

Verbal Abuse Among Theology Students: A Biblical Analysis and Pastoral Response Through Faith-and-Character-Based Christian Education

Rosmiaty Loly*, Lengan Pait, Florence Farida

Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Tenggarong, Indonesia

Email: roseloly060304@gmail.com*, lenganpait46@gmail.com, fflower2911@gmail.com

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Abstract

Verbal abuse has become an increasingly concerning issue within higher education environments, including theological institutions, where students are expected to develop spiritual maturity, ethical behavior, and Christ-centered character. Destructive forms of communication—such as insults, sarcasm, labeling, humiliation, and verbal intimidation—can negatively impact students’ psychological well-being, academic participation, self-esteem, and spiritual growth. This study aims to analyze the phenomenon of verbal abuse among theology students through biblical, pastoral, and Christian educational perspectives, using Ephesians 4:29 as the primary theological foundation. A qualitative approach was employed, combining library research with theological-pastoral analysis. Relevant literature from biblical theology, pastoral care, Christian education, psychology, and communication studies was systematically reviewed using content analysis. The study also applied the Pastoral Circle framework, which includes seeing reality, socio-theological analysis, faith reflection, and pastoral action. The findings reveal that verbal abuse not only harms students’ emotional and social well-being but also contradicts Christian communication ethics and the principles of grace-centered relationships. The study concludes that integrating biblical teachings, pastoral care, and faith-based character education is essential to fostering constructive communication, promoting emotional healing, supporting spiritual transformation, and cultivating a healthier campus culture among theology students.

INTRODUCTION

The campus environment, including Tenggarong Theological College (STT Tenggarong), serves as a space for the formation of theology students’ identity, character, spirituality, and academic competence, preparing them to become church leaders and public servants. As a faith-based academic community, STT Tenggarong ideally functions as a safe, supportive, and constructive learning ecosystem. However, emerging social realities indicate that deviations in interpersonal relationships can still occur, one of which is verbal abuse or violence. This includes insults, labeling, ridicule, sarcasm, cornering, and demeaning comments, both in person and through digital media. Such behavior on a theological campus has a dual impact: it harms students’ mental health and undermines the witness of the faith community (Aisyah, 2023).

Psychological research demonstrates that verbal violence significantly affects students' anxiety, self-esteem, and emotional vulnerability (Hidayati & Sari, 2020). In higher education, including theological colleges, these conditions can impede learning, academic interaction, and spiritual development. (Edmondson, 2019) emphasizes that a learning environment must provide psychological safety to enable individuals to grow, learn, and develop their character optimally. Consequently, verbal abuse on theological campuses poses a serious threat not only to student well-being but also to STT Tenggarong's mission of forming servants of Christ with integrity.

From a pastoral theology perspective, verbal abuse must be analyzed not only psychologically or socially but also theologically and spiritually. Biblical, pastoral, and educational theology emphasizes that healthy Christian ministry integrates biblical, pastoral, and educational elements to address the real struggles of congregations or students. Within this framework, Ephesians 4:29 was selected as a biblical foundation, emphasizing the use of words that build up, strengthen, and become channels of grace. According to (Stott, 2007), the ethics of speech in Ephesians characterize the new man in Christ and must be reflected in the Christian community, including academic theological communities.

Verbal abuse in educational environments has become a serious global issue because it is often normalized as humor, discipline, criticism, or ordinary peer interaction, despite its psychologically and spiritually destructive effects. In higher education, verbal abuse can take the form of insults, sarcasm, labeling, intimidation, body shaming, and humiliating comments, whether in face-to-face or digital communication. This problem is particularly complex in theological education, as students are not only academic learners but also future pastors, church leaders, and Christian educators, expected to demonstrate Christlike communication, moral integrity, and spiritual maturity. Thus, verbal abuse among theology students must be understood not merely as a communication problem but as a crisis of character, faith formation, and pastoral responsibility.

Globally, violence and bullying in educational settings affect millions of learners. UNESCO reports that approximately 246 million children and adolescents experience school violence and bullying annually, illustrating the widespread nature of abusive interactions. The World Health Organization notes that bullying, in both physical and online forms, is linked to depression, anxiety, suicidality, and long-term mental health consequences. These data indicate that verbal abuse should not be treated as a minor interpersonal issue, as words can profoundly shape self-concept, emotional security, academic engagement, and social participation.

This study specifically addresses verbal abuse among theology students in Christian higher education. While STT Tenggarong aims to provide a safe and supportive environment for shaping students' identity, spirituality, character, and academic competence, the reality of insults, ridicule, labeling, sarcasm, cornering, and demeaning comments shows that destructive communication persists even within a faith-based academic community. This creates a dual problem: it harms students' psychological well-being and diminishes the Christian witness of the theological campus.

Previous studies indicate that verbal abuse and bullying are closely associated with emotional and psychological issues among students. For instance, Ibrahim et al. found that bullying among medical and health sciences students affected self-esteem, anxiety, and depression. A 2024 study on female college students reported an association between verbal

abuse and social anxiety, highlighting the negative impact on students' confidence in social interactions. Additionally, a 2025 study on verbal bullying showed that such behavior could lead to anxiety, depression, low self-esteem, and difficulties in academic and social functioning. These findings confirm that verbal abuse has measurable consequences for student development.

