

Breaking Boundaries: The Younger Generation and Careers in Christian Religious Education in Facing Social and Cultural Change

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Abstract : This study aims to explore the perceptions of young people toward a career as Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers amidst dynamic social and cultural changes. The declining interest in this profession is not solely driven by economic and social status concerns but is also influenced by digitalization, secularization, and a lack of vocational formation from families and churches. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, data were collected through literature review and in-depth interviews with church youth and theology students. The findings reveal that young people still hold potential interest in this vocation when supported by strong theological narratives, integrated mentoring strategies, and 21st-century skills. This research recommends the revitalization of holistic and contextual Christian education systems to address contemporary challenges and rekindle youth interest in pursuing a career as CRE teachers.

Keywords: youth generation, calling, Christian religious education, social change, digitalization

1. Introduction

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a vital role in shaping the character and spirituality of the younger generation. However, in the face of rapid social change, the profession of teaching Christian Religious Education is increasingly marginalized and widely perceived as less relevant. The younger generation, particularly those living in the digital era, are more drawn to careers that offer greater financial gain and social prestige, whereas the CRE teaching profession is often considered less promising in terms of material gain and social status (Situmorang 2021). On the other hand, a limited understanding of the importance of religious education in everyday life is also a factor that deters many young people from choosing this profession as a serious career path (Zega 2021).

Shifting values and career aspirations within an ever-evolving social context pose a primary challenge. Amidst rapid globalization and cultural change, the younger generation tends to prioritize jobs that offer higher income and quicker paths to social mobility (Lazuardina and Amalia G. 2023). The profession of teaching Christian Religious Education, often perceived as a career choice rooted in a spiritual calling, frequently fails to meet the expectations of those seeking financial stability and more tangible social advancement. Consequently, the profession has become less sought-after, despite its significant contribution to the development of national character and morality.

Furthermore, the impacts of digitalization and secularization have further diminished the interest of young people in this profession. With the rise of technology and social media, a wide array of career options in the digital, creative, and technology sectors have emerged that are more aligned with the interests and lifestyles of contemporary youth (Irisnowati 2016). Secularization, which steadily diminishes the role of religion in everyday life, further exacerbates the younger generation's negative perception of Christian Religious Education. They are more attracted to professions offering direct access to a more modern and technological world, whereas the teaching of Christian religion is perceived as less relevant to the demands of the modern era, which increasingly prioritizes material advancement and individualism.

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This situation creates an urgency to evaluate and reflect upon the approaches used in nurturing the younger generation. The Church and Christian educational institutions are faced with the challenge of revitalizing their methods, narratives, and spaces for interaction that enable young people to find both spiritual meaning and social relevance in the calling to become Christian Religious Education teachers (Waruwu and Lawalata 2023). It is no longer sufficient to merely emphasize the spiritual aspects; there must also be an integration with 21st-century skills so that this profession is understood as competent and adaptive to the demands of the times.

Prior research has addressed the challenges faced by the younger generation in choosing careers in the field of Christian Religious Education (CRE), particularly within the context of shifting social values and the influence of digitalization. Research conducted by Rezeki Putra Gulo and Tony Salurante (2023) highlights the challenge of maintaining the relevance of Christian Religious Education (CRE) amid the swift pace of modern times. Their study emphasizes the urgent need to revitalize the CRE curriculum and its teaching methodologies. The objective is to ensure this education can not only survive but also effectively address the various issues and value shifts brought about by the digital era. This study is highly relevant to the title "Breaking Boundaries," as it directly highlights the "social change" (the digital era) that forms the primary context of this challenge. This effort to revitalize education is a concrete form of 'breaking the boundaries' of outdated perceptions, aimed at making careers in CRE attractive and prospective once more for the younger generation (Gulo and Salurante 2023).

