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The Pedagogical Role of Religious Education Teachers in Addressing the Phenomenon of Cyber-Grooming: A Review of Digital Literacy Based on Christian Values

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Abstract

The development of digital technology has brought significant changes to various aspects of human life, including education. Expanded internet access allows students to obtain information quickly and easily. However, this progress is also marked by an increase in various online risks, one of which is the phenomenon of cyber-grooming, which targets children and adolescents as a vulnerable group. Cyber-grooming is a manipulative process carried out by perpetrators to build emotional relationships with victims through digital media for the purpose of exploitation. This study aims to examine in-depth the pedagogical role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers in addressing the phenomenon of cyber-grooming through a Christian values-based digital literacy approach. The method used was literature observation, reviewing various relevant academic sources. The results of the study indicate that CRE teachers play a strategic role in shaping the awareness of digital learners, who are raised through the integration of Christian faith values such as love, self-control, wisdom, and responsibility. This approach serves not only as a preventative measure against digital threats but also as a means of holistic character development. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen teacher competencies and develop a curriculum that is responsive to the challenges of the digital era.

Keywords: CRE teachers, cyber-grooming, digital literacy, Christian values, character education

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of digital technology has had a significant impact on various aspects of life, including the world of education and the character development of students. On the one hand, these advancements provide easier access to information and expand learning opportunities. However, on the other hand, various new threats have emerged in the digital space, one of which is the practice of cyber-grooming—manipulative efforts by perpetrators to build emotional relationships with children or teenagers via online platforms with the aim of exploitation (Kominfo, n.d.).

This situation calls for serious attention from various quarters, particularly the education sector. Students at a vulnerable stage of psychological development often lack the digital literacy skills required to recognise and avoid such threats. Therefore, education must not only focus on cognitive aspects, but must also encompass character building, ethics and the ability to think critically when using technology.

In this context, teachers of Christian Religious Education (CRE) play a strategic pedagogical role (Rusmanto & Lestari, 2025). They are not merely conveyors of teaching material; they also serve as spiritual and moral guides capable of instilling Christian values in their pupils' lives (Pasaribu et al, 2025). Values such as love, self-control, honesty and wisdom form an important foundation for fostering a healthy and responsible digital awareness.

Through a Christian values-based approach to digital literacy, CRE teachers are expected to equip pupils with the ability to recognise potential dangers in the online world, including cyber-grooming, and to make wise and ethical decisions. This approach emphasises

not only the technical aspects of using technology, but also the integration of faith and moral values into every digital activity.

Against this background, this study aims to examine the pedagogical role of CRE teachers in addressing the phenomenon of cyber-grooming through a literature review, with a focus on the development of digital literacy rooted in Christian values (Paelongan et al., 2024). It is hoped that this study will contribute to strengthening educational strategies relevant to the challenges of the digital age, whilst enriching holistic and contextual learning practices.

The rapid development of information and communication technology has brought many conveniences, but on the other hand it has also opened the door to various criminal activities, one of which is cyber-grooming. This phenomenon involves perpetrators using the internet to build emotional relationships with children or teenagers with the aim of sexual exploitation (UNICEF, n.d.). Children and teenagers, who often have an underdeveloped level of digital literacy and are vulnerable to outside influences, are the primary targets of these perpetrators.

In the context of education, particularly Christian Religious Education (CRE), teachers play a vital role not only in delivering religious content but also in shaping pupils' character and moral values. CRE teachers are expected to guide pupils to grow into individuals of integrity, capable of distinguishing between right and wrong, even in the digital world (Heluka, 2025). Therefore, strengthening digital literacy based on Christian values is an absolute necessity. Digital literacy in this context is not merely the ability to use technology, but also the ability to think critically, ethically, and responsibly when interacting in the digital space, all of which stem from Christian teachings.

This article will explore in greater depth the pedagogical role of religious education teachers in addressing the phenomenon of cyber-grooming through a review of the literature. The primary focus is on how religious education teachers can effectively instil digital literacy grounded in Christian values in pupils as a preventive and remedial measure against the threat of cyber-grooming.

METHOD

This study employs a qualitative approach using a literature review method (Sirait, 2024). This method was chosen as it enables the researcher to examine various concepts, theories and research findings relevant to the topic under discussion. Data sources were drawn from a range of academic literature, such as scientific journals, textbooks and research reports relating to Christian religious education, digital literacy and cyber-grooming. The data collected was then analysed through several stages, namely data reduction, theme categorisation, and concept synthesis. This approach aims to produce a comprehensive understanding of the pedagogical role of Christian religious education teachers in addressing the phenomenon of cyber-grooming.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Phenomenon of Cyber-Grooming and the Urgency of Digital Literacy

A review of the literature indicates that the development of digital technology has increased the risk of cybercrime against children, including cyber-grooming (Ayu, 2025; Hardianti et

al, 2023). Cyber-grooming is a process of psychological manipulation by perpetrators to build trust with the victim (the child) via digital media prior to further exploitation (Kominfo, n.d.). Research shows that low digital literacy leaves children vulnerable to this threat, as they are not yet able to recognise patterns of harmful interaction online. Therefore, digital literacy is not merely about technical skills, but also encompasses security awareness, ethics, and the ability to make wise decisions in the digital space. Furthermore, poor digital literacy also contributes to various other risks such as online fraud, sexual exploitation, and cyberbullying (Lausiana & Dona, 2025). This underscores that cyber-grooming is part of a broader crisis of digital ethics and security.

