



Transforming Christian Religious Education For Character Formation in The Digital Era

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Abstract. *The transformation of Christian Religious Education in character building in the digital era is an important response to the changing educational landscape and the increasing use of digital technology among students. The research subjects include students, educators, and parents in several Christian schools in Indonesia. The research method used is a qualitative study with an in-depth interview and participatory observation approach. The research results indicate that the use of digital technology in Christian Religious Education can enhance students' understanding of Christian values, but also presents new challenges in character building. On one hand, digital platforms provide broader access to learning materials and supportive discussion communities, but on the other hand, the risk of spreading inaccurate information and the negative influence of social media can disrupt the character-building process. The findings also emphasize the importance of teacher guidance, parental involvement, and students' digital literacy in ensuring that technology is used responsibly and consistently with Christian values. Therefore, digital learning should not merely emphasize technological skills but also promote ethical awareness, critical thinking, responsibility, and meaningful application of Christian values in everyday life. The recommendation from this study is the need for better curriculum integration between Christian Religious Education and digital technology, as well as training for educators to use technology effectively in supporting character education.*

Keywords: Character Development; Christian Religious Education; Digital Era; Technology; Transformation.

1. BACKGROUND

Digital transformation has fundamentally changed the ways in which students access information, communicate, learn, and construct knowledge. These changes have intensified since the COVID-19 pandemic, which encouraged educational institutions to adopt various forms of digital technology-based learning (Nieto-Taborda et al., 2025; Timotheou et al., 2023). In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) faces the challenge of maintaining its relevance amid an increasingly digital learning environment. CRE is not merely oriented toward the transfer of knowledge about the Bible, doctrine, and Christian teachings, but also bears responsibility for developing students' character so that they are able to apply faith-based values in their everyday lives. Character education in CRE encompasses the development of attitudes, morality, responsibility, integrity, love, honesty, discipline, and concern for others (Tandana et al., 2022; Marbun et al., 2023). Therefore, the digital transformation of CRE should be understood not merely as a change in instructional media but as a pedagogical transformation that influences the processes of value internalization and character development among students.

The urgency of this transformation has become increasingly evident as digital technology has expanded students' spaces of interaction beyond schools and families into digital environments. Social media, online learning platforms, digital videos, Bible applications, search engines, and various internet-based information sources enable students to access religious knowledge more rapidly and diversely. Kase and Duryadi (2025) demonstrated that the integration of technology into CRE can increase student engagement, facilitate understanding of Christian values, and support spiritual and character development. Similar findings were reported by Soukotta and Souhaly (2025), who demonstrated that digital-based CRE models are relevant to the characteristics of Generation Alpha, which has grown up in technology-rich environments, particularly through the use of interactive media, project-based learning, and various digital platforms. Therefore, digital technology has considerable potential to make CRE more contextual, interactive, and responsive to the characteristics of contemporary learners.

Nevertheless, digital transformation also presents new challenges for character development. Students live in an increasingly open information environment in which they encounter information that is not always accurate, content that may conflict with moral values, unethical communication practices, and various forms of digital interaction that can influence their attitudes and character development. Under these conditions, students need the ability to use technology critically, ethically, responsibly, and in accordance with the values they uphold. Christian education occupies a strategic position because character development involves not only knowledge of moral values but also the internalization and application of those values in real-life contexts. Halawa et al. (2021) emphasized the important role of CRE teachers in guiding students to translate Christian values into moral and ethical behavior. Thus, technological competence should be positioned as an integral component of character development rather than merely as a technical skill.

Previous studies have demonstrated that the relationship between CRE and character development has received considerable scholarly attention. Rondo et al. (2022), for example, demonstrated that the CRE curriculum and teaching methods make important contributions to student character development through the internalization of values. This finding indicates that the success of character education is determined not only by the content being taught but also by how Christian values are translated into the learning process. Consistent with this finding, Anas et al. (2026); Sembiring & Panjaitan (2025) positioned CRE teachers as important figures in students' character development because teachers function not only as transmitters of

religious knowledge but also as moral guides and role models. These studies can therefore be regarded as supporting the importance of CRE as an instrument for character development.

However, previous studies reveal a number of limitations that constitute a research gap. Research on the integration of technology into CRE has tended to emphasize the use of digital media to increase students' interest, engagement, understanding, and learning experiences (Rafiki et al., 2025; Khairat et al., 2026). Meanwhile, studies of character development in CRE have focused more extensively on the roles of teachers, curricula, instructional methods, and the internalization of Christian values (Kadenyi., 2024; Anselmus Dami et al., 2023). Consequently, there remains a research opportunity to examine how the digital transformation of CRE can systematically integrate the use of technology, digital literacy, the internalization of Christian values, and students' character development within a single pedagogical framework. This gap is important because technology does not automatically produce positive character outcomes; its effects depend largely on how technology is designed, used, guided, and connected to the objectives of values-based education.