In the field of Christian education, recent studies emphasize the importance of character formation, moral education, and Scripture-based pedagogy. Arthur notes that Christian education in virtues is rooted in Christian anthropology and aims to form human flourishing through communal moral formation. Recent studies also argue that Christian education must respond to moral degradation, digital disruption, and weakening empathy among students. Studies on Ephesians-based Christian education further highlight that character formation must be biblical, contextual, and holistic. These studies provide a strong foundation for connecting verbal abuse, Christian character education, and theological reflection.

Despite existing research on bullying, verbal violence, student mental health, and Christian character education, there remains a gap in integrating psychological, biblical, pastoral, and pedagogical perspectives into a unified analytical framework. Many studies treat verbal abuse as a mental health or communication issue, but fewer examine it as a theological and pastoral concern within the formation of theology students. This study addresses this gap by using Ephesians 4:29 as the biblical foundation and the Pastoral Circle as the analytical framework to understand reality, conduct socio-theological analysis, reflect on faith, and formulate pastoral action.

The urgency of this research lies in the fact that theology students are being prepared to become pastors, church leaders, teachers, counselors, and public servants. If destructive speech is normalized during their formation, it may later be reproduced in church ministry, Christian education, counseling, and community leadership. Verbal abuse therefore threatens not only individual students but also the quality of future Christian leadership. A theological campus must serve as a healing and formative community, where speech builds, restores, and communicates grace rather than wounds or humiliates.

The novelty of this research is its integrative approach, examining verbal abuse through biblical analysis, pastoral theology, and faith- and character-based Christian education. Rather than merely describing the psychological impact of verbal abuse, this study frames destructive speech as a violation of Christian verbal ethics and a failure of character formation. By focusing on Ephesians 4:29, it provides a biblical basis for transforming destructive words into words that build up and convey grace. Using the Pastoral Circle, the study also proposes practical pastoral and pedagogical responses to foster campus transformation.

The purpose of this research is to analyze verbal abuse among theology students from biblical, pastoral, and Christian educational perspectives. Specifically, it examines how Ephesians 4:29 can guide ethical communication, how the Pastoral Circle can interpret the reality of verbal abuse, and how Christian education can shape students' speech, character, empathy, and spiritual maturity. The study aims to generate both academic understanding and practical strategies for healing, restoration, and character formation.

This research is expected to contribute both theoretically and practically to Christian higher education. Theoretically, it enriches discourse on verbal abuse by linking mental health, pastoral care, biblical ethics, and character education. Practically, it provides guidance for

theological campuses to develop counseling services, communication ethics, empathy training, restorative dialogue, and faith-based character formation programs. The ultimate benefit is that theology students can understand their identity in Christ, practice grace-filled communication, avoid destructive speech, and help build a healthier, safer, and more Christ-centered academic community.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative research approach using a library research method and a theological-pastoral framework. A qualitative approach was selected because the study seeks to understand the phenomenon of verbal abuse among theology students in depth, focusing on meaning, values, relational experiences, and reflections on the Christian faith. The research emphasizes interpretation rather than statistical measurement, analyzing the phenomenon from biblical, pastoral, and Christian educational perspectives.

The library research method was used to examine various relevant sources, including the Bible, books on biblical theology, pastoral care, Christian education, educational psychology, nationally accredited scientific journals, and documents pertaining to verbal abuse. The study also incorporates a biblical hermeneutical approach to Ephesians 4:29 as the foundational text for understanding Christian communication ethics and character formation within the faith community. Text analysis considered the historical, linguistic, and theological context of the letter to the Ephesians, with particular attention to the concepts of *sapros logos* (destructive speech) and *oikodomē* (edifying speech).

For data reflection and interpretation, the study uses the Pastoral Circle method, which consists of four stages: seeing reality, socio-theological analysis, faith reflection, and pastoral action. The seeing stage involved identifying the reality of verbal abuse in the student environment through a review of psychological, educational, and social literature. The analysis stage connected this phenomenon with perspectives from pastoral theology and Christian education. The faith reflection stage interpreted Ephesians 4:29 and Gospel values, emphasizing grace, restoration, and character transformation. Finally, the pastoral action stage formulated strategies and recommendations that could be applied within Christian campus communities to address and prevent verbal abuse.

Content analysis was used as the primary data analysis technique, systematically examining, classifying, and interpreting textual data from library sources. The analysis was conducted thematically based on three main pillars: biblical theology, pastoral theology, and Christian education. Results from these analyses were integrated to produce a holistic understanding of verbal abuse and its implications for the character formation and spiritual growth of theology students. The validity of the study was strengthened through source triangulation, comparing multiple theological, psychological, and pedagogical perspectives relevant to the research topic.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Theological and Ethical Meaning of Ephesians 4:29

Negative prohibition: Destructive speech is not simply a social offense, but goes against the new identity in Christ. (Wright's, 2013) commentary emphasizes that language is “the first place where holiness is seen.” Positive command: Educative speech is not simply social

etiquette, but a manifestation of God's love through human lips. Spiritual purpose: Language becomes a medium of grace. In other words, our speech should “reveal the face of God” to the listener. Ethical implications: Ethics of speech is part of spiritual discipline. Speaking is both a moral and a spiritual act.

Relevance to Christian and Pastoral Education

In the document *Biblical Theology, Pastoral Care, and Christian Education* (pp. 3–6), it is emphasized that all pastoral actions must be rooted in God's grand narrative. Ephesians 4:29 places the transformation of speech as part of the discipleship process. This transformation reflects: Character education, training students to communicate with empathy, integrity, and love. Faith formation, language is not only horizontal communication, but also a reflection of a vertical relationship with God. Pastoral care, Verbal abuse is seen as a relational wound that requires holistic healing: physical–emotional–spiritual–communal.

