

Alignment of Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory in the Independent Curriculum: Christian Religious Education in Focus

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Alignment of Jean Piaget's Cognitive Development Theory in the Independent Curriculum: Christian Religious Education in Focus

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Abstract

The problem background of this article discusses progress in human life and other organisms, from the beginning of life to changes in the life cycle. The term cognition Refers to mental processes in the human mind, important for understanding the world and interactions with the environment. Jean Piaget highlighted how children build understanding through stages of cognitive development. The Independent Curriculum and Christian religious education provide a relevant context for discussing education and holistic individual development. The method used in this article is library research, namely collecting data from various literature related to research. The stages of literature study include preparing equipment, making a bibliography, managing time, and reading and recording research materials. Data was collected through searching for sources from various media such as books, journals and previous research, with critical and in-depth explanations to support arguments and ideas. The result of this article is that cognitive development is influenced by different stages. Children think differently at each stage, for example from sensorimotor to formal operational. The Freedom to Learn curriculum can integrate Piaget's theory in Christian religious education with a focus on direct experience, critical questions, constructive activities, and stages of cognitive development. This helps students understand and process information better.

Keywords: Alignment, Cognitive Development Theory, Jean Piaget, Independent Curriculum, Christian Religious Education

Abstract

The background of the problem of this article discusses the progressiveness of human life and other organisms, from the beginning of life to changes in the life cycle. The term cognition Refers to mental processes in the human mind, important for understanding the world and interactions with the environment. Jean Piaget highlighted how children build understanding through stages of cognitive development. The Independent Curriculum and Christian religious education provide a relevant context for discussing education and individual development holistically. The method used in this article is library research, namely collecting data from various literature related to the research. The stages of literature study include preparing equipment, making a bibliography, arranging time, and reading and recording research materials. Data were collected through searching for sources from various media such as books, journals, and previous research, with critical and in-depth explanations to support propositions and ideas. The results of this article are that cognitive development is influenced by different stages. Children think differently at each stage, for example from sensorimotor to formal operational. The Independent Learning Curriculum can integrate Piaget's theory in Christian Religious Education with a focus on direct experience, critical questions, constructive activities, and stages of cognitive development. This helps students understand and process information better.

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INTRODUCTION

In the Dictionary of Psychology, which refers to the progressive stages of change that occur in the lives of humans and other organisms, without distinguishing individual aspects of the organism. (Mu'min 2013) Meanwhile, according to Santrok and Yussen (in Mulyani

31 Sumantri), Development is a pattern of movement or change that begins at conception and continues throughout the life cycle. (Mulayani Sumantri 2011) 11 The term "Cognitive" comes from the word cognition, which means understanding, understanding. The broad definition of cognition is the acquisition, organization, and use of knowledge. (Diana Nurhaliza, Ahmad Zaini 2021) Cognition is a broad term that encompasses a variety of mental processes in the human mind, from perception to reasoning, which 65 play a key role in understanding the world and interacting with the environment. (Nasution et al. 2023) It refers to the internal processes in the central nervous system when thinking. Originally used to refer to models of understanding such as perception, imagination, meaning capture, and others, over time, the concept of cognitive has become popular in human psychology as a field of study that covers all aspects of mental recognition, including activities such as processing information, solving problems, and others. Through cognitive understanding, we explore how humans understand and interact with the environment, allowing us to better understand the complexity of the human mind and the use of knowledge in everyday life. From the various perspectives that exist, the author introduces Jean Piaget's theory, in accordance with the discussion of the article being discussed.

We know Jean Piaget, a philosopher, scientist, and developmental psychologist 26 born in Neuchatel, Switzerland, on August 9, 1896, and died on September 16, 1980, at the age of 84. 39 Piaget is famous for his research on children and his theory of cognitive development. He designed a model that explains how humans understand their world by collecting and organizing information. With his works, Piaget made a huge contribution to our understanding of human intellectual and cognitive development. (Jhoni Warmansyah, Tri Utami, Faizatul Fardy, Syarfina, Tria Marini 2023) The basis of Jean 24 Piaget's theory. Piaget believed that humans 27 actively create their own understanding of the world. According to Piaget's cognitive theory, 58 children do not only passively receive knowledge, but they also actively construct their understanding of the world through four separate stages of cognitive development. Thus, Piaget emphasized the active role of children in the process of forming their understanding and knowledge of the world. (Jhoni Warmansyah, Tri Utami, Faizatul Fardy, Syarfina, Tria Marini 2023) According to Piaget, children first try to understand new concepts by connecting them to their previous experiences. They will adjust their expectations and previous experiences to understand and integrate the new concept. In other words, children are constantly constructing their knowledge based on the new ideas they encounter, and this brings about ongoing changes in their understanding. Piaget emphasized cognitive development that occurs over time, and his

