

Research/Review

Challenges and Opportunities of Christian Religious Education in the Digital Era

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Abstract. Christian Religious Education (PAK) has an important role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students. In the digital era, PAK faces new challenges and opportunities. The main challenge is the lack of teacher readiness in using technology and the negative influence of the digital world. However, the digital era also opens up great opportunities through interactive learning media and wider accessibility. This study uses a literature review method to analyze digital transformation in PAK. The results show that the integration of technology in PAK must be supported by teacher training, relevant curriculum development, and collaboration between schools, churches, and families. With an innovative and collaborative approach, PAK can continue to be relevant and effective in strengthening the faith and character of students amidst the flow of modernization. PAK teachers need to utilize technology to enrich the learning experience, while maintaining Christian values. Collaboration between teachers, churches, parents, and students is the key to optimizing the benefits of technology and minimizing its negative impacts. Thus, PAK in the digital era is able to form a young generation that is technologically literate and steadfast in the Christian faith.

Keywords: Challenges; Christian Religious Education; Digital Era; Opportunities

1. Introduction

Christian Religious Education has an urgency to build character and spiritual values of students. PAK is not only to introduce Christian values, but also to strengthen faith and provide a strong foundation for students in going through various life problems. This religious education is the main basis in building a person with integrity, faith, and responsibility as taught by Jesus. Currently, the development of technology and the flow of global information is increasingly advanced so that PAK faces various new challenges that affect the way students teach and receive material. The digital era brings significant changes in the teaching and learning process, both in terms of methods, media, and interactions between teachers and students. One of the main challenges is the lack of teacher readiness in utilizing technology as a learning tool. (Tafonao et al., 2022). Not all educators have adequate digital skills, so the process of adapting technology in the classroom often does not run optimally. This is exacerbated by limited infrastructure in some areas, such as minimal internet access and technological devices, which makes online learning difficult to implement evenly. In addition, other challenges arise from the negative influence of the digital world. Learners are increasingly exposed to various content that is not always in line with Christian teachings, ranging from misinformation to digital entertainment that encourages a consumerist and individualistic lifestyle. Social media, although it has a positive side, can also be a means for the spread of ideologies that conflict with the principles of the Christian faith. This condition requires PAK to be more adaptive and innovative in order to be able to compete with the flow of information that is so fast and broad. (Doni, 2024).

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However, behind these challenges, the digital era also opens up great opportunities for the development of PAK. Technology allows the creation of interesting interactive learning media, such as educational videos, digital Bible applications, and online discussion platforms that broaden students' spiritual insights. With easy access to various digital resources, students have the opportunity to deepen their understanding of Christian teachings outside of school hours. Spiritual materials can be packaged in the form of podcasts, webinars, and e-books that make learning more flexible and interesting. Collaboration between teachers, parents, and church communities has also become more effective through social media and online communication platforms. For example, virtual study groups or online prayer communities can strengthen spiritual relationships between congregation members, as well as become a discussion space for students to ask questions and share faith experiences. The role of parents is also increasingly crucial in supervising and accompanying their children to use technology wisely and responsibly. (Lift, 2024).

Therefore, it is important for educators to understand and manage these challenges and opportunities wisely. The integration of technology in PAK must be supported by adequate training for teachers, curriculum development that is relevant to the needs of the times, and active collaboration between schools, churches, and families. Thus, PAK is not only able to survive in the digital era, but also becomes an effective means of strengthening the faith and character of students amidst the current of modernization. Through an innovative and collaborative approach, PAK can continue to be light and salt for the younger generation, preparing them to become future leaders based on Christian faith and love.

2. Literature Review

Transformation of Christian Religious Education in a Digital Context

The development of digital technology has fundamentally changed the educational landscape, including in the domain of Christian Religious Education (PAK). According to (Knight, 2019), digital transformation in religious education not only affects teaching methods, but also changes the way students understand and experience spirituality. Research conducted by (Anderson & Thompson, 2020) shows that the implementation of technology in PAK can increase student engagement by up to 65%, but also poses challenges in maintaining the relational and communal aspects that are characteristic of religious education.

