



Volume 17, Nomor 2, Tahun 2026

Halaman 167–178

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.21831/jpka.v17i2.101247>

p-ISSN: 2089-5003

e-ISSN: 2527-7014

# Transforming Christian Religious Education for Character Development in the Digital Era: A Conceptual Framework for Higher Education

Juliana Simangunsong<sup>1\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Universitas Terbuka, Indonesia

[julianasimangunsong26@gmail.com](mailto:julianasimangunsong26@gmail.com)

*\*Penulis Korespondensi (Corresponding Author)*

**Abstract:** Character development has become one of the most pressing challenges in higher education as students navigate the complexities of the digital era, including rapid technological advancement, artificial intelligence, information overload, and ethical dilemmas in online environments. These challenges require educational approaches that extend beyond developing digital competence to fostering moral integrity, spiritual maturity, ethical reasoning, and responsible digital citizenship. In this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) plays a strategic role as a transformative educational approach by integrating Christian values into meaningful learning experiences that support holistic character development. This study employed a library research approach by critically reviewing and synthesizing contemporary literature on character education, Christian Religious Education, digital literacy, digital citizenship, and technology-enhanced learning. The findings propose an integrative conceptual framework explaining how character development can be fostered through seven interconnected stages: Digital Era, Digital Literacy, Transformative Christian Religious Education, Internalization of Christian Values, Spiritual Reflection, Habit Formation, and Character Development. The proposed framework constitutes the principal contribution of this study by demonstrating that Christian Religious Education is not merely a medium for theological instruction but a transformative educational approach that fosters holistic character development through the ethical integration of digital technologies. The framework provides a theoretical foundation for future research and practical guidance for lecturers and higher education institutions in designing digitally enriched learning environments that intentionally promote character development.

**Keywords:** character development; Christian Religious Education; digital literacy; digital citizenship; higher education

## Introduction

### The Challenge of Character Development in the Digital Era

The digital era has fundamentally transformed the way university students learn, communicate, and participate in society. Digital technologies, including artificial intelligence (AI), social media, Learning Management Systems (LMS), and online learning platforms, have created unprecedented opportunities for accessing knowledge and expanding educational experiences. However, these developments have also introduced increasingly complex challenges to students' character development. Easy access to information, digital misinformation, cyberbullying, academic dishonesty, declining empathy, and unethical online behaviour demonstrate that technological advancement is not always accompanied by moral growth or ethical responsibility. Consequently, higher education institutions are expected not only to develop students' academic competencies but also to cultivate integrity, responsibility, empathy,

and ethical awareness required for responsible participation in digital society ((Livingstone & Helsper, 2007); (Lyon, 2017)

Recent scholarship further argues that digital literacy should no longer be understood merely as technical competence but as a broader concept encompassing digital rights, digital citizenship, ethical participation, critical thinking, and responsible engagement in online environments (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). Likewise, digital citizenship requires learners to demonstrate ethical behaviour, responsible communication, critical participation, and awareness of digital rights as essential competencies for twenty-first-century education ((Stellmann & Song, 2024); (Yang et al., 2025)). The growing use of artificial intelligence in education also raises ethical concerns regarding transparency, privacy, academic integrity, and responsible decision-making, highlighting the need to integrate ethical values into digitally mediated learning environments (Klimova et al., 2023)). Therefore, character development has become an increasingly urgent educational priority in responding to the opportunities and ethical challenges of digital transformation (Astuti et al., 2025).

### **The Importance of Character Development in Higher Education**

Character development has become one of the fundamental missions of higher education worldwide. Universities are no longer expected to produce graduates with academic excellence alone but also individuals who demonstrate ethical leadership, social responsibility, resilience, collaboration, and sound moral judgment. Character education promotes virtues such as honesty, responsibility, integrity, compassion, respect, and civic engagement that enable students to contribute positively to society (Lickona, 2004). Likewise, higher education should prepare students to participate responsibly in culturally diverse societies by fostering justice, tolerance, and respect for human dignity (Banks, 2019)

Recent studies further indicate that character formation in higher education is a developmental process shaped through intentional educational experiences, institutional culture, reflective learning, and meaningful interpersonal relationships (Lamb et al., 2022). Moreover, personal attributes such as integrity, responsibility, leadership, collaboration, ethical reasoning, and resilience have been identified as key indicators of students' competencies required for success in higher education and professional life (Mardhiyah et al., 2025). Accordingly, character development should not be regarded as an incidental outcome of university education but as an intentional educational objective embedded throughout curriculum design, learning experiences, and institutional culture.

