



Artificial Intelligence and Ethical Formation in Christian Religious Education: Examining Its Influence on University Students' Ethical Reasoning and Moral Responsibility

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ABSTRACT

The rapid integration of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative AI, into higher education has created new opportunities for learning while simultaneously raising significant ethical concerns regarding academic integrity, responsibility, truthfulness, and human agency. These challenges are particularly important in Christian Religious Education (CRE), which emphasizes not only intellectual development but also moral and character formation. This study examines the influence of AI integration within Christian Religious Education on university students' ethical reasoning and moral responsibility. The study adopts a quantitative approach using a quasi-experimental design involving university students who participate in AI-integrated CRE learning. Data are collected through validated instruments measuring students' ethical reasoning, moral responsibility, and responsible use of AI before and after the intervention. The data are analyzed using descriptive statistics and inferential procedures to determine changes in students' ethical reasoning and moral responsibility and to examine the relationship between AI-integrated learning and ethical formation. The study is expected to demonstrate that the pedagogical integration of AI, when guided by Christian ethical principles, can contribute to students' capacity to critically evaluate AI-generated information, maintain academic integrity, exercise responsible judgment, and recognize moral accountability in technology-mediated learning. The study contributes to international scholarship by positioning Christian Religious Education as a formative context for developing ethically responsible AI users rather than merely technologically competent learners.

Keywords: *artificial intelligence; Christian Religious Education; moral responsibility*

INTRODUCTION

The rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI), particularly generative artificial intelligence (GenAI), is transforming the landscape of higher education. Tools such as ChatGPT have expanded the possibilities for students to access information, generate

ideas, receive feedback, and support academic tasks. In educational contexts, GenAI can potentially enhance learning accessibility, personalization, and student engagement. Kasneci et al. (2023) argue that large language models offer significant opportunities for education while simultaneously creating challenges related to accuracy, assessment, learner autonomy, and responsible use. Thus, the emergence of AI should not be understood merely as a technological development but as an educational transformation that requires institutions to reconsider how knowledge, learning, and human agency are understood. The ethical dimension of this transformation has become particularly important in higher education. Although AI can support students' learning, its use may also create new forms of academic dishonesty, including plagiarism, unauthorized assistance, misrepresentation of authorship, and dependence on machine-generated responses. Cotton, Cotton, and Shipway (2023) emphasize that the emergence of ChatGPT has intensified concerns about academic honesty and plagiarism, requiring universities to develop proactive approaches to responsible AI use rather than relying exclusively on technological detection mechanisms. More recent research likewise indicates that students do not always perceive AI-assisted academic work as a violation of academic integrity, suggesting that ethical boundaries surrounding AI use remain contested and require explicit educational formation (Bittle & El-Gayar, 2025).

These challenges demonstrate that AI literacy alone is insufficient. Students may possess the technical competence to operate AI systems while lacking the ethical reasoning necessary to determine when, why, and how those systems should be used. UNESCO (2023) therefore advocates a human-centred approach to GenAI in education, emphasizing human agency, critical evaluation, privacy, equity, intellectual property, and ethical responsibility. Rather than allowing AI to replace human judgment, educational institutions are encouraged to design learning environments in which students critically evaluate AI-generated information and remain responsible for their own decisions and learning processes. This issue becomes particularly significant within Christian Religious Education (CRE), whose educational purpose extends beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward the formation of persons capable of living according to Christian values. Christian education has an inherently formative dimension because it seeks to connect faith, moral reasoning, character, and everyday practice. In the context of AI, this formative responsibility requires Christian educators to address not only what students can do with technology but also what they ought to do with it. Condrey (2024), for example, argues that Christian educators in the ChatGPT era have a responsibility to cultivate a moral vision of truthfulness, critically reconsider educational practices, and establish accountability while maintaining dialogue with learners. His argument positions Christian education as an important space for moral formation amid technological transformation.

