

The Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers in Optimizing the Use of Smartphones in the Christian Religious Education Learning Process for Grade VII Students at SMPN 3 Palangka Raya

Pilenia¹, Matius Timan Herdi Ginting², Della Gita Van Gobel³

^{1,2,3} Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Palangka Raya, Indonesia

Email: pilenia026@gmail.com, bangmatzz@gmail.com, dellgita216@gmail.com

Article history

Submitted: 2026/10/07; Revised: 2026/10/11; Accepted: 2026/10/17

Abstract

The widespread use of smartphones in schools creates opportunities for more flexible and interactive learning, but it also presents challenges related to distraction and responsible use. This study describes the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in planning, implementing, and optimizing smartphone use among seventh-grade students at SMP Negeri 3 Palangka Raya, Indonesia. A descriptive qualitative approach was employed. Data were collected through interviews with the CRE teacher and students, classroom observation in class VII-3 on 25 May 2026, and documentation of the teaching module and student worksheets. Data were analyzed through reduction, display, and conclusion drawing, with source and method triangulation. The findings show that the teacher incorporated smartphones into the teaching module in alignment with the Merdeka Curriculum and selected WhatsApp, YouTube, Google Classroom, PowerPoint, and digital Bible applications according to learning objectives. Implementation involved spiritual opening activities, digitally supported core learning, group discussion, and technology-assisted assessment. The teacher optimized use through explicit instructions, active monitoring, modeling responsible digital behavior, and integrating Christian values. Smartphones supported students' interest, participation, and understanding, although unstable internet access, limited battery and device capacity, notifications, and non-learning applications remained obstacles. The study concludes that purposeful planning, guidance, supervision, and school support are essential to keeping smartphone use aligned with CRE learning objectives.

Keywords

Christian Religious Education; digital learning; smartphone; teacher role; seventh-grade students



© 202x by the authors. This is an open-access publication under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY SA) license, <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-sa/4.0/>.

INTRODUCTION

Digital transformation has reshaped how learners obtain information, communicate, and participate in classroom activities. Smartphones are especially relevant because they combine internet access, digital texts, video, communication tools, and educational applications in a portable device. In school settings, these affordances can support flexible access to learning resources and student participation, but they do not automatically produce meaningful learning. Their educational value depends on the instructional purpose, the quality of learning tasks, and the guidance provided by teachers (Crompton et al., 2017; Crompton & Burke, 2020; Firmansyah et al., 2020). The broader policy discussion also recognizes mobile devices as potential learning resources when supported by appropriate educational policy and teacher preparation (UNESCO, 2013, 2018).

These opportunities and risks are particularly important in Christian Religious Education (CRE), which aims not only to develop religious knowledge but also to nurture faith, character, responsibility, and the application of Christian values in everyday life. In this subject, smartphones may provide access to digital Bible texts, learning videos, and supporting information. At the same time, social media, games, unrelated content, and uncritical information searches may distract learners. Therefore, the integration of technology should remain consistent with the spiritual and character-building aims of CRE, while promoting responsible and ethical digital behavior (Hia & Keluanan, 2023; Apriyanti et al., 2023; Boiliu & Telaumbanua, 2022).

The thesis identifies a practical problem at SMP Negeri 3 Palangka Raya: students bring smartphones to school, while their use may move beyond learning purposes unless it is guided. Initial observations during the researcher's school placement indicated that off-task use could occur, whereas directed activities such as searching for Bible verses or using interactive learning resources could increase participation and enthusiasm. Previous studies have examined mobile learning benefits and the moral implications of gadget use, but the present study focuses specifically on the teacher's connected roles in planning, implementing, and optimizing smartphone use in Grade VII CRE. This focus addresses the practical question of how digital devices can be used purposefully without weakening classroom discipline or the subject's Christian values. Research on classroom mobile phones similarly suggests that educational benefits depend on preparation, digital competence, and pedagogical implementation rather than device access alone (Calderón-Garrido et al., 2022; Crompton & Burke, 2020).

METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to explore the role of the Christian Religious Education teacher in smartphone-supported learning in its natural school context. The research was conducted at SMP Negeri 3 Palangka Raya and focused on Grade VII, particularly class VII-3. The principal informant was the CRE teacher, Yuli Kristiningsih, M.Pd., while student perspectives were obtained from six Grade VII learners identified in the thesis. A qualitative design was appropriate because the study sought to describe practices, experiences, and classroom processes rather than measure the statistical effect of smartphone use. The inquiry followed the three research questions concerning lesson planning, classroom implementation, and optimization of smartphone use. This approach is consistent with qualitative inquiry that emphasizes context, participant perspectives, and interpretation of lived practices (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

Data were collected through interviews, classroom observation, and documentation. The interview material included the teacher's account and student experiences; observation notes recorded classroom activity and the teacher's guidance; and documents included the CRE teaching module and student worksheet related to the topic of human responsibility for nature. The thesis records classroom observation on 25 May 2026 and includes a learning activity in which students were instructed to use textbooks, the Bible, and smartphones to support their answers. Data analysis followed data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. Information from interviews, observations, and documents was compared to identify convergent themes and to strengthen interpretation. The analysis was organized around the three research questions, while the findings were interpreted descriptively and not treated as statistical proof of causal effects. The reduction, display, and conclusion-drawing sequence follows a widely used framework for qualitative data analysis (Miles et al., 2014).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Results

1. Teacher Role in Planning Smartphone-Based Learning

The findings indicate that smartphone use was incorporated into the teacher's instructional planning rather than introduced as an improvised activity. The teaching module provided the learning sequence and connected the device to the subject matter and learning objectives. The teacher considered the suitability of resources and activities for seventh-grade learners and used smartphones as supporting tools for

finding information, accessing Bible verses, and viewing learning videos. This planning role involved selecting appropriate learning resources, explaining the purpose of the activity, and ensuring that smartphone use complemented rather than replaced the teacher's explanation, the Bible, and printed learning materials.

Observation and documentary evidence show that the learning design retained a structured lesson sequence. The learning materials and student worksheet framed smartphone use as one source of support alongside textbooks and the Bible. This arrangement is significant because it positioned the device as a means to achieve learning objectives, not as the objective itself. The teacher's planning also needed to anticipate possible distractions and technical limitations so that tasks remained achievable within the available class time.

2. Teacher Role in Implementing Smartphone-Based Learning

Implementation followed the opening, core, and closing stages of the lesson. The opening included worship and prayer, maintaining the spiritual orientation of CRE. During the core activities, the teacher introduced the task, directed students toward relevant sources, and guided their use of smartphones to locate information and support learning. Students were not simply left to explore their devices independently; the teacher explained what to access and how the activity related to the lesson. The closing stage provided an opportunity to consolidate learning and connect the activity to the lesson's purpose.

Students' accounts suggest that teacher orientation helped clarify how smartphones should be used during the lesson. Digital resources, including videos and Bible applications or online Bible texts, were perceived as helpful for understanding material and locating verses. The teacher's role therefore combined facilitation with classroom management: students were given opportunities to search and participate, while the teacher remained responsible for keeping activity aligned with the task and maintaining a learning-focused environment.

3. Teacher Role in Optimizing Smartphone Use

Optimization involved guidance, monitoring, motivation, and modeling responsible behavior. The teacher reminded students to use devices for the assigned learning activity, redirected attention when use moved away from the task, and encouraged students to take responsibility for their learning. In CRE, this responsibility is also a character-education concern: honesty, self-control, discipline, and respect should be reflected in how students use digital resources. The teacher's role was thus not limited to technical assistance; it included helping students make

choices consistent with classroom expectations and Christian values.

The thesis also documents practical barriers. Students reported weak or unstable internet connections, batteries that ran out, and limited device storage. The findings further point to the risk of off-task use and the need for consistent supervision beyond the classroom, including support from parents. These constraints mean that smartphone-based learning cannot depend entirely on continuous connectivity or on students' self-regulation. Backup resources, clear task instructions, reasonable time limits, and alternatives such as printed materials are important for maintaining access and lesson continuity.

