

Challenges and Opportunities for Christian Religious Education in the Development of Information Technology in Class IX

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Abstract

The rapid development of information technology has transformed almost every aspect of human life, including the educational sector. This study aims to analyze the challenges and opportunities of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the development of information technology and to examine how teachers optimize technology integration in learning among Grade IX students at SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach, with data collected through interviews, observations, and documentation. The findings reveal that the major challenges faced by Christian Religious Education include students' excessive use of digital devices, exposure to online content that may contradict Christian values, disparities in teachers' digital competencies, and limitations in technological infrastructure. Despite these challenges, information technology provides significant opportunities to enhance access to religious learning resources, improve student engagement through interactive multimedia, facilitate collaborative learning, and support spiritual formation through digital faith-based platforms. The study also found that teachers optimize technology use by integrating multimedia resources into instruction, utilizing digital communication platforms, promoting digital literacy and ethical technology use, and continuously improving their technological and pedagogical competencies. The study concludes that the effective implementation of Christian Religious Education in the digital era requires a balanced approach that embraces technological innovation while maintaining the core mission of nurturing students' faith, character, moral values, and spiritual development.

Keywords

Challenges and Opportunities; Christian Religious Education; Development; Information Technology



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INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of information technology has transformed almost every aspect of human life, including the educational sector. Digital technology has reshaped the way knowledge is accessed, delivered, and shared, creating new opportunities as well as significant challenges for educators and students worldwide. The integration of internet-based learning,

digital media, online platforms, and mobile technologies has shifted educational practices from traditional teacher-centered approaches toward more learner-centered environments. In this context, students are no longer limited to acquiring knowledge within the classroom, but can access information anytime and anywhere through various digital devices. According to Bond et al. (2021), digital technologies have become an essential component of contemporary education because they support flexibility, collaboration, and personalized learning experiences. However, alongside these benefits, technology also introduces challenges related to information overload, digital distractions, ethical concerns, and the weakening of interpersonal interactions within educational settings.

Within the field of religious education, technological advancement presents a particularly complex situation. Christian Religious Education (CRE) is not only concerned with the transmission of knowledge but also with the formation of faith, moral character, spiritual values, and Christian identity. Consequently, the rapid expansion of digital technology requires Christian educators to reconsider how religious instruction can remain relevant and effective in an increasingly digitalized world. Research by Campbell (2021) highlights that digital technology has created new spaces for religious engagement, allowing faith communities and educational institutions to expand their reach beyond physical boundaries. Digital platforms, social media, online worship services, podcasts, and Bible applications have enabled Christian teachings to be disseminated more broadly and interactively than ever before. These developments offer valuable opportunities for educators to engage students through media that are already integrated into their daily lives.

Despite these opportunities, the influence of digital technology on adolescents raises important concerns. Students today belong to a generation that has grown up surrounded by smartphones, social networking platforms, online entertainment, and instant access to information. While technology provides unprecedented educational resources, excessive exposure to digital media may negatively affect concentration, critical thinking, emotional development, and spiritual growth. Studies have shown that prolonged engagement with social media and digital entertainment can contribute to reduced attention spans, increased dependency on technology, and weakened face-to-face social interactions (Twenge, 2023). For Christian Religious Education, these challenges become particularly significant because spiritual formation requires reflection, personal engagement, ethical discernment, and meaningful relationships that may be difficult to cultivate in environments dominated by digital distractions.

The challenges faced by Christian Religious Education are further intensified by the increasing prevalence of secular and materialistic values within digital culture. Students are continuously exposed to diverse viewpoints, ideologies, and lifestyles through online content, some of which may conflict with biblical teachings and Christian moral principles. Consequently, teachers are expected not only to deliver religious content but also to guide students in developing digital literacy, ethical awareness, and responsible technology use. According to Holmes (2022), Christian education in the digital era must balance technological

innovation with spiritual formation to ensure that technological tools serve educational and faith-development purposes rather than becoming obstacles to them. Therefore, educators must equip students with the ability to critically evaluate online information while maintaining a strong foundation in Christian values.

At SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya, these issues have become increasingly relevant in the implementation of Christian Religious Education for Grade IX students. Based on preliminary observations and findings from the study, several challenges emerge in the teaching and learning process. These include students' reduced focus during lessons due to excessive gadget use, limited digital competencies among some teachers, inadequate technological infrastructure, and varying levels of digital literacy among students. Such conditions create obstacles to achieving the objectives of Christian Religious Education, particularly in fostering spiritual maturity, moral character, and meaningful engagement with Christian teachings. Furthermore, the rapid pace of technological change requires educators to continuously adapt their pedagogical strategies and develop new competencies in utilizing digital tools effectively.

Nevertheless, the development of information technology also offers considerable opportunities for enhancing Christian Religious Education. Digital resources provide students with easier access to biblical materials, Christian educational content, online learning platforms, and interactive multimedia resources that can enrich the learning experience. Technology can support more engaging instructional methods through educational videos, interactive quizzes, digital storytelling, virtual discussions, and online collaborative activities. Research by Trust and Whalen (2021) suggests that effective technology integration can increase student motivation, participation, and engagement when accompanied by appropriate pedagogical strategies. In the context of Christian Religious Education, these innovations can help teachers communicate biblical truths in ways that are meaningful and relevant to contemporary learners.

Given these realities, it is important to examine both the challenges and opportunities associated with the development of information technology in Christian Religious Education. Understanding how technology influences teaching practices, student behavior, and spiritual formation is essential for designing educational approaches that remain faithful to Christian principles while embracing technological advancement. Therefore, this study entitled "Challenges and Opportunities for Christian Religious Education in the Development of Information Technology in Class IX of SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya" seeks to explore the challenges encountered, identify the opportunities available, and analyze the strategies employed by teachers in optimizing technology to support effective Christian Religious Education in the digital age.

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative research design to explore the challenges and opportunities of Christian Religious Education in the development of information technology among Grade IX students at SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya. A qualitative approach was chosen because it enables an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences,

perceptions, and responses regarding the integration of technology in Christian Religious Education. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and documentation analysis involving the school principal, Christian Religious Education teachers, and Grade IX students as the primary informants. The collected data were analyzed using the interactive model of Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014), which consists of data condensation, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. To ensure the trustworthiness of the findings, the study applied source triangulation and method triangulation, allowing the researcher to compare information obtained from different participants and data collection techniques. Through this approach, the study sought to provide a comprehensive understanding of the challenges, opportunities, and teacher strategies related to the utilization of information technology in Christian Religious Education within the context of digital-era learning.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Challenges Are Faced by Christian Religious Education in the Era of Information Technology Development

The development of information technology has significantly transformed educational practices, including the implementation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in schools. Based on the findings at SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya, one of the major challenges encountered in Christian Religious Education is the excessive use of digital devices among students. Grade IX students are highly familiar with smartphones, social media platforms, online games, and digital entertainment, which often divert their attention from learning activities. During classroom instruction, students frequently experience difficulties maintaining concentration because they are accustomed to instant access to information and continuous digital stimulation. This condition affects the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education, whose objectives extend beyond cognitive achievement to include spiritual formation, moral development, and character building. The challenge becomes more complex because students tend to prefer digital content that provides immediate gratification rather than engaging in reflective and value-oriented learning processes emphasized in Christian teachings. Consequently, teachers face increasing difficulties in cultivating students' spiritual awareness and moral responsibility amid the distractions created by digital technology (Twenge, 2023).

Another challenge identified in this study concerns the varying levels of digital competence among teachers. Although information technology offers numerous opportunities to enrich learning, not all Christian Religious Education teachers possess adequate technological skills to integrate digital tools effectively into classroom instruction. Some teachers continue to rely on conventional teaching methods due to limited training, insufficient confidence in using educational technology, or a lack of familiarity with emerging digital platforms. As a result, the gap between students' digital experiences and classroom learning environments becomes increasingly apparent. Modern students expect interactive and technology-enhanced learning experiences, while some educational practices remain

predominantly lecture-based. This mismatch may reduce student engagement and limit the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education in addressing contemporary educational needs. Therefore, teacher readiness and professional development emerge as crucial factors influencing the successful adaptation of Christian Religious Education to technological advancements (Trust & Whalen, 2021).