The Pedagogical Role of Christian Religious Education Teachers in the Digital Context

Studies show that Christian Religious Education teachers play a strategic pedagogical role in addressing the phenomenon of cyber-grooming, particularly as moral and spiritual guides. Teachers in this role not only act as conveyors of subject matter but also as shapers of pupils' character through the application of Christian values such as love, honesty, responsibility and self-control. These values serve as a vital moral foundation for guiding pupils' behaviour, particularly in digital interactions. It is hoped that pupils will be able to respect their own bodies and dignity, reject suspicious digital relationships, and have the courage to report inappropriate behaviour.

Christian teachers also act as facilitators of digital literacy, supporting pupils' ability to use technology intelligently, critically and responsibly (Pandie, 2022). Digital literacy in CRE encompasses an understanding of digital security elements, the ability to select appropriate information, and knowledge of online communication ethics. When media literacy is incorporated into the learning process, it has been shown to significantly enhance pupils' critical thinking skills, particularly in terms of evaluating the truthfulness and impact of the digital information they receive. Therefore, teachers must actively teach pupils the skills required to face the challenges of the digital world, including cyber security.

The role of teachers as role models is also crucial in digital literacy education. Their attitudes and behavior-particularly in the wise and responsible use of technology-help pupils develop good digital habits. Teachers' openness, empathy and responsiveness to pupils' online issues also help prevent cyber grooming. This encourages pupils to be more willing to share their experiences or problems, enabling teachers to intervene promptly.

Digital Literacy Integration Based on Christian Values

In addressing the challenges arising in the digital age, the integration of digital literacy grounded in Christian values is a pedagogical approach deemed effective and contextually relevant. This model does not merely focus on technological proficiency; it also emphasises the moral and character development of learners. Christian Religious Education (CRE) can provide a clear moral framework for pupils when interacting in the digital world by incorporating values of faith into digital literacy practices. This method requires a strong moral foundation because digital activities are now inseparable from daily life, making it highly relevant.

Christ-centredness is the defining feature of this model. Christ's teachings serve as the foundation for the use of digital technology. Learners are encouraged to understand that every activity taking place in the digital world—such as communication, consuming information, and interacting with others—is an essential component of faith. Consequently, principles such as compassion, truth, and responsibility are applied both in the real world and in the virtual world, fostering consistent personal integrity (Purba, 2022).

The holistic nature of digital literacy, which encompasses cognitive, affective and psychomotor aspects, is the next characteristic. Digital literacy does not merely refer to technical skills or knowledge, but also involves fostering attitudes and behaviours that align with Christian values. Students are not only taught about the benefits and risks of technology, but are also taught to apply these principles in real life, such as communicating ethically, ensuring personal safety, and taking responsibility for their use of digital media.

Furthermore, this approach is collaborative in nature, emphasising that various stakeholders must work together to support the success of digital literacy education. Parents, the church, and the wider social environment must support the teacher's role as a facilitator. All these components must work together to create a safe and comfortable digital ecosystem for children's development. By working together effectively, values can be consistently monitored, practised, and reinforced. This enables pupils to develop into intelligent, critical, and principled individuals capable of navigating the dynamics of the digital world.

Pedagogical Strategies for Dealing with Cyber-Grooming

Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers must develop comprehensive and context-specific pedagogical strategies to address the phenomenon of cyber-grooming. A literature review indicates that successful approaches do not merely focus on cognitive aspects but also encompass the emotional and spiritual aspects of learners. This is crucial because cyber-grooming poses a threat that targets individuals' psychological and moral well-being. Consequently, the approach adopted must equip students with the knowledge, awareness and resilience to navigate risks in the digital world. Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers must develop comprehensive and context-specific pedagogical strategies to address the phenomenon of cyber-grooming. A literature review indicates that successful approaches do not merely focus on cognitive aspects but also encompass the emotional and spiritual aspects of learners. This is crucial because cyber-grooming poses a threat that targets individuals' psychological and moral well-being. Consequently, the approach adopted must equip students with the knowledge, awareness and resilience to navigate risks in the digital world.

One of the key strategies is preventive digital education, which aims to instil awareness of the threat of cyber-grooming from an early age. Civics teachers must teach pupils about the characteristics of perpetrators, the methods used, and how to prevent offences. This approach highlights the importance of vigilance and the ability to identify potentially dangerous situations. Comprehensive education is expected to help pupils make wise decisions and avoid risky digital interactions.

The reflective-theological approach integrates Christian values into students' digital experiences. Students are encouraged to reflect on their actions and interactions in the digital world through the lens of Christian teachings, using approaches such as discussion, reflection

and case studies. This method not only enhances conceptual understanding but also fosters the internalisation of values. Consequently, students can develop their moral awareness when assessing and acting in various digital situations.

