



Christian Religious Education in the Post-Truth Era: Fostering Critical Thinking, Epistemic Discernment, and Commitment to Truth among University Students

Tiurma Berasa

Lecturer, Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Tarutung

*correspondence: tiurma.berasa@gmail.com

ABSTRACT

The post-truth era presents a significant epistemic challenge for university students who encounter an unprecedented volume of information, misinformation, disinformation, and emotionally persuasive claims through digital media. This article examines the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in fostering critical thinking, epistemic discernment, and commitment to truth among university students. Using a conceptual and interdisciplinary approach, the study integrates perspectives from critical thinking, epistemic cognition, media and information literacy, and Christian educational formation. The discussion argues that CRE should move beyond the transmission of religious knowledge toward the formation of students who can critically examine claims, evaluate evidence and sources, recognize epistemic limitations, and respond responsibly to competing truth claims. Critical thinking provides students with analytical tools for interpreting and evaluating information, while epistemic discernment enables them to assess the grounds and credibility of knowledge claims. Within Christian education, these intellectual capacities should be accompanied by virtues such as intellectual humility, honesty, openness to correction, and responsibility toward truth. The article further proposes that commitment to truth should not be understood merely as agreement with particular propositions, but as an ethical and formative orientation toward reality, knowledge, and responsible action. Consequently, CRE can contribute to higher education by integrating rigorous inquiry with Christian intellectual and moral formation, preparing students to navigate complex information environments with discernment, integrity, and a sustained commitment to truth.

Keywords: *post-truth; Christian Religious Education; critical thinking; epistemic discernment*

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary information environment has fundamentally transformed the conditions under which university students encounter, interpret, and evaluate claims

about reality. Digital platforms provide unprecedented access to information, yet this accessibility does not automatically produce informed judgment. Students are increasingly exposed to a continuous flow of news, opinions, algorithmically amplified content, misinformation, disinformation, and emotionally persuasive narratives. Within this environment, the concept of the post-truth era has become particularly significant. Post-truth does not simply imply the disappearance of truth; rather, it describes a condition in which factual evidence can become less influential in shaping public beliefs than personal convictions, emotions, and ideological commitments (McIntyre, 2018). Lewandowsky et al. (2017) similarly demonstrate that misinformation must be understood within wider psychological, technological, political, and social contexts, making the contemporary crisis of truth more complex than a simple problem of insufficient information. This development presents an epistemic challenge. Universities have traditionally been expected to cultivate inquiry, reasoned judgment, and responsible engagement with knowledge. However, the abundance of accessible information means that students must now confront a more fundamental question: not merely “What do I know?” but “How do I know what I claim to know?” Parker (2024) argues that the post-truth environment challenges fundamental purposes of higher education because institutions must respond to declining trust in expertise, the contestation of factual authority, and the increasing influence of political and ideological narratives on public understanding. Consequently, universities cannot assume that students will naturally acquire the capacity to distinguish reliable knowledge from unsupported claims simply through exposure to academic content.

Critical thinking is therefore an essential educational concern. Facione (1990) conceptualizes critical thinking as purposeful and self-regulatory judgment involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and reflection on the considerations supporting judgment. This understanding is particularly relevant in the post-truth era because students must learn to examine claims rather than merely receive or reproduce them. Critical thinking requires attention to evidence, logical relationships, assumptions, alternative explanations, and the quality of arguments. However, the challenge of post-truth also suggests that critical thinking cannot be reduced to a collection of technical cognitive skills. Students may possess analytical abilities while still allowing confirmation bias, ideological loyalty, or emotional identification to determine what evidence they accept. This limitation directs attention to epistemic discernment. Epistemic discernment refers to the responsible capacity to examine the grounds, sources, processes, and limitations of knowledge claims before granting them credibility. Research on epistemic thinking emphasizes that knowing involves both cognitive and metacognitive dimensions. Barzilai and Zohar (2014) argue that epistemic thinking should be understood as a multifaceted process involving knowledge about persons, strategies, and tasks as well as metacognitive skills and experiences. Their work is especially relevant to university learning because students must increasingly decide which sources deserve trust and how competing claims should be evaluated. Empirical research on online information evaluation demonstrates the urgency of this task. McGrew et al. (2018) found that students across assessed groups often struggled to evaluate online claims, sources, and evidence effectively. These findings challenge the assumption that frequent exposure to digital technologies necessarily develops sound evaluative judgment. Likewise, Barzilai