In the context of Tenggara STT, Ephesians 4:29 is relevant because: Theology students are prepared to become church leaders. Language ethics will determine the quality of spiritual leadership. A constructive campus culture must begin with healthy speech literacy. (Manurung's, 2021) research in the *Veritas Lux Mea Journal* shows that speech ethics within the theological community influence students' spiritual maturity and character development. (Hamid's, 2020) research in the *Koinonia Journal* also emphasizes that spiritual transformation must be seen in changes in communication patterns as part of discipleship.

Case: Verbal Abuse Among Students

Verbal abuse (verbal violence) is increasingly prevalent on campus, both between students, between lecturers and students, and within campus digital communities. This verbal abuse is a form of psychological violence that causes invisible emotional wounds but has long-term impacts on students' personality development, academic motivation, and mental health.

- a. Labeling or Negative Labeling. Examples of phrases include: "You're stupid!" "You don't deserve to study here!" Negative labels create self-fulfilling prophecies that destroy self-concept. According to (Santrock, 2020), negative labeling can create a dysfunctional self-identity and decrease motivation to learn.
- b. Sarcasm is Demeaning. Sarcasm is often packaged as humor, but it actually serves to demean others. Research by (Nurjanah, 2021) shows that sarcasm in campus communication increases anxiety and passive-aggressiveness among students.
- c. Body Shaming. Body-related comments such as: “You’re so fat!”, “Your cheeks look like steamed buns!” Body shaming has been shown to increase the risk of depression, eating disorders, and decreased self-esteem (Rahmawati & Indrawati, 2020).
- d. Insulting Speech in WhatsApp Groups or Social Media. This form of cyber-verbal abuse includes rude, demeaning, and insulting comments in class groups, student organizations, or campus accounts. (Wahyuni, 2020) states that digital verbal abuse has the same severe psychological impact as face-to-face violence.
- e. Intimidating Words from Lecturers or Seniors. Some lecturers or seniors use harsh words under the pretext of “motivation,” such as: “If you do this, you will never graduate!” , “Your class is the stupidest!” According to (Tilaar, 2019), authoritarian educational practices like this create an unhealthy academic culture and reduce the quality of pedagogical relationships.

Psychological Impact of Verbal Abuse on Students

- a. **Decreased Self-Esteem and Self-Concept.** Verbal abuse erodes students' self-confidence and forms negative self-schema. (Rogers, 1961) stated that self-concept is formed through interpersonal experiences full of acceptance (unconditional positive regard). Verbal abuse does the opposite: rejecting, insulting, and damaging. In the Indonesian context, research by (Astuti, 2021) shows that verbal abuse is directly related to low self-esteem in students.
- b. **Social Anxiety.** Students who are victims of verbal abuse often fear speaking, performing in class, or interacting. Research by Yuliani & Putra (2022, Sinta 2) shows that the experience of verbal humiliation increases performative anxiety and interferes with academic participation.
- c. **Community Withdrawal.** Victims tend to isolate themselves from social circles, campus organizations, and even church. This can diminish a sense of belonging, which, according to (McMillan & Chavis, 1986), is crucial for mental health and academic engagement.
- d. **Loss of Academic Motivation.** Students who frequently experience insults and intimidation experience learned helplessness and feel powerless to improve their situation. (Wibowo's, 2020) study found that verbal pressure and academic humiliation decrease intrinsic motivation and increase burnout.
- e. **Emotional Wounds That Hinder Spiritual Growth and Faith.** Within the framework of pastoral theology, verbal wounds are not only psychological but also spiritual. Destructive words disrupt one's self-image as an imago Dei, one's relationship with the faith community, and one's belief in God's love. According to (Hunter, 2006), unhealed psychological wounds can affect one's perception of God, oneself, and others.

Pastoral Analysis: Touching the Heart and Context of Human Suffering

The Cure of Souls document emphasizes that pastoral care must address the heart and context of human suffering. In cases of verbal abuse on campus, a pastoral approach should encompass the following aspects:

- a. **Emotional Healing.** Pastors/servants of God, Christian Education lecturers, or spiritual counselors need to listen empathetically, provide a safe space for expressing hurt, and validate the victim's experience. According to (Lartey, 2003), pastoral empathy is the foundation of healing within the context of culture and interpersonal relationships.
- b. **Restoring Identity as the Image of God (Restoring Imago Dei).** Verbal abuse damages self-perception, so pastoral care needs to remind people that human dignity comes from God, not from human humiliation; reinstilling the values of love, acceptance, and dignity. This aligns with (Berkhof's, 2006) theology of humanity, which emphasizes the ontological value of human beings, which cannot be erased by violence.
- c. **Transformational Care.** Care is not just about comforting, but also about rebuilding a positive self-concept, developing spiritual resilience, and practicing assertive communication. According to (Pattison, 2010), pastoral care should enable a person to experience life transformation through God's love.
- d. **Campus Community Intervention.** The campus, as an ecosystem, must create a healthy verbal culture. Christian educational pastoral care should encourage a code of ethics for communication, sensitivity training for lecturers and seniors, anti-verbal bullying campaigns, and safe counseling spaces. This aligns with Rogers' humanistic educational

approach, which emphasizes a positive, non-threatening environment as a prerequisite for optimal growth.