The cultivation of Christian character is also a vital method for building students' moral resilience. Behaviour, both in the real world and online, must be grounded in principles such as compassion, purity of life, and responsibility. A strong character will help pupils withstand the pressure, temptations and manipulation that often occur in cyber-grooming. Throughout this process, teachers must receive ongoing training and set an example as educational role models.

Finally, an equally important supporting strategy is the use of interactive learning materials, as well as support and counselling. There is evidence that pupils can become more engaged and gain a better understanding of online safety through the use of digital modules, apps and other interactive media. Conversely, CRE teachers also act as mentors, providing a safe environment in which pupils can share their experiences and concerns. Students can receive emotional support and appropriate solutions through an empathetic and responsive counselling approach. This enables efforts to prevent and address cyber-grooming to be carried out more effectively and sustainably.

Pedagogical Implications of the Cyber-Grooming Phenomenon

The phenomenon of online care has significant pedagogical implications for the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers. A review of the literature indicates that the teacher's role must shift from that of a traditional instructor to a multifunctional figure encompassing a digital educator, spiritual guide and protector of pupils in the digital environment. This shift requires teachers to understand the dynamics of digital interactions that impact pupils' moral, psychological and social development. This shift in role is particularly important because the threat of cyber-grooming is not merely technical in nature, but also affects pupils' emotions and faith.

As digital educators, CRE teachers are responsible for equipping their pupils with adequate digital literacy skills. This includes being aware of harmful content, following the rules of online communication, and using technology safely and responsibly. If digital literacy is combined with Christian values, pupils will have the ability to assess every digital interaction against a clear moral framework, thereby reducing the risk of falling victim to digital exploitation. Therefore, the role of the teacher as a digital educator is vital in creating a safe learning environment in the information age.

In addition, CRE teachers continue to act as spiritual mentors, helping students to understand Christian values whilst using technology. Activities such as case studies, reflective discussions, and devotional sessions that link students' digital experiences to principles of faith are some of the ways in which this approach can be implemented. Consequently, spiritual guidance is not only beneficial in daily life but also helps students understand the ethics of online interaction, enabling them to distinguish between appropriate behaviour and behaviour that could be harmful.

As guardians of pupils in the digital environment, the role of teachers emphasises the importance of more proactive supervision and support. Teachers must provide a safe space

where pupils can report negative experiences or threats they encounter whilst online. Furthermore, teachers must be able to intervene appropriately through counselling, preventive measures and ongoing guidance to ensure that pupils receive psychological and moral protection. This role demonstrates that teachers are not merely educators but also guardians of students' well-being in the digital world.

Improving teachers' competencies is vital to enabling this transformation of their role. Digital literacy skills, psychological support skills, and contextual pedagogy that adapts learning to students' situations and needs are all essential skills (Cahyani et al, 2026). CRE educators will struggle to address the increasingly complex and dynamic challenges of cyber-grooming if they do not master these three elements. With sufficient skills, educators can provide guidance that encompasses all aspects of students' minds, ethics and emotions.

In conclusion, the phenomenon of online learning demonstrates that the role of Christian Education teachers must be adapted to modern education. Teachers must become proficient digital educators, wise spiritual mentors, and strong guardians against threats in the digital world. To keep pace with this transformation, teachers must acquire enhanced professional competencies through digital literacy, contextual pedagogy, and psychological counselling skills. This strategy will enable CRE education to create a learning environment that is safe, moral, and responsive to the challenges of the digital world. It will also strengthen Christian values and the character of the students.

CONCLUSION

A review of the literature indicates that online risks pose a significant threat to pupils in today's complex digital age. This is exacerbated by a lack of digital literacy and an awareness of online dangers. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers serve as educators, moral and spiritual guides, and guardians of pupils. They teach students Christian values such as love, self-control, wisdom and honesty to foster healthy and responsible digital behaviour. It has been proven that digital literacy grounded in Christian values helps to enhance students' technical competence whilst also raising their moral and spiritual awareness, enabling them to recognise dangers, make wise choices and use technology wisely. To achieve this goal, it is necessary to enhance teachers' capabilities, develop a responsive curriculum, and foster close collaboration between schools, parents and the church. A safe learning environment and support for holistic character development are also required. Pedagogically, the role of CRE teachers is not only to protect students from digital threats but also to shape them into people of faith, critical thinkers, and wise individuals. CRE teachers can be at the forefront of equipping the younger generation with digital care and fostering robust digital literacy grounded in Christian values through an integrated approach and synergistic collaboration.

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BIODATA



Gok Dame Simbolon, S.Pd.K., was born in Parbuluan on October 25, 1987. He completed his undergraduate education at STT PAULUS MEDAN and is currently pursuing a postgraduate degree at the same institution, STT PAULUS MEDAN. He is currently working as a teacher at SDN. 030298 Simallopuk. In addition to writing books and articles, I am also involved in church ministry (Women's Ministry and mass worship services).

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