and Zohar (2012) demonstrate the importance of epistemic thinking when learners evaluate website trustworthiness and integrate information from multiple online sources. UNESCO (2021) consequently positions media and information literacy as a broad set of competencies needed to critically and effectively engage with information, media content, institutions, and digital technologies, particularly amid the growth of misinformation and disinformation. Christian Religious Education (CRE) has a distinctive contribution to make. The purpose of CRE should not be confined to transmitting religious propositions that students are expected to accept without examination. Christian education is also concerned with the formation of persons and their patterns of love, desire, judgment, and engagement with the world. Smith (2009) argues that education is fundamentally formative: it shapes the kind of persons learners become and the visions of the good life that direct their lives. From this perspective, commitment to truth involves more than possessing correct information. It also requires the cultivation of intellectual and moral dispositions, including humility, honesty, attentiveness, openness to correction, and willingness to follow evidence where it leads.

This perspective resonates with Christian approaches to knowing that reject both naïve certainty and radical skepticism. Meek (2011) develops a covenant epistemology in which knowing is understood as a responsible and personal engagement with reality. Such an approach is relevant to epistemic discernment because it frames knowledge not merely as the possession of information but as a faithful response to what is real. In the context of post-truth, CRE may therefore contribute to students' intellectual formation by connecting critical inquiry with virtues that sustain a genuine commitment to truth. Critical thinking becomes not an instrument for winning arguments, but a disciplined practice of seeking understanding responsibly. Recent scholarship in Indonesian Christian pedagogy has similarly argued for rethinking critical thinking as more than an individual cognitive competence. KaroKaro et al. (2024) contend that the post-truth environment and generative artificial intelligence expose the limitations of approaches based exclusively on individual cognitive skills and call for attention to intellectual virtues and collaborative Christian pedagogy. This perspective opens an important space for examining how CRE can foster students who are capable of questioning claims, evaluating evidence, recognizing epistemic limitations, and remaining committed to truth without abandoning intellectual humility. This article explores the role of Christian Religious Education in responding to the epistemic challenges of the post-truth era among university students. It focuses on three interconnected educational objectives: fostering critical thinking, developing epistemic discernment, and nurturing a sustained commitment to truth. The article argues that CRE can contribute meaningfully to higher education when it integrates rigorous inquiry with intellectual virtues and Christian moral formation. Such an approach positions students not as passive recipients of information or religious doctrine, but as responsible knowers who can evaluate claims critically, discern the credibility of competing sources, acknowledge the limits of their knowledge, and pursue truth with both intellectual rigor and ethical responsibility.

METHODS

A qualitative research design with a literature-based approach was implemented to examine the role of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in responding to the epistemic

challenges of the post-truth era. A qualitative approach was considered appropriate because the study seeks to understand meanings, concepts, educational practices, and relationships among critical thinking, epistemic discernment, and commitment to truth rather than to measure these constructs statistically. Qualitative inquiry enables researchers to interpret complex educational phenomena within their social, cultural, and intellectual contexts (Creswell & Poth, 2018). The study specifically used qualitative literature research and document analysis. This approach is appropriate when scholarly publications and other relevant documents constitute the primary sources of evidence. Bowen (2009) explains that document analysis can provide systematic procedures for examining documents as qualitative data and can be used to identify meanings, patterns, and relationships across a body of literature. The data consisted of scholarly literature relevant to four interconnected areas: the post-truth phenomenon and contemporary information environments, critical thinking and epistemic cognition, Christian Religious Education and Christian pedagogy, and truth formation, intellectual virtues, and religious education in contemporary society. Priority was given to peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books, and authoritative scholarly publications. Particular attention was given to literature addressing higher education and Christian education, as the focus of the study is university students. The literature was selected purposively according to its relevance to the research objectives. Sources were included when they contributed substantively to understanding how students can evaluate information, examine knowledge claims, exercise intellectual judgment, and develop responsible attitudes toward truth. Recent scholarship specifically connecting Christian pedagogy with post-truth and critical thinking was also considered, including KaroKaro et al. (2024), who conceptualize critical thinking within Christian education as a practice connected to intellectual virtues and communal formation. Because the study relied exclusively on publicly available scholarly literature and did not involve human participants, no interviews, questionnaires, or personally identifiable information were collected. Ethical attention was therefore directed primarily toward accurate representation of authors' arguments, appropriate attribution, transparent interpretation, and avoidance of unsupported claims. This methodological orientation is consistent with the qualitative emphasis on systematic interpretation and transparent research procedures (Creswell & Poth, 2018; Bowen, 2009).