### **Christian Religious Education as a Means of Character Development**

Within this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) offers significant potential to foster holistic character development in higher education. Rather than functioning solely as theological instruction, CRE seeks to nurture students' spiritual maturity, ethical reasoning, moral decision-making, and commitment to Christian values that guide everyday life. Christian virtues—including love, integrity, honesty, responsibility, compassion, discipline, justice, and stewardship—provide a moral foundation that enables students to respond wisely to ethical challenges encountered in contemporary digital society.

Christian Religious Education contributes to the development of moral virtues by integrating faith formation with ethical practice, enabling learners to cultivate virtuous habits through continuous reflection and action (Horowski, 2020). Similarly, religious education in contemporary society should facilitate dialogue between faith and rapidly changing cultural contexts (Cooling, 2012). Recent scholarship also emphasizes that Christian pedagogy should intentionally integrate meaningful relationships, reflective practice, and faith-based learning experiences to support holistic student development (Chalwell, 2025). Furthermore, Christian worldview pedagogy encourages students to integrate biblical perspectives with academic inquiry and daily life, thereby strengthening moral responsibility and ethical decision-making (Kanitz, 2005). Through biblical reflection, collaborative learning, service-learning, and spiritual formation, Christian Religious Education supports the internalization of Christian values that shape students' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviours ((Binsen S. Sidjabat, 2019); (Simangunsong, 2024)).

## **Digital Learning and the Transformation of Christian Religious Education**

Rapid advances in educational technology have significantly expanded opportunities for transforming Christian Religious Education. Digital learning environments supported by Learning Management Systems (LMS), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), hybrid learning, instructional videos, and artificial intelligence provide flexible, interactive, and student-centred learning experiences that extend beyond conventional classroom settings. These technologies facilitate collaboration, reflective dialogue, personalized learning, and continuous interaction between students and lecturers.

Nevertheless, technology itself does not automatically contribute to character formation. Its educational value depends on pedagogical strategies that intentionally integrate digital literacy, ethical reflection, Christian values, and spiritual formation throughout the learning process. Meaningful student engagement remains the central objective of technology-enhanced learning rather than the technology itself (Olga, 2025). Likewise, emerging digital technologies should be integrated into educational practices in ways that strengthen critical thinking, collaboration, lifelong learning, and responsible technology use (Devi & Deka, 2024). Recent studies further highlight that the ethical implementation of artificial intelligence should prioritize transparency, accountability, and responsible professional practice (Mohammed et al., 2025). Therefore, transforming Christian Religious Education requires more than adopting digital tools; it requires designing digitally enriched learning experiences that intentionally cultivate students' moral, spiritual, and personal development.

### **Research Gap**

Previous studies have examined character education, digital learning, Christian Religious Education, digital citizenship, and spiritual formation as important but largely separate fields of inquiry. Research on digital learning has predominantly focused on technological effectiveness, student engagement, and learning outcomes ((Olga, 2025); (Devi & Deka, 2024)), while studies on character education have emphasized leadership competencies, school culture, critical thinking, and moral development ((Lamb et al., 2022); (Mardhiyah et al., 2025); (Nova & Chaerunnisah, 2025)). Other studies have demonstrated that religious education and habituation contribute significantly to character formation by strengthening moral values, spiritual identity, and ethical behaviour ((Hidayah et al., 2025); (Rangkuti et al., 2025); (Aufi et al., 2025)). Similarly, research on digital citizenship has highlighted ethical participation and responsible technology use without adequately explaining how these competencies can be integrated into faith-based character education ((Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021); (Stellmann & Song, 2024); (Yang et al., 2025)).

Although Christian Religious Education has long emphasized spiritual formation and moral virtue ((Horowski, 2020); (Cooling, 2012)), limited attention has been given to explaining how digitally enhanced Christian learning environments can systematically foster holistic character development in higher education. To date, few studies have proposed an integrative conceptual framework that connects digital literacy, digital learning, Christian Religious Education, internalization of Christian values, spiritual reflection, habit formation, and character development within a unified educational model. Addressing this conceptual gap is essential for developing pedagogically meaningful and spiritually grounded approaches that respond effectively to the ethical challenges of higher education in the digital era.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study aims to develop a conceptual framework explaining how Christian Religious Education contributes to character development in higher education within the context of the digital era. Using a library research approach, the study synthesizes contemporary literature on character education, Christian Religious Education, digital literacy, digital citizenship, technology-enhanced learning, and faith-based pedagogy to construct an integrative framework consisting of seven interconnected stages: Digital Era, Digital Literacy, Transformative Christian Religious Education, Internalization of Christian Values, Spiritual Reflection, Habit Formation, and Character Development. The proposed framework represents the principal contribution of this study by demonstrating how digital innovation, Christian educational principles, and intentional pedagogical practices can be integrated to foster holistic character development among university students.