focus is on how children overcome intellectual challenges and form their understanding of the world. (Serhat, KURT, & BOZDOĞAN 2023) The concept of assimilation and investment in Piaget's theory. Assimilation occurs when a child integrates new information into his/her previously acquired knowledge. Meanwhile, failure occurs when a child adjusts his/her knowledge to fit the new information and experiences gained. For example, an eight-year-old girl is given a hammer and nails to hang a picture on the wall. Although she has never used a hammer before, she applies the knowledge of how to use a hammer based on her previous observations (assimilation). However, when she experiences the hammer being too heavy and causing the nail to bend, she must adjust the pressure of her blow to avoid similar problems in the future (accommodation). This example shows how a child combines new information with existing knowledge and then adjusts her knowledge to fit the situation at hand.

Piaget²⁴ believed that humans go through four stages in understanding the world, which are related to age and different ways of thinking. These differences in how to understand the world make one stage more advanced than another. For Piaget, increasing understanding of the world is not only related to the addition of information, but also to qualitative changes in the way of thinking. (Jhoni Warmansyah, Tri Utami, Faizatul Fardy, Syarfina, Tria Marini 2023) This statement explains that children's⁵¹ cognition is qualitatively different in one stage compared to another. Then talk about the general description of the Independent Curriculum.

The Independent Curriculum has become a topic that has attracted the attention of many parties since it was introduced. Departing from the spirit of the previous program, namely Through Independent Learning Activities and the emergence of Driving Schools, the government finally officially issued the policy in early 2020. This marks an important step in efforts to improve the quality of education in Indonesia.³ The Independent Curriculum is driven by the spirit of giving schools more freedom in designing curricula according to local needs and global developments. This is expected to make education more relevant, responsive, and prepare students to face future challenges. (Warsihna et al. 2023) Philosophically, the Independent Curriculum seeks to provide space for schools to design learning activities that explore the potential and strengths of each student. The emergence of the Independent Curriculum can also be seen as an anticipation of the increasingly rapid development of technology. Through this approach, the Independent Curriculum allows students to engage in more active and challenging learning, by utilizing various technological media and developing skills that are relevant to the³

demands of the 21st century. Therefore, the Independent Curriculum aims to prepare the young generation of Indonesia to be ready to face various changes and challenges of the future. (Hasim 2020) The Independent Curriculum provides opportunities for students to optimize their potential, with an emphasis on facilities that support learning. (Indarta, Yose 2022) The goal is to enrich creativity and improve students' critical thinking skills. While the general description of Christian religious education.

Christian religious education in general aims to form students who have a deep understanding of the teachings of the Bible and the principles of the Christian faith. (Widiyaningtyas et al. 2023) Through Bible teaching, worship, character development, study of Christian ethics, involvement in church services, and an understanding of the global context of Christianity, Christian religious education in schools provides a solid foundation for students to build a personal relationship with God, develop character in accordance with teaching Christ, and become active members of the Christian community and society more broadly.

RESEARCH METHODS

The method in this article uses library research, which is a method of collecting data by understanding and studying theories from various literature related to research. There are four stages of library study in research, namely preparing the necessary equipment, preparing a working bibliography, managing time, and reading or recording research materials. (Adlini et al. 2022) Data collection uses the method of searching for sources and constructing them from various sources, such as books, journals, and previous research. Library materials obtained from various reference sources are explained critically and must be in-depth to support arguments and ideas.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The main principles in Piaget's theory of cognitive development

According to Jean Piaget's principles, he stated that children's way of thinking is not only less mature due to limited knowledge compared to adults, but also qualitatively different. Based on his research, that the stage of individual intellectual development and age changes affect the individual's ability to observe science. Thus, understanding cognitive development and age changes is important in transmitting how children and adolescents process and

understand the world around them. (Ibda 2015) ¹ Piaget's theory is often called genetic epistemology because this theory tries to trace the development of intellectual abilities, that genetics refers to developmental growth, not biological inheritance (heredity).