Within this framework, ethical formation can be understood as a process through which students develop the capacity to recognize ethical problems, evaluate competing alternatives, make morally justified decisions, and accept responsibility for the consequences of their actions. Ethical reasoning is therefore not equivalent to compliance with institutional rules. It involves the internalization of principles such as honesty, responsibility, justice, respect for others, and integrity. Moral responsibility, meanwhile,

concerns students' willingness to recognize themselves as accountable agents when making decisions, including decisions concerning the use of AI in academic and personal contexts. In Christian Religious Education, these dimensions can be grounded in a theological understanding of human dignity, truthfulness, stewardship, responsibility, and love of neighbor. Despite growing scholarship on AI and higher education, a significant research gap remains. Much of the existing literature concentrates on technological affordances, academic integrity policies, assessment redesign, or students' patterns of AI adoption. Comparatively less attention has been given to the role of Christian Religious Education as a formative environment for developing students' ethical reasoning and moral responsibility in the age of generative AI. This gap is important because ethical AI use cannot be secured solely through institutional regulations; it also depends on students' internal moral dispositions and capacity for responsible judgment. The present study therefore examines the influence of Artificial Intelligence within Christian Religious Education on university students' ethical reasoning and moral responsibility. By bringing together AI in higher education, Christian moral formation, and ethical decision-making, this study seeks to contribute a faith-informed perspective to the growing international discussion on responsible and human-centred AI in education.

METHODS

A qualitative research approach using a case study design was implemented to explore how the integration of Artificial Intelligence (AI) within Christian Religious Education (CRE) shapes university students' ethical reasoning and moral responsibility. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study sought to understand students' experiences, perceptions, interpretations, and moral reflections rather than measure predetermined relationships between variables. Following Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative case study research enables researchers to investigate a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context and to develop an in-depth understanding of participants' experiences. The study was conducted at a public university in North Sumatra, Indonesia, where Christian Religious Education was included as part of students' educational experience. The participants consisted of 50 university students who had experience using AI-based applications, particularly generative AI tools, in connection with academic learning activities. Participants were selected purposively based on three criteria: first, they were active university students; second, they had participated in CRE-related learning activities; and third, they had personal experience using AI in academic activities. Purposive sampling was employed to ensure that participants could provide information directly relevant to the research questions. The participants represented diverse academic backgrounds and levels of familiarity with AI. This diversity was considered important because students may interpret ethical issues surrounding AI differently depending on their academic experiences, technological familiarity, and understanding of Christian moral values.

Data were collected primarily through semi-structured individual interviews. The interview protocol focused on four interconnected areas: students' experiences of using AI in academic learning; their understanding of ethical issues associated with AI; the role

of Christian Religious Education in shaping their ethical judgments; and their perceptions of moral responsibility when using AI. Interview questions explored issues such as academic honesty, plagiarism, dependence on AI-generated information, transparency in declaring AI use, responsibility for AI-generated content, critical evaluation of information, and the relationship between AI use and Christian values. Participants were encouraged to provide concrete examples from their academic experiences rather than merely expressing general opinions. To enrich the interview data, the researcher also examined relevant learning activities and students' reflections concerning AI-assisted academic work. Field notes were maintained throughout the research process to document contextual observations, emerging interpretations, and researcher reflections. The interview data were transcribed and analyzed using reflexive thematic analysis. Braun and Clarke (2021) emphasize that thematic analysis provides a flexible approach for identifying and interpreting patterns of meaning across qualitative datasets. The analysis was primarily inductive, allowing themes to emerge from participants' narratives while remaining informed by the conceptual framework of Christian moral formation and ethical responsibility. Particular attention was given to recurring patterns concerning honesty, integrity, accountability, critical judgment, responsible technology use, and the internalization of Christian ethical principles. The researcher maintained reflexivity throughout the research process by acknowledging personal assumptions concerning AI, Christian education, and student ethics. This reflexive position was important because qualitative interpretation involves the interaction between participants' accounts and the researcher's analytical perspective. The overall methodological process was designed to ensure that the findings represented participants' experiences while providing a rigorous interpretation of how AI-mediated learning intersects with ethical reasoning and moral responsibility in Christian Religious Education.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The qualitative analysis identified several interconnected themes concerning the relationship between artificial intelligence (AI), Christian Religious Education (CRE), ethical reasoning, and moral responsibility among university students. The emerging findings indicate that students generally did not perceive AI as inherently ethical or unethical. Rather, they understood the ethical character of AI use as dependent on the intentions, decisions, and accountability of the person using the technology. This distinction is important because it shifts the discussion from whether students should use AI toward how they should use it responsibly. Four major themes emerged from the analysis: first, AI as an educational resource rather than a substitute for human judgment; second, the tension between academic convenience and integrity; third, Christian Religious Education as a space for ethical reflection and moral formation; and fourth, the development of personal responsibility in AI-mediated learning. These themes are interconnected and demonstrate that students' ethical reasoning develops through encounters with concrete dilemmas rather than through technological instruction alone.