Furthermore, research by Dalensang and Molle (2021) shifts the focus to the role of the church institution as the primary foundation for the spiritual formation of young people. They found that the church holds a strategic position to foster interest and a calling to ministry among the younger generation. According to their study, structured and engaging religious education programs organized by the church are key to forming potential ministers. This research directly relates to the topic of "The Younger Generation and Careers in Christian Religious Education," as it demonstrates that the church is the primary cultural arena where this career interest is nurtured. The failure of the church to adapt to the 'cultural changes' of the younger generation can become a significant 'boundary,' hindering them from considering this profession (Dalensang and Molle 2021).

From the perspective of educator competency, research by Sitorus & Boiliu (2021) also underscores the importance of CRE teachers adapting their competencies to technological developments. Their research specifically examines how information and communication technology transforms the educational landscape. This study reinforces the argument that 'breaking boundaries' within CRE careers demands a transformation from its practitioners. This career can no longer be viewed traditionally; instead, it must be able to adapt to the 'social and cultural changes' driven by technology—a crucial aspect the 'younger generation' considers when choosing their professional paths (Sitorus and Boiliu 2021).

This research offers novelty in two main aspects. First, this study simultaneously integrates theological, sociological, and cultural perspectives in examining the younger generation's perception of a career as a Christian Religious Education teacher. This approach differs from previous research, which has tended to focus on the technical or structural aspects of religious education. This study does not merely capture a social phenomenon but also reflects upon it within the framework of a divine calling (*vocatio*), based on biblical principles.

This research emphasizes the importance of contextualizing Christian religious education in the digital era by highlighting the challenges and opportunities from the direct experiences of the younger generation. Using a descriptive qualitative approach, this study uncovers the subjective meaning-making of young people regarding their career choices and how they assess the profession of a Christian religious teacher amidst the pressures of secular culture and economic demands. This perspective has not been extensively explored in previous studies, which have tended to be macro-level or institutional in nature.

By considering this complexity, this research seeks to delve deeper into how the younger generation makes sense of the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher in the context of the modern era. This study aims to:

1. Describe the perceptions of the younger generation regarding careers in Christian Religious Education.
2. Analyze the influence of social and cultural changes on the interest of the younger generation in becoming Christian Religious Education teacher.

Understanding the motivations, obstacles, and the internal as well as external dynamics that influence their career choices becomes crucial, including how the influence of family, church, education, and digital culture shapes their attitudes. Furthermore, it is also important to examine the extent to which theological values, such as a life calling (*vocatio*) and service, still hold appeal for a generation living in a pragmatic and secular society. This research is expected to formulate contextual strategies for mentorship, curriculum development, and support systems to encourage the regeneration of Christian educators who are not only professionally competent but also spiritually steadfast. Through an integrative and reflective approach, this study aims to contribute to strengthening the existence of the Christian Religious Education teaching profession amidst the dynamic challenges of the times..

2. Proposed Method

This study employs a descriptive qualitative approach. Data were collected through a literature study and semi-structured interviews with informants consisting of church youth and theology students. The data analysis technique involved data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing. This approach was chosen to facilitate an in-depth exploration of the social realities that influence the perceptions and career choices of the younger generation within the context of Christian religious education (Zaini et al. 2023).

3. Results and Discussion

The results of this study indicate that the younger generation's perception of a career as a Christian Religious Education teacher is influenced by a variety of complex and interconnected factors. This phenomenon is not only understood in practical contexts, such as economic stability and social status, but also from the accompanying spiritual and theological dimensions. Although many young people doubt the future of this profession due to a lack of financial security, others still regard it as a noble life calling. This imbalance between spiritual values and social realities reflects a gap between faith-based beliefs and the demands of the modern era.

This profession is often not a primary choice because it is considered less promising economically and socially, even though it is spiritually valued as a noble calling (Situmorang 2021). On the other hand, the meaning-making associated with this profession is also highly dependent on theological frameworks, the role of the family, the influence of the church community, the challenges of the digital era, and the impact of secularization. Each of these aspects contributes to shaping the younger generation's perspective on the relevance and prospects of a career in this field. Therefore, the following discussion is systematically designed to describe the social and spiritual dynamics faced by the younger generation, and to explain how Christian religious education can remain relevant and appealing to them amidst the changing times.