According to Piaget, children are born with sensorimotor schemas that serve as a framework for their early interactions with the environment. (Ramadanti, Sary, and Suarni 2022) Children's early experiences will be influenced by these schemas, where only events that can be adjusted to these schemas ¹ can be responded to by the child, and this will determine the limits of their experiences. However, through experience, these initial schemas will be modified. Each experience brings ¹ unique elements that need to be accommodated by the child's cognitive structure. Interaction with the environment will change the cognitive structure, allowing experiences to continue to develop. However, this process is slow because new schemas always develop from pre-existing ones. Through this process, ⁷ intellectual growth begins from the ⁶⁶ child's reflexive response to the environment until they are able to think about potential events and explore their consequences mentally. This is a complex process of interiorization in children's cognitive development.

¹⁷ Interiorization results in the development of operations that allow children to no longer rely on direct interaction with the environment, because they can perform symbolic manipulation. (Huda and Yadi 2023) ⁷ The development of operations provides children with more complex ways to interact with the environment, so that they are able to perform more complex intellectual actions. This happens because the child's cognitive structure becomes more articulated. ¹⁷ As a result, the child's physical environment is also shaped by their cognitive structure. Thus, it can be ⁷ said that the child's cognitive structure actively constructs their physical environment.

¹⁷ Stages of cognitive development according to Piaget

The most fundamental thing about Piaget's theory is his explanation of four different stages of cognitive development, each with its own unique characteristics. Each stage builds on previous achievements, and almost all children experience a relatively similar sequence of development through individual variation. The age ranges used in this explanation are average ages, so some children may master skills faster or slower than others. Understanding each stage

in detail in Piaget's theory can provide deep insight into the child's thinking process at different stages of development. (Faizah, Ulifa Rahma 2027)

⁴³ *Sensorimotor Stage (birth to 2 years)* , Entering the early stages of human life, ²⁰ where babies use their senses and body movements to understand the world around them. This stage is known as the sensorimotor stage, which lasts from birth to two years of age. During this period, babies learn about objects, space, time, and how to act in the world through their sensory experiences and physical movements. This is a crucial stage in cognitive development, where babies begin to build the foundation for further understanding of the world around them. (Muhamad Erwan Syah, Esti Damayanti 2023)

Preoperative stage (ages 2 to 6/7 years), Entering the symbolic pre-thinking stage in children's cognitive development, ³⁶ which occurs around the ages of two to seven. During this period, children begin to be able to think about various concepts symbolically. Their more advanced use of language allows them to express more complex ideas. In addition, they ²⁹ develop memories and imaginations that allow them to understand the difference between the past and the future. ⁴⁰ However, thinking at this stage is still based on intuition and is not yet fully logical, which means that children still have difficulty drawing logistical conclusions based on the information they receive . (Muhamad Erwan Syah, Esti Damayanti 2023)

⁵⁵ *Concrete operational stage (ages 6/7 years to 11/12 years)*, The concrete operational stage in children's cognitive development, which occurs around the ages of seven to eleven, especially during elementary school and pre-adolescence. At this stage, children demonstrate more logical and concrete reasoning abilities. They are able to understand events that are not necessarily related to themselves, and are aware that others have different points of view. However, although they can think logically in a concrete context, they still have difficulty with abstract or hypothetical concepts. This shows that the ability to think abstractly and propose hypotheses is still developing at this stage. (Muhamad Erwan Syah, Esti Damayanti 2023)

⁵² *Formal Operational Stage (ages 11/12 years to adulthood)*, Entering ⁴⁶ the final stage in cognitive development, called the formal operational stage. At this stage, which occurs in adolescence and adulthood, children have achieved ⁴¹ the ability to use symbols related to abstract concepts, such as in science and algebra. They are able to think about problems in a systematic way, consider possibilities, and produce complex theories. This stage is also known as

hypothetical-deductive reasoning, where individuals are able to propose hypotheses and test their logic systematically. This is an important stage in cognitive development, where individuals begin to develop more mature abstract and analytical thinking skills.

A person who has reached this stage has the ability to imagine various solutions and potential outcomes in a given situation. For example, a child who has reached the formal operational stage can consider many ways to solve a problem and then choose the best option based on its logistical level or the clarity of its potential outcomes. This shows that individuals at this stage have developed abstract, analytical, and systematic thinking skills that allow them to explore and solve problems in more sophisticated ways. (Muhamad Erwan Syah, Esti Damayanti 2023)