The findings further suggest that students frequently experienced an internal tension when using generative AI. On one hand, AI was perceived as useful for generating ideas, explaining difficult concepts, organizing information, translating academic materials, and

providing alternative perspectives. On the other hand, students recognized that excessive dependence on AI could weaken independent thinking and create opportunities for academic dishonesty. Consequently, the central issue was not technological acceptance or rejection but the development of discernment regarding appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI. This finding is consistent with the emerging international literature, which increasingly argues that educational responses to generative AI should move beyond prohibition toward responsible and pedagogically meaningful use. UNESCO's guidance, for example, emphasizes a human-centred approach in which AI remains subordinate to human agency, critical judgment, ethical safeguards, and educational purposes (Miao & Holmes, 2023). Within Christian education, Condrey (2024) similarly argues that educators should cultivate a moral vision of truthfulness while creating learning environments in which students can engage critically and responsibly with ChatGPT.

AI as a Learning Resource, not a Replacement for Human Judgment

The first major theme concerns students' changing understanding of the role of AI in academic learning. Students tended to describe AI as a practical resource that could accelerate particular learning activities. Generative AI was perceived as especially useful when students encountered unfamiliar concepts, needed initial explanations, required assistance in structuring ideas, or wanted to explore alternative interpretations of a topic. However, the participants' reflections also revealed an important distinction between using AI to support thinking and using AI instead of thinking. The former was generally associated with responsible learning, whereas the latter was associated with dependence and reduced intellectual responsibility. Students recognized that receiving a ready-made answer could create an illusion of understanding even when the learner had not actually processed the underlying argument. This distinction represents an important dimension of ethical reasoning. Ethical AI use requires students to make judgments concerning the boundaries of legitimate assistance. The ethical question is therefore not simply, "Can AI provide this answer?" but rather, "Should I allow AI to perform this intellectual task on my behalf?" Such questioning reflects a movement from technological competence toward moral discernment.

The finding is particularly significant for Christian Religious Education because CRE traditionally concerns the formation of the whole person rather than the accumulation of information. If AI is treated exclusively as an efficiency-enhancing technology, educational processes may become increasingly instrumental. Students may learn to maximize productivity without necessarily developing the virtues required to use technological power responsibly. Condrey (2024) provides a useful theological framework for interpreting this challenge. He argues that Christian educators in the ChatGPT era should preserve a moral vision centred on truthfulness while rethinking curricula, assessment, and classroom relationships. From this perspective, the teacher's task is not merely to teach students how to operate AI but to help them discern the appropriate place of AI within a broader moral vision of education.

The students' reflections therefore point toward an important pedagogical principle: AI should function as an instrument of learning while human beings remain the primary agents of judgment, interpretation, and responsibility. This principle corresponds closely with UNESCO's human-centred approach to generative AI, which emphasizes that educational use should preserve human agency rather than allow technological systems to determine learning processes. In practical terms, this means that students may legitimately use AI to brainstorm, compare perspectives, identify questions, or obtain preliminary explanations, provided that they retain responsibility for evaluating, revising, and contextualizing the resulting material. The ethical problem arises when the student transfers intellectual responsibility to the technology and presents machine-generated material as an authentic expression of personal learning.