In the Indonesian context, research (Hura et al., 2024) identified that Christian Religious Education learning methods in the current digital era require transformation to increase accessibility and help students face moral dilemmas related to technology, in line with Christian teachings on ethics. During the COVID-19 pandemic, hybrid learning was adopted by 78% of Christian schools, but there is still a digital divide that affects access to learning in remote areas. Unlike previous studies that focused on the technical aspects of implementation, this study will explore the theological and pedagogical dimensions of technology integration in Christian Religious Education.

(Miller & Davis, 2022) in their comprehensive study on "Digital Faith Formation" emphasize the importance of balancing technological innovation with the preservation of traditional spiritual values. They argue that technology should be a means to deepen the experience of faith, not replace it. This research is in line with the findings (Purnomo & Siahaan, 2021) which shows that the effectiveness of digital PAK depends on the educator's ability to integrate digital content with authentic spiritual practices.

Challenges and Opportunities of Digitalization in Religious Education

Challenges of Digitalization of PAK

Contemporary literature identifies several key challenges in the digitalization of PAK. (Peterson, 2020) highlights the issue of the "digital divide" which creates inequality in access to quality religious education. This challenge is reinforced by research (Siahaya & Ambarita, 2021) who found that In the home learning situation due to COVID-19, PAK teachers try to remain professional by giving assignments, holding online workshops, and

encouraging students to learn independently from the internet or asking for help from friends. However, learning difficulties often arise due to limited internet access, which hinders the effectiveness of these learning methods.

Transformative Opportunities of the Digital Age

On the other hand, various studies show the significant opportunities offered by the digital era. (Lee & Park, 2022) In their longitudinal study they found that the use of interactive multimedia in PAK can increase material retention by up to 73% compared to conventional methods. This finding is supported by experiments conducted (Octaviani, 2024) which demonstrates the effectiveness of digital storytelling in teaching Bible narrative.

(Liswany et al., 2024) identified five key opportunities for PAK digitalization: (1) personalization of learning, (2) global accessibility, (3) multimedia interactivity, (4) virtual collaboration, and (5) real-time assessment. However, they also emphasized the need for a strong theological framework to guide the implementation of these technologies.

Recent research by (Sidabutar & Munthe, 2022) explores the use of artificial intelligence in personalizing PAK curriculum, showing the potential for adapting learning according to students' individual learning styles and spiritual levels. Although promising, this study still requires further validation in the Indonesian cultural context.

3. Research Method

This study uses a literature review method to collect information from various sources about virtual faith communities and Christian religious education in the digital era. The literature review was conducted to analyze various studies, articles, and relevant sources that discuss digital transformation in Christian religious education. With this approach, the author can understand the dynamics of virtual communities and the challenges faced in building faith communities in the digital era. (Waruwu, 2024).

4. Results and Discussion

Definition of Christian Religious Education Teacher

Christian Religious Education is a conscious effort to guide someone of various ages and backgrounds in responding to the teachings of God revealed through Christ and the church. The goal itself is to prepare individuals with the guidance of the Holy Spirit so that they can serve God in the challenges and problems of life including family. PAK teachers play a role in the responsibility of guiding all generations to become true followers of Christ. Before teaching, PAK educators must be obedient and true disciples of Christ. The role of PAK teachers is not only to teach, but also as a facilitator in a learning process by utilizing various sources and materials to help individuals broaden their understanding of the Christian faith and strengthen their personal spiritual experiences. (Tanduklangi, 2020). In this process, teacher creativity plays an important role, namely by using various sources and teaching methods, students not only understand the concept of Christian faith, but also apply it in real life.

Digital Transformation in Christian Religious Education

Digital transformation in Christian Religious Education has undergone significant changes due to the COVID-19 pandemic which has driven a shift in the use of technology in the learning process. The integration of e-learning platforms, digital applications, video conferencing and social media has changed the way material is delivered, making it more flexible without being limited by space and time. This change has not only affected educational institutions but also religious groups, such as Christians in the Czech Republic who are exploring the impact of technology on their spiritual lives. (Melkias, 2024). As a result of the impact of the pandemic, the digitalization of the global education system has become increasingly rapid. This underlines how crucial it is to increase the capacity, role and digital readiness in the school environment to realize an effective and efficient digital transformation. With the maximum use of technology, PAK teachers have the opportunity to increase student

activity and broaden their understanding of religious teachings so that the learning process becomes more interactive.(Boiliu et al., 2024).

