must be experienced and shared collectively. It aligns with the prophetic tradition of the Hebrew Scriptures (Amos 5:24), where righteousness flows like an ever-living stream. Meanwhile, Basengat ka' Jubata captures ecological spirituality, envisioning humanity as co-inhabitants of creation, echoing Paul's theology of the body (Romans 12:4–5). The principle of Handep Hapakat embodies cooperation and solidarity—“working together with one heart”—which finds direct parallel with koinonia in the New Testament (Acts 2:42–47). This principle provides a contextual framework for Christian ecclesiology and education, demonstrating how faith and communal life are inseparable. It also reflects the spirit of what Bonhoeffer (1937) termed life together, wherein shared suffering and service express authentic discipleship.

Parallels between Huma Betang and Biblical Theology of Koinonia

The communal structure of Huma Betang serves as a living metaphor for the church as the “household of God” (Ephesians 2:19–22). Each member contributes to the well-being of others, modeling an egalitarian spirituality consistent with the early Christian communities. In this sense, Huma Betang offers an indigenous articulation of koinonia, one grounded in reciprocity, dialogue, and peace (Pattiasina, 2025). In Christian education, Handep Hapakat functions as a pedagogical principle that promotes cooperative learning and service-based praxis. It affirms the role of communal dialogue as a means of knowledge construction, consistent with Freire's (1970) pedagogy of the oppressed, which emphasizes liberation through participation and reflection.

Critical Reflection on Idealism and Social Reality

Despite its idealistic harmony, the study reveals a gap between the philosophical ideals of Huma Betang and the realities of social tension and ethnic conflict among Dayak communities (Yusuf et al., 2020). The theological task, therefore, is to avoid romanticizing culture and instead develop what Pattiasina (2025) calls a theology of reconciliation one that recognizes the brokenness of human communities and seeks their restoration in Christ. Huma Betang must be read as a dynamic process of becoming, not as a static moral code. This approach aligns with Bevans' (1992) "translation model" of contextual theology, where faith and culture engage in a transformative dialogue rather than assimilation.

Toward an Indigenous Hermeneutic of Contextual Theology

The study proposes Huma Betang as an indigenous hermeneutic for interpreting Christian theology. It embodies the incarnational principle that faith becomes alive when expressed through local symbols and experiences. This theological move reflects Pieris' (1988) view of Asian religiosity as "a communion with the divine through solidarity with the poor and creation." Thus, Huma Betang becomes a lens for reading Scripture contextually through the language of justice (*adil*), community (*hapakat*), and breath (*jubata*).

Huma Betang and the Fivefold Mission of the Church

Integrating Huma Betang into Christian theology enriches the understanding of the church's fivefold mission: *Koinonia*, *Diakonia*, *Kerygma*, *Martyria*, and *Liturgia*. The value *Hatala* (belief in the Supreme God) parallels *Kerygma* and *Liturgia*; *Belom Bahadat* (ethical civility) mirrors *Diakonia*; *Handep Hapakat* resonates with *Koinonia*; and *Hapakat Basara* (consensual dialogue) embodies *Martyria* through peaceful discernment. *Belum Penyang Hinje Simpei* (living in peace) fulfills the church's witness of reconciliation and love (Herman, 2025). Through these parallels, the Huma Betang house becomes a metaphor for the *ekklesia*—an open home where faith is lived in relational harmony. It challenges churches to move beyond doctrinal rigidity toward inclusive communion, embodying Christ's hospitality in the midst of diversity (Masterinus, 2024).

Ethnopedagogical Theology: A Contextual Model for Christian Education

Within Christian higher education, Huma Betang offers a model of Ethnopedagogical Theology—an approach that integrates theological formation with cultural participation. Education becomes dialogical and transformative, bridging knowledge, spirituality, and moral action. In this model, classrooms mirror the Huma Betang house: spaces of shared learning, storytelling, and service (Siregar et al., 2025). The principle *Basengat ka' Jubata* deepens this pedagogy by grounding environmental ethics in spirituality. Christian educators are thus encouraged to cultivate ecological discipleship—a spiritual practice of caring for creation as part of faith expression. In doing so, theology and education converge in shaping believers who are both spiritually mature and ecologically responsible.

Peacebuilding and Reconciliation through Hapakat Basara

The Huma Betang ethic of consensus (*hapakat basara*) provides a theological foundation for restorative justice and peace education. It parallels biblical reconciliation, where dialogue and confession restore broken relationships (Matthew 18:15–17). Within Christian education, this principle encourages dialogical learning communities that nurture empathy and peacebuilding skills (Nugroho, 2014). By embodying *hapakat basara*, educational institutions and churches alike become agents of reconciliation. They model

diakonia as social solidarity and martyria as public witness to God's peace in a fragmented society.

Huma Betang as a Contextual Theology of Education for Multicultural Indonesia

Synthesizing the theological and pedagogical dimensions, Huma Betang functions as a contextual theology of education for Indonesia. It offers an integrated vision where faith formation, cultural identity, and civic virtue intersect. The church becomes a learning house that forms disciples who embody *handep hapakat*-collaborative solidarity and *belom bahadat*-ethical living within pluralistic communities. This synthesis contributes to public theology and nation-building by reinforcing the ideals of Pancasila and *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika*. Theologically, it situates the gospel within the Indonesian narrative of unity in diversity. Educationally, it promotes intercultural dialogue, ecological responsibility, and moral integrity as the core aims of Christian pedagogy. As such, Huma Betang stands as both a theological metaphor and a transformative praxis an indigenous expression of Christian faith that embodies justice, peace, and communal harmony for a multicultural Indonesia.