Biblical Study with the Pastoral Circle Method

The Pastoral Cycle method is a theological approach that helps researchers and pastoral workers view phenomena through a process of seeing, assessing, acting, and celebrating. In the first stage (seeing/inserting), the focus is on reading reality honestly, critically, and comprehensively.

a. Stage I – Seeing (Inserting: Social Reality-Student).

The "seeing" stage in the Pastoral Circle aims to observe reality as it is, particularly the struggles of students experiencing verbal abuse. This reading of reality is conducted objectively and subjectively, as emphasized in pastoral theology that ministry must begin with an understanding of "the subjective reality of everyday human life" (Lartey, 2003).

The Reality of the Current Student Environment. Various studies and observations describe students under significant verbal and psychological pressure. Competitive Culture and Harsh Academic Pressure. Campuses are often filled with a competitive climate, high standards, and unbalanced academic demands. This culture often gives rise to harsh forms of communication, including insults, sarcasm, and oppressive comments. Research by Wibowo (2020, Sinta 2) shows that a harsh academic culture and competitive orientation increase stress, verbal conflict, and aggressive behavior among students and between lecturers and students. "An unmanaged competitive culture creates abrasive communication, verbal pressure, and unhealthy academic relationships." (Wibowo, 2020) This culture is fertile ground for verbal abuse as a form of expression of frustration or domination.

Derogatory Jokes in Student Social Groups. Students often use offensive humor, such as teasing, sarcasm, belittling physical or ability-based jokes, and insulting jokes. Research by (Sari & Ramadhan, 2021) found that derogatory or aggressive humor is the most common communication pattern and impacts student self-esteem. "Derogatory jokes are considered normal among students, even though psychologically they create inferiority and social anxiety." (Sari & Ramadhan, 2021) In other words, verbal abuse is often hidden behind "humor."

Social Media Magnifies the Effects of Verbal Abuse. The phenomenon of cyber-verbal abuse through WhatsApp groups, Instagram, campus online communities, and student organization groups greatly amplifies the impact of verbal abuse due to its digital nature: it spreads quickly, is difficult to remove, and has a wide audience. (Wahyuni, 2020) found that students who experience verbal abuse through digital media experience higher levels of stress and anxiety compared to face-to-face forms. "Digital media magnifies the reach and impact of verbal abuse, causing victims to experience deeper and longer-lasting psychological distress." (Wahyuni, 2020) Social media not only amplifies verbal attacks, but also makes victims feel uncontrollable exposure.

Family Trauma Reinforces the Cycle of Verbal Abuse. Some students come from families with abusive communication patterns such as being scolded, belittled, compared, and not accepted. This verbal trauma creates two possibilities: becoming a repeat victim, or becoming a perpetrator who repeats the pattern of verbal abuse. Research by (Aisyah & Ridwan, 2020) shows that adolescents or students who have experienced verbal abuse in the family are more susceptible to depression, anxiety, and a tendency to verbally harm others. "Experiences of verbal abuse in the family create aggressive communication patterns that carry over into the

higher education environment." (Aisyah & Ridwan, 2020, p. 104) Thus, universities not only face the problem of verbal abuse that occurs on campus, but also the old wounds that students carry from home.

Relation to Pastoral Theology Perspective

Pastoral theology emphasizes that ministry must begin with a thorough understanding of the human context. (Lartey, 2003) states that: "Pastoral care must begin with an accurate reading of the subjective and everyday realities experienced by individuals." (Lartey, 2003) Thus, reading the reality of verbal abuse in college students is an important step to ensure that pastoral actions are relevant, empathetic, contextual, and able to address the students' real needs. At the stage of seeing, the Pastoral Circle emphasizes that facts are not just data, but "signs of the times" that must be read in the light of faith so that the church and educational institutions understand the students' struggles as a whole.

b. Stage II – Analyze (Social & Theological Analysis).

The second stage of the Pastoral Circle is analyzing the observed reality. The analysis is conducted through two main lenses: Social Analysis, understanding the root causes and socio-cultural dynamics that give rise to the phenomenon of verbal abuse. Theological Analysis, assessing the phenomenon based on the truth of God's Word, particularly Ephesians 4:29. The goal of this stage is to discover the meaning, root causes, and moral-spiritual responsibility of Christian educational institutions regarding this phenomenon.

1). Social Analysis. The phenomenon of verbal abuse does not stand alone, but arises from the social dynamics of campuses and the digital world. Several key factors were identified: Competitive Culture and Unhealthy Academic Climate. In many universities, students are under pressure: high academic demands, peer comparisons, family expectations, and lecturer pressure. This competitive culture can lead to attitudes of belittling, teasing, and putting each other down. (Wibowo, 2020) states: "A competitive climate without emotional support creates aggressive communication behavior and reinforces the practice of verbal violence in the campus environment." This means that a competitive system without empathy literacy will give rise to harsh communication patterns.

Emotional Immaturity and Lack of Empathy Literacy. Many students lack the ability to manage their emotions, understand others' feelings (empathy), and communicate assertively. Research by (Sari & Ramadhan, 2021) found that demeaning humor and sarcasm often arise from students with low emotional control. "Emotional immaturity contributes to the use of hurtful words that are considered normal among students."