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The literature synthesis indicates that the post-truth era should not be understood merely as a period characterized by the increasing circulation of false information. More fundamentally, it represents a transformation in the social conditions under which people determine what they consider to be true, credible, and worthy of trust. In this environment, factual evidence may compete with emotions, identity, ideological commitments, social belonging, and algorithmically amplified narratives. Chinn, Barzilai, and Duncan (2021) describe the post-truth environment as one characterized by widespread disagreement concerning what is known, how knowledge should be acquired, and whom or what should be trusted. Their analysis consequently places epistemic education at the center of the educational response to post-truth. This challenge is particularly significant because higher education is expected to develop independent

judgment rather than dependence upon unexamined authority. Students are required to work with multiple sources, distinguish evidence from assertion, formulate arguments, and participate in intellectual dialogue. However, access to information does not automatically produce the capacity to evaluate it. McGrew et al. (2018), for example, found that students across different educational levels, including college students, frequently struggled to evaluate online claims, sources, and evidence. Their findings demonstrate that digital familiarity should not be confused with epistemic competence.

This distinction is fundamental for Christian Religious Education (CRE). If university students are expected to become responsible Christian thinkers, then the educational task cannot be limited to providing them with more information. They must also be equipped to evaluate information and to reflect critically on how knowledge claims are constructed, communicated, justified, and challenged. Thus, the post-truth problem is simultaneously a pedagogical and epistemological problem. Parker (2024) similarly argues that post-truth conditions challenge fundamental purposes of higher education because polarization can lead individuals to discount information that conflicts with their existing worldviews. He therefore emphasizes the importance of educational communities that develop trust and a form of critical loyalty toward knowledge and truth. This observation has direct implications for CRE because Christian education operates not only through the transmission of propositions but also through relationships, dialogue, community, and the formation of intellectual and moral dispositions.

Critical Thinking as a Core Educational Response

The first major theme emerging from the literature is the importance of critical thinking. Facione (1990), through the American Philosophical Association Delphi project, defines critical thinking as purposeful and self-regulatory judgment involving interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and reflection upon the evidential and conceptual grounds of judgment. Importantly, the Delphi consensus does not reduce critical thinking to cognitive skills alone; it also recognizes a dispositional dimension. This distinction is particularly important in the post-truth era. A student may possess the technical ability to analyze an argument but still refuse to reconsider a preferred conclusion when confronted with contradictory evidence. Critical thinking therefore requires not only the capacity to reason but also the willingness to employ that capacity honestly. From the perspective of CRE, this means that critical thinking should not be presented as a threat to faith. Instead, critical inquiry can become part of mature Christian formation. KaroKaro, Kus, and Hotmarlina (2024) explicitly argue that the post-truth era and generative artificial intelligence have transformed the epistemic landscape of higher education and exposed the limitations of approaches that understand critical thinking exclusively as an individual cognitive skill. Their conceptual study proposes that critical thinking in Christian pedagogy should be reframed as a spiritual-communal practice rooted in intellectual virtues.