Implications

The findings of this study carry significant theoretical and practical implications for both theological discourse and Christian educational praxis in Indonesia's multicultural context. Theologically, the Huma Betang philosophy demonstrates that indigenous wisdom can serve as a valid locus for divine revelation and contextual theology. It reaffirms the incarnational principle that God's truth is not bound to a single culture but becomes flesh within local histories and narratives (Bevans, 1992). The Dayak worldview, with its holistic and relational orientation, invites theologians to articulate doctrines of fellowship, creation, and salvation in terms that are deeply rooted in local experience. This has implications for developing a contextual theological hermeneutic that takes indigenous categories such as *Adil ka' Talino* and *Handep Hapakat* as theological entry points for understanding justice, communion, and stewardship.

For Christian education, Huma Betang provides an ethnopedagogical paradigm that reshapes the way faith formation and character education are understood. Instead of a top-down transfer of knowledge, learning becomes dialogical, participatory, and experiential. The communal nature of Huma Betang offers a model of classroom practice that emphasizes cooperation, moral formation, and social responsibility. Students learn to view faith not as an individual possession but as a communal journey of mutual growth and service (Krisdiantoro et al., 2022). This model aligns with transformative pedagogies that integrate spiritual, ethical, and cultural dimensions encouraging learners to embody justice, empathy, and peace within their communities.

Practically, the integration of Huma Betang values into theological and educational institutions calls for curriculum transformation. Courses on contextual theology, peace studies, and ecological ethics should be embedded into Christian education programs, especially in regions like Central Kalimantan where cultural and religious pluralism is an everyday reality. The principle of *Basengat ka' Jubata* can shape environmental stewardship programs, while *Belom Bahadat* can inform moral and civic education. In this way, Huma Betang becomes not only an object of study but a pedagogical method that embodies its own ethical vision.

In ecclesial practice, the Huma Betang framework offers a renewed vision for the church's mission. It invites congregations to become spaces of *koinonia*—inclusive fellowships that reflect divine hospitality. The ethic of *Hapakat Basara* (consensual dialogue) encourages participatory decision-making and conflict resolution, contributing to peacebuilding within and beyond the church. By embracing the Huma Betang ethos, the church can reimagine its *diakonia* as collaborative service that transcends denominational and religious boundaries, promoting social justice and ecological care.

In the broader societal context, this study affirms that contextual theology and ethnopedagogical education contribute directly to nation-building. The Huma Betang philosophy reinforces Indonesia's foundational values of *Bhinneka Tunggal Ika* and *Pancasila*, offering a theological rationale for unity in diversity. As such, the synthesis of Huma Betang and Christian theology provides a framework for peace-oriented education that strengthens moral integrity, ecological consciousness, and intercultural understanding key pillars for sustaining Indonesia's plural democracy.

Recommendation for Further Research

The present study offers a theological and educational synthesis of the Huma Betang philosophy as a contextual framework for Christian education in Indonesia. Nevertheless, further research is needed to expand and empirically ground the theoretical insights developed here. Future studies should examine how Huma Betang-based pedagogy can be implemented concretely in Christian schools and theological institutions, particularly through curriculum design, classroom practice, and community engagement.

Qualitative field studies involving teachers, students, and indigenous leaders would enrich understanding of how Dayak cultural wisdom can transform learning environments and interfaith relationships. Comparative research between Huma Betang and other indigenous philosophies such as *gotong royong* in Java or *mapalus* in North Sulawesi could deepen theological reflection on local expressions of communal life and Christian ethics in diverse Indonesian contexts. Additionally, interdisciplinary collaboration between theologians, anthropologists, and educators will be essential for developing a comprehensive model of contextual theology of education that integrates indigenous spirituality, ecological awareness, and peace education. Such research would further demonstrate how local wisdom contributes to global theological discourse, affirming Indonesia's role in shaping the emerging field of Asian contextual theology.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that the Huma Betang philosophy constitutes a significant theological and educational resource for articulating a contextual theology of Christian education in Indonesia. It offers a living paradigm that integrates sacred, social, and ecological dimensions into a coherent vision of life rooted in divine fellowship and communal ethics. Through its core values, including *Handep*, *Belom Bahadat*, and *Hapakat*, Huma Betang provides a contextual framework for expressing the biblical principles of *koinonia*, *diakonia*, and *martyria* within the local cultural setting.

The findings affirm that Huma Betang is not merely a cultural heritage of the Dayak people but also a dynamic theology of togetherness (*teologi kebersamaan*). It challenges the church to embody inclusivity, justice, and reconciliation as expressions of Christian witness

in a pluralistic society. Educationally, Huma Betang inspires an ethnopedagogical model that integrates faith formation, character development, ecological stewardship, and peacebuilding as key dimensions of holistic Christian education in multicultural Indonesia.

By reclaiming Indigenous wisdom as a partner in theological reflection, this study contributes to the indigenization of Christian theology and the decolonization of education. It encourages churches, educators, and policymakers to understand theology not merely as an imported system but as a living dialogue among Scripture, culture, and community. Ultimately, the Huma Betang philosophy points toward a transformative vision of faith that nurtures communion with God, promotes justice and mutual respect, and contributes to building a peaceful and reconciled community in the Spirit of Christ.

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