## Method

This study employed a library research approach to develop a conceptual framework explaining how Christian Religious Education contributes to character development in higher education within the context of the digital era. Library research was selected because the objective of the study was not to collect empirical data but to synthesize and critically interpret existing scholarly knowledge to construct an integrative theoretical framework. This approach enables researchers to examine concepts, identify relationships among key variables, and generate new conceptual insights based on comprehensive analysis of previous studies.

The literature reviewed in this study consisted primarily of peer-reviewed international journal articles, scholarly books, and reputable educational policy documents published within the last ten years, with particular emphasis on studies concerning character education, Christian Religious Education, digital literacy, digital citizenship, technology-enhanced learning, artificial intelligence in education, and higher education. Classical references that have made enduring theoretical contributions to character education and faith development, such as the works of (Lickona, 2004) and (Fowler, 1981), were also included to strengthen the conceptual foundation of the proposed framework.

The literature selection followed three criteria. First, publications had to be directly relevant to one or more of the study's core themes: character development, Christian Religious Education, digital transformation in education, digital literacy, digital citizenship, or technology-enhanced learning. Second, priority was given to articles published in reputable international journals indexed in major academic databases, together with selected articles from *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter* that provide recent perspectives on character education in the Indonesian context. Third, only publications that contributed conceptual, theoretical, or empirical insights relevant to higher education were included in the analysis.

The data were analysed using thematic analysis. The analysis began by identifying recurring concepts across the selected literature, followed by coding key themes related to character development, Christian values, digital literacy, digital learning, spiritual formation, and ethical digital citizenship. Similar concepts were then grouped into broader thematic categories to identify conceptual relationships among them. Finally, these themes were synthesized into an integrative conceptual framework that explains the sequential process through which Transformative Christian Religious Education can foster holistic character development in higher education.

To enhance the credibility of the analysis, the study employed source triangulation by comparing findings from various scholarly perspectives, including character education, Christian Religious Education, digital pedagogy, digital citizenship, and educational technology. Rather than relying on a single disciplinary perspective, the proposed framework was developed through the integration of complementary theories and contemporary research findings. This process ensured that the conceptual model was grounded in a broad body of scholarly evidence while maintaining coherence with the objectives of Christian Religious Education in higher education.

## Results and Discussion

### Character Development as the Primary Goal of Christian Religious Education

The findings of this library research indicate that character development should become the primary educational objective of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in higher education. Contemporary universities are expected not only to equip students with disciplinary knowledge and professional competencies but also to cultivate ethical awareness, integrity, responsibility, empathy, resilience, and spiritual maturity that enable graduates to navigate increasingly complex digital environments. Character formation is therefore not an incidental outcome of university education, but a developmental process fostered through intentional educational experiences, institutional culture, reflective learning, and meaningful interpersonal relationships (Lamb et al., 2022). Likewise, recent conceptual analysis identifies integrity, ethical reasoning, collaboration, leadership, and responsibility as essential personal attributes that define students' competencies in higher education, reinforcing the view that character development should

become an explicit educational outcome rather than an implicit expectation (Mardhiyah et al., 2025).

The rapid advancement of digital technologies has intensified the urgency of character education. Although digital innovation provides unprecedented opportunities for learning, communication, and collaboration, it also presents ethical challenges such as misinformation, cyberbullying, academic dishonesty, irresponsible use of artificial intelligence, and declining empathy in online interactions ((Lyon, 2017); (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021)). Furthermore, the integration of artificial intelligence into education raises important concerns regarding transparency, privacy, academic integrity, and responsible decision-making, requiring educational institutions to integrate ethical considerations into digital learning environments (Klimova et al., 2023). Consequently, universities are increasingly expected to prepare graduates who demonstrate not only digital competence but also ethical judgment, moral responsibility, and responsible digital citizenship (Astuti et al., 2025).

Within this context, Christian Religious Education extends beyond the transmission of theological knowledge. It functions as a transformative educational process that integrates intellectual, moral, spiritual, and social dimensions of learning to cultivate holistic character development. Christian virtues—including love, integrity, honesty, responsibility, discipline, compassion, justice, and stewardship—provide ethical foundations that guide students' thinking, decision-making, and behaviour in both physical and digital environments (Horowski, 2020). Christian pedagogy also emphasizes that meaningful relationships, reflective practice, and faith integration are fundamental components of teaching that intentionally nurtures students' moral and spiritual formation (Chalwell, 2025). Therefore, character development should be regarded not as a complementary outcome but as the central purpose of Christian Religious Education in higher education.