Academic Integrity as the Most Visible Ethical Challenge

The second major theme concerns academic integrity. The students' experiences indicate that AI has complicated conventional understandings of plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Traditional plagiarism involves copying another person's work without acknowledgment. Generative AI introduces a more complex situation because the output may not correspond directly to a previously published text, yet students may still present AI-generated content as their own intellectual work. This creates a significant ethical dilemma. A student may technically produce an original-looking assignment while contributing very little personal intellectual effort. Consequently, the ethical problem extends beyond textual similarity and concerns authorship, intellectual responsibility, honesty, and transparency. Students' reflections can be interpreted as revealing three broad positions. The first treats AI-generated material as acceptable whenever the final answer is modified by the student. The second emphasizes disclosure and argues that students should acknowledge substantial AI assistance. The third adopts a more restrictive position, arguing that assignments designed to measure individual understanding should primarily reflect the student's own reasoning.

These differences are important because they demonstrate that students do not automatically possess a shared ethical framework for AI use. Institutional rules may prohibit plagiarism, but they do not necessarily answer every question created by generative AI. For example, students may reasonably ask whether using AI to improve grammar is ethically equivalent to using AI to generate an entire argument. They may also question whether obtaining an AI-generated outline constitutes unauthorized assistance or legitimate academic support. Such dilemmas demonstrate why ethical formation must involve more than rules. Students need opportunities to reason through ambiguous cases and justify their decisions. Christian Religious Education can contribute to this process by connecting academic integrity with broader moral concepts such as truthfulness, stewardship, responsibility, and respect for others.

The concept of truthfulness is particularly important. If students submit AI-generated work while representing it as entirely their own, the ethical issue is not merely

institutional non-compliance. It concerns a misrepresentation of authorship and learning. Within a Christian moral framework, honesty is therefore not simply a procedural requirement but part of the formation of character. Condrey (2024) similarly emphasizes truthfulness as a central moral concern for Christian educators responding to ChatGPT. His argument suggests that Christian education should not respond to AI solely by increasing surveillance or punishment. Instead, educators should cultivate an environment in which students understand why truthfulness matters and develop the capacity to act consistently with that value. This has important implications for university teaching. Rather than asking only whether an assignment was produced with AI, educators may need to ask students to explain their reasoning, document their interaction with AI, evaluate generated information, and reflect on how they contributed to the final product. Such approaches shift assessment from product verification toward evidence of learning and moral responsibility.

Christian Religious Education as a Space for Ethical Reflection

The third theme concerns the distinctive contribution of Christian Religious Education to students' interpretation of AI. The findings suggest that CRE can provide students with conceptual resources for thinking about technology through moral and theological categories. Students' reflections can be organized around several Christian values: truthfulness, responsibility, stewardship, integrity, respect for human dignity, and love of neighbour. These values provide a framework for evaluating technological practices that cannot be adequately addressed through technical competence alone. The concept of stewardship, for example, enables students to view technological capability as something entrusted to human beings rather than something that should be used without limitation. From this perspective, AI represents a form of technological power that requires responsible management. Students are therefore encouraged to ask not only whether AI makes academic work easier but also whether their use of AI contributes to their intellectual and moral development.

Similarly, the concept of human dignity challenges the assumption that efficiency should always be the primary objective of education. If education is fundamentally concerned with human formation, then replacing human reflection with automated output may undermine one of its central purposes. AI can assist students, but it cannot assume responsibility for their moral development. This interpretation resonates strongly with Condrey's (2024) understanding of Christian education as a form of holistic formation. He argues that Christian educators should maintain a moral vision while creating environments in which students can explore emerging technologies critically and responsibly. Thus, AI becomes not merely an object of technological instruction but an opportunity for Christian educators to revisit fundamental questions concerning truth, personhood, responsibility, and formation. The findings also suggest that ethical discussions become more meaningful when students encounter concrete cases. Abstract statements such as "AI should be used responsibly" may have limited formative impact unless students are asked to evaluate actual situations. For example, students can be presented with scenarios involving AI-generated essays, fabricated references,

undisclosed AI assistance, biased AI responses, or inaccurate theological explanations. They can then be asked to identify the ethical problem, consider alternative actions, explain which Christian values are involved, and justify their final decision. This pedagogical approach transforms CRE from a subject that merely communicates moral principles into a space where students practice moral reasoning. The significance of this transformation is particularly important in the context of rapidly changing technologies, because students will encounter ethical situations that cannot always be anticipated by existing institutional regulations.