This argument provides an important conceptual bridge between critical thinking and Christian Religious Education. If critical thinking is understood merely as skepticism or the

ability to defeat an opponent in debate, it can become destructive. However, if critical thinking is understood as disciplined inquiry directed toward understanding what is true, it can be compatible with Christian commitments to truth, humility, wisdom, and responsible action. CRE at the university level should provide opportunities for students to interrogate claims rather than merely memorize conclusions. Students should be encouraged to ask: What evidence supports this claim? What is the source? What assumptions are being made? Are alternative explanations possible? What evidence would challenge the claim? What distinction exists between fact, interpretation, opinion, and belief? Such questions can be applied to religious as well as secular material. Biblical interpretation, theological arguments, ethical issues, social controversies, scientific claims, political narratives, and digital content can all become contexts in which students practice responsible reasoning. This approach does not require abandoning Christian convictions. Rather, it seeks to form students whose convictions can withstand examination because they have learned to articulate reasons, acknowledge limitations, and distinguish genuine evidence from rhetorical persuasion.

Epistemic Discernment Beyond Simple Fact-Checking

The second major theme identified through the literature is epistemic discernment. Epistemic discernment goes beyond determining whether a particular statement is true or false. It involves evaluating the processes through which knowledge claims are produced and deciding what degree of confidence is warranted. Chinn et al. (2021) argue that epistemic education should address epistemic aims, epistemic ideals, and reliable epistemic processes. Their framework is significant because it shifts educational attention from simply possessing correct answers toward understanding what constitutes responsible knowing. Barzilai and Zohar (2012) provide empirical support for this perspective. Their study of students' online inquiry examined the relationship between personal epistemologies and practices such as evaluating website trustworthiness and integrating information from multiple online sources. Their findings demonstrated that epistemic thinking played an important role in online inquiry and that students differed considerably in how they approached the evaluation and integration of information.

These findings suggest that epistemic discernment cannot be developed through a simple checklist. Students need to learn how to investigate sources and relationships among sources. Breakstone et al. (2018) specifically criticize checklist-based approaches to digital literacy and argue for teaching students to investigate unfamiliar sources by looking beyond the original website and examining who created the content, why it was created, and how other credible sources evaluate the same claim. This approach is highly relevant to CRE because religious information increasingly circulates through digital platforms. Students may encounter sermons, theological arguments, biblical interpretations, inspirational quotations, apologetic claims, historical assertions, and religious controversies through social media without knowing their origins. A Christian educational response should therefore teach students to distinguish between a biblical text and someone's interpretation of that text, between theological argument and personal

opinion, and between legitimate scholarship and unsupported religious claims. Epistemic discernment also requires recognition of uncertainty. A mature learner should be able to say, "I do not yet know," "the evidence is insufficient," or "this interpretation is plausible but contested." Such statements should not automatically be regarded as weaknesses of faith. Instead, they can demonstrate intellectual humility. In this regard, epistemic discernment provides an important corrective to both naïve certainty and radical relativism. Naïve certainty assumes that one's preferred interpretation is unquestionably correct, while radical relativism treats all claims as equally subjective. Neither position provides an adequate foundation for academic inquiry. CRE can instead cultivate a third orientation: confidence that truth exists alongside humility concerning one's own ability to understand it completely.

Digital and Media Literacy as Part of Christian Formation

A third result of the thematic synthesis concerns the relationship between epistemic discernment and media and information literacy. UNESCO's media and information literacy framework emphasizes the ability to access, analyze, critically evaluate, interpret, use, create, and disseminate information in responsible and ethical ways (UNESCO, 2021). The framework is particularly important in an environment in which misinformation and disinformation can circulate rapidly through digital networks. For university students, media literacy should therefore become part of academic and moral formation. Students should not only know how to search for information but also understand how digital environments shape what they see. Algorithms, platform structures, engagement incentives, selective exposure, and emotionally provocative content can influence patterns of attention and belief. This has implications for Christian Religious Education because Christian ethics extends to the ways individuals communicate with others. Sharing unverified information is not merely a technical mistake. It can have moral consequences when it damages another person's reputation, reinforces prejudice, creates fear, or contributes to social polarization.

Consequently, CRE can connect digital literacy with Christian virtues such as honesty, responsibility, love of neighbor, self-control, and justice. Students can be taught to pause before sharing information, investigate the original source, compare multiple sources, distinguish evidence from speculation, and consider the possible consequences of disseminating uncertain claims. KaroKaro et al. (2024) make a similar connection by arguing that Christian critical thinking in the post-truth and generative-AI environment should be understood through intellectual virtues and collaborative practices rather than isolated cognitive techniques. This suggests that digital literacy should not be treated as an optional technical competence added to CRE. It can become an arena in which Christian intellectual and ethical formation is practiced.

