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Capacity Building in Christian Religious Education, Family Education, and Entrepreneurial Spirit Development: Strengthening Services and Growth of Congregation at Toraja Church in Kuala Lumpur

Djoys Anneke Rantung¹, Desi Sianipar^{2*}, Mesta Limbong³, Ktut Silvanita⁴, Wiwik Sri Widiarti⁵, Ingrid M. Kaliey⁶

^{1,2,6}Master of Christian Religious Education, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

³Master of Education Administration, Postgraduate Program, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁴Management, Faculty of Economics and Business, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

⁵Master of Law, Faculty of Law, Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Jakarta, Indonesia

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Abstract

This community service program aims to strengthen the effectiveness of ministry and the growth of the diaspora congregation of the Toraja Church in Kuala Lumpur through capacity building in Christian Religious Education, Family Education, and Entrepreneurial Spirit Development. The program was conducted by five lecturers and one student from four study programs at Universitas Kristen Indonesia (UKI), in collaboration with the Toraja Church in Kuala Lumpur. Based on informal consultations, the congregation expressed a need for training in church ministry, family education, child protection, and entrepreneurial mindset development. The capacity-building activities were delivered through interactive seminars. These activities emphasized strengthening theological understanding of ministry and family, enhancing family communication skills, and introducing practical entrepreneurial principles relevant to the diaspora context. The outcomes of the training indicated increased knowledge, greater confidence in implementing church ministry and family education practices, and heightened motivation to initiate small-scale entrepreneurial efforts. This program demonstrates that an integrative capacity-building model is effective in supporting the holistic growth of diaspora congregations.

1. Introduction

The Toraja diaspora community in Kuala Lumpur represents a Christian migrant group that strives to live and grow in a context far removed from their ancestral homeland, while simultaneously navigating complex social, cultural, and spiritual dynamics. As a migrant congregation, they are required to preserve their faith identity, cultural values, and religious practices within a multicultural environment. These circumstances form the foundation for the implementation of a community empowerment program through Christian Religious Education (CRE), family education, and entrepreneurial development as strategic efforts to strengthen church ministry and support the growth of the diaspora congregation.

Within the diaspora context, members of the Toraja congregation often experience pressures of cultural assimilation, intergenerational value differences, and challenges in maintaining spiritual discipline within a setting that differs significantly from their place of origin. Recent studies reveal that diaspora churches are vulnerable to weakened faith practices, limited internal leadership capacity, and discontinuity in religious education when not supported by contextual and structured formation (Wilson & Smith, 2019; Lee et al., 2021). While various stakeholders—such as local churches and migrant support groups—have provided social and pastoral assistance, educational interventions that

*Corresponding author, email: desi.sianipar07@gmail.com

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intentionally integrate faith formation, cultural preservation, and the specific needs of diaspora communities remain scarce.

The limited availability of educational materials that are relevant to diaspora contexts indicates the need for a more systematic empowerment program. Studies from the last five years affirm that education plays a significant role in strengthening diaspora identity, enhancing congregational participation, and building spiritual resilience amid cultural transitions (Smith & Jones, 2020; Krause et al., 2022). Therefore, this community engagement initiative is designed to address the real needs of the Toraja diaspora congregation in Kuala Lumpur through the strengthening of Christian religious education, family education, and entrepreneurship training.

The primary objective of this program is to enhance the quality of church ministry and the spiritual growth of the diaspora congregation (Pătru, 2021) through contextualized educational strategies. The program targets three key areas: (1) sustaining faith and spiritual formation within a cross-cultural environment, (2) strengthening the role of families as centers of intergenerational faith transmission, and (3) improving the congregation's economic capacity through entrepreneurship skill development. These activities are implemented by emphasizing active community participation through seminars, participatory discussions, and collaborative partnerships between church leaders and the congregation.

The conceptual framework of this initiative draws on recent scholarship on contextual theological education, diaspora leadership formation, and the integration of educational practices with the social dynamics of migrant communities (Tang, 2025; Marshall, 2024). These perspectives underscore that education within diaspora settings must be designed adaptively, grounded in the lived experiences of the community, and capable of fostering both cultural and spiritual resilience. Thus, this introduction provides the foundational rationale for the subsequent sections, which discuss the methods, implementation strategies, and anticipated impact of the empowerment program for the Toraja diaspora congregation through a holistic and contextually responsive educational approach.

2. Methods

This Community Service Program was carried out through a participatory seminar as the primary approach to address the needs of faith formation, family education, and economic capacity building among the Toraja diaspora congregation in Kuala Lumpur. This method adapts the principles of participatory learning, which emphasize active involvement of participants throughout the learning process (Wood, 2020).

The activity was conducted on 15 November 2025, from 10:00 to 16:00, and consisted of four main sessions: (1) faith formation, (2) family education, (3) child protection, and (4) basic entrepreneurial skills development. The program took place at the Toraja Church Kuala Lumpur, selected because it serves as the spiritual and social hub of the diaspora congregation and offers facilities that support seminar-based learning. The seminar was attended by approximately 50 families, including parents, youth, and church leaders. The diverse occupational backgrounds of the participants made the interactive seminar approach particularly relevant and effective.

The seminar was implemented through a combination of lectures, discussions, and dialogic interaction. The procedural stages consisted of:

- a) Needs identification, aimed at mapping issues related to faith formation, family education, and household economic challenges;
- b) Material delivery using an interactive lecturing approach modified from community empowerment models (Theresia et al., 2014);
- c) Group discussion and question-answer sessions, designed to deepen understanding and formulate practical solutions; and
- d) Reflection and brief evaluation, to assess changes in participants' knowledge and responses to the seminar.