### **Digital Transformation as an Opportunity for Character Development**

The synthesis of the reviewed literature demonstrates that digital transformation should not be understood merely as technological innovation but as an opportunity to strengthen character development through meaningful educational experiences. Digital technologies—including Learning Management Systems (LMS), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), hybrid learning, instructional videos, and artificial intelligence—provide flexible and interactive learning environments that encourage students to become active participants in their own learning ((Olga, 2025); (Devi & Deka, 2024)). Nevertheless, technology alone cannot foster character development. Its educational value depends on pedagogical strategies that intentionally integrate ethical reflection, responsibility, collaboration, and spiritual formation throughout the learning process.

Meaningful technology-enhanced learning is achieved when digital platforms encourage authentic engagement, reflective dialogue, collaboration, and critical thinking rather than merely delivering instructional content (Olga, 2025). Likewise, emerging educational technologies should strengthen students' lifelong learning, collaboration, and ethical technology use (Devi & Deka, 2024). Research also demonstrates that instructional innovations, including case-based learning supported by digital resources, effectively promote critical thinking and character development because students learn to analyse authentic problems while making responsible decisions (Nova & Chaerunnisah, 2025).

Artificial intelligence further expands opportunities for personalized learning and timely feedback; however, its implementation should be guided by ethical principles that emphasize academic integrity, accountability, transparency, and responsible technology use ((Klimova et al., 2023); (Mohammed et al., 2025)). Therefore, digital learning environments contribute to character development only when technological innovation is intentionally aligned with pedagogical objectives, ethical values, and students' spiritual formation.

### **Christian Values as the Foundation of Character Development**

The literature further indicates that the effectiveness of Christian Religious Education in fostering character development depends largely on the successful internalization of Christian values throughout the learning process. Character is not formed solely through cognitive understanding but through continuous engagement with values that shape students' beliefs,

attitudes, decisions, and behaviours. Christian virtues such as love, integrity, honesty, responsibility, compassion, humility, justice, and stewardship provide a moral framework that enables students to respond wisely to ethical challenges encountered in both academic and digital contexts (Horowski, 2020).

The internalization of these values occurs when they are consistently embedded in biblical reflection, collaborative learning, service-learning, project-based learning, reflective dialogue, and lecturers' role modelling. Faith development enables students to connect theological understanding with everyday ethical practice (Fowler, 1981), while character education requires learners not only to understand moral principles but also to value and consistently practice them (Lickona, 2004). Religious-based habituation has likewise been shown to strengthen students' character by transforming moral values into sustainable behavioural patterns through repeated educational practices and supportive institutional culture (Hidayah et al., 2025).

Furthermore, studies on faith-based education consistently demonstrate that spirituality serves as a powerful foundation for ethical behaviour and character formation. In vocational higher education, the integration of spiritual values into learning activities strengthens students' responsibility, integrity, and professional ethics (Aufi et al., 2025). Although conducted within different religious traditions, research also indicates that religious education plays an important role in developing moral identity, ethical behaviour, and resilience in responding to contemporary digital challenges (Rangkuti et al., 2025). These findings reinforce the argument that Christian Religious Education contributes to character formation by connecting faith, ethical reasoning, spiritual reflection, and responsible action within students' daily lives.

### **Integrating Digital Learning and Christian Religious Education**

A major finding of this study is that character development in the digital era requires an integrative educational approach that combines digital pedagogy with Christian values. Previous studies have frequently examined digital learning, digital citizenship, character education, and Christian Religious Education as separate areas of inquiry ((Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021); (Lamb et al., 2022); (Horowski, 2020)). The present study demonstrates that these dimensions should instead be understood as mutually reinforcing components within a holistic educational framework for higher education.

Digital learning provides interactive educational environments, whereas Christian Religious Education offers moral and spiritual guidance that enables students to engage with technology ethically and responsibly. Digital literacy strengthens students' ability to evaluate information critically, communicate respectfully, protect digital rights, and participate responsibly within online communities (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). Likewise, digital citizenship encompasses ethical participation, responsible communication, critical thinking, and civic engagement in digital spaces ((Stellmann & Song, 2024); (Yang et al., 2025)). Christian pedagogy complements these competencies by integrating faith, reflection, relationships, and ethical decision-making into technology-enhanced learning environments ((Chalwell, 2025); (Kanitz, 2005)).

The synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests that meaningful character development emerges when digital innovation is intentionally integrated with Christian values through reflective learning, spiritual mentoring, collaborative dialogue, and value internalization. Rather than viewing technology and spirituality as separate domains, this study positions digital technology as a pedagogical medium that supports faith formation, ethical reasoning, and responsible digital citizenship. Consequently, transformative Christian Religious Education provides a holistic educational approach that prepares students to become academically competent, digitally literate, spiritually mature, and ethically responsible members of society. This integrative perspective constitutes the conceptual foundation of the framework proposed in this study and distinguishes it from previous studies that have generally examined these dimensions independently.

### **Strengthening Character Development through Institutional Learning Culture**

Beyond classroom instruction, the successful implementation of Transformative Christian Religious Education also depends on the institutional learning culture that consistently reinforces character development. Character formation is more likely to occur when Christian

values are reflected not only in teaching strategies but also in curriculum design, assessment practices, academic policies, student services, and interactions within the university community. A supportive educational environment encourages students to practice integrity, responsibility, collaboration, respect, and ethical decision-making across both physical and digital learning spaces. Religious-based habituation has been shown to strengthen students' moral character through continuous educational experiences embedded in institutional culture rather than through isolated instructional activities (Hidayah et al., 2025). Likewise, institutional efforts to integrate character education into higher education management contribute to developing graduates who possess both academic competence and strong personal attributes required for leadership and responsible citizenship ((Astuti et al., 2025); (Mardhiyah et al., 2025)). Consequently, character development should be understood as a shared institutional responsibility that extends beyond individual courses and becomes an integral component of the university's educational mission.

### **A Conceptual Framework for Character Development through Transformative Christian Religious Education**

The synthesis of the literature reviewed in this study demonstrates that character development in higher education requires a holistic educational approach that intentionally integrates digital transformation, Christian values, and reflective learning. Contemporary digital technologies—including artificial intelligence (AI), Learning Management Systems (LMS), Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs), hybrid learning, and other technology-enhanced learning environments—have transformed educational practices by providing greater flexibility, accessibility, and opportunities for collaboration. At the same time, these developments have introduced ethical and moral challenges that require higher education institutions to strengthen students' character formation alongside academic achievement ((Olga, 2025); (Devi & Deka, 2024)). Recent studies also emphasize that educational institutions in the digital era must intentionally integrate character education into learning management to prepare students who are ethically responsible and socially accountable (Astuti et al., 2025).

Within this context, Christian Religious Education (CRE) should not be understood merely as theological instruction. Rather, it functions as a transformative educational process that intentionally cultivates students' moral integrity, spiritual maturity, ethical reasoning, and responsible citizenship through the integration of faith and learning (Horowski, 2020). Christian pedagogy emphasizes reflective learning, authentic relationships, and faith integration as essential components of holistic education, enabling students to connect biblical principles with personal and social responsibility (Chalwell, 2025). Character development therefore becomes the ultimate educational outcome, while digital technology serves as a pedagogical medium through which meaningful and value-oriented learning experiences can be designed.

Based on the synthesis of previous studies, this research proposes a conceptual framework explaining how Christian Religious Education contributes to character development in higher education through six interconnected stages. Unlike previous studies that have generally discussed digital learning, character education, Christian Religious Education, or digital citizenship independently ((Lamb et al., 2022); (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021); (Horowski, 2020)), the proposed framework integrates these dimensions into a continuous developmental process linking digital competence, Christian values, spiritual formation, habitual practice, and character development. Accordingly, the framework positions Transformative Christian Religious Education as the pedagogical bridge connecting digital innovation with holistic character formation.

