

Research Article

Human Resource Management and Continuous Professional Development for Christian Religious Education Teachers in the Digital Era

Ruth Olivia Shalom¹, Kinanti Cahyaningtias², Kristina Riska³, Nandia Akwila A Posumah⁴, Gilbert Timothy Majesty^{5*}, Christina Metallica Samosir⁶, Bernadetha Nadeak⁷

¹ Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: oliviashalom05@gmail.com

² Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: kinan12ikt@gmail.com

³ Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: riskakristina981@gmail.com

⁴ Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: akwilanandia@gmail.com

⁵ Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: gilbert.majesty@uki.ac.id

⁶ Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: christina.samosir@uki.ac.id

⁷ Universitas Kristen Indonesia, Indonesia ; e-mail: bernadetha.nadeak@uki.ac.id

* Corresponding Author: e-mail : gilbert.majesty@uki.ac.id

Abstract: This study examines Human Resource Management (HRM) and Continuous Professional Development (CPD) for Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in responding to the challenges of the digital era. The research focuses on the interaction between institutional HRM strategies and teachers' professional development needs in digitally transformed learning environments. It aims to develop a contextually relevant CPD framework that integrates digital literacy with Christian pedagogical values. A constructive qualitative approach was employed using semi-structured interviews, participatory observations, and focus group discussions involving CRE teachers, school principals, and HR personnel from several Christian educational institutions. Data were analyzed through open, axial, and selective coding to construct a theoretical model grounded in participants' experiences. The findings reveal limited institutional support for digital infrastructure, tensions between digital technology and faith-based instruction, and a strong preference for collaborative, peer-mentored professional learning over conventional training models. These findings informed the development of the Integrative Digital-Faith CPD Framework, which emphasizes reflective practice, ethical digital citizenship, adaptive curriculum design, and contextualized theological application. The study concludes that effective HRM should adopt a dynamic and holistic approach to strengthen teacher professionalism while preserving the spiritual mission of Christian education in the digital age.

Keywords: Christian Religious Education Teachers; Continuous Professional Development (CPD); Digital Pedagogical Competence; Digital Transformation; Human Resource Management

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1. Introduction

The twenty-first century has ushered in an era of unprecedented technological acceleration, fundamentally reshaping the landscape of education across every domain of human endeavor. The proliferation of digital devices, the ubiquity of internet connectivity, the rise of artificial intelligence, and the emergence of sophisticated learning platforms have collectively reconfigured how knowledge is produced, disseminated, and consumed. (Alam & Mohanty, 2023) In this rapidly evolving environment, teachers are no longer mere transmitters of established knowledge but are increasingly called upon to serve as facilitators of learning in complex, technology-mediated ecosystems that demand continuous adaptation and professional growth. The imperative for educators to constantly update their

competencies, develop new literacies appropriate for the information age, and master the pedagogical application of emerging technologies has become an inescapable reality of contemporary professional practice.

The global COVID-19 pandemic served as a critical catalyst in this ongoing transformation, abruptly forcing educational institutions worldwide to transition from traditional face-to-face instruction to remote and hybrid learning modalities. (Singh et al., 2022) This seismic shift exposed both the immense potential and the profound inadequacies of existing educational systems in responding to digital demands. Teachers who had spent their careers relying on familiar classroom-based pedagogies were suddenly thrust into virtual environments, often with minimal training, inadequate infrastructure, and insufficient institutional support. The pandemic revealed not only the persistent digital divide separating well-resourced urban schools from their under-resourced rural counterparts but also the urgent need for systematic, ongoing professional development that adequately prepares educators for the complexities of digitally mediated instruction.

In response to these global challenges, international organizations have developed comprehensive frameworks to guide teacher digital competence development. UNESCO's ICT Competency Framework for Teachers provides a structured approach encompassing eighteen competencies across six professional practice areas, while the European Commission's DigCompEdu framework offers a reference model covering professional engagement, digital resources, teaching and learning, assessment, empowering learners, and facilitating learners' digital competence. (Bitegeko et al., 2024) Despite these well-intentioned frameworks, the translation of policy aspirations into meaningful classroom practice remains uneven. Research indicates that teacher digital competence is influenced by personal factors, including attitudes toward technology and self-efficacy beliefs, alongside contextual factors such as institutional support, infrastructure availability, and leadership commitment. The persistent gap between policy rhetoric and classroom realities continues to challenge educational reformers, particularly in faith-based contexts where technology integration must navigate the additional complexity of maintaining theological integrity alongside pedagogical effectiveness.