Truth as an Intellectual and Moral Commitment

The fourth major theme concerns the meaning of commitment to truth. The literature suggests that an effective response to post-truth cannot stop at teaching students how to detect misinformation. Students must also develop a disposition to value truth even when the truth is inconvenient, personally uncomfortable, or inconsistent with their existing assumptions. This point is particularly important because misinformation is not always successful because people lack information. Individuals can reject accurate information because it threatens their identity or worldview. Parker (2024) notes that polarized cognitive environments can cause individuals to discount information that does not fit their existing values. Therefore, increasing the amount of information available to students is insufficient. CRE has a distinctive contribution at this point because Christian formation is concerned with the kind of person the learner becomes. Truthfulness can be understood as both an intellectual and moral orientation. A student committed to truth should be willing to examine personal assumptions, acknowledge error, correct misinformation, listen carefully to opposing arguments, and distinguish loyalty to truth from loyalty to one's own position. Palmer (1998) emphasizes the relational and communal dimensions of knowing and teaching. His work highlights the importance of a learning community in which teachers and students encounter knowledge through disciplined conversation rather than through detached information transfer. ([WorldCat][9]) This perspective is particularly relevant to the post-truth era because epistemic trust is not established solely through facts; it is also cultivated through trustworthy relationships and practices of intellectual responsibility.

Thus, a Christian classroom should become a community in which truth-seeking is modeled. Teachers should be willing to acknowledge when their own assumptions require revision. Students should be permitted to ask difficult questions without being immediately labeled as disloyal or unbelieving. Disagreement should become an opportunity for examination rather than a reason for exclusion. Such pedagogy also protects CRE from two opposite dangers. The first is dogmatic closure, in which students are discouraged from questioning religious claims. The second is epistemic relativism, in which all claims are treated as equally valid. A mature Christian pedagogy can instead establish an environment in which questions are welcomed while truth remains a serious educational and theological commitment.

Critical Thinking, Faith, and Intellectual Humility

The synthesis further indicates that critical thinking and faith should not be positioned as mutually exclusive categories. KaroKaro et al. (2024) explicitly propose moving Christian pedagogy away from defensive or accommodationist approaches toward intellectually mature pedagogy in which students can think critically because of their faith rather than despite it. This is particularly important for university students because higher education exposes them to multiple intellectual traditions. If CRE responds to intellectual diversity by simply demanding uncritical acceptance, students may perceive a contradiction

between academic inquiry and religious commitment. Conversely, if CRE abandons its theological identity in an attempt to appear academically neutral, it loses its distinctive contribution. The alternative is intellectually responsible theological education. Students can study competing perspectives, examine arguments against Christian claims, evaluate historical and contemporary interpretations, and engage different disciplines while maintaining a Christian framework for inquiry. The objective is not to guarantee that every student reaches identical conclusions but to cultivate students who can reason carefully and responsibly about the conclusions they hold. Intellectual humility is central to this process. It allows students to distinguish conviction from certainty, recognize the limits of personal knowledge, and remain open to correction. In an environment dominated by confident but unsupported claims, the ability to acknowledge uncertainty may itself constitute an important form of intellectual maturity. This approach also changes the role of the lecturer. The lecturer is not simply an authority who supplies answers but a facilitator of responsible inquiry. Palmer's (1998) emphasis on teaching as a relational and communal practice supports this understanding of the educator's role. The teacher models how to investigate sources, evaluate arguments, respond to disagreement, and revise conclusions responsibly.