The issue of the younger generation's career interest in the field of Christian Religious Education cannot be separated from their struggle with the realities of the times. The dynamics of social change, economic pressures, and the influx of modern values all contribute to shaping the mindset of young people. In a constantly changing world, the younger generation not only considers spiritual aspects but also evaluates the pragmatic value of every career choice they make. Therefore, it is essential to comprehensively understand this reality so that formative strategies can be designed appropriately and contextually. By considering these various dynamics, this section outlines several key factors that influence the perceptions and career choices of the younger generation regarding the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher.

Theological Framework: The Teaching Profession as a Divine Calling

The profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher has a strong theological foundation as part of a divine calling. (Ephesians 4:11–12) states that God gave some to be teachers to equip the saints for the work of ministry and for building up the body of Christ. This indicates that the teaching profession is not merely an academic activity but a form of service within God's plan for His people. The teacher becomes God's instrument for instilling Christian values that are living and impactful in the character of the students. Amidst the currents of a changing era, the presence of teachers who understand their spiritual role is crucial for preserving the purity of doctrine and for shaping a generation faithful to Christ.

(John 21:15–17) provides a strong foundation for the spiritual responsibility of a teacher. In this passage, Jesus calls Peter and repeatedly commissions him to "feed my sheep." Although the context is pastoral, this principle is highly relevant to the task of a Christian religious teacher. A religious teacher is a spiritual shepherd in the classroom. He or she not only delivers teachings cognitively but also attends to the emotional and spiritual needs of the students. The task of shepherding is one of love and sacrifice, which demands exemplary conduct, integrity, and commitment. A Christian religious teacher is a servant who guides students toward spiritual maturity.

In 1 Corinthians 15:58, the Apostle Paul gives deeply encouraging advice: "Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." This verse becomes an encouragement for teachers who may face challenges in terms of economics, social recognition, or cultural pressures. In the light of God's word, this profession holds eternal value. What is sown in faithfulness and love for the students will reap a harvest in their lives and become part of God's great work. Thus, being a Christian Religious Education teacher is a call to remain faithful, to persevere, and to trust that the God who calls will also equip.

Martin Luther, in his teaching on vocation (*vocatio*), stated that every work done in faith is a form of service to God. A Christian religious teacher is a co-worker with God in shaping the congregation, especially the younger generation, so that they may grow in true faith. This understanding helps the younger generation to see that this profession holds an eternal value that cannot be measured by mere economic or social standards. Even in a profession that seems humble, if it is carried out in faith, a person is serving in the Kingdom of God (Harjanto 2019).

The Role of the Family in Shaping Career Orientation

The family plays a highly significant role in shaping the career orientation of the younger generation (Nirwana 2020). Interview results show that many parents are more likely to encourage their children toward career choices that are considered financially promising and socially prestigious, such as becoming a doctor, engineer, or entrepreneur. Meanwhile, the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher is rarely seen as a primary option because it is perceived as not having sufficiently bright economic prospects. This reality reflects a shift in values within Christian families, which place a greater emphasis on worldly success compared to the meaning of service or a life calling. Consequently, the interest of young people in pursuing the religious teaching profession is often hindered from an early age by the influence of pragmatic family expectations. This imbalance between Christian values and worldly career ambitions results in the family itself becoming a hidden spiritual obstacle.

And yet, from a Christian faith perspective, the family is the first and foremost place for shaping life values, including guiding children's career choices. (Proverbs 22:6) emphasizes the importance of training up a child in the way he should go, so that when he is old he will not depart from it. Spiritual education within the family will build an awareness that a career as a religious teacher is part of serving God and others. When parents consistently instill Christian values, children are better prepared to accept and live out their life's calling. Moral and spiritual support from the family becomes essential capital for a young person to answer the call as a teacher who serves with integrity and faithfulness. This career will then be seen not just as a job, but as part of a spiritual mission that brings impact to the lives of others and the church.