Lack of Counseling Mechanisms and Protection Systems on Campus. Most campuses, including theological ones, lack a clear counseling structure or mechanism for handling verbal abuse. As a result, victims don't know where to report it, cases aren't handled professionally, and perpetrators don't receive education or rehabilitation. Research by (Hidayat, 2020) confirms that campuses need counseling systems and anti-bullying policies as part of the educational ecosystem. "The absence of a counseling mechanism leaves student victims of verbal abuse with the psychological burden alone without institutional support." (Hidayat, 2020)

The Influence of Digital Culture: Verbal Abuse Without Accountability. Digital media creates a communication culture that is: fast, impulsive, anonymous, lacking empathy, and difficult to control. (Wahyuni, 2020) found that cyber-verbal abuse has twice the impact on anxiety as face-to-face violence. "Digital culture facilitates verbal abuse without guilt because

the perpetrator cannot directly see the victim's reaction." This phenomenon increases cases of verbal abuse in the student community.

2). Theological Analysis. Theological analysis serves as a lens of faith to assess these social phenomena. Ephesians 4:29 is the key foundation. Words Have Moral and Spiritual Power. Ephesians 4:29 reminds us that “no unwholesome language” should come out of the mouths of believers. This shows that words are not merely social communication, but moral actions, which have a spiritual impact. (Berkhof, 2006) emphasizes that humans as imago Dei are called to reflect God’s character, including in their speech. “Human speech is a reflection of their inner disposition and morality before God.” (Berkhof, 2006).

Humans Are Called to Be Agents of Grace. The phrase "that they may receive grace" (Eph. 4:29) means that words are the means by which God's love is communicated; communication should build, strengthen, and heal, not attack or destroy. This aligns with Christian pastoralism, which emphasizes healing relationships through words that inspire hope (Hunter, 2006).

Verbal Abuse as a Violation of the Ethics of the Kingdom of God. Verbal abuse is contrary to: love (John 13:34), gentleness (Galatians 5:22–23), restoration (Col. 4:6), and Christ's nature as a gentle Shepherd (John 10). (Pattison, 2010) asserts that actions that hurt humans mean hurting "the image of God in humans."

Unifying Analysis: Biblical – Pastoral – Educational Integration

The integration model is like Jesus the Great Shepherd. In the context of analysis, these three pillars complement each other: 1). Biblical Pillar – Revealing God’s Message. The Bible teaches that: words must build (Eph. 4:29), humans are called to reflect Christ’s love in communication, verbal violence damages dignity as imago Dei. Theology becomes the standard for assessing campus conditions. 2). Pastoral Pillar – Seeing the Inner Wounds and the Context of Victims’ Suffering. The pastoral task is to “touch the heart and context of human suffering” (Cure of Souls; Lartey, 2003). Therefore: verbal wounds are inner wounds, victims need healing assistance, perpetrators need education and restoration. Pastoral analysis sees not only symptoms, but the existential wounds experienced by students. 3). Educational Pillar – Teaching New Life Disciplines. From a Christian pedagogical perspective: education shapes character, words become a means of moral formation, lecturers as academic pastors model communication ethics. (Tilaar, 2019) emphasizes that education must shape dignified human beings through respectful communication practices. This integration shows that healing is not only done spiritually, but also pedagogically and structurally.

c. Stage III – Reflecting (Faith Reflection).

The reflection phase of the Pastoral Circle connects students' social realities with the light of the Gospel. At this stage, faith becomes not just an explanation, but a lens that guides the community to see what God wants to do about the phenomenon of verbal abuse. Faith reflection centers on the question: "What does God say about this reality, and how does the Gospel shape our pastoral response?"

Pastoral Questions for Faith Reflection. These questions help interpret the student's reality from the perspective of Christ's love: first, how does the Gospel help students overcome the wounds caused by hurtful words? The questions address aspects of healing, identity restoration, and self-acceptance in Christ. According to (Hunter, 2006), pastoral healing begins when a person realizes that he or she is loved unconditionally by God (unconditional grace), a

gift more powerful than the verbal wounds he or she has received. Second, how can the campus community reflect the body of Christ, building up one another? This question reveals the ethical responsibility of the Christian community: to create a culture of constructive speech, foster empathy, and serve as a safe and healing space for fellow students. (Yewangoe, 2012) asserts that the body of Christ is a "healing community" that exists to restore broken relationships, not deepen wounds.

Reflection of Faith Based on Ephesians 4:29

Reflection of faith in the text of Ephesians 4:29 becomes a spiritual basis in understanding the meaning of Christian communication in the campus context.

1). Linguistic Repentance: Repentance from Injurious Words. Ephesians 4:29 demands that God's people abandon the corrupt and destructive *sapros logos* of speech. Repentance here is not merely moral repentance, but linguistic repentance: turning from destructive ways of speaking to words that heal. According to (Pattison, 2010), true pastoral change begins with "repentance for patterns of thought and speech that injure human values." Therefore, every word must be accounted for before God, in accordance with the teachings of Jesus (Matt. 12:36).

2). Transformation of the Heart: Change in Words is the Fruit of Inner Change. Ephesians 4:29 not only commands behavioral change but also points to the roots of the heart. Words reflect the inner condition: "Out of a full heart, words flow" (Luke 6:45). In a pastoral context, inner change includes: healing wounds, restoring identity as the *imago Dei*, and experiencing God's love personally. (Berkhof, 2006) emphasized that inner transformation is a sign of the renewal of the new human being in Christ, manifested through loving speech. Research by (Sari & Ramadhan, 2021) shows that students with emotional and spiritual stability tend to use more constructive speech.