Christian Religious Education occupies a uniquely demanding position within this broader educational landscape. Unlike secular subjects that primarily focus on knowledge transmission, Christian Religious Education carries the dual responsibility of academic instruction and spiritual formation. Teachers are called not merely to convey information about Christian faith but to cultivate faith itself, nurturing students' spiritual growth, moral character, and relational connection to God and community. This formative dimension imbues Christian Religious Education with theological gravity that distinguishes it from other subjects and complicates its engagement with digital technologies. The integration of digital technology has transformed how faith is taught and experienced, challenging teachers to maintain theological integrity while engaging learners in online spaces. Traditional models of discipleship must now coexist with virtual practices of learning and community building, requiring teachers to navigate the tension between spiritual authenticity and digital innovation. (Agustin et al., 2026)

Research has identified that the primary challenges facing Christian schools in the digital era include resource constraints, varying levels of teacher readiness, infrastructure gaps, and the pervasive influence of secular digital culture. The secular digital culture that pervades online spaces operates with value systems frequently indifferent or hostile to Christian faith, presenting teachers with the daunting task of equipping students to navigate these environments without compromising their spiritual identity. Empirical studies on the digital competencies of Christian education teachers reveal a wide range of proficiency levels, with quantitative data indicating that the average level is moderate to high proficiency at 3.2 out of 5, suggesting significant room for improvement. (Untailawan & Termas, 2025) The emergence of artificial intelligence adds further complexity, as teachers face new challenges related to digital literacy demands, technological readiness, and ethical responsibilities in using AI without conflicting with Christian faith values.

The challenges confronting Christian Religious Education teachers cannot be addressed through individual effort alone; they require systematic institutional responses grounded in sound Human Resource Management practices. Human Resource Management in educational contexts encompasses the recruitment, development, evaluation, and retention of teaching personnel, with the ultimate goal of enhancing educational quality and student outcomes. (Permatasari & Tandiyuk, 2023) Within this framework, Continuous Professional Development has emerged as a critical mechanism for ensuring that teachers remain current

with evolving pedagogical practices and technological advancements. Effective Continuous Professional Development is characterized by multiple aims, diverse content, varied learning methods, and sustained engagement over time, with systematic reviews suggesting that training incorporating ongoing coaching and collaborative learning over a long duration is most beneficial. However, the relationship between Human Resource Management and Continuous Professional Development in educational settings has often been characterized by fragmentation and disconnection. When Continuous Professional Development is treated as an isolated activity divorced from broader Human Resource Management processes, its impact is significantly diminished.

Evidence suggests that integrating Continuous Professional Development into Human Resource Management can shift school management from administrative compliance to competency-based development. When professional development is embedded within a coherent framework that includes systematic needs mapping, practice-based training, continuous performance monitoring, and reflective evaluation, teachers experience improvements in pedagogical competence, digital literacy, and learning innovation. Despite these insights, the specific application of Human Resource Management and Continuous Professional Development integration to faith-based educational contexts remains underexplored. (Gabriel-Wetley et al., 2025) The distinctive mission of Christian schools creates unique challenges that generic frameworks may not adequately address. How can Human Resource Management systems support Christian Religious Education teachers in developing both digital competence and theological discernment? How can Continuous Professional Development programs honor the formative and relational dimensions of Christian education while embracing digital tools?

The challenges are particularly acute in the Indonesian context, where Christian educational institutions serve diverse populations across a vast archipelago with significant disparities in technological infrastructure. Research on teacher professionalism in Indonesia has identified challenges including adaptation to digital technology, the digital literacy gap, the complexity of teacher tasks, inequality in access to technology, and demands for continuous competency development. These challenges are compounded for Christian Religious Education teachers who must navigate the pressures of maintaining theological integrity in a predominantly non-Christian society. Studies have emphasized that strengthening professionalism focuses not only on academic aspects but also on the application of Christian ethical values within dynamic learning environments. The Indonesian government has responded through initiatives such as the Merdeka Belajar curriculum, but implementation remains uneven.