In several interviews, it was found that some young people expressed an interest in becoming religious teachers, but family support was minimal. One respondent mentioned that his parents forbade it, reasoning that the income of a religious teacher is very small and does not promise a future. This finding is consistent with the research by Pattinama (2019), which revealed that economic perceptions and social status often become primary obstacles in shaping an interest in ministry among the younger generation. Therefore, there is a need for family education that emphasizes spiritual values over worldly considerations, so that every family member understands that a life calling does not always align with mere material gain (Pattinama 2019).

The Influence of the Church and Spiritual Role Models

The church plays a strategic role in shaping the career orientation of the younger generation, especially in the context of religious education. As a community of faith, the church provides a space for spiritual formation through various activities such as Sunday school, youth ministry, youth fellowships, and spiritual retreats (Panggilan et al. 2025). Through these activities, faith values are not only taught but also modeled. When the church consistently presents a healthy formative atmosphere and encourages young people to explore their spiritual potential, it opens up the possibility for them to perceive the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher as a form of calling, not just an ordinary career choice. A church that is responsive to the changing times has a great opportunity to foster the interest of the younger generation in this field.

This study finds that the presence of spiritual role models within the church environment profoundly influences the direction and passion for ministry among the younger generation. When adolescents have a close relationship with Sunday school teachers, pastors, or church ministers who demonstrate exemplary conduct in their lives and teachings, they are more inclined to walk a similar path of service. A tangible example of faithfulness, integrity, and a spirit of service becomes a powerful inspiration for young people to consider a career as a Christian religious teacher. However, if the church fails to present figures worthy of emulation, then interest in this profession will continue to decline. Therefore, the church must play an active role as a place for concrete and tangible discipleship and the formation of callings in everyday life.

In light of (2 Timothy 2:2), which reads, "And the things you have heard me say... entrust to reliable people who will also be qualified to teach others," the church is encouraged to establish a sustainable mentoring system. It is not enough to merely provide short-term or ceremonial training programs; rather, there needs to be a continuous structure and culture of ministry that consistently guides the younger generation. This empowerment will produce cadres of teachers who not only master the content of the Christian faith but are also capable of conveying its teachings in a relevant, contextual, and impactful manner. With this approach, the church will become fertile ground that yields a successor generation of Christian Religious Education teachers who are highly committed in their service and life witness.

In practice, a church that actively engages in vocation formation will be more successful in fostering the interest of the younger generation in religious careers. For example, a church that has regular mentoring programs, spiritual leadership classes, and intergenerational ministries creates a safe space for youth to ask questions, grow, and answer their calling. Conversely, a church that only provides ritualistic activities without tangible vocation formation tends to lose its emotional connection with the younger generation. Therefore, a spiritual role model is not just displayed from the pulpit, but through the daily lives of church leaders who become models of both spiritual and professional life.

The Challenge of Digitalization to Interest in Religious Professions

The development of digital technology has significantly transformed the landscape of life for the younger generation. They now live in a dynamic digital ecosystem where the speed of information access, work flexibility, and content creativity are inseparable parts of daily life. In this context, their career choices have also shifted toward fields considered more aligned with the characteristics of the digital world, such as the creative industry, information technology, media content, and online entrepreneurship. Meanwhile, the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher is often perceived as irrelevant because it is deemed to be lagging behind the times and does not promise high income or social recognition (Arifianto et al. 2024).

(Matthew 28:19–20) contains the mandate to make disciples of all nations, which today can be translated into the form of digital ministry innovation. A Christian Religious Education teacher can use social media, podcasts, interactive videos, online classes, and other digital platforms as means to convey faith values in a creative and contextual manner. When managed well, the digital space can become a teaching environment that is not only effective but also captures the attention of a younger generation more familiar with technology than with traditional learning methods.

The challenge lies in how churches and Christian educational institutions respond to this change systematically and progressively. Many institutions are still trapped in old patterns that are less adaptive to digital needs, thus making the religious learning process feel rigid and irrelevant. This gap causes the younger generation to further distance themselves from an interest in becoming religious teachers. Therefore, a paradigm shift is needed, along with the development of a digital-based curriculum and technological skills training for educators. If the religious teaching profession can adapt to this digital age, then the likelihood of the younger generation's interest in the profession growing will increase significantly.