Definition and characteristics of the Independent Curriculum

In this case, the definition of the Merdeka Belajar ³ curriculum is a policy program taken by the Ministry of Education and Culture, Research and Technology with the essence of freedom of thought that teachers have before carrying out the learning process to their students. In the year the data is available, the teaching system will also change from being in the classroom to being outside the classroom. The class will be more lively with more interactive discussions conducted by teachers with their students, with this indirectly teachers can shape the character of students who have independence and courage, are smart and sociable, have good manners and are polite by not only relying on themselves, the ranking system is in school. From the simple description above, it is hoped that this Merdeka curriculum can increase competitiveness and graduates on a national and global scale. (Qomariyah and Maghfiroh 2022)

Educational units in educational institutions within which the teacher and student components are given choices and freedom in implementing the independent learning curriculum by considering all factors that support the implementation of the curriculum so that it can produce new things that are more creative and innovative in learning and life. Every student has an original talent or talent that is within him, so teachers as educators are required to bring out, maintain and develop the talents possessed by students. (Qomariyah and Maghfiroh 2022)

In the independent curriculum policy, learning is carried out by providing learning space and collaboration between students called project-based learning, meaning learning by providing space for teachers and students to analyze problems experienced by students in everyday life, with teachers positioning teachers as mentors and providing direction and solutions to problems experienced by students by exploring student abilities through learning projects. This also aims to make students independent. (Qomariyah and Maghfiroh 2022)

Meanwhile, the characteristics of the Merdeka curriculum include the following:

Focus on Essential Material, Focus on essential materials that allow more time to apply interactive and collaborative learning methods, such as discussion, argumentation, and project-based learning. With more focused materials, teachers have a greater opportunity to pay attention to students' learning processes optimally, including through formative assessments that help understand students' initial abilities and learning needs. This allows teachers to teach and assign assignments more appropriately according to students' abilities and characteristics. (Hida Ainissyifa, Yufi Mohammad Nasrullah, Nurul Fatonah, Shelsya Azzahra Indriani, Syifa Nuril Asyfiya, Alif Rohmah 2023) The benefits of this approach are not only felt by teachers and students, but also by schools. With more space and time to use material concepts according to the school's vision and mission, as well as the conditions of the surrounding environment, schools can focus more on developing students' soft skills. This provides a more meaningful and enjoyable learning experience for students, while improving their literacy and numeracy skills to prepare for a better future. (Hida Ainissyifa, Yufi Mohammad Nasrullah, Nurul Fatonah, Shelsya Azzahra Indriani, Syifa Nuril Asyfiya, Alif Rohmah 2023)

More Flexible, The independent curriculum is considered more flexible than the previous curriculum. This means that teachers, students, and schools have more freedom in carrying out learning activities at school. For example, students are not limited to learning in class by reading books or memorizing, but can learn anywhere to create works or projects. (Hida Ainissyifa, Yufi Mohammad Nasrullah, Nurul Fatonah, Shelsya Azzahra Indriani, Syifa Nuril Asyfiya, Alif Rohmah 2023) In the independent curriculum, competencies or learning achievements are no longer set for each year, but for each specific phase. For example, at the elementary school level, the achievement of phase A is set at the end of grade 2, phase B at the end of grade 4, and phase C at the end of grade 6. This helps teachers in designing the learning flow and adjusting the learning pace to the conditions and needs of students. In addition, class

hours have also changed from 13.00-14.00. These learning hours are not targeted per week, but per year. Thus, schools can design their operations more flexibly. High school students and package C grades II and 12 are given the freedom to choose subjects according to their interests and talents. In other words, the independent curriculum no longer limits students' time. (Hida Ainissyifa, Yufi Mohammad Nasrullah, Nurul Fatonah, Shelsya Azzahra Indriani, Syifa Nuril Asyfiya, Alif Rohmah 2023)

The main objective of the Independent Curriculum in the context of Christian religious education

It is important to emphasize that in the implementation of the Independent Curriculum, learning that focuses on the individual needs of students is the main priority. The goal of the Independent Curriculum in Christian religious education is to create quality learning that is in accordance with the learning needs of each student, known as differentiated learning. Often, teachers or educators assume that the learning methods they apply are the best for students, but in reality, this does not always result in quality and enjoyable learning for students. As a result, students often experience boredom in learning, and the learning outcomes achieved are not in accordance with teacher expectations. (Yamin and Syahrir 2020) In the context of Christian religious education, teachers need to understand the concept of differentiated learning in depth, how to accommodate individual student learning needs, and how to apply it in classroom learning. This involves a comprehensive understanding of the unique needs and characteristics of each student. (Herkulanus Rangga, Yonatan Alex Arifianto 2023)