The digital era has changed the way virtual faith groups are formed, and social networks play a role in maintaining and strengthening faith of its members. However, there are challenges such as limited technological infrastructure, unaffordable internet access, and low digital literacy that must be overcome so that technology can be used optimally. Integrating technology in a spiritual context requires pedagogical, theological, and ethical considerations, so a careful approach is needed to anticipate any challenges that may arise.(Martin Putra Hura et al., 2024). The adoption of digital technology in religious education has brought about significant changes in teaching methods, affecting student engagement, learning outcomes, and moral formation. To manage this, religious education institutions must prioritize strategies that include training and professional development for educators, strengthening cooperation between each educational institution, church community, and technology developers.(Gunawan et al., 2024).

The Digital Age and Its Implications for Education

In the ever-changing modern era, education can no longer ignore the impact of the digital revolution that has penetrated every aspect of life. Over the past decades, technological advances have changed the way we interact with information and culture, and fundamentally changed the teaching and learning process. The shift from traditional educational methods to the use of digital technology has huge implications and potential that will reshape the world of education globally.(Sindi Septia Hasnida et al., 2023).

To meet the demands of the digital era, learning needs to be designed so that students can learn instantly (immediacy of learning), thus eliminating the boundaries between school and non-school environments. The learning style of digital students is no longer limited to classroom observation; they are used to collecting various information from various sources outside the classroom. In addition, the millennial generation also tends to express their thoughts spontaneously, unlike previous students who may need preparation. Therefore, the right approach is crucial to ensure that student participation in class remains meaningful and motivating for them. With an effective strategy, subject matter can be presented more broadly through connectivity between teachers and students, thus accelerating the development of student potential and enabling them to achieve deep understanding.(Afif, 2019).

Challenges of Christian Religious Education in the Digital Era

The new civilization is characterized by digitalization, flexibility and openness giving a big change to education. The digital era is seen as a double-edged sword. On the one hand, digital technology gives many roles for education, but also presents new challenges. The integration of digital technology into the learning process forces educational institutions to adapt to the ever-evolving learning culture. The digital era is a time when access and distribution of information is fast and easy to use. This development is marked by the emergence of devices such as computers, mobile phones, and social media. Examples of other devices include TVs, smartphones, computers, and laptops. The digitalization process can be seen in various things, such as printed books becoming electronic books (e-books), physical letters becoming emails, and cassettes becoming digital formats such as MP3 or MP4. The change from conventional devices to sophisticated technology raises new challenges in various fields, such as politics, economics, socio-culture, defense, and information technology. More than just digitalization, this development also affects the internet and information technology systems universally, as recorded in the media *The Good Years* which promotes culture through mass media and the internet(Nide, 2023).

Although technology provides convenience, there is an impact on the quality of social interaction. People are communicating less and less directly due to being busy with devices such as PCs, laptop, and mobile phones. This phenomenon is clearly visible, especially among millennials and Gen Z, who, even though they gather in places like cafes or public spaces, are more focused on gadgets to access social media or play games. They are more likely to spend

time looking for interesting content and following information related to other people through statuses or posts on social media.(Doni, 2024).

The use of gadgets can be seen in the practice of Christian Religious Education (PAK) in the 4.0 era, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic. With restrictions on direct meetings, the delivery of God's Word is done online. Worship takes place from each home, and social media becomes meanseffective in preaching the Word of God. Although technology is used in spreading the Word of God, the Bible must remain the primary source.(Serdianus, 2003). The delivery of the Word of God is also expected to not only teach the contents of the Bible, but also to carry out Christian values in their lives. In addition, the delivery of the Word of God must maintain the purity of the sermon but remain relevant, utilizing various means provided, in order to reach people who live in the era of advanced telecommunications, globalization, and openness of information. Therefore, Christians are challenged to remain faithful to their faith amidst the development of digital flows. The Church and Christian Religious Education in schools have a responsibility to guide the younger generation to be able to follow technological developments without losing direction in the truth of the Christian faith. Thus, they remain steadfast in their faith and live their lives according to Christian principles.(Samalinggai, 2021).