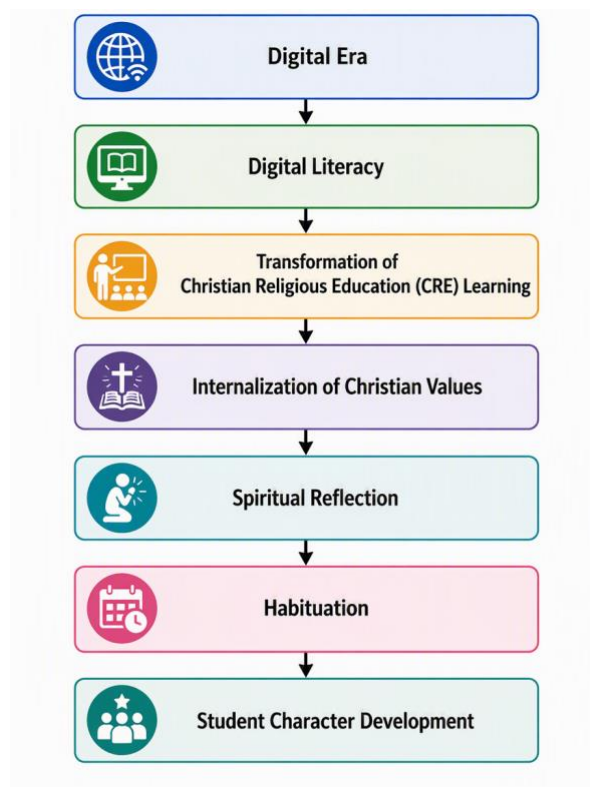


**Figure 1.** Conceptual Model of the Transformation of Christian Religious Education in Building Student Character in the Digital Era

The framework begins with the **Digital Era**, representing the contemporary educational environment characterized by rapid technological advancement, artificial intelligence, digital communication, social media, and unrestricted access to information. This environment creates unprecedented opportunities for educational innovation while simultaneously increasing the need for ethical awareness, responsible technology use, and moral discernment (Lyon, 2017). Educational institutions are therefore challenged to ensure that technological advancement is accompanied by the cultivation of students' character and ethical responsibility (Astuti et al., 2025).

The second stage, **Digital Literacy**, equips students with the competencies required to use digital technologies critically, ethically, and responsibly. Digital literacy extends beyond technical proficiency to include information evaluation, ethical communication, digital rights, digital citizenship, critical thinking, and responsible participation in online communities (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021). Recent studies further identify responsible communication, ethical participation, and digital citizenship as essential competencies for learners in the twenty-first century ((Stellmann & Song, 2024); (Yang et al., 2025)). Consequently, digital literacy becomes the ethical foundation upon which meaningful character development can occur in digital learning environments.

The third stage, **Transformative Christian Religious Education**, represents the pedagogical process through which digital learning is intentionally integrated with Christian educational principles. Learning activities supported by LMS, MOOCs, hybrid learning, instructional videos, collaborative learning, and artificial intelligence are designed not only to facilitate knowledge acquisition but also to promote reflection, dialogue, collaboration, and spiritual formation ((Olga, 2025); (Devi & Deka, 2024)). Christian pedagogy encourages educators to integrate biblical worldviews, reflective practice, and authentic relationships into teaching, ensuring that technology serves as a means for holistic learning rather than becoming an end in itself ((Kanitz, 2005); (Chalwell, 2025)).

The fourth stage, **Internalization of Christian Values**, constitutes the moral core of the framework. Christian virtues—including love, integrity, honesty, responsibility, compassion, justice, discipline, humility, and stewardship—are intentionally embedded through biblical

reflection, collaborative dialogue, service-learning, authentic learning experiences, and lecturers' role modelling. The internalization of these values enables students to integrate Christian ethical principles into their academic, personal, and social lives ((Binsen S. Sidjabat, 2019; Horowski, 2020)). This process is consistent with studies demonstrating that spiritual values significantly strengthen students' moral responsibility, ethical awareness, and professional character within higher education (Aufi et al., 2025).

The fifth stage, **Spiritual Reflection**, enables students to examine their beliefs, attitudes, decisions, and behaviours considering Christian ethical principles. Reflective learning strengthens the relationship between faith, knowledge, and personal experience, thereby fostering moral reasoning, ethical awareness, and spiritual maturity that support responsible decision-making in digital environments (Fowler, 1981). Reflection also encourages students to evaluate the ethical consequences of technology use, including the responsible application of artificial intelligence and digital communication.

The sixth stage, **Habit Formation**, emphasizes that character is developed through continuous practice rather than isolated instructional activities. Values that have been understood and internalized gradually become enduring personal characteristics when consistently practiced in academic, social, and digital contexts. Religious-based habituation has been shown to transform moral understanding into sustainable behavioural patterns through repeated educational experiences supported by institutional culture (Hidayah et al., 2025). This finding reinforces (Lickona, 2004) argument that character education requires learners not only to understand moral values but also to appreciate and consistently practice them in everyday life.

The culmination of this developmental process is **Character Development**, reflected in students who demonstrate integrity, honesty, responsibility, self-discipline, compassion, critical thinking, ethical digital citizenship, spiritual maturity, leadership, and social responsibility. These characteristics represent the intended learning outcomes of Transformative Christian Religious Education in higher education. Character development is therefore understood as a lifelong developmental process shaped through intentional educational experiences, reflective practice, supportive institutional culture, and meaningful interpersonal relationships rather than as an incidental outcome of university education ((Lamb et al., 2022); (Mardhiyah et al., 2025)).