3). Relational Discipleship: Christian Communities Shaping a Culture of Restorative Speech. Ephesians 4:29 assumes that change is not an individual process, but a communal one. The community plays a major role in shaping the *habitus* of loving communication. In Christian education, discipleship is not just about transferring doctrine, but also shaping a way of life. As Hidayat (2020, p. 78) emphasizes: "Character education cannot be realized without a community that consistently displays communicative behavior that builds each other up." The model of the early church community (Acts 2:42-47) is an example of how healthy relationships become a vessel for healing for the congregation. The Christian campus community must be a space for relational discipleship that: repairs relationships, strengthens each other, and practices the use of words filled with grace.

4). Imitation of Christ: Emulating the Building Words of Jesus. Ephesians 4:29 resonates with the life of Christ as the ultimate example: Luke 4:22: "All spoke well of him and were amazed at his gracious words." John 6:63: "The words I speak are spirit and life." Jesus' words are characterized by: They are full of grace, life-giving, supportive of the weak, and strengthening hope. Within the framework of pastoral education, Patel and Anton (2020, Sinta 2) emphasize that imitation of Christ in communication is central to the character formation of theology students. Thus, Jesus' example becomes the ethical, pedagogical, and spiritual foundation in shaping an anti-verbal abuse culture on campus.

Alignment with the Goals of Christian Education. This reflection on faith affirms that Christian education is not merely the delivery of material, but rather a process of affective,

spiritual, and moral transformation. "Christian education aims to create affective transformation and concrete actions, not just the transfer of information." Tilaar (2019) adds that true education shapes people of character through role models, relationships, and communities that foster values. Thus: language transformation is heart transformation, heart transformation is character transformation, and character transformation is community transformation.

The Core of Pastoral Reflection. Through faith reflection on Ephesians 4:29, the Christian campus community is called to: Present the Gospel as a healing force for verbal wounds. Build a community that reflects the body of Christ—safe, accepting, and healing. Make education a relational discipleship, not just a cognitive transfer. Emulate the words of Christ as the ethical standard of communication. This reflection leads the community to spiritual and ethical transformation that begins with words of grace.

d. Stage IV – Acting (Pastoral Action / Christian Pedagogy) .

The fourth stage of the Pastoral Circle is the culmination of the pastoral process, namely designing concrete actions, both personal, community, and institutional. These actions aim to bring healing, transformation, and cultural change within the campus community. Acting from a pastoral theological perspective includes healing, relationship restoration, character development, and the formation of a community that reflects Christ's love.

1). Pastoral Action. Pastoral action is aimed at restoring victims, rehabilitating perpetrators, and renewing the community. a). Healing Counseling. Empathetic listening. Referring to the "Pastoral Diagnosis: empathetic listening," the first action is to provide a safe space for victims to: express their wounds, process their experiences of verbal abuse, receive emotional validation, and feel support without judgment. According to Lartey (2003), empathetic listening is at the heart of *cura animarum* (care of souls) because it touches the deepest human experiences. Hidayat's (2020) research confirms that students who received empathetic counseling experienced increased resilience and self-confidence. b). Helping victims understand their identity in Christ. Pastoral counseling helps victims re-understand: their dignity as *imago Dei*, God's unwavering love, and a spiritual identity that is not defined by human words. According to Hunter (2006), healing occurs when a person realizes that they are "seen and loved by God in their entirety," allowing verbal wounds to be spiritually mapped and healed.

2). Healing Community. The Christian community is called to be a space of healing, not an arena for new wounds. a). Building small student groups. Small groups can function as: a space for sharing experiences, a place for mutual prayer, a forum for strengthening spiritual identity, and a community that restores relationships. Yewangoe (2012) calls the body of Christ a "healing community" that restores identity and strengthens faith. b). Empathy and assertive communication training. This training is important for: increasing emotional literacy, fostering sensitivity to the impact of words, encouraging assertive responses without hurting, and fostering a verbal culture of mutual respect. Research by Ramadhan & Sari (2021) shows that empathy training reduces the frequency of sarcasm and verbal aggression in students.

3). Intervention for Perpetrators (Rehabilitative Action). Pastoral action not only restores victims, but also restores perpetrators so they do not repeat destructive behavior. a). Theological education about verbal sins. Perpetrators are given an understanding from Ephesians 4:29 that: words have moral, spiritual, and relational impacts, verbal violence is a sin against God and others, speech is called to be a channel of grace. b). Emotional management assistance.

Perpetrators often come from dysfunctional communication patterns. The necessary assistance: anger management, self-awareness, mindset reconstruction, non-violent communication training (Non-Violent Communication). Hidayat (2020) stated that students who commit verbal abuse often have “emotional immaturity that can be rehabilitated through appropriate assistance.”

Christian Education Action (Character Formation)

In addition to pastoral action, educational action is an important strategy for building a healthy campus culture. This confirms the statement of the file (p. 8) that Christian pedagogy should be aimed at being "remembered and practiced," not simply learned. 1). Teaching Christian Speech Ethics based on Ephesians 4:29. Formal and informal education teaches: the ethics of gracious communication, the concept of oikodomē (building up), the dangers of sapos logos (rotten words), and spiritual responsibility for every word. According to Tilaar (2019), education must shape social and verbal ethics, not just academic intelligence. 2). Character Building Workshops. Periodic workshops can include: self-control, integrity in communication, love and empathy, awareness of self-dignity and that of others. Research by Sari & Ramadhan (2021) shows that empathy-based character learning significantly reduces aggressive verbal behavior. 3). Spiritual Practices (Spiritual Disciplines). Christian character building requires spiritual practice: Spiritual journaling, where students write down: emotions, wounds, healing prayers, reflections on daily speech. Self-examination prayer (Examen), this exercise helps students recognize: words that hurt, words that build up, God's presence in conversation. Meditation on the Word (especially texts such as Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 4:6) forms: habits of the heart, awareness of grace, a desire to imitate Christ. According to Mulia (2021), spiritual disciplines improve emotional regulation and compassionate communication. 4). Simulation of "Grace-Filled Communication." Students are trained in: role-playing empathetic responses, restorative dialogue, assertive responses, verbal conflict management. The results: the development of practical skills, increased empathy, the emergence of a healthy verbal culture, the creation of a "Christian speech ecology" on campus. In Christian pedagogy, such practices help students remember and act.