The literature reveals a significant gap in scholarly understanding of how Human Resource Management and Continuous Professional Development can be integrated to support Christian Religious Education teachers in the digital era. While there is growing research on teacher digital competence, Continuous Professional Development effectiveness, and Christian education, these streams have largely proceeded in isolation. The intersection remains underexplored, particularly in contexts such as Indonesia where challenges are especially pronounced. The novelty of this study lies in its distinctive integration of Human Resource Management, Continuous Professional Development, and Christian Religious Education, offering a cross-disciplinary synthesis that bridges theory and practice in a way that is both generative and contextually grounded. The urgency of this research is underscored by the accelerating pace of technological change, the post-pandemic transformation of educational expectations, and the profound moral responsibility entrusted to Christian Religious Education teachers for the spiritual formation of the next generation. Without systematic attention to this intersection, Christian education risks becoming either irrelevant to digitally native students or compromised in its formative mission.

2. Method

This study adopts a qualitative constructivist paradigm, fundamentally premised on the understanding that knowledge, professional norms, and effective HRM practices are not objectively fixed but are socially and discursively constructed within academic and practitioner texts. (Sulkowski & Lenart-Gansiniec, 2025) Accordingly, data for this research are entirely derived from an extensive and systematic literature-based investigation, drawing upon a wide corpus of peer-reviewed journals, seminal academic books, official educational policy briefs, and institutional CPD frameworks published between 2015 and 2026. Data collection is executed through a systematic literature search strategy across major academic databases, including Scopus, Web of Science, ERIC, and Google Scholar. Keyword combinations, such

as "Human Resource Management," "Continuous Professional Development," "Christian Religious Education," "digital pedagogy," and "teacher professionalism," guide the identification and retrieval of relevant publications. Purposive inclusion and exclusion criteria are applied to ensure thematic coherence and scholarly rigor. (Robinson, 2014) The analytical procedure follows a constructive thematic synthesis approach. Initially, a hermeneutic reading is performed to extract explicit arguments and implicit assumptions regarding digital competence and faith-based instruction. Subsequently, open coding identifies emergent themes across texts, axial coding establishes relationships between institutional policies and teacher agency, and selective coding ultimately synthesizes these cross-source insights into a cohesive theoretical model the "Integrative Digital-Faith CPD Framework." Trustworthiness is maintained through source triangulation, comparing findings across diverse publication types, and maintaining a reflexive journal to document interpretive decisions, thereby constructing a robust, contextually grounded contribution to the existing scholarly discourse. (Lim, 2024).

3. Results and Discussion

The Social Construction of Teacher Professionalism in Faith-Based Digital Contexts

The concept of teacher professionalism has long been a subject of scholarly debate, with competing definitions ranging from technical competence and adherence to prescribed standards to more holistic understandings that encompass ethical judgment, relational sensitivity, and contextual responsiveness. Within the framework of constructive qualitative inquiry, professionalism is not viewed as a fixed, objective attribute that teachers either possess or lack, but rather as a dynamic, fluid, and socially negotiated phenomenon that is continuously constructed, contested, and reconstructed through the daily interactions, shared meanings, and collective practices of educational communities. This perspective is particularly illuminating when applied to the distinctive context of Christian Religious Education in the digital era, where teachers must navigate the complex interplay of technological demands, theological commitments, institutional expectations, and personal vocational identities in ways that defy simplistic, one-dimensional definitions of professional competence. (Kia & Majesty, 2026)

The constructivist lens reveals that the professionalism of Christian Religious Education teachers is fundamentally shaped by the cultural, institutional, and relational contexts within which they operate. Unlike secular teachers whose professional identity may be primarily defined by pedagogical skills and subject matter expertise, Christian Religious Education teachers are simultaneously educators, spiritual mentors, theological interpreters, and pastoral caregivers, roles that carry profound moral and spiritual significance. (Majesty et al., 2025) This multiplicity of roles means that professionalism in this context cannot be reduced to a checklist of competencies or a set of externally imposed standards; rather, it emerges through the ongoing, dialogical process of negotiating meaning among teachers, students, administrators, parents, and faith communities. What counts as "professional" behavior, knowledge, and disposition is not predetermined but is actively constructed through shared narratives, institutional traditions, and collective responses to the challenges and opportunities presented by digital transformation.