### **Theoretical Contribution**

This study contributes to the literature by proposing an integrative conceptual framework that connects four domains that have generally been examined independently: **character education, Christian Religious Education, digital literacy, and technology-enhanced learning**. Previous studies have primarily focused on technological effectiveness, digital citizenship, faith formation, or character education as separate areas of inquiry ((Horowski, 2020); (Pangrazio & Sefton-Green, 2021); (Lamb et al., 2022)). In contrast, the framework developed in this study demonstrates that meaningful character development emerges from the intentional integration of digital pedagogy, Christian values, spiritual reflection, and habitual ethical practice.

Accordingly, this study positions **Transformative Christian Religious Education** as the pedagogical bridge linking digital innovation with holistic character development. The framework also extends current discussions on digital citizenship by arguing that responsible participation in digital environments should be grounded not only in technological competence but also in enduring moral and spiritual values ((Stellmann & Song, 2024); (Yang et al., 2025)). By integrating these dimensions into a coherent developmental process, the framework offers a new conceptual perspective for character education in Christian higher education.

### **Practical Implications**

The proposed framework provides practical guidance for lecturers, curriculum developers, and higher education institutions seeking to strengthen character development through Christian Religious Education. Learning activities should intentionally combine digital technologies with pedagogical strategies that encourage ethical reasoning, biblical reflection, collaborative learning, service-learning, spiritual mentoring, and reflective practice. Character formation should be embedded throughout curriculum design, instructional activities, assessment strategies, and institutional culture rather than being treated as an additional learning outcome.

Digital platforms such as Learning Management Systems (LMS), MOOCs, hybrid learning, instructional videos, and artificial intelligence should therefore be employed not merely to improve instructional efficiency but also to cultivate integrity, responsibility, compassion, self-discipline, critical thinking, ethical digital citizenship, and spiritual maturity. Through this holistic approach, Christian Religious Education can prepare graduates who are academically competent, digitally literate, spiritually mature, ethically responsible, and capable of making meaningful contributions to society in the digital era.

## **Conclusion**

This study concludes that character development should remain the primary educational outcome of Christian Religious Education in higher education, particularly in responding to the ethical and moral challenges emerging in the digital era. The synthesis of contemporary literature demonstrates that technological advancement alone is insufficient to foster students' moral growth. Rather, meaningful character formation requires the intentional integration of digital learning, Christian values, ethical reflection, and spiritual formation within the educational process.

The principal contribution of this study is the development of an integrative conceptual framework that explains character development as a continuous process consisting of the Digital Era, Digital Literacy, Transformative Christian Religious Education, Internalization of Christian Values, Spiritual Reflection, Habit Formation, and Character Development. These interconnected stages illustrate how digital innovation can function as a pedagogical medium that supports the cultivation of integrity, responsibility, compassion, ethical reasoning, spiritual maturity, and responsible digital citizenship. In this way, the proposed framework extends existing scholarship by integrating character education, Christian Religious Education, digital literacy, and technology-enhanced learning into a coherent model for higher education.

Accordingly, Christian Religious Education should be understood not merely as a medium for theological instruction but as a transformative educational approach that fosters holistic character development through the ethical integration of digital technologies. This perspective reinforces the role of Christian Religious Education in preparing graduates who are academically competent, digitally literate, spiritually mature, and ethically responsible within contemporary society.

From a practical perspective, the proposed framework provides a pedagogical reference for lecturers, curriculum developers, and higher education institutions in designing digitally enriched learning environments that intentionally integrate Christian values into teaching, learning activities, assessment, and student development. Such an approach supports universities in strengthening character education while responding effectively to the opportunities and challenges of digital transformation.

Future research should empirically examine and validate the proposed conceptual framework across diverse higher education contexts. Quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods studies are recommended to investigate the relationships among digital literacy, transformative Christian Religious Education, internalization of Christian values, spiritual reflection, habit formation, and character development, thereby refining and extending the applicability of the framework in various educational settings.

## **Acknowledgments**

The author would like to express sincere gratitude to Universitas Terbuka for providing academic support and a conducive environment for conducting this study. Appreciation is also extended to colleagues and reviewers whose valuable insights and constructive feedback contributed to the improvement of this manuscript. Finally, the author acknowledges all scholars whose published works have provided the theoretical foundation for the development of the conceptual framework presented in this study.