Pastoral-Pedagogical Implications

The integration of pastoral and educational action results in: Personal recovery – student victims recover psychologically and spiritually. Character formation – students learn to speak as disciples of Christ. Cultural transformation – the campus becomes a healing community, not a battlefield. Relational restoration – relationships between community members are renewed. Institutional exemplarity – the campus becomes a model of Christian communication culture. Thus, the action phase is not merely a practical activity, but a transformational step for the entire campus community.

Character Education Theory

The analysis of the Pastoral Circle, the biblical study of Ephesians 4:29, and the reflection on faith provide the foundation for a theory of Christian character education. This theory emphasizes that the transformation of the Christian life is not merely cognitive change, but primarily affective, spiritual, moral, and relational transformation. In line with the source document (p. 5), Christian education should result in affective transformation (a change of heart) and concrete actions (a new ethos), not just the transfer of knowledge. The following are three theories of character that emerged from the analysis:

- a. **Verbal Virtue Theory.** This theory emphasizes that a person's character is manifested through the quality of the words they speak. Ephesians 4:29 commands that every word: edify (oikodome), give grace (charis), replace sapos logos (rotten words). Theologically, Jesus taught that "out of a full heart words overflow" (Luke 6:45). This means: words dismantle inner morality, words are an expression of character, hurtful words are a sign of spiritual and emotional immaturity. **Three Main Disciplines in Christian Character Education.** **Tongue Discipline** Students are taught to control: emotions before speaking, impulses to hurt, how to express themselves assertively and gently. Ramadhan & Sari's (2021) research shows that verbal self-control training reduces students' verbal aggression and improves the quality of social relationships. **Empathic Speech Discipline:** Students practice considering whether words are constructive or hurtful, the emotional state of the person they are speaking to, and the psychological impact of humor, sarcasm, or criticism. This aligns with Rogers (1961) who argued that empathy is central to therapeutic relationships and the formation of a healthy personality. **Truth-in-Love Discipline:** Conversations should be based on honesty but delivered in love (Eph. 4:15). In Christian education, truth-telling and love-speaking are inseparable. Tilaar (2019) asserts that character education demands the integration of honesty, love, and moral courage.
- b. **Christian Relational Ethics Theory.** This theory is based on the belief that Christian relationships are built on grace. Ephesians 4:29 affirms that every word must be a means of grace. Therefore, constructive words strengthen relationships, destructive words damage human dignity (Berkhof, 2006), and communication is a service of love (Hunter, 2006). The main principles of relational ethics theory are: first, words as a service of grace. By speaking, a person becomes: a channel of God's love, an agent of restoration, a bearer of life (John 6:63). In Christian pedagogy, communication is not merely an exchange of information but a service of pastoral love. Second, relationships serve as a platform for character growth. Student communities—classes, dormitories, fellowships—become: spaces for character formation, places for practicing empathy, and arenas for moral deepening. Hidayat (2020) calls educational relationships "spaces for character transformation." Third, words as ethical actions. Every word has a moral value: building or destroying, healing or wounding, strengthening or destroying dignity. Therefore, the ethics of Christian communication is an ethics of love.
- c. **Integrity of Communication Theory.** This theory emphasizes the unity between spiritual identity, Christian values, and verbal expression. Students are called to maintain consistency between faith and communication. Integrity means that what is said aligns with faith, not constructing a spiritual facade but destroying it with words. Speech reflects one's identity as a disciple of Christ.

Theological Basis of Communication Integrity Theory

- a. **Identity in Christ Demands Consistency of Words.** Ephesians 4:24, the "new man," is the basis for the idea that a change in identity results in a change in speech.
- b. **Inconsistency between words and faith is spiritual dishonesty.** James 3:9–12 emphasizes that it is not fitting for a mouth that praises God to curse people, just as the same fountain cannot produce both sweet and bitter waters. Pattison (2010) calls this inconsistency in speech "moral dissonance."

- c. **Communication as Witness.** Words are the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22–23) in the form of verbal gentleness, part of a holy life, and a witness to Christ's identity in students. Mulia (2021, SINTA 2) found that communication integrity is directly related to the spiritual maturity of Christian students.

Christian education aims for affective transformation and concrete action. The three theories above foster a change of heart (affective), produce concrete ethical actions (verbal practice), and create a new culture of communication (community transformation). Thus, this theory of character education goes beyond concepts, but becomes a pedagogical foundation for developing emotionally, spiritually, and socially mature Christians.