The rapid expansion of digital information also presents challenges related to values, ethics, and religious identity. Through social media, websites, video-sharing platforms, and online communities, students are exposed to diverse perspectives, ideologies, and lifestyles that may conflict with Christian principles. The unrestricted nature of digital information means that students frequently encounter content promoting secularism, relativism, materialism, and behaviors inconsistent with biblical teachings. In this context, Christian Religious Education teachers are no longer responsible solely for transmitting religious knowledge but must also guide students in critically evaluating information and developing ethical decision-making skills. The findings at SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya indicate that teachers often face difficulties in helping students distinguish between information that supports Christian values and content that undermines spiritual development. Consequently, digital literacy and faith-based discernment have become essential competencies within Christian Religious Education in the digital era (Campbell, 2021).

In addition, inadequate technological infrastructure remains a practical challenge affecting the implementation of technology-based Christian Religious Education. Although technological advancement continues rapidly, access to digital resources is not always evenly distributed. The findings reveal that limitations in internet connectivity, digital devices, and educational technology facilities can hinder the integration of technology into classroom learning. Such constraints may reduce opportunities for teachers to utilize multimedia resources, online learning platforms, and interactive educational applications effectively. Furthermore, disparities in students' access to technology outside school may contribute to unequal learning experiences. These infrastructural limitations demonstrate that the successful implementation of technology-enhanced Christian Religious Education depends not only on pedagogical innovation but also on institutional support and resource availability. Therefore, educational stakeholders must address technological inequalities to ensure that all students can benefit from digital learning opportunities (UNESCO, 2023).

Opportunities Can Be Utilized for the Development of Christian Religious Education Through Information Technology

Despite the challenges associated with technological advancement, information technology offers substantial opportunities for enhancing Christian Religious Education. One of the most significant opportunities identified at SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya is the increased accessibility of religious learning resources. Through internet-based platforms, students can access digital Bibles, Christian articles, educational videos, online devotionals, podcasts, and various multimedia materials that support religious learning beyond the classroom. These resources enable students to deepen their understanding of Christian teachings independently

and facilitate continuous learning regardless of time and location. Technology therefore expands the scope of Christian Religious Education from a classroom-centered activity into a lifelong learning process that supports both intellectual and spiritual growth. The availability of diverse learning resources also enables students to engage with Christian teachings through formats that align with their learning preferences and digital habits (Bond et al., 2021).

Another opportunity lies in the enhancement of student engagement through interactive learning methods. Traditional religious instruction often relies heavily on lectures and textbook-based learning, which may not fully capture the attention of contemporary learners. Information technology enables teachers to utilize videos, animations, interactive presentations, educational games, and virtual discussions to make Christian Religious Education more engaging and meaningful. At SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya, the use of multimedia content has been found to increase student participation and motivation during learning activities. Visual and interactive learning materials help students better understand biblical narratives, Christian values, and ethical concepts by presenting them in formats that are more relevant to their daily experiences. Consequently, technology serves as a bridge between traditional religious teachings and the digital realities experienced by modern students (Mayer, 2021).

Information technology also provides opportunities for collaborative and student-centered learning. Digital communication platforms enable students to participate in group discussions, collaborative projects, and peer-learning activities that extend beyond the physical classroom. Through online forums, virtual meetings, and educational applications, students can share reflections, discuss moral issues, and engage in collective learning experiences grounded in Christian values. Such collaborative approaches encourage active participation rather than passive reception of information. Furthermore, digital technologies support personalized learning by allowing students to access resources according to their individual learning needs and interests. This flexibility contributes to more inclusive and effective Christian Religious Education, accommodating diverse learning styles and fostering deeper engagement with religious content (Redecker, 2020).

An additional opportunity involves strengthening spiritual formation through digital ministry and faith-based online communities. The findings indicate that students frequently use digital media in their everyday lives, creating opportunities for Christian educators to extend religious engagement beyond formal classroom instruction. Teachers can encourage students to access online devotionals, participate in virtual Bible study groups, watch faith-based educational content, and engage with positive Christian communities through digital platforms. Such initiatives help integrate faith into students' daily digital experiences and support the development of Christian identity in contemporary society. Rather than viewing technology solely as a threat to spiritual development, Christian educators can utilize digital platforms as instruments for evangelization, discipleship, and character formation. This perspective aligns with contemporary understandings of digital religion, which emphasize the

capacity of technology to facilitate meaningful expressions of faith and religious participation (Campbell, 2021).