## **Conflict of Interest Statement**

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

## References

- Astuti, N. D., Marzuki, M., Hajaroh, M., Prihatni, Y., Kusumawardhani, R., Hartono, A., Setiawan, A., & Abd Aziz, M. K. N. (2025). Manajemen pendidikan karakter berbasis sekolah era digital di Indonesia. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 28–38.
- Aufi, A. U., Kumara, R. B., Kurniawan, F., Alimatussa'diyah, A., & Harsono, P. (2025). How Spiritualization of Maritime Science Learning in Vocational Higher Education is Carried Out? *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*, 1–11.
- Banks, J. A. . (2019). *An introduction to multicultural education*. Pearson.
- Binsen S. Sidjabat. (2019). MERETAS POLARISASI PENDIDIKAN KRISTIANI. *Indonesian Journal of Theology*, 10, 7–24. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.46567/ijt.v7i1.2>
- Chalwell, K. (2025). The Christian Pedagogy Lotus: Relationship and reflection for teaching Christianly. *International Journal of Christianity & Education*, 29(3), 188–200.
- Cooling, T. (2012). What is a controversial issue? Implications for the treatment of religious beliefs in education. *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 33(2), 169–181.
- Devi, A., & Deka, Q. (2024). The Role of Spiritual Intelligence and Personality in Young Adulthood. *Asian Journal of Management*, 15(4), 360–367.
- Fowler, J. W. (1981). *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*. Harper & Row. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=bfuYAAAAAMAAJ>
- Hidayah, I. N., Kurniawaty, I., & Parhan, M. (2025). Reinforcing school culture through religious-based habituation. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*.
- Horowski, J. (2020). Christian religious education and the development of moral virtues: a neo-Thomistic approach. *British Journal of Religious Education*, 42(4), 447–458.
- Kanitz, L. (2005). Improving Christian worldview pedagogy: Going beyond mere Christianity. *Christian Higher Education*, 4(2), 99–108.
- Klimova, B., Pikhart, M., & Kacetl, J. (2023). Ethical issues of the use of AI-driven mobile apps for education. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 10, 1118116.
- Lamb, M., Dykhuis, E. M., Mendonça, S. E., & Jayawickreme, E. (2022). Commencing character: A case study of character development in college. *Journal of Moral Education*, 51(2), 238–260.
- Lickona, T. (2004). *Character Matters: How to Help Our Children Develop Good Judgment, Integrity, and Other Essential Virtues*. Atria Books. <https://books.google.co.id/books?id=DydVrHfRf3IC>
- Livingstone, S., & Helsper, E. (2007). Gradations in digital inclusion: Children, young people and the digital divide. *New Media and Society*, 9(4), 671–696. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1461444807080335>
- Lyon, D. (2017). Digital citizenship and surveillance| Surveillance culture: engagement, exposure, and ethics in digital modernity. *International Journal of Communication*.
- Mardhiyah, S. A., Stiawan, D., Meilinda, M., Pratiwi, M., & Iswari, R. D. (2025). Personal Attributes As Indicators Of Students Leading Competence: A Conceptual Analysis In The Context Of Higher Education. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*.
- Mohammed, S. A. A. Q., Osman, Y. M. M., Ibrahim, A. M., & Shaban, M. (2025). Ethical and regulatory considerations in the use of AI and machine learning in nursing: A systematic review. *International Nursing Review*, 72(1), e70010.
- Nova, M., & Chaerunnisah, I. U. (2025). Enhancing Students' Critical Thinking Character Through Case-Based Learning With Online News. *Jurnal Pendidikan Karakter*.
- Olga, R. (2025). Beyond technology tools: Supporting student engagement in technology enhanced learning. *Education Sciences*, 15(12), 1617.
- Pangrazio, L., & Sefton-Green, J. (2021). Digital rights, digital citizenship and digital literacy: What's the difference? *Journal of New Approaches in Educational Research*, 10(1), 15–27.
- Rangkuti, A. N. H., Aspani, R., & Sopian, A. (2025). The Role Of Aqidah In Building Muslim Character In The Digital Era: A Theological And Psychological Perspective. *Urwatul Wutsqo: Jurnal Studi Kependidikan Dan Keislaman*, 14(2), 449–463.
- Simangunsong, J. (2024). ANALISIS PERSEPSI MAHASISWA TERHADAP BAHAN AJAR INTERAKTIF DALAM PENDIDIKAN AGAMA KRISTEN. 16, 260–266.

- Stellmann, E., & Song, L. (2024). Essential elements of digital citizenship: Insights from the literature. *TechTrends, 68*(4), 749–760.
- Yang, H. H., Yin, Z., & Zhu, S. (2025). Examining students' acceptance of the large-scale HyFlex course: An empirical study. *British Journal of Educational Technology, 56*(1), 42–60.