Differentiated Learning in Christian religious education has a significant impact on creating inclusive and effective learning experiences for students with diverse needs and characteristics. Teachers can respond to individual differences in students, including learning styles, abilities, and interests, allowing for adaptive and responsive learning. In the context of Christian religious education, this approach allows each student to be actively involved and achieve their spiritual potential according to their needs and characteristics. (Amalia Yunia Rahmawati 2020) Implementation of the Independent Learning Curriculum in Christian Religious Education Subjects, the use of a variety of learning materials and resources is a key element. This aims to create a learning environment that suits the needs and preferences of

individual **students**. Christian Religious Education teachers who understand students' learning styles can develop effective teaching strategies. (Doni 2024) The concept of the Independent Learning Curriculum, which encourages freedom and independence in learning, encourages the use of a variety of learning materials and resources that can accommodate different learning styles. (Mariawan, Hadiyaturrido, and Rahayu 2023) As a Christian Religious Education teacher, a variety of learning materials such as text, video, audio, and interactive elements allow students to choose the most effective way of learning for them.

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Piaget's theory integration strategy in the Independent Curriculum

Of course, **in the Independent Curriculum**, Piaget's cognitive principles can be initiated to strengthen students' understanding and processing of information. Here are some ways this integration can be done:

First, Experience-Based Learning. The Independent Curriculum has the potential to encourage learning that focuses on direct experience, where students can conduct observations, experiments, and direct exploration of the concepts taught. Through this experience, students are actively involved in processing information and building a deeper understanding. (Elfrianto, Indra Utama, Akmaluddin 2020) These principles are one of the main pillars in the Independent Curriculum concept, which emphasizes an approach that allows students to experience learning through direct experience and experience knowledge with real-world situations.

This approach not only delivers theoretical information, but also emphasizes the importance of applying knowledge in the context of real and concrete projects. In experiential learning, students are given assignments or projects that reflect real-world situations. They not only gain theoretical understanding, but also face challenges that require problem solving, creativity, and collaboration. For example, in a science lesson, students may be asked to design an experiment, collect data, and present the results in a meaningful format.

Second, Higher Thinking Questions . Teachers can use questions that encourage critical and reflective thinking, according to the stage of students' cognitive development. These questions can trigger deep thinking processes and help students process information better. (Haryanti 2017) Critical thinking skills are an important aspect of education that are not only useful in academic contexts, but also **in everyday life and the world of work**. Having critical thinking skills allows individuals to face challenges more effectively, analyze information more carefully, and make better decisions.

Third, Constructive Thinking Activities. The Independent Curriculum can provide activities that encourage students to be actively involved in building their own knowledge. (Agustina and Zaim 2023) This can be in the form of collaborative projects, group discussions, or problem solving that requires constructive thinking from students. In learning activities, the teacher only acts as a motivator and facilitator.

Fourth, Emphasis on Stages of Cognitive Development. The Independent Curriculum can pay attention to the stages of cognitive development proposed by Piaget in designing the curriculum and learning activities. (Wahyuni, Uswatun, and Fauziati 2023) By understanding these stages, teachers can develop teaching strategies that are appropriate to the level of understanding and abilities of students.

Fifth, Formative Evaluation. The Independent Curriculum can use regular formative evaluation to track the progress of students' understanding. (Rambung et al. 2023) This allows teachers to provide appropriate feedback and help students identify areas where they need to focus more on reading information.

By integrating the principles of Piaget's cognitive theory into the Independent Curriculum, the learning approach can be adjusted to the needs and abilities of students, thereby increasing the effectiveness of learning in strengthening understanding and processing information.

Examples of the application of Piaget's theory in Christian religious learning

First, Piaget helped teachers understand that the primary goal of education is student development or growth. For Christians, the ultimate goal of human development is for them to glorify God by becoming like Jesus Christ in all aspects of life. The difficult task for Christian educators is to help students develop so that they reflect the character of Christ. Therefore, Christian educators are not only tasked with transferring knowledge, but also responsible as character educators who shape students to be more like Christ. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Second, Piaget helped teachers understand that knowledge is the result of social activity. Humans grow and develop when they interact with others. This phenomenon is illustrated in the example of the early church where they studied the Bible together, resulting in their spiritual growth (cf. Acts 2:41-47). Although good lectures and powerful discourses may be important

stimuli in education, Piaget emphasized that interaction between individuals is the main key in the growth experience. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Third, Piaget helped teachers understand that learning is a process involving balance and balancing. Humans grow when they are confronted with the issues and problems of life in the light of God's Word. Life is filled with disappointments and challenges, and is influenced by sin at every stage of spiritual growth. Humans are always in tension between the way they are and how they should live according to God's teachings. The good news of the gospel must always be the answer to the bad news of the human condition. The purpose of knowledge, even knowledge of the Bible, is to be a tool in helping humans resolve their deepest dilemmas. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Fourth, this theory reminds us that the learning process experienced by a child must be in accordance with the stage of his cognitive development, because the cognitive stage controls what the child can learn. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021) This principle can be seen in the practice of the Lord Jesus, where in interacting with people, He used different approaches. For example, Jesus' attitude toward children (Matthew 19:13-15) was different from His attitude in interacting with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26).