The final theme concerns the pedagogical transformation required if CRE is to respond effectively to post-truth conditions. The literature suggests that the response should move beyond content transmission toward formative, dialogical, and participatory education. Mohammed, Grundy, and Bytautas (2024) argue that addressing post-truth in higher education requires a critical pedagogical approach capable of examining not only misinformation but also the power relationships and dominant frameworks through which knowledge is produced and presented. This is significant because students should not only ask whether information is accurate; they should also ask whose voice is represented, whose interests are served, what assumptions shape a particular narrative, and whose experiences may have been excluded. Kahl (2024) similarly argues that post-truth messages can generate cognitive overload and exploit existing beliefs, while dialogical critical communication pedagogy can provide opportunities for students to evaluate the veracity of such messages. This means that classroom activities should create opportunities for investigation rather than passive reception. Students might compare competing interpretations of a social issue, investigate the origins of viral religious claims, analyze how biblical passages are used in digital discourse, evaluate theological arguments, or conduct lateral reading across multiple sources. The objective is not simply to produce students who can identify "fake news." More fundamentally, the objective is to develop epistemically responsible Christian students who understand that truth-seeking involves evidence, reasoning, community, humility, ethical responsibility, and a willingness to revise one's understanding.

Based on the thematic synthesis, this study proposes an integrative framework consisting of three mutually reinforcing dimensions: critical thinking, epistemic discernment, and commitment to truth. The first dimension, critical thinking, provides the cognitive tools for analyzing claims. Students learn to interpret, compare, infer, evaluate evidence, identify assumptions, and construct reasoned conclusions (Facione, 1990). The second dimension, epistemic discernment, provides the criteria and processes through which students decide what deserves confidence. Students learn to evaluate sources, compare

evidence, recognize uncertainty, distinguish types of knowledge claims, and reflect upon how they know (Barzilai & Zohar, 2012; Chinn et al., 2021). The third dimension, commitment to truth, provides the ethical and formative orientation for using these capacities. Students are encouraged to value truth even when doing so requires them to reconsider their own assumptions. This dimension prevents critical thinking from becoming merely argumentative or skeptical and transforms it into a practice of intellectual responsibility. These three dimensions should operate together. Critical thinking without commitment to truth may become rhetorical manipulation. Commitment to truth without epistemic discernment may become naïve certainty. Epistemic discernment without moral responsibility may become detached intellectualism. CRE can integrate the three by creating learning environments in which students investigate claims carefully, evaluate evidence responsibly, and practice intellectual virtues in community. Such a model is consistent with the argument of KaroKaro et al. (2024), who propose a Christian collaborative pedagogy grounded in intellectual virtues and generative engagement between faith and skepticism. It also corresponds with Chinn et al.'s (2021) conception of epistemic education as involving epistemic aims, ideals, and reliable processes rather than isolated reasoning skills.

The findings have several implications for the design of university-level CRE. First, critical thinking should become an explicit learning objective rather than an incidental outcome. Course syllabi should identify opportunities for students to evaluate evidence, compare interpretations, formulate arguments, and reflect upon their reasoning. Second, digital information evaluation should be integrated into CRE. Students should practice source verification, lateral reading, comparison of multiple sources, and identification of unsupported claims. This recommendation is strongly supported by research demonstrating students' difficulties in evaluating online information (McGrew et al., 2018) and by research emphasizing the importance of epistemic thinking in online inquiry (Barzilai & Zohar, 2012). Third, classroom dialogue should be strengthened. Students need spaces in which disagreement is intellectually productive rather than personally threatening. This requires teachers to cultivate norms of listening, evidence-based argumentation, respect, and intellectual humility. Fourth, Christian educators should explicitly connect truth-seeking with Christian ethical formation. Students should recognize that the responsibility to seek truth also entails responsibility for how information is communicated to others. UNESCO's (2021) emphasis on ethical and responsible information practices provides a useful complement to Christian ethical formation. Finally, the teacher's role should shift from being primarily a transmitter of predetermined answers toward becoming a facilitator of epistemically responsible inquiry. This does not eliminate the teacher's authority; rather, it changes the basis of that authority. The teacher exercises authority by modeling intellectual integrity, careful scholarship, openness to questions, and responsible engagement with evidence.

The overall synthesis demonstrates that the post-truth era requires Christian Religious Education to reconsider what it means to educate students for truth. The challenge is not simply that students encounter false information. The deeper challenge is that contemporary information environments complicate the processes through which individuals decide whom to trust, what evidence to accept, and how to distinguish

knowledge from assertion. The literature indicates that critical thinking is necessary but insufficient when understood solely as a set of cognitive techniques. Epistemic discernment adds the capacity to evaluate how knowledge claims are justified, while commitment to truth supplies the moral and formative orientation necessary to use these capacities responsibly. This triadic relationship constitutes the central finding of the present qualitative synthesis. For university students, CRE therefore has the potential to become an important site of epistemic formation. It can help students resist both misinformation and intellectual arrogance, while cultivating a posture that combines conviction with humility. In the post-truth era, such formation is especially important because the goal of Christian education cannot simply be to produce students who know more. It should contribute to the formation of students who know responsibly, question wisely, discern carefully, and pursue truth faithfully.