Opportunities for Christian Religious Education in the Digital Era

The digital era offers great potential for PAK, especially for adults. Despite the challenges, technology can be used to expand the reach of religious teaching, increase student engagement, and create innovative and efficient learning methods. Some key opportunities include:

- **Wider Accessibility**

Digital technology allows PAK materials to be accessed anywhere, including in remote areas or those with limited time to attend face-to-face classes.

- **Use of Interactive Media**

Videos, simulations, and interactive apps are used to convey Bible stories and Christian principles in innovative and creative ways.

- **Online Community**

Social media and digital platforms make it possible to form online faith communities where individuals can share experiences and strengthen their faith growth.Waruwu, "Building a Virtual Faith Community: Challenges and Opportunities for Christian Religious Education in the Future."

- **Independent Learning**

Technology allows individuals to learn independently at their own pace and time. Apps like digital Bibles with daily devotionals, teaching videos, and spiritual podcasts are helpful.

Technology is used to expand learning materials, increase activity and create a more interactive learning experience. The key point in technology integration is the use of persuasive design to present materials to students, by utilizing visual media such as videos and images. In addition, online platforms allow teachers to give assignments online, and work on them anytime and anywhere.(Doni, 2024).Christian Religious Education learning can be a firm support for students in responding to various information and communication technology issues in the digital age, namely by teaching:

- Using the internet as a means to explore, study, and critique various beliefs and practices of worship, important questions, and ethical issues.

- Take advantage of social media or video conferencing to interact and collaborate with friends who are far away.
- Various multimedia and presentation applications can be used to present student assignments and learning products.
- Supporting software can be used to organize, visualize concepts, and communicate knowledge and understanding related to the diversity of religious beliefs and practices.
- The use of digital cameras to display images and recordings in the classroom can support conversations and broaden understanding of the implications of religious beliefs and practices.

The role of teachers is now expanding, no longer just a single source of learning. Thanks to the information-rich internet, learning can now also take place virtually, not only face-to-face. Books are now not only in printed form, but in the form of electronic books. Social interaction is no longer limited to direct conversations in one place. With social media, communication can be established across space and time. Furthermore, the integration of technology allows students to access a variety of Christian education resources online, including texts, videos, and other learning materials. Technology significantly facilitates the adjustment of approaches and learning processes to align with the needs of each individual. Students can obtain teaching materials that are relevant to their respective understanding capacities.(Ate et al., 2025).

Negative Impacts of the Digital Era

A 2015 survey by UNICEF in collaboration with Harvard University's Communication and Information Technology in the USA, showed that out of 400 respondents aged 10-19 years spread throughout Indonesia, both from rural and urban areas, 98% of children and adolescents understood the internet, and 79.5% actively used the internet. This survey also showed that children and adolescents who became internet users were vulnerable to deviant and improper behavior, especially if there was no supervision and guidance from parents.(UNICEF, 2015).

The Indonesian Child Protection Commission noted that in 2014 to 2015, 1,022 children became victims of pornography, with the breakdown being around 28%.Survivors of online pornography21% were exposed to online child pornography, 20% were involved in online child prostitution, 15% were targeted in pornographic CDs, and 11% were victims of online sexual violence. Data from the Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association (2016) estimates that internet users in Indonesia are 132.7 million people, an increase of 51.8% compared to the 2014 survey and in 2017 the number of internet users increased to 143.26 million people. Of this number, child internet users are 16.68% or equivalent to 23.89 million children. This shows the large number of children and adolescents who use the internet. Although technological advances have an impact on ease of access, it must be noted that this convenience not only has a positive impact, but also a negative impact(APPJII, 2022).

Research in Surabaya involving children aged 6-12 years showed that 27% of children first used the internet at the age of 8 years. It was also found that there were children who started to know the internet since toddler age, namely 5 years as much as 12%, 4 years as much as 4% and 3 years 1%. This must be a concern for parents, because children aged 10-14 years also often use the internet to watch videos, especially through platforms such as YouTube, which shows data with 300 million videos uploaded every minute and 2 billion viewers every month. social media is the most frequently played content, with around 129.2 million users(Muhaimin, 2001).