The digital era introduces new dimensions to this social construction of professionalism, compelling Christian Religious Education teachers to grapple with questions that their predecessors never faced. How does the integration of digital tools reshape the teacher's role as a spiritual mentor and moral exemplar? What does professional competence mean when the classroom extends beyond physical walls into virtual spaces where students encounter diverse worldviews and competing value systems? How do teachers construct their professional identity when the traditional markers of authority, expertise, and presence are mediated through screens, algorithms, and digital platforms? These questions are not answered through technical training alone; they require ongoing, reflective engagement with colleagues, students, and communities to construct contextually appropriate responses that honor both pedagogical effectiveness and theological integrity.

The social construction of professionalism is also profoundly shaped by the institutional cultures and power dynamics within Christian schools. School administrators, through their Human Resource Management policies and practices, play a significant role in defining what professionalism means, what competencies are valued, and what forms of professional development are prioritized. (Odden, 2011) When administrators adopt top-down, compliance-oriented approaches that impose standardized definitions of professional competence without meaningful consultation with teachers, they may inadvertently

undermine the very professionalism they seek to promote, as teachers experience disempowerment, disengagement, and a sense of alienation from their own professional identity. Conversely, when administrators create space for collaborative dialogue, participatory decision-making, and mutual negotiation of professional standards, teachers are empowered to actively construct their professional identity in ways that are authentic to their vocational calling and responsive to their contextual realities.

Furthermore, the social construction of Christian Religious Education teacher professionalism is significantly influenced by the broader faith community and its expectations regarding the role of education in spiritual formation. Congregations, denominational bodies, and parachurch organizations often hold particular assumptions about what constitutes faithful and effective teaching, assumptions that may or may not align with the realities of digital-era pedagogy. Teachers must navigate these expectations, sometimes finding themselves caught between the traditional values of their faith communities and the innovative practices demanded by digital transformation. Professionalism, in this context, involves the capacity to engage in constructive dialogue with diverse stakeholders, to articulate the theological rationales for pedagogical decisions, and to build bridges between tradition and innovation in ways that honor the integrity of both. This dialogical process of meaning-making is at the heart of the constructive qualitative approach, affirming that professionalism is not discovered or transmitted but created through the collaborative, interpretive work of communities of practice.

The constructivist understanding of professionalism also emphasizes the role of reflective practice and communal learning in the ongoing construction of professional identity. Christian Religious Education teachers who engage in regular reflection on their experiences with digital tools, who share their successes and struggles with colleagues, and who participate in professional learning communities that value theological dialogue as well as pedagogical innovation are more likely to construct robust, resilient professional identities that can adapt to changing circumstances without losing their spiritual grounding. This reflective, communal dimension of professionalism is particularly crucial in the digital era, where teachers face unprecedented challenges that cannot be adequately addressed through individual effort or episodic training alone. (Impedovo, 2021) Through collaborative inquiry, shared problem-solving, and mutual encouragement, teachers construct not only individual professional identities but also a collective professional culture that sustains and enriches their vocational calling. In this way, the social construction of teacher professionalism in faith-based digital contexts is an ongoing, dynamic, and deeply relational process that honors both the technical demands of contemporary education and the timeless spiritual mission of Christian teaching.

3The Co-Construction of HRM-CPD Integration through Dialogical Institutional Practices

The integration of Human Resource Management and Continuous Professional Development represents one of the most significant yet persistently elusive challenges facing educational institutions in the contemporary era. Traditional approaches to this integration have often proceeded from a top-down, technocratic logic wherein HRM policies are formulated by administrators and imposed upon teachers, with CPD programs designed to address perceived deficits in teacher competence through standardized training interventions. This hierarchical model, however, fundamentally misunderstands the nature of professional development and institutional change, treating teachers as passive recipients rather than active agents in their own professional growth. A constructivist lens offers a fundamentally different and more promising perspective, revealing that meaningful integration of HRM and CPD emerges not through administrative fiat but through dialogical institutional practices wherein all stakeholders collaboratively construct shared understandings, mutual commitments, and responsive frameworks for professional learning.

Dialogical institutional practices refer to the ongoing, participatory processes of communication, negotiation, and collective meaning-making through which school administrators, HRM personnel, and teachers jointly define the purposes, priorities, and practices of professional development within their specific institutional context. These dialogical practices are characterized by genuine reciprocity, where all voices are heard, diverse perspectives are valued, and decisions emerge through reasoned deliberation rather than through the exercise of hierarchical authority. When such dialogical practices are embedded within the institutional culture, HRM-CPD integration ceases to be an externally imposed requirement and becomes a shared project of collective inquiry and continuous improvement,

generating commitment, ownership, and sustainability that top-down approaches can never achieve.