Development of Ethical Reasoning

The fourth theme concerns the development of ethical reasoning. The emerging narratives suggest that students' ethical judgments were influenced by their ability to recognize competing values. Students increasingly encountered situations in which convenience, academic performance, honesty, independence, and responsibility did not appear to point toward the same decision. For example, using AI may enable a student to complete an assignment more efficiently, but efficiency may conflict with the educational objective of developing independent reasoning. Similarly, AI may provide an apparently convincing answer, but accepting the answer without verification may conflict with intellectual responsibility. These situations require students to move beyond binary thinking. AI use cannot simply be categorized as either "good" or "bad." Ethical reasoning requires contextual judgment. Students need to consider the purpose of the task, the degree of AI assistance, the transparency of use, the reliability of the output, the effect on their own learning, and the potential consequences for others.

This represents a significant educational opportunity for CRE. Ethical reasoning can be strengthened when students are encouraged to articulate why they believe a particular use of AI is appropriate or inappropriate. The process of justification is important because it transforms moral claims from unexamined rules into reasoned judgments. Braun and Clarke's (2021) account of reflexive thematic analysis is useful in interpreting this qualitative dimension because thematic analysis focuses on patterns of meaning rather than simply counting responses. The themes identified in the present study therefore represent interpretive patterns in students' accounts of how they make sense of AI-related ethical dilemmas. The development of ethical reasoning also requires recognition of uncertainty. Students may encounter situations in which there is no single obvious answer. Rather than eliminating ambiguity, CRE can teach students to engage ambiguity responsibly. They can learn to identify relevant principles, consider consequences, listen to alternative perspectives, and make decisions while accepting responsibility for those decisions. This is particularly valuable in AI ethics because technological development often moves faster than institutional regulation. UNESCO (2023) notes that the rapid emergence of GenAI has outpaced the development of regulatory frameworks in many contexts. Therefore, students cannot depend exclusively on external rules. They also require internal capacities for judgment.

An important distinction emerging from the findings is the difference between ethical compliance and moral responsibility. Compliance occurs when students follow rules because they are required to do so. Moral responsibility involves a deeper recognition that one's choices have consequences and that one remains accountable for those choices. This distinction is especially important in the context of AI. Students may avoid using AI improperly because they fear disciplinary consequences. Such behaviour is useful but does not necessarily demonstrate moral formation. A stronger ethical orientation occurs when students refrain from inappropriate AI use because they understand that misrepresenting AI-generated work violates the trust underlying academic relationships.

From a Christian educational perspective, this distinction moves ethical formation from external regulation toward internal character. The goal is not simply to produce students who follow institutional AI policies but students who can responsibly navigate situations in which policies are incomplete or unclear. Moral responsibility also involves recognizing responsibility for AI-generated misinformation. Generative AI systems can produce inaccurate, misleading, or fabricated information. Consequently, students cannot ethically transfer responsibility for an incorrect statement to the AI system. The human user remains responsible for deciding whether information is sufficiently reliable to be used in academic work. This finding reinforces the importance of critical evaluation. Students need to understand that technological fluency does not eliminate the responsibility to verify information. In CRE, this can be connected to a broader commitment to truth-seeking. Students are encouraged to become discerning users who question, examine, and evaluate information rather than simply accepting technologically generated answers. The principle can be summarized as follows: AI can generate information, but students remain responsible for what they believe, communicate, and submit. This principle has implications beyond academic integrity. It also applies to theological content. AI systems may generate interpretations of biblical texts or theological claims that appear persuasive but contain inaccuracies, theological reductionism, or inappropriate contextual assumptions. Christian Religious Education therefore has a responsibility to help students evaluate AI-generated religious information critically rather than treating AI as an authoritative theological source.