Technology can be a highly effective tool in enhancing the appeal of Christian religious learning. A church in Jakarta, for example, successfully developed an e-learning platform for catechism classes and doctrinal teaching with high interactivity, which is accessed by thousands of young people. This demonstrates that if well-facilitated, digitalization can actually strengthen the mission of faith education. The digital-native generation is not anti-religion, but they are seeking new formats that are closer to their world. Thus, a tech-savvy teacher can reach their hearts and minds more deeply than conventional approaches.

The Impact of Secularization and the Relevance of Religious Education

Secularization poses a major challenge to the world of religious education today. The dominance of a secular worldview, which emphasizes rationality, individualism, and material achievement, has resulted in religion being increasingly marginalized from the public sphere and daily life. Consequently, the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher is considered less prestigious and lacks strong financial or social appeal. The younger generation, in turn, prefers careers that offer material security and recognition rather than pursuing a path of service in religious education. If not addressed seriously, this phenomenon will weaken the sustainability of Christian religious education and reduce the regeneration of qualified teachers (Nggiri et al. 2024).

Nevertheless, religious education remains relevant in forming the moral and character foundation of human beings. In the context of ethical crises, moral degradation, and the void of meaning in life experienced by many in the younger generation, Christian values continue to be a needed source of enlightenment. Christian Religious Education plays a role not only as a medium for doctrinal teaching but also as a profound process of humanization. The Church and educational institutions must realize that they have a great responsibility to communicate the relevance of faith teachings to the younger generation in a creative, contextual, and inspiring manner. Without a renewal of approach, religious education will be increasingly abandoned for being perceived as inapplicable to modern life.

To answer this challenge, Christian Religious Education teachers must be equipped with relevant competencies, such as digital literacy, contextual pedagogical approaches, and the ability to engage in cross-cultural dialogue. Teaching methods that are collaborative, discursive, and touch upon the realities of daily life can help restore the younger generation's interest in faith values. Religious education needs to be revived as a space for existential and spiritual reflection that addresses the deepest human needs. In doing so, the profession of a religious teacher will not only be seen as a spiritual choice but also as a strategic agent of social change amidst the dynamics of a secular society.

In the Indonesian educational context, secularization has entered through policies and educational practices that separate religious values from academic life. The secularism permeating the school environment creates a chasm between faith and rationality. This has a direct impact on the youth's perception of Christian religious education as something optional and insignificant. And yet, the identity crises, void of meaning, and social alienation faced by many young people actually require a holistic and spiritual educational approach. Therefore, Christian religious teachers need to be present as transformative figures who bridge spirituality and contemporary reality (Simanullang 2025).

Potential for Transformation and Revitalization Strategies

Although the younger generation's interest in the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher is currently considered low, the research results indicate a great potential for change. Many respondents expressed an interest in pursuing this profession if it were packaged more contextually and relevantly to the needs of the times. This suggests that the negative perception is not an absolute factor but can be overcome with a more inspiring and strategic approach. This profession can regain its appeal if it is presented as a form of meaningful service as well as a space for self-development. Transforming this perception

requires a new narrative that emphasizes that becoming a Christian religious teacher means participating in shaping character and human values amidst a complex world (Samaloisa 2023).

The church, family, and Christian educational institutions have a central role in realizing this revitalization. Cross-sector collaboration is needed to create a holistic and sustainable formation ecosystem. The church can provide a space for young people to express themselves and get involved in ministry from an early age. Meanwhile, the family needs to provide spiritual and moral support so that children feel proud to choose a path of service. Christian educational institutions must also update their curriculum and teaching methods to align with the changing times, including the integration of digital technology and contextual approaches. If these three elements work synergistically, then a career as a Christian religious teacher will be viewed as more meaningful and promising (Supartini 2019).