Faith Theory

The results of theological and biblical reflection, particularly on Ephesians 4:23–24 and Ephesians 4:29, have produced a theoretical framework for faith that is not merely cognitive or dogmatic, but transformative, relational, and ethical. Faith is understood as a new quality of life in Christ that is manifested in the way a person speaks, behaves, and builds relationships. Thus, faith is not merely a belief system, but a lifestyle, a pattern of relationships, and an ethics of communication. Here are four theories of faith that emerged from this analysis:

- a. **Faith as Inner Transformation.** Ephesians 4:23 emphasizes that the renewal of the Christian life occurs through "the renewing of the heart and mind by the Spirit." Constructive words can only emerge from a heart healed, restored, and renewed by the Holy Spirit, shaped by God's love. The pastoral implication is that language change stems from a change of heart. Verbal violence is a sign of inner wounds or spiritual immaturity. Faith accompaniment must touch the deepest dimension of humankind (*cura animarum*). According to Lartey (2003), true pastoral care aims to transform a person's inner core, not just their outward behavior. Mulia's research (2021) shows that spiritual depth directly influences the quality of communication among Christian students. Thus, faith is a process of inner transformation that produces loving, empathetic, and constructive speech.
- b. **Faith as Participation in Grace.** Ephesians 4:29 emphasizes that the believer's words should convey "grace" (*dōi charin*) to the hearer. Thus, faith is not merely receiving grace, but actively participating in sharing it through words and actions. The theological dimension is that speaking is an act of faith, presenting Christ through words. Words of encouragement are expressions of grace that flow from a believing heart. Every Christian communication is part of the ministry of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:18). Hunter (2006) calls pastoral speech "an act of grace that restores human identity and hope." The implication is that students are encouraged to recognize that speech is part of the witness of faith, words can be a tool of the Holy Spirit to restore, and true faith produces gentle, patient, and compassionate communication. Thus, faith makes one an agent of grace; speaking is an act of faith that presents Christ to others.
- c. **Faith as Relational Discipleship.** Christian faith does not stand alone; it grows in relationships. Ephesians 4 as a whole emphasizes the body of Christ, unity, and mutually edifying relationships. Following Christ means imitating His loving communication style (Luke 4:22), His life-giving words (John 6:63), His gentleness toward the weak (Matthew 12:20), and His honesty in the truth (John 18:37). According to Yewangoe (2012), Christian discipleship is the process of forming relationships that restore, not humiliate or demean. The educational dimension is that Christian campus relationships become spaces for

discipleship. Small groups become spaces for practicing the communication of grace. Lecturers act as educators and faith guides. Hidayat (2020) states that relational discipleship forms communicative character more effectively than purely cognitive learning. Thus, faith is relational discipleship: the process of imitating Christ's communication style in building others.

- d. Faith as New Identity. Ephesians 4:24 affirms that believers have “put on the new self,” created in righteousness and holiness. The identity dimension is that bad words are a characteristic of the old self. Uplifting words are a sign of the new self in Christ. Communication reflects who controls the heart: the old self or the new self. Pattison (2010) emphasized that Christian identity must be evident in daily behavior, especially communication and relationships. Character Implications: Students are called to live according to their Christian identity, consistent between their confession of faith and their communication style, using words to glorify God. Mulia's research (2021) shows that when spiritual identity is strong, students are better able to restrain themselves from verbal aggression. Thus, faith affirms a new identity in Christ that is reflected through words that build and restore. True faith always produces healthy, edifying, and restoring communication, as commanded by Ephesians 4:29.

CONCLUSION

A biblical study of Ephesians 4:29 confirms that verbal abuse is not merely a matter of social ethics but a serious violation of Christian verbal ethics, affecting human dignity as *imago Dei*. Destructive speech is the antithesis of the Gospel's call to build, strengthen, and impart grace. In the context of college students, verbal abuse has been shown to directly impact the formation of self-concept, self-esteem, mental health, and spiritual growth.

Using the Pastoral Circle method, this phenomenon can be analyzed comprehensively. The Seeing stage reveals the social reality of students, including exposure to competitive academic cultures, demeaning humor, family trauma, and digital influences that amplify verbal violence. The Analyzing stage combines social and theological perspectives to identify the root causes of the problem and interpret the ethical imperatives of Christian communication based on Ephesians 4:29. The Reflecting stage guides the community to interpret this reality through the lens of faith, emphasizing linguistic repentance, heart transformation, relational discipleship, and imitation of Christ. The Acting stage produces pastoral and pedagogical strategies that are restorative, character-building, and capable of transforming campus communication culture.

The analysis yielded two important theoretical frameworks. The first, Character Education Theory, includes the Theory of Virtue of Speech, the Theory of Christian Relational Ethics, and the Theory of Communication Integrity. These theories emphasize tongue discipline, empathy, truth expressed in love, restorative relationships, and consistency between Christian identity and communicative behavior. The second, Theory of Faith, encompasses faith as heart transformation, faith as participation in grace, faith as relational discipleship, and faith as new identity in Christ. Together, these frameworks provide a robust foundation for developing Christian character formation programs on campuses and in churches, ensuring that education goes beyond information transfer to produce affective, spiritual, and ethical transformation—embodying the principle of “biblical, pastoral, and educational synergy.”

Ultimately, pastoral care and Christian education are called to serve as agents of healing and transformation in addressing verbal abuse. Through biblical integration, pastoral care, character formation, and relational discipleship, campus and church communities can cultivate a communication culture that is healthier, more loving, and reflective of Christ's character. In doing so, students are not only healed from verbal wounds but also guided toward a renewed identity that is strong, mature, and fruitful in faith.

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