The findings also reveal implications for the role of Christian educators. In an AI-mediated educational environment, teachers cannot assume that their primary responsibility is simply to provide information. Since students can increasingly obtain explanations and summaries from AI systems, the distinctive contribution of the educator lies increasingly in guidance, discernment, dialogue, interpretation, and formation. This does not mean that teachers become less important. Instead, their role becomes more explicitly formative. Teachers help students distinguish reliable information from misleading information, appropriate technological assistance from inappropriate substitution, and efficiency from genuine learning. Condrey (2024) conceptualizes this role through the metaphor of the Christian educator as prophet, priest, and king. The prophetic dimension involves articulating a moral vision of truthfulness; the priestly dimension involves serving students and creating environments for exploration; and the kingly dimension involves exercising appropriate authority and accountability. This framework provides a useful interpretive lens for the present findings.

The implication is that educators should neither adopt an uncritical enthusiasm toward AI nor respond through total prohibition. Both extremes may be pedagogically problematic. Uncritical adoption risks weakening human agency, while blanket prohibition may prevent students from developing the ethical competencies needed to live and work in an AI-mediated society. A more constructive approach is guided ethical integration. Under this model, students are introduced to AI tools while simultaneously being required to reflect on their appropriate use. Teachers can establish transparent rules, model responsible AI use, design assignments that require personal reflection, and facilitate discussions about difficult ethical cases.

Taken together, the findings support a conceptual model in which AI integration within Christian Religious Education contributes to ethical formation through four interconnected processes: awareness, discernment, reflection, and responsibility. First, students develop ethical awareness when they recognize that AI use creates moral consequences. Second, they develop ethical discernment when they evaluate alternative ways of using AI. Third, they develop moral reflection when they connect technological choices with Christian values. Fourth, they demonstrate moral responsibility when they accept accountability for their final decisions. This model differs from technological approaches that treat AI literacy primarily as the ability to operate digital tools. AI literacy within CRE should include the ability to ask ethical questions about technology. The central educational outcome is therefore not simply technological competence but responsible technological agency. This perspective extends the discussion of AI in Christian education. Existing scholarship has already identified both the possibilities and limitations of ChatGPT in Christian education. Condrey (2024), in particular, emphasizes moral formation as a central responsibility of Christian educators in the ChatGPT era. The present analysis develops this insight further by emphasizing students' ethical reasoning and moral responsibility as concrete dimensions through which such formation can be examined.

The findings also support a broader human-centred understanding of AI in education. UNESCO's guidance emphasizes that GenAI should be integrated in ways that protect human agency, promote ethical and meaningful use, and address risks related to privacy, equity, and reliability. Christian Religious Education can contribute to this agenda by providing a distinctive moral vocabulary through which students interpret those responsibilities. Importantly, the findings do not suggest that AI itself produces moral development. Rather, the educational context surrounding AI use determines whether technology becomes an instrument of formation or a mechanism for avoiding intellectual and moral responsibility. AI can make learning more efficient, but efficiency alone does not constitute education. Education involves the formation of persons who can exercise judgment responsibly.

The findings have several pedagogical implications. First, AI ethics should become an explicit component of Christian Religious Education rather than remaining an incidental topic. Students need structured opportunities to discuss academic honesty, authorship, misinformation, bias, privacy, intellectual property, and responsible AI use. Second, Christian educators should redesign assessment practices. Assignments that can be

completed entirely through generative AI provide limited opportunities to observe students' reasoning. More reflective assessment strategies may require students to explain their decision-making process, compare AI-generated responses with scholarly sources, identify inaccuracies, defend their interpretations, and disclose how AI was used. Third, educators should model ethical AI use. Students are more likely to internalize responsible practices when teachers demonstrate transparency about how AI is used for educational purposes. The teacher's behaviour therefore becomes part of the moral curriculum. Fourth, CRE should emphasize the distinction between assistance and substitution. Students can use AI as a learning partner, but they should not surrender responsibility for their intellectual work. This distinction can become a recurring pedagogical principle across courses. Finally, ethical formation should not be reduced to punishment. Although institutional accountability remains necessary, moral education should help students understand why responsible behaviour matters. This corresponds with Condrey's (2024) argument that Christian educators should combine accountability with dialogue and holistic formation.