Prior to the implementation of the program, the diaspora congregation exhibited a need for contextual faith formation, strengthened family-based religious education, and practical solutions to address economic challenges common among migrant workers. These conditions indicated the necessity of a targeted intervention through structured seminar activities.

The expected outcomes of the program included:

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- a) Enhanced understanding of faith formation within diaspora contexts;
- b) Strengthened family roles as centers of intergenerational faith transmission;
- c) Increased foundational knowledge of entrepreneurship among migrant families; and
- d) Improved motivation for sustained engagement in both spiritual and economic empowerment initiatives.

This method was chosen because it is effective for short-term programs that require both knowledge transfer and active community participation (Wood, 2020; Theresia et al., 2014).

3. Result and Discussion

The participatory seminar held on 15 November 2025 at the Toraja Church in Kuala Lumpur successfully engaged approximately 50 Toraja diaspora families representing diverse occupational backgrounds. The program employed interactive learning methods through participatory seminars and guided reflections, aligning with Wood's (2020) participatory principles and the empowerment model proposed by Theresia et al. (2014). This approach was particularly relevant given the needs of diaspora congregations for educational interventions that are not merely theoretical but also directly applicable to their lived experiences in a multicultural environment.

The activity consisted of four core sessions—faith formation, family education, child protection, and basic entrepreneurial skills training. The faith formation session emphasized spiritual disciplines such as personal prayer, family worship, and regular Scripture reading, which are essential for diaspora congregations navigating cultural assimilation pressures in Malaysia. The centrality of parents as primary educators within the household was highlighted, as they are expected to guide their families in shaping their children's faith identity, preventing generational alienation, and ensuring the sustained transmission of Christian values in a multicultural context. The family education component underscored the role of parents as the center of intergenerational faith transmission, with discussions revealing a gap between first-generation migrants who uphold traditional customs and second-generation youth who are increasingly acculturated. The material emphasized parents' responsibilities as primary educators, thereby strengthening household solidarity. The session outcomes encouraged participants to develop intergenerational family programs in which parents not only transmit religious knowledge but also foster children's emotional resilience amid social pressures—an approach that aligns with contextual Christian education strategies for diaspora congregations.



Picture 1. The four speakers were delivering their seminar presentations: Dr. Wiwik Sri Widiarty, Dr. Ktut Silvanita, Dr. Djoys Anneke Ranting, and Dr. Desi Sianipar

The child protection session addressed forms of physical, psychological, sexual, and social abuse according to Indonesia's Law No. 35/2014 and Malaysia's Child Act 2001, with a focus on prevention through responsible parenting. This knowledge is essential for diaspora families who are vulnerable to child neglect due to demanding informal work schedules and migration-related stress. Parents were guided to recognize indicators such as malnutrition and bullying. The significance of this session lies in empowering parents as primary protectors who can implement preventive strategies such as emotional monitoring and child-rights education, thereby ensuring a safe environment that supports children's holistic development in the host country.



Picture 2. Community Service Team together with some of seminar participants

The entrepreneurship training introduced key entrepreneurial characteristics, including self-confidence, innovation, and risk-taking, as well as business ideas derived from hobbies or local skills to strengthen family economic resilience. Within the diaspora context, such skills are crucial for reducing dependence on precarious employment. Families were encouraged to explore micro-enterprise opportunities such as traditional food production or craft making for the multicultural Kuala Lumpur market. The importance of entrepreneurial skills within the family lies in the parents' role as models of industriousness, where creativity and responsible work contribute to household income, generate internal employment, and integrate Christian ethical values—such as integrity—into sustainable economic practices.



Picture 3. Community Service Team together with the elders of the Toraja Church in Kuala Lumpur

Together, the four sessions formed a complementary framework in which parents, as educators, protectors, and household entrepreneurs, play a central role in strengthening diaspora church ministry. Discussions and evaluations indicated increased motivation to form small groups and initiate entrepreneurial ventures, supporting congregational growth (Brown, 2018; Ferguson, 2021) through integrative education. Looking ahead, the church is encouraged to further ensure spiritual and economic resilience amid the dynamic realities of migration.

3. Conclusion

The empowerment program for the Toraja diaspora community in Kuala Lumpur, implemented through a participatory seminar on 15 November 2025, successfully strengthened the congregation amid challenges of cultural assimilation and economic vulnerability by focusing on four key pillars: enhancing spiritual discipline to preserve faith identity; reinforcing the role of parents as the primary agents of intergenerational faith transmission; increasing understanding of child protection within the context of migration; and introducing basic entrepreneurial skills to promote economic self-reliance. Collectively, these sessions comprehensively supported spiritual growth and improved the resilience of diaspora families, positioning contextual education as a key strategy for strengthening church ministry and community life, as well as fostering congregational growth.

Author Contributions

Djoys Anneke Rantung: Conceptualized and developed content on the role of parents in children's religious education. **Desi Sianipar:** Conceptualized and developed content on Christian religious education within the family context. **Mesta Limbong:** Conceptualized and developed content on family education. **Ktut Silvanita:** Conceptualized and developed content on entrepreneurship. **Wiwik Sri Widiarti:** Conceptualized and developed content on child protection. **Ingrid M. Kaliey:** Performed the editing and refinement of the manuscript.

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Declaration of Conflicting Interests

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