Discussion

Planning as Pedagogical Integration

The first research question concerns how the teacher plans smartphone-based CRE learning. The findings suggest that planning is the stage at which the educational value of the device is established. By linking smartphone activities to the teaching module, lesson objectives, and the topic being studied, the teacher gives students a reason to use technology and establishes boundaries for its use. This is consistent with research showing that mobile devices can support contextualized and flexible learning, but that the quality of the learning activity and its theoretical alignment matter (Crompton et al., 2017; Crompton & Burke, 2020). A device used only to reproduce an ordinary task may add little value; a carefully planned activity can widen access to resources and invite active exploration. The relationship among technology, pedagogy, and subject content is also central to the technological pedagogical content knowledge framework (Mishra & Koehler, 2006).

For CRE, planning also requires attention to the content and values of the subject. Digital Bible resources and learning videos can make textual or narrative material easier to access, but teachers must evaluate their relevance and reliability and ensure that digital content supports rather than displaces reflection on Christian teaching. The worksheet documented in the thesis explicitly allowed students to use the textbook, Bible, and phone together, illustrating a complementary rather than exclusive approach to learning resources. This finding supports the view that technology integration should be guided by pedagogy and subject objectives, not by novelty alone (Firmansyah et al., 2020; Calderón-Garrido et al., 2022).

Implementation as Guided and Spiritually Grounded Learning

The second research question concerns implementation. The lesson sequence documented in the thesis shows that smartphone use occurred within a teacher-led

learning process that retained worship, prayer, orientation, guided activity, and consolidation. Such structure matters because access to a device does not guarantee focused engagement. Clear instructions, demonstration of the relevant resource, and active teacher presence help students understand both the task and the expected boundaries of device use. The teacher consequently acts as facilitator and classroom manager while maintaining the distinctive spiritual character of CRE.

Students' reported experiences indicate that videos and digital Bible resources could make information easier to access and help them locate relevant verses. The observations also recorded increased interest and participation when smartphone use was directed toward learning. These findings should be interpreted as qualitative evidence of perceived engagement and classroom participation, not as proof that smartphones independently caused higher achievement. Reviews of mobile learning likewise report potential benefits but emphasize that outcomes vary with instructional design, learning context, and implementation quality (Crompton et al., 2017; Dorris et al., 2024).

Optimization, Digital Responsibility, and Constraints

The third research question concerns optimization. The findings show that optimization requires purposeful tasks, explicit rules, teacher monitoring, redirection of off-task behavior, and the development of student responsibility. A prohibition-only approach may reduce opportunities to learn digital responsibility, whereas unrestricted use may increase distraction. A guided approach balances access and boundaries: students use the device when it serves the lesson, know which resources to access, and are expected to return attention to discussion and reflection. This is especially relevant in CRE because responsible technology use can be connected to discipline, honesty, care for others, and stewardship.

Technical and behavioral barriers also shape what is possible. Weak connectivity, battery limitations, and insufficient storage can interrupt activities, while social media and games may compete for students' attention. Teachers and schools can respond through offline or downloadable materials, printed alternatives, pre-checking resources, clear time limits, and collaboration with parents on consistent expectations. The findings align with wider reviews that identify learner and teacher readiness, learning management, and support systems as important conditions for mobile learning (Naciri et al., 2021; Calderón-Garrido et al., 2022). Therefore, smartphone optimization is a shared responsibility involving teachers, students, school policy, and families rather than a task that can be solved by the teacher alone.

CONCLUSION

This study found that the CRE teacher at SMP Negeri 3 Palangka Raya played interconnected roles in planning, implementing, and optimizing smartphone-supported learning for seventh-grade students. Planning involved incorporating digital tools into the teaching module and selecting resources such as WhatsApp, YouTube, Google Classroom, PowerPoint, and digital Bible applications according to lesson objectives. Implementation combined spiritual opening activities, guided digital exploration, discussion, assignments, and technology-assisted assessment. Optimization depended on clear instructions, active monitoring, teacher role modeling, and the cultivation of responsible use consistent with Christian values.