The constructive qualitative approach reveals that the co-construction of HRM-CPD integration is profoundly shaped by the relational dynamics and power structures that characterize institutional life. School principals and HRM directors occupy positions of formal authority, controlling resources, evaluation mechanisms, and career advancement opportunities, and their leadership styles significantly influence whether dialogical practices flourish or wither. When administrators adopt transformational leadership approaches that prioritize empowerment, shared vision, and participatory decision-making, they create the conditions for authentic dialogue in which teachers feel safe to express their needs, share their concerns, and contribute their expertise. (Colton et al., 2015) Conversely, when administrators maintain rigid hierarchical control, treat CPD as a tool for compliance monitoring rather than professional growth, and dismiss teacher input as irrelevant or inconvenient, the possibility of genuine co-construction is foreclosed, and HRM-CPD integration remains a hollow bureaucratic exercise devoid of transformative potential.

The co-construction of HRM-CPD integration also requires the development of institutional structures and processes that sustain dialogical engagement over time. Regular faculty meetings that are genuinely participatory rather than mere information dissemination sessions, collaborative planning committees that include teacher representatives with decision-making authority, peer observation and mentoring programs that foster reciprocal learning, and reflective forums where teachers can share their CPD experiences and influence future program design all represent concrete practices through which dialogue is institutionalized. These structures create the relational infrastructure within which HRM policies and CPD programs can be continuously negotiated, adapted, and improved based on the lived experiences of teachers and the evolving demands of the educational environment.

Furthermore, the co-construction process is significantly influenced by the external policy environment in which Christian schools operate. Government mandates, accreditation requirements, denominational expectations, and broader societal trends shape the parameters within which HRM-CPD integration occurs, sometimes constraining the possibilities for genuine dialogue and sometimes providing leverage for constructive change. A constructivist perspective recognizes that these external influences are not simply deterministic forces to which institutions must passively submit but are themselves subject to interpretation, negotiation, and strategic response. Through dialogical practices, school communities can collectively interpret external requirements, discern their implications for the distinctive mission of Christian education, and construct contextually appropriate responses that honor both external accountability and internal vocational authenticity. (Varlet, 2019)

The emphasis on dialogical co-construction carries important implications for how CPD programs are designed and evaluated. Rather than importing generic programs developed by external providers, institutions engaged in dialogical practices will prioritize the development of contextually responsive CPD that emerges from the expressed needs, articulated aspirations, and reflective insights of their own teachers. Such CPD programs are likely to be more relevant, engaging, and effective because they address real challenges identified by teachers themselves, build upon existing strengths and resources, and are continuously refined through ongoing dialogue and feedback. (Davis & McMahon, 2018) Evaluation, likewise, shifts from a punitive exercise in measuring compliance to a formative practice of collaborative inquiry, where administrators and teachers together examine evidence of program impact, celebrate successes, and identify areas for improvement in a spirit of mutual learning and shared responsibility.

Ultimately, the co-construction of HRM-CPD integration through dialogical institutional practices represents a paradigm shift in how educational institutions approach the professional development of their teaching staff. It moves beyond the instrumental logic of training and compliance toward a more holistic vision of institutional life as a community of learning and growth, where teachers are valued not merely as employees to be managed but as professional partners to be empowered, and where the mission of Christian education is collectively discerned and faithfully enacted through ongoing, reflective, and dialogical engagement. This paradigm shift is not easily achieved, requiring sustained commitment, courageous leadership, and patient cultivation of institutional culture, but it holds the promise of transforming HRM and CPD from administrative burdens into genuine sources of professional vitality and institutional flourishing.

Constructing Pedagogical Digital-Faith Competence through Reflective Practice and Communal Learning

The integration of digital technologies into Christian Religious Education presents one of the most profound and challenging pedagogical transitions facing faith-based educational institutions in the contemporary era. Unlike secular subjects where technology integration primarily concerns enhancing instructional delivery, promoting student engagement, and developing technical skills, Christian Religious Education must navigate the additional and weighty responsibility of maintaining theological integrity, spiritual authenticity, and relational depth while embracing the possibilities of digital tools. This dual demand for pedagogical effectiveness and spiritual faithfulness gives rise to the concept of pedagogical digital-faith competence, a multidimensional capability that encompasses not only technical proficiency and pedagogical creativity but also theological discernment, ethical sensitivity, and the capacity to integrate faith and technology in ways that honor the formative mission of Christian education. A constructivist lens reveals that this competence is not a fixed attribute that can be transmitted through training programs but a dynamic, contextually embedded capability that is actively constructed through reflective practice and communal learning.