The need to develop a more systematic approach is further supported by recent research on Christian character education design. Siang et al. (2026) developed an ADDIE-based Christian character education learning design that integrates Gospel values into learning components through learning activities, reflection, and the application of values in real-life contexts. Their findings indicate that structured learning designs can support students' understanding and application of Christian character values, particularly love and honesty. This finding demonstrates a development in the research landscape from merely emphasizing the importance of character education toward developing instructional designs that systematically integrate Christian values. Nevertheless, the design does not specifically position digital transformation and digital literacy as central components of students' character development.

Based on these conditions, the novelty of this study lies in conceptualizing the digital transformation of Christian Religious Education as a pedagogical transformation that is not solely oriented toward technology use but also integrates digital technology, digital literacy, the internalization of Christian values, and students' character development. This approach extends previous research, which has generally examined technology as an instructional medium or character as an outcome of values education separately. From this perspective, students are not merely expected to become competent technology users but are also encouraged to become individuals who are able to use technology critically, ethically, responsibly, and in accordance with Christian values. Thus, the digital transformation of CRE is directed toward achieving a balance between digital competence and Christian character.

In the Indonesian context, which is characterized by considerable social, cultural, and religious diversity, the transformation of CRE should also be directed toward developing character that enables students to live responsibly within a pluralistic society. Christian values such as love, honesty, responsibility, respect for others, compassion, self-control, and integrity need to be manifested not only in face-to-face interactions but also in digital communication. Accordingly, character development through CRE can serve as a foundation for students to respond to various challenges of modern life reflectively and ethically. Research on CRE in contemporary contexts has likewise emphasized the important function of Christian education in developing character and Christian values that can be applied in students' everyday lives (Ekoprodjo & Wibowo, 2024).

Based on the foregoing discussion, this study aims to analyze the transformation of Christian Religious Education in the digital era in relation to students' character development, identify the opportunities and challenges associated with the use of digital technology in CRE, and analyze strategies for integrating digital technology, digital literacy, and Christian values to strengthen students' character. This study is expected to provide conceptual and pedagogical contributions to the development of CRE that is adaptive to technological developments without compromising its spiritual foundation and commitment to Christian character. Thus, CRE in the digital era should not function merely as a means of transferring religious knowledge but also as a pedagogical space for developing students who possess faith, integrity, critical thinking skills, moral responsibility, and ethical competence in the use of technology.

2. THEORETICAL REVIEW

Christian Religious Education and Character Formation

Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays an important role in shaping students' character by integrating Christian faith, values, and everyday behavior. Character formation is not limited to knowledge but involves developing attitudes and actions that reflect Christian values. Therefore, teachers' pedagogical and personal competencies are essential in guiding students toward responsible and Christ-centered behavior (Rondo & Moku, 2022; Anselmus Dami et al., 2023).

Transforming Christian Religious Education in the Digital Era

The development of digital technology has transformed educational practices, including CRE. Digital platforms provide opportunities for flexible, interactive, and contextual learning, but they also require teachers to adapt their pedagogical approaches. Digital transformation

therefore involves not only the use of technology but also changes in teaching strategies, learning environments, and teacher competencies (Timotheou et al., 2023; Epafra, 2026).

Christian Character Education in the Digital Environment

The digital environment influences students' attitudes, interactions, and moral development. CRE needs to respond by strengthening values such as responsibility, honesty, self-control, empathy, and respect in students' digital behavior. Character education should therefore connect Christian teachings with students' experiences in digital spaces.

The Role of CRE Teachers as Role Models and Facilitators

CRE teachers have a strategic role in character formation because students learn not only through instruction but also through teachers' attitudes and behavior. Teachers are expected to become role models while facilitating learning experiences that encourage reflection, responsibility, and the application of Christian values in everyday and digital contexts.

Digital Pedagogy in Christian Religious Education

Digital pedagogy emphasizes the meaningful integration of technology into learning. In CRE, digital media can be used to present biblical content, facilitate discussion, encourage collaboration, and connect religious values with contemporary issues. Effective digital pedagogy requires teachers to combine technological competence with appropriate pedagogical and theological understanding.

Digital Literacy as Part of Christian Character Formation

Digital literacy is an important component of character formation in the digital era. Students need to develop the ability to critically evaluate information, communicate ethically, respect others, and use technology responsibly. Thus, CRE should integrate digital literacy with Christian values so that students are able to demonstrate faith and moral responsibility in digital environments.