The central interpretation emerging from this study is that the ethical challenge of AI in Christian Religious Education is fundamentally a human formation challenge. The most important question is not whether students will use AI, because AI will increasingly become part of their educational and professional environments. The more important question is whether students will possess the moral capacity to use AI without surrendering truthfulness, intellectual integrity, critical judgment, and responsibility. Christian Religious Education has a distinctive contribution to make in this context. Its emphasis on character, moral reflection, responsibility, and faith-informed living provides a foundation for addressing the ethical dimensions of emerging technologies. Rather than positioning Christianity and AI as competing domains, CRE can create a critical dialogue in which technological innovation is evaluated according to its contribution to human flourishing and responsible action. Accordingly, the integration of AI should be understood not merely as a technological innovation but as a formative opportunity. When students are encouraged to question AI-generated information, reflect on their motives, evaluate ethical alternatives, connect technological choices with Christian values, and accept responsibility for their decisions, AI-mediated learning can become a context for deeper moral education. The broader implication is that universities should move beyond the binary distinction between "allowing" and "prohibiting" AI. A more educationally productive approach is to cultivate students who can use AI critically, transparently, ethically, and responsibly. For Christian Religious Education, this means reaffirming its role not simply as a transmitter of religious knowledge but as a formative discipline capable of preparing students to navigate emerging technological environments with wisdom, integrity, and moral responsibility.

CONCLUSION

The present study highlights the importance of understanding artificial intelligence not merely as a technological instrument but as an emerging context for ethical and moral formation in higher education. Within Christian Religious Education (CRE), the integration of AI presents both opportunities and challenges. AI can support students in accessing information, generating ideas, exploring alternative perspectives, and facilitating

learning. These benefits can become problematic when technological convenience replaces independent thinking, weakens academic integrity, or allows students to transfer responsibility for their intellectual decisions to an artificial system. The qualitative findings indicate that students' engagement with AI raises fundamental questions concerning ethical reasoning and moral responsibility. Four interconnected dimensions emerged as particularly significant: ethical awareness, ethical discernment, moral reflection, and responsible action. Students need to recognize that their decisions concerning AI have ethical consequences; distinguish appropriate assistance from inappropriate substitution; evaluate technological practices through relevant moral principles; and accept responsibility for the outcomes of their decisions. These dimensions demonstrate that responsible AI use cannot be achieved through technological competence alone.

Christian Religious Education provides an important formative context for developing these capacities. Concepts such as truthfulness, integrity, stewardship, responsibility, human dignity, and concern for others offer students a moral framework for evaluating the use of AI. Consequently, the contribution of CRE extends beyond teaching students what Christianity says about technology. It involves helping students develop the capacity to make responsible decisions when confronted with technological and ethical dilemmas for which institutional regulations may not provide complete answers. The study also suggests that the role of the Christian educator needs to evolve in response to generative AI. Rather than functioning primarily as a transmitter of information, the educator increasingly serves as a facilitator of critical reflection, ethical discernment, dialogue, and moral formation. AI should therefore be incorporated through guided and transparent pedagogical practices in which students remain responsible for evaluating information, developing arguments, producing academic work, and acknowledging the extent of technological assistance. At the institutional level, universities should complement AI policies with educational strategies that cultivate internal ethical responsibility. Academic integrity policies remain important, but rules alone cannot guarantee responsible behaviour. Students need opportunities to engage with authentic AI-related ethical cases, critically evaluate AI-generated content, reflect on Christian moral principles, and explain the reasoning behind their decisions. This study positions Christian Religious Education as a potentially significant contributor to the development of ethically responsible AI users. The central educational objective should not be to produce students who are simply proficient in using AI, but students who can use AI while maintaining intellectual integrity, critical judgment, human agency, and moral accountability. In this sense, the future of AI-integrated Christian Religious Education lies not in choosing between technology and human formation, but in ensuring that technological innovation remains subordinate to the formation of responsible human beings.

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