Fifth, parents as members of the congregation should be creative in providing new information to children, especially in the context of Christian Religious Education (PAK), as stated in Deuteronomy 6:4-9. This can be done through the use of stories, play tools, games, and other methods. When teaching children about numbers, for example, it is important to show objects that can be counted. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Sixth, Because children's mindsets are different and less logical than adults, teachers must have a good understanding of how children think. Teaching should be adjusted to their mindset, not the other way around expecting children to adapt to the teacher's mindset. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Seventh, ⁶¹ It is also important to note that teaching is not only about providing information, but also about direct experience. Therefore, the combination of providing information and allowing children to experience directly is very important. In other words, a balance between telling and direct experience must be maintained. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Eighth, the balancing process (equilibration) is also very important for the development of knowledge, while maintaining children's mental stability. This process allows children to continue to develop in their understanding, while maintaining mental and emotional balance. (Nainggolan and Daeli 2021)

Implications for Christian Religious Education

The implications of Piaget's cognitive principles in the Independent Learning Curriculum in Christian Religious Education subjects can provide significant information impacts in improving students' understanding and processing.

The Merdeka Belajar curriculum encourages learning that is centered on students' direct experiences. (Pertiwi, Nurfatimah, and Hasna 2022) In the context of Christian religious education, this can be realized through direct exploration of religious concepts, such as through group discussions, observations, or practical activities such as church services or services. Through these direct experiences, students can actively engage in deeper religious understanding and experience.

Teachers can use questions that encourage critical and reflective thinking in Christian religious learning. (Jome 2023) These questions can help students develop a deeper understanding of religious concepts, as well as trigger critical and analytical thinking processes. For example, teachers can ask questions that invite students to convey the moral of a Bible story or the ethical consequences of an action.

The Independent Curriculum can provide activities that encourage students to be actively involved in constructing their own knowledge in the context of Christianity. (Lahagu and Hidayat 2023) This could include group discussions on the principles of Christian faith, collaborative projects on the application of religious values in everyday life, or problem solving that requires constructive thinking about moral or theological dilemmas.

The Independent Curriculum can allow for greater focus on essential material in Christian religious education, allowing teachers more time to explore key concepts and facilitate deeper understanding. (Nugroho Oktavianus Heri Prasetyo 2014) This can help students gain a more comprehensive understanding of biblical teachings and the principles of the Christian faith, and apply these values in their daily lives.

By integrating Piaget's cognitive principles into the Independent Learning Curriculum in Christian Religious Education subjects, educators ¹⁵ can create more engaging, relevant, and effective learning experiences for students. This not only helps improve students' understanding of religious concepts, but also forms strong character and spiritual values within them.

CONCLUSION

Piaget put forward the main principles in the theory of cognitive development, emphasizing that children's thinking is not only less mature due to limited knowledge compared to adults, but also qualitatively different. ¹ The stages of cognitive development according to Piaget ¹⁶ include the sensorimotor stage, the symbolic pre-thinking stage, concrete operational, and formal operational. Each stage has its own characteristics and supports the evolution of children's thinking from reflective responses to abstract and analytical thinking skills. ⁶³ The Independent Learning Curriculum is a policy program that emphasizes teachers' freedom of thought in implementing a learning process that accommodates students' individual learning needs. The integration of Piaget's theory in the Independent Curriculum can be done with an experience-based approach, highly inspiring questions, constructive thinking activities, an emphasis on stages of cognitive development, and formative evaluation. The application of Piaget's theory in Christian religious learning has a significant impact on improving students' understanding and processing of religious concepts, through direct experience, critical questions, self-knowledge-building activities, and a focus on essential material. ³⁴ Thus, this article underlines the importance of understanding the stages of cognitive development, the integration of Piaget's theory in the Independent Curriculum, and the application of these principles in Christian religious learning to improve the effectiveness of education and student development.

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