Based on this survey, the negative impacts of the digital era have a major influence on children's spirituality and morality. SoParents need to be actively involvedin strengthening children's faith and morals through Christian religious education in the family. This is based on Christian moral principles, with teaching materials that contain true faith values. The goal is to guide children to have attitudes that are in accordance with the teachings of Christ and

form a strong Christian character. In the digital era, strengthening children's morals and attitudes is important, because morals determine how to distinguish between good and bad deeds. Moral norms are the reference used to judge the right or wrong of an act. Thus, morality occurs when someone acts well based on an awareness of responsibility, not for their own benefit. This good, sincere and selfless attitude and behavior is what is called true morality (Tafonao et al., 2022)

Challenges in Improving the Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in the Digital Era

Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers face various challenges when developing digital learning materials. (Roidola, 2023). The challenges are as follows:

- **Low Level of Digital Literacy**

Minimal understanding of digital technology including software and online learning platforms is a challenge for PAK teachers in creating teaching materials.

- **Limitations of Technology Infrastructure and Internet Access**

Unstable internet access and limited technological devices are obstacles to adopting technology for teaching and learning activities.

- **Lack of Technology Training**

Not all teachers have the opportunity to participate in technology training and professional development, making it difficult for them to develop and use technology in Christian religious learning.

- **Difficulties in Evaluating Digital Materials**

The right assessment method is needed to measure the creativity and effectiveness of implementing digital teaching materials in the learning process.

- **Collaboration to Adapt Curriculum**

Adapting the PAK curriculum to technology is a challenge in itself, especially to ensure that Christian values remain fully integrated. (Irmawati et al., 2024).

- **Adaptation to Technological development**

Teachers are required to be able to adapt to technological advances, including learning and mastering new devices, applications, and platforms in the learning process.

- **Balance between Virtual and Face to Face Learning**

Maintaining the essence of Christian religious teaching requires careful efforts to find the right middle ground between utilizing technology as a tool and maintaining the importance of direct interaction in the teaching and learning process.

- **Security and Digital Ethics**

Ensuring that technology use is carried out in accordance with Christian religious principles, while protecting students from digital security risks.

- **Dependence Overdoing It on Technology**

Excessive use of technology can reduce the closeness between teachers and students, resulting in a lack of understanding of Christian spiritual and moral values.

- Management Time

Integrating technology requires careful allocation of time for material preparation, mastery of new devices, and smooth implementation of learning. (Sipahutar & Naibaho, 2023).

Opportunities in Improving the Professional Competence of Christian Religious Education Teachers in the Digital Era

Currently Christian Religious Education teachers have various opportunities to improve their professional competence. (Mesah, 2024). Some of these opportunities include:

- Access to Learning Resources

The Internet offers a variety of learning resources, including course materials, scholarly journals, and discussion forums, which provide opportunities for teachers to continually improve their knowledge of Christianity.

- Online Learning Platform

There are various online platforms designed to help teachers develop their skills, from teaching techniques, designing relevant curriculum, to utilizing technology in the teaching and learning process.

- Networking and Collaboration

Social media opens up opportunities for teachers to connect with friends, exchange ideas, and discuss quality practices in teaching Christian Religious Education.

- Utilization of Technology in Learning

The use of a variety of technologies, including educational apps, interactive videos, and e-learning platforms, enables teachers to create more engaging and dynamic learning experiences for students.

- Continuing Education

Through online courses, webinars, and training programs, teachers can update their understanding of new issues in Christian Religious Education and develop teaching methods that are adaptive to current developments.

- Innovation in Curriculum

The combination of Christian values, technology, and materials appropriate to students' experiences paves the way for teachers to develop innovative and relevant curricula. (Sipahutar & Naibaho, 2023).

5. Conclusions

Christian Religious Education (PAK) in the digital era brings challenges and opportunities. PAK teachers have an important role not only as teachers, but also as facilitators of faith, utilizing technology to enrich the learning experience without neglecting Christian values. Digital transformation opens up wide access to online learning resources and collaboration, although still faced with technological limitations and threats to digital ethics. Therefore, collaboration between teachers, churches, parents, and students is key to optimizing the benefits of technology while minimizing its negative impacts. With a wise approach, PAK in the digital era is able to form a young generation that is both technologically literate and steadfast in the Christian faith.

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