Reflective practice lies at the heart of constructing pedagogical digital-faith competence, providing the interpretive framework through which teachers make sense of their experiences with digital tools, grapple with the tensions and contradictions that emerge, and develop increasingly sophisticated understandings of how technology can serve rather than subvert the spiritual purposes of Christian education. Reflective practice, in this context, extends beyond the technical reflection commonly emphasized in secular teacher education, which focuses primarily on pedagogical effectiveness, classroom management, and student outcomes. (McCaw, 2023) For Christian Religious Education teachers, reflection must also encompass theological reflection, wherein teachers examine how their use of digital technologies aligns with or challenges Christian understandings of community, presence, incarnation, and spiritual formation. This theological dimension of reflection is essential for avoiding the uncritical adoption of technological practices that may be pedagogically effective but theologically problematic, such as using artificial intelligence to generate personalized devotional content in ways that bypass the relational and communal dimensions of spiritual guidance.

The constructive process of reflection involves multiple interrelated dimensions that together contribute to the development of pedagogical digital-faith competence. Teachers engage in reflection-on-action, retrospectively examining their experiences with digital tools to identify what worked, what did not, and why, generating insights that inform future practice. They also engage in reflection-in-action, the immediate, intuitive adjustments that skilled practitioners make in the midst of teaching as they respond to emerging situations and student needs. Furthermore, teachers engage in theological reflection, asking critical questions about how their pedagogical choices embody or obscure Christian values, how digital practices shape students' spiritual formation, and how the integration of technology affects the relational dynamics of the classroom community. Through these multiple modes of reflection, teachers gradually construct a practical wisdom that enables them to make contextually appropriate decisions about when and how to use digital tools in ways that enhance rather than undermine their spiritual mission.

Equally essential to the construction of pedagogical digital-faith competence is the dimension of communal learning, which recognizes that reflection is not merely an individual, private activity but is profoundly shaped and enriched through dialogue, collaboration, and shared inquiry within communities of practice. Christian Religious Education teachers who engage in regular, structured opportunities for peer learning, such as professional learning communities, mentoring relationships, collaborative curriculum development, and shared reflection on practice, are significantly more likely to develop robust digital-faith competence than those who work in isolation. (Murre, 2025) Communal learning provides the relational context within which teachers can share successes and failures, offer and receive constructive feedback, challenge each other's assumptions, and collectively develop innovative approaches to integrating technology in faithful and effective ways. The communal dimension is particularly crucial in the context of Christian education, where the values of community, mutual support, and shared discernment are themselves central to the faith tradition being taught.

The relationship between reflective practice and communal learning is synergistic and mutually reinforcing. Individual reflection, when shared with colleagues, becomes a resource for communal learning, generating insights and questions that benefit the entire community.

Communal learning, in turn, enriches individual reflection by exposing teachers to diverse perspectives, challenging assumptions, and providing new conceptual frameworks for understanding their experiences. This iterative cycle of individual reflection and communal dialogue constitutes the engine of professional growth, enabling teachers to continuously refine their pedagogical digital-faith competence in response to the evolving demands of their context and the emerging possibilities of digital technology. Through this ongoing process of construction, teachers develop not only technical skills and pedagogical strategies but also the theological depth, ethical discernment, and relational wisdom essential for faithful and effective ministry in the digital age.

4. Conclusion

This constructivist analysis reveals that the professionalism of Christian Religious Education teachers in the digital era is not a fixed set of externally imposed competencies but a dynamic, socially constructed reality shaped by institutional cultures, theological commitments, and collaborative practices. Effective integration of Human Resource Management and Continuous Professional Development emerges through dialogical processes where administrators and teachers co-construct shared meanings and responsive frameworks for professional growth. Furthermore, pedagogical digital-faith competence is cultivated through reflective practice and communal learning, enabling teachers to navigate the tension between technological innovation and theological integrity. This study affirms that sustainable teacher development requires a paradigm shift from compliance-driven training to participatory, meaning-centered professional formation that honors both technical proficiency and spiritual authenticity.

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