Smartphones appeared to support student interest, participation, and access to learning content when use was purposeful and supervised. However, unstable internet, battery and storage limitations, notifications, and access to non-learning applications remained obstacles. Schools should support reliable infrastructure and clear device-use policies, while teachers should strengthen digital literacy and prepare alternatives for technical interruptions. Future research could compare several schools or grade levels and use additional measures of student self-regulation to examine how these practices operate across contexts.

REFERENCES

- Apriyanti, R., Rantung, D. A., & Naibaho, L. (2023). Integrasi teknologi dalam pembelajaran Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK) sebagai peluang dan tantangan di era digital. *Journal on Education*.
- Boiliu, E. R., & Telaumbanua, S. (2022). Inovasi pembelajaran digital dalam meningkatkan motivasi belajar siswa: Suatu analisis Pendidikan Agama Kristen. *REAL DIDACHE: Journal of Christian Education*.
- Calderón-Garrido, D., Ramos-Pardo, F. J., & Suárez-Guerrero, C. (2022). The use of mobile phones in classrooms: A systematic review. *International Journal of Emerging Technologies in Learning*, 17(6), 194–210. <https://doi.org/10.3991/ijet.v17i06.29181>
- Cholid, N. (2021). Menjadi guru profesional. CV Presisi Cipta Media.
- Crompton, H., Burke, D., & Gregory, K. H. (2017). The use of mobile learning in PK–12 education: A systematic review. *Computers & Education*, 110, 51–63. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2017.03.013>
- Crompton, H., & Burke, D. (2020). Mobile learning and pedagogical opportunities: A configurative systematic review of PreK–12 research using the SAMR

framework. Computers & Education, 156, 103945.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.compedu.2020.103945>

Dorris, C., Winter, K., & O'Hare, L. (2024). A systematic review of mobile device use in the primary school classroom and impact on pupil literacy and numeracy attainment. Campbell Systematic Reviews, 20(2), e1417.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/cl2.1417>

Firmansyah, R. O., Hamdani, R. A., & Kuswardhana, D. (2020). The use of smartphone on learning activities: Systematic review. IOP Conference Series: Materials Science and Engineering, 850, 012006. <https://doi.org/10.1088/1757-899X/850/1/012006>

Hia, R. D., & Keluanan, Y. H. (2023). Peran guru Pendidikan Agama Kristen terhadap pengaruh gadget bagi perkembangan moral peserta didik. Sinar Kasih: Jurnal Pendidikan Agama dan Filsafat.

Hidayat, A., & Khotimah, K. (2021). Kompetensi guru dalam integrasi teknologi pembelajaran di era digital. Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan, 23(2).

Karim, A. (2024). Implementasi mobile learning dalam meningkatkan efektivitas pembelajaran di era digital. Jurnal Teknologi Pendidikan, 26(1).

Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldaña, J. (2014). Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook (3rd ed.). SAGE Publications.

Mayer, R. E. (2009). Multimedia learning (2nd ed.). Cambridge University Press.

Naciri, A., Baba, M. A., Achbani, A., & Kharbach, A. (2021). Mobile learning in higher education: A systematic review. Education and Information Technologies.

Redecker, C. (2017). European framework for the digital competence of educators: DigCompEdu. Publications Office of the European Union.
<https://doi.org/10.2760/159770>

Mishra, P., & Koehler, M. J. (2006). Technological pedagogical content knowledge: A framework for teacher knowledge. Teachers College Record, 108(6), 1017–1054. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9620.2006.00684.x>

Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches (4th ed.). SAGE Publications.

UNESCO. (2013). Policy guidelines for mobile learning. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

UNESCO. (2018). UNESCO ICT competency framework for teachers (Version 3). United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization.

Wang, Y., & Chen, N.-S. (2009). Criteria for evaluating the quality of learning in

a mobile environment. *International Journal of Mobile Learning and Organisation*, 3(4), 396–412.