Revitalization strategies also include strengthening the personal capacity of prospective teachers through leadership training, spiritual retreats, theological mentoring, and mastery of digital media. The world of Christian religious education can no longer rely solely on classic approaches but must be adaptive to social and technological dynamics. By equipping the younger generation with 21st-century skills, they will be more confident and prepared to carry out their duties as competent and impactful educators. When religious teachers are positioned as agents of change and bearers of the values of the Kingdom of God in a contemporary context, the regeneration of this profession will occur naturally and continuously.

Gulo & Salurante (2023) emphasize the importance of "redeeming the time," as written in (Ephesians 5:15-16), as a call not to passively face the era but to actively use opportunities to do things of eternal value. In this regard, the church and Christian educational institutions must realize that transformation cannot stop merely at curriculum changes but must touch the paradigms of thinking and the work culture of the entire educational ecosystem. Revitalization must be viewed as a long-term, strategic, and measurable process that is continuously evaluated. If the younger generation sees a genuine commitment to the formation and development of this profession, they will be more prepared to answer the call to become Christian Religious Education teachers (Gulo and Salurante 2023).

The Younger Generation's Perspective on the Meaning of Calling and Career

Based on the interviews conducted, many from the younger generation have diverse understandings of the concept of a calling in the Christian life. The majority recognize that a life calling is something that originates from God and has a spiritual dimension, yet they also tend to separate it from the reality of a professional career. A career is seen as a means to obtain economic stability, while a calling is considered a form of personal devotion or service within the church context. This dichotomous view reflects a theological challenge in bridging the gap between daily work and spiritual life, especially when discussing the profession of a Christian Religious Education teacher (Harjanto 2019).

In the narrative of some young people, becoming a Christian religious teacher is seen as a form of calling, but it is often accompanied by doubts regarding its financial and social future. They question whether they can support a family or meet personal needs if they pursue this profession. This indicates that in a contemporary cultural context that heavily emphasizes material success and the achievement of prestige, even a profession with high spiritual value must compete with worldly demands. It is here that the importance of developing an understanding that a career based on a calling actually has a holistic dimension serving God, others, and also making a tangible contribution to society becomes evident.

Reformation theology, as taught by Calvin and Luther, emphasizes that all work is sacred if it is done with faith and integrity. This means that any career, including that of a Christian Religious Education teacher, is not only a spiritual calling but also an embodiment of faith in action. By introducing this understanding to the younger generation, it is hoped that they will be able to see that becoming a religious teacher is not a backward or less valuable choice, but rather one of the most impactful and noble forms of service in shaping the character of the next generation (Rezeki Putra Gulo 2023).

4. Conclusions

The perception of the younger generation regarding a career as a Christian Religious Education teacher is profoundly influenced by current social and cultural dynamics. The tendency to choose more modern and economically advantageous professions poses a major challenge to the regeneration of CRE teachers. Therefore, it is essential for educational

institutions, churches, and Christian communities to revitalize their approach to religious education by aligning Christian values with technological developments in order to attract the interest of the younger generation.

5. Research Implications and Recommendations

This research has several theoretical and practical implications that need to be considered by stakeholders in the field of Christian education and ministry. Theologically, the research findings affirm the need for instilling a deeper understanding of a life calling as an integral aspect of every career, including the teaching profession. This becomes the responsibility of the church, theological schools, and educational institutions to teach that service to God is not limited to the pulpit or the altar, but also extends to the world of education and teaching.

Practically, churches and Christian educational institutions need to design holistic career formation programs that not only nurture the spiritual aspects but also provide skills training relevant to the contemporary workforce. Programs such as spiritual mentoring, digital training, leadership development, and technology-based teaching skills are crucial for supporting the interest and readiness of the younger generation. Furthermore, collaboration with local churches to create scholarships or financial support for prospective Christian religious teachers would help alleviate economic concerns.

For future researchers, this study can be expanded by using a quantitative approach to statistically measure the relationship between the perception of a calling, social influence, and career interest in the religious field. Research could also broaden its geographical scope to various regions with different cultural contexts to gain a wider understanding of the dynamics of perception among the Christian younger generation in Indonesia. Thus, the regeneration of Christian Religious Education teachers will become more directed and sustainable.

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