3. RESEARCH METHODS

This study employed a descriptive qualitative approach to understand the transformation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in fostering students' character in the digital era. This approach was used to describe participants' experiences, perceptions, and perspectives regarding a phenomenon within its natural context (Kim et al., 2017).

Data were collected through in-depth interviews with CRE teachers, students, and parents, as well as an open-ended questionnaire concerning the use of digital media in CRE learning. In-depth interviews enabled the researchers to gain an understanding of participants' experiences and the meanings they attributed to the phenomenon under investigation.

(DeJonckheere & Vaughn, 2019). Data trustworthiness was established through source and methodological triangulation by comparing information obtained from teachers, students, and parents, as well as findings from interviews and questionnaires (Carter et al., 2014).

The data were analyzed using thematic analysis through a process of coding, categorization, and identification of themes related to technology use, instructional methods, challenges in digital education, the roles of teachers and families, and students' character development (Braun & Clarke, 2021; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). The findings were presented descriptively and narratively to illustrate participants' experiences and perspectives and to explain the contribution of digital transformation to character development in CRE.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Transformation of Teaching Methods in Christian Religious Education in the Digital Era

Digital development has progressed rapidly and has affected various aspects of life, including communication, education, and social interaction. Technology has gradually changed the ways in which people obtain, process, and disseminate information. In the educational context, these developments have encouraged changes in the ways learning is designed and implemented. Turnip and Siahaan (2021) emphasize that the development of digital media has facilitated access to information while simultaneously creating new demands concerning ethical communication in digital spaces. This condition indicates that digital transformation in education is unavoidable but needs to be directed toward achieving optimal pedagogical benefits.

In the digital era, teaching methods in Christian Religious Education (CRE) have undergone significant transformation. One important change is the increasing use of online learning and various digital media as means of delivering instructional materials (Pazmino, 2008). This transformation provides educators with opportunities to develop learning that is more flexible, interactive, and responsive to students' characteristics (Hura, 2025). However, the transformation of CRE should not merely be understood as a shift from classroom-based learning to digital learning environments. Technology needs to be integrated with pedagogical objectives, Christian values, and students' developmental needs. Epafra (2026) emphasizes that digital pedagogy should be understood as part of a learning ecosystem rather than merely as the use of digital devices. Therefore, technology should be utilized to enrich learning experiences, expand interaction, and help students connect religious learning materials with real-life contexts.

An important characteristic of this transformation is the shift from teacher-centered learning toward more student-centered and collaborative learning (Masinambow et al., 2025). The use of Learning Management Systems (LMS), instructional videos, interactive media, and online discussion forums can provide students with opportunities to participate actively in the learning process. In CRE, these media can be utilized to deepen students' understanding of Christian values while encouraging their application in everyday life (Zega, 2025). Thus, CRE learning does not stop at doctrinal understanding but develops into a process of character formation that is relevant to students' digital lives.

Digital character education should also not be equated merely with the use of technological devices in the learning process. The use of technology without a clear pedagogical strategy may result in learning that is oriented toward technological devices but does not produce meaningful changes in students' learning experiences. Triyanto (2020) explains that character education in the digital era presents both opportunities and challenges, meaning that the use of technology needs to be accompanied by the strengthening of values and students' abilities to navigate digital environments. In line with this view, Epafras (2026) highlights the importance of understanding digital pedagogy as an effort to improve learning quality through the integration of technology with pedagogical needs and students' development. Therefore, the success of digital transformation in CRE largely depends on teachers' ability to select appropriate media, design learning activities, and connect technology with character formation objectives.

In addition to teacher competence, parental involvement is an important factor in the transformation of CRE. Character education does not take place only at school but also through the family environment and students' everyday lives. In the digital context, parents play an important role in assisting children in using digital devices, monitoring the content they consume, and providing examples of responsible technology use. Sinaga et al. (2021) demonstrate the importance of support and the role of educators in character-based online learning during the pandemic. These findings indicate that digital learning requires a support system that enables the values taught through education to continue to be applied in students' everyday lives.

Therefore, the transformation of CRE teaching methods needs to be directed toward the integration of technology, pedagogy, and character formation. Technology is not the objective of learning but rather a means of creating more relevant and meaningful learning experiences. The use of digital media also needs to be accompanied by evaluation and feedback from both students and educators so that the learning process can be continuously improved. Unequal

access to digital devices and the internet, as well as teachers limited digital competence, should also be considered by educational institutions. Therefore, teacher training, the provision of digital learning resources, and stronger family support are important components in ensuring that the digital transformation of CRE is implemented effectively.