Teachers Optimize the Use of Information Technology in Christian Religious Education Learning

The findings from SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya demonstrate that Christian Religious Education teachers employ various strategies to optimize information technology in the teaching and learning process. One important strategy involves integrating multimedia resources into classroom instruction. Teachers utilize videos, digital presentations, images, and online educational materials to explain biblical teachings and Christian values more effectively. Multimedia content helps transform abstract theological concepts into concrete and relatable learning experiences. Students often demonstrate greater interest and comprehension when lessons incorporate visual and audiovisual elements compared to traditional lecture methods. By presenting Christian teachings through contemporary media formats, teachers can connect religious content with students' everyday digital experiences and thereby enhance learning outcomes (Mayer, 2021).

Teachers also optimize technology by utilizing digital communication platforms to facilitate interaction and learning beyond classroom hours. Applications such as online learning management systems, messaging platforms, and educational websites enable teachers to distribute learning materials, provide assignments, and communicate with students more efficiently. These technologies support continuity in learning and allow students to access educational content at their convenience. Furthermore, digital communication fosters stronger teacher-student engagement by creating additional opportunities for discussion, feedback, and reflection. In Christian Religious Education, such interactions are particularly important because spiritual growth often requires ongoing guidance, encouragement, and mentorship. Therefore, digital communication technologies contribute not only to academic learning but also to the development of meaningful educational relationships (Hodges et al., 2020).

Another optimization strategy involves promoting digital literacy and ethical technology use among students. Recognizing the challenges associated with misinformation and inappropriate online content, Christian Religious Education teachers intentionally incorporate discussions about digital ethics into their lessons. Students are encouraged to evaluate online information critically, practice responsible digital citizenship, and apply Christian values when interacting in digital environments. Teachers emphasize honesty, respect, integrity, and accountability in students' online behavior, helping them understand that faith-based principles should guide both offline and online activities. This approach reflects the evolving role of Christian Religious Education in preparing students to navigate complex digital societies while maintaining strong moral and spiritual foundations. Through such efforts, technology becomes not merely a learning tool but also a context for character education and ethical development (Ribble, 2021).

Finally, teachers optimize information technology by continuously improving their professional competencies and adapting to technological change. The study indicates that educators actively seek opportunities to learn new digital skills through training programs, workshops, peer collaboration, and independent learning. This commitment to professional development enables teachers to remain responsive to emerging educational technologies and changing student needs. Effective integration of technology requires not only technical proficiency but also pedagogical understanding regarding how digital tools can support learning objectives. By combining technological competence with Christian educational principles, teachers can create learning environments that are both innovative and spiritually meaningful. Their efforts demonstrate that successful Christian Religious Education in the digital era depends on educators who are willing to embrace change while maintaining the fundamental mission of nurturing students' faith, character, and spiritual growth (Koehler, Mishra, & Cain, 2022).

CONCLUSION

The development of information technology has brought both significant challenges and valuable opportunities for the implementation of Christian Religious Education among Grade IX students at SMP Negeri 8 Palangka Raya. The primary challenges include students' excessive dependence on digital devices, exposure to diverse online values that may conflict with Christian teachings, varying levels of teachers' digital competence, and limitations in technological infrastructure. However, information technology also provides opportunities to expand access to Christian learning resources, increase student engagement through interactive and multimedia-based instruction, facilitate collaborative and student-centered learning, and strengthen spiritual formation through digital faith communities and online religious resources. To optimize these opportunities, Christian Religious Education teachers integrate multimedia technologies into classroom learning, utilize digital communication platforms, promote digital literacy and ethical technology use, and continuously improve their professional competencies in educational technology. Therefore, the successful implementation of Christian Religious Education in the digital era requires a balanced approach that embraces technological innovation while maintaining the fundamental mission of fostering students' faith, character, moral values, and spiritual growth in accordance with Christian principles.

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