The contribution of this study is consequently conceptual rather than statistical. It does not claim to demonstrate experimentally that a particular CRE strategy increases critical thinking or epistemic discernment. Rather, the qualitative synthesis of established scholarship indicates a strong theoretical basis for integrating these dimensions into Christian higher education. Future empirical research should test this proposed framework through classroom-based qualitative studies, mixed-method research, or intervention studies involving university students. Such research could investigate how students actually negotiate conflicting information, how Christian beliefs influence epistemic judgments, and which pedagogical practices most effectively cultivate intellectual humility, critical reasoning, and commitment to truth. Christian Religious Education can respond constructively to the post-truth era not by withdrawing from intellectual complexity, but by entering it with theological depth, pedagogical wisdom, epistemic discipline, and moral courage.

CONCLUSION

This study has examined the contribution of Christian Religious Education (CRE) to university students' formation in the post-truth era, with particular attention to critical thinking, epistemic discernment, and commitment to truth. Based on the qualitative synthesis of relevant literature, the study concludes that the contemporary challenge of post-truth is not simply the existence of misinformation or false claims. More fundamentally, it concerns the ways individuals determine what is credible, whom they trust, what constitutes adequate evidence, and how they respond when evidence conflicts with previously held beliefs. The experts therefore emphasize the need for education to address epistemic aims, ideals, and reliable processes rather than focusing exclusively on the acquisition of information. The first conclusion concerns the importance of critical thinking as an essential dimension of Christian higher education. Critical thinking involves interpretation, analysis, evaluation, inference, explanation, and self-regulation, while also requiring dispositions such as open-mindedness, intellectual honesty, and willingness to reconsider one's judgment. In CRE, these capacities should not be regarded as contrary to faith. Rather, they can become part of mature Christian formation in which students are encouraged to examine claims carefully while

maintaining a responsible commitment to truth. Christian pedagogy in the post-truth era should move beyond a purely individual cognitive conception of critical thinking toward an intellectually mature and spiritually grounded practice. Second, the study concludes that critical thinking alone is insufficient. University students also require epistemic discernment, the ability to evaluate how knowledge claims are constructed, justified, communicated, and supported. In an information environment characterized by competing authorities and conflicting narratives, students must learn not merely to ask whether a statement is true, but also how the claim can be justified and what degree of confidence is warranted. Epistemic education should therefore develop students' ability to make epistemic assumptions visible, examine standards of reasoning, and participate responsibly in processes of knowing. Third, the study identifies commitment to truth as an intellectual and moral disposition. A meaningful Christian response to post-truth cannot be reduced to fact-checking skills. Students must also develop the willingness to acknowledge error, reconsider assumptions, listen to alternative perspectives, and prioritize truth over personal preference or ideological loyalty. Consequently, CRE should cultivate intellectual humility alongside intellectual confidence. Students should be formed to recognize that possessing convictions does not eliminate the responsibility to examine those convictions critically.