The Impact of Digital Transformation on Character Formation

Digital transformation in CRE not only changes teaching methods but also affects the process of students' character formation. Technology provides broader opportunities for students to interact, communicate, obtain information, and participate in social activities. When appropriately directed, digital spaces can be used as a means of practicing Christian values such as care, love, empathy, responsibility, and solidarity. Therefore, digital environments should not always be viewed as threats to character development but can also function as spaces for moral and social learning.

Nevertheless, uncontrolled technology use can have negative effects on character development. Students who become overly dependent on digital devices may experience reduced direct interaction with their social environment, decreased participation in non-digital activities, and the development of behaviors that are less responsive to others. Triana et al. (2023) demonstrate that technological development affects character education among elementary school students, both by providing opportunities for skill development and by creating risks associated with inappropriate technology use. The findings of Syafitri et al. (2024) also indicate that technology use can influence students' behavior and character development. These conditions demonstrate that the impact of technology on character largely depends on how technology is used and the extent to which students receive appropriate guidance and supervision.

On the other hand, technology can support the development of students' critical thinking and creativity. Access to various sources of information enables students to explore knowledge, compare information, develop curiosity, and generate new ideas. Therefore, the main issue does not lie in the existence of technology itself but in the quality of its use and the guidance provided to students. CRE has a strategic position in directing these abilities so that they are used responsibly and in accordance with Christian values.

In this context, digital literacy needs to become an integral part of character formation. Students need to be able to select credible information, recognize harmful content, understand the consequences of digital actions, and communicate ethically. Digital literacy in CRE is therefore not limited to the technical ability to use digital devices but also involves the ability to make decisions based on moral and spiritual considerations. Accordingly, students are

expected to apply the values of love, honesty, responsibility, and respect for others when engaging in digital spaces.

Character Development through Christian Religious Education

Christian Religious Education plays an important role in character formation because the learning process is not only directed toward the acquisition of religious knowledge but also toward the internalization and application of Christian values in everyday life. Values such as love, honesty, responsibility, care, tolerance, and forgiveness need to be manifested in students' actual behavior. In the digital context, these values need to be translated into behaviors that are appropriate to students' lives on social media and within digital environments.

Character formation through CRE also requires a systematic learning process. Rezeki et al. (2026); Siang et al. (2026) demonstrate that the development of Christian character education learning designs can be directed through instructional designs that explicitly integrate Christian values with learning activities. These findings reinforce the view that character education cannot be achieved merely through the delivery of instructional content but needs to be realized through activities, reflection, habituation, and the application of values in real-life contexts.

In this process, CRE teachers have a strategic role as educators, mentors, and role models. Teachers are not only expected to master religious subject matter but also need to possess digital competence so that they can guide students in using technology productively and ethically. Gulo et al. (2024) demonstrate that strategies employed by CRE teachers to develop students' character in the digital era need to involve the integration of Christian values, role modeling, digital literacy, supervision, and collaboration with students' surrounding environments. This indicates that teachers' digital competence needs to develop alongside their pedagogical and spiritual competence.

Character development also requires family involvement. The values taught at school will be more effective when reinforced through habituation at home. Parents can help students develop healthy, responsible, and morally appropriate habits in using technology. Thus, character formation in CRE is a process involving schools, families, students, and the digital environment simultaneously.

Based on these overall findings, digital transformation in Christian Religious Education should be understood as a pedagogical transformation, rather than merely the digitalization of instructional media. Technology provides opportunities to improve students' access, flexibility, engagement, creativity, and learning experiences, but it also presents risks such as device dependence, reduced social interaction, and exposure to negative information and content.

Therefore, technology needs to be positioned as a means of strengthening the character formation process rather than replacing it. The integration of digital technology, digital literacy, Christian values, teacher role modeling, and family involvement constitutes an important strategy for ensuring that CRE remains relevant in developing students who possess religious knowledge as well as strong character, critical thinking skills, responsibility, and the ability to use technology ethically.

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The transformation of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in character formation is essential to remain relevant in the digital era. Digital technology and online platforms provide opportunities to deliver Christian values through more engaging, interactive, and accessible learning while overcoming geographical barriers. However, the widespread availability of digital content also poses challenges, particularly exposure to information that may conflict with Christian values. Therefore, CRE teachers need to provide relevant digital content and develop students' critical and ethical digital literacy.

Character formation in digital-based CRE should also adopt a holistic approach that integrates cognitive, affective, and psychomotor development. Active participation in social and community activities can strengthen the application of Christian values in everyday life. Ultimately, successful digital transformation requires collaboration among schools, churches, and parents to create a supportive environment for students to internalize Christian values and develop strong character and integrity.

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