The study therefore proposes that effective CRE in the post-truth era should integrate three mutually reinforcing dimensions: critical thinking, epistemic discernment, and commitment to truth. Critical thinking provides the analytical capacity to examine claims; epistemic discernment provides the framework for evaluating the credibility and justification of knowledge; and commitment to truth provides the ethical orientation that guides how these capacities are used. Separating these dimensions may produce an incomplete educational response. Critical thinking without truth-oriented dispositions can become merely argumentative, while commitment to truth without epistemic discernment may become uncritical certainty. Finally, this study concludes that CRE has a distinctive contribution to make to university education precisely because it addresses both how students think and who they are becoming. The classroom can function as a community in which questioning is encouraged, evidence is examined, disagreement is handled constructively, and intellectual humility is practiced. Such an approach is consistent with the emerging proposal for Christian pedagogy that forms students to think critically because of, rather than despite, their faith. The study is conceptual and literature-based; therefore, it does not claim empirical evidence that a particular CRE intervention directly produces higher levels of critical thinking or epistemic discernment. Future research should test the proposed framework through qualitative classroom studies, mixed-method research, and empirical interventions involving university students. Nevertheless, the literature strongly supports the need for CRE to become a space of intellectual formation, epistemic responsibility, and truth-seeking. In the post-truth era, the ultimate educational task is not simply to produce students who possess more information, but students who can think critically, discern responsibly, acknowledge their limitations, and pursue truth with intellectual integrity and Christian commitment.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barzilai, S., & Zohar, A. (2012). Epistemic thinking in action: Evaluating and integrating online sources. *Cognition and Instruction*, 30(1), 39–85. <https://doi.org/10.1080/07370008.2011.636495> (Tandfonline)
- Barzilai, S., & Zohar, A. (2014). Reconsidering personal epistemology as metacognition: A multifaceted approach to the analysis of epistemic thinking. *Educational Psychologist*, 49(1), 13–35. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00461520.2013.863265> (DOI)
- Bowen, G. A. (2009). Document analysis as a qualitative research method. *Qualitative Research Journal*, 9(2), 27–40. <https://doi.org/10.3316/QRJ0902027> (rediee.cl)
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa> (Wikipedia)
- Chinn, C. A., Barzilai, S., & Duncan, R. G. (2021). Education for a “post-truth” world: New directions for research and practice. *Educational Researcher*, 50(1), 51–60. <https://doi.org/10.3102/0013189X20940683> (Rutgers University)
- Creswell, J. W., & Poth, C. N. (2018). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five approaches* (4th ed.). SAGE Publications. (SAGE Publishing)
- Facione, P. A. (1990). *Critical thinking: A statement of expert consensus for purposes of educational assessment and instruction: Research findings and recommendations*. American Philosophical Association. (ERIC)
- Kahl, D. H., Jr. (2024). Post-truth’s effect on the brain and the future self: A critical communication pedagogy response. *Journal of Communication Pedagogy*, 8, 112–119. <https://doi.org/10.31446/JCP.2024.1.08> (ERIC)
- KaroKaro, D., Kus, B. K., & Hotmarlina, E. (2024). Berpikir kritis sebagai praktik spiritual: Membingkai ulang pedagogi kolaboratif Kristen di era *post-truth* dan kecerdasan buatan generatif. *KURIOS*, 10(3), 864–876. <https://doi.org/10.30995/kur.v10i3.1096> (STTPB)
- Lewandowsky, S., Ecker, U. K. H., & Cook, J. (2017). Beyond misinformation: Understanding and coping with the “post-truth” era. *Journal of Applied Research in Memory and Cognition*, 6(4), 353–369. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jarmac.2017.07.008> (Monash University)
- McGrew, S., Breakstone, J., Ortega, T., Smith, M., & Wineburg, S. (2018). Can students evaluate online sources? Learning from assessments of civic online reasoning. *Theory & Research in Social Education*, 46(2), 165–193. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00933104.2017.1416320> (DOI)

- Meek, E. L. (2011). *Loving to know: Covenant epistemology*. Wipf & Stock Publishers. ([Google Books](#))
- Mohammed, S., Grundy, Q., & Bytautas, J. (2024). Addressing post-truth in the classroom: Towards a critical pedagogy. *Teaching & Learning Inquiry*, 12, 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.20343/teachlearningqu.12.24> ([ResearchGate](#))
- Palmer, P. J. (1998). *The courage to teach: Exploring the inner landscape of a teacher's life*. Jossey-Bass. ([ERIC](#))
- Parker, J. (2024). The role of higher education in the post-truth era. *Journal of Political Science Education*, 20(3), 391–404. <https://doi.org/10.1080/15512169.2024.2354972> ([Tandfonline](#))
- Smith, J. K. A. (2009). *Desiring the kingdom: Worship, worldview, and cultural formation*. Baker Academic. ([Google Books](#))
- UNESCO. (2021). *Global standards for media and information literacy curricula development guidelines*. UNESCO. ([UNESCO](#))