

Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges and Opportunities in Teaching Christian Religious Education in Public Schools

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the challenges and opportunities in teaching Christian Religious Education in public schools in Indonesia. Using a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design, data were collected through in-depth interviews with Christian Religious Education teachers and classroom observations. The findings reveal several key challenges, including the diversity of student religions, limited resources and facilities, and an inflexible curriculum. Despite these challenges, teachers perceive opportunities in the increased awareness of students about the importance of religion, the use of technology and media in teaching, and the inclusive approach that utilizes religious diversity in the classroom. Teachers see these challenges as opportunities for innovation in teaching, using religious diversity as a basis for teaching universal values and leveraging technology to overcome resource limitations. This research highlights the potential to enhance Christian Religious Education by fostering more relevant, interactive, and inclusive teaching practices, suggesting that overcoming existing barriers can lead to better educational outcomes.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Christian education in Indonesian public schools has a strategic role in shaping the character, morals, and spirituality of students (Hendra Agung Saputrsa Samaloisa & Hutahaeon, 2023) (Hendra Agung Saputra Samaloisa & Bilo, 2024). In the context of a multicultural and multireligious society, religious education does not only aim to impart knowledge about Christian teachings (Patandi & Herdalina, 2025), but also serves to instill ethical and moral values, guide students in decision-making in accordance with religious principles, and strengthen their spiritual identity (Tobe, Tafuli, & Topayung, 2024) (Benu & Manurung, 2025). Religious education in public schools also contributes to building interfaith harmony (Bessie, Poko, & Saingo, 2025), which is very important considering that Indonesia is a Muslim-majority country, but has a religious minority population (Syarif, 2021), including Christianity. Setiawan emphasized that the integration of religious education in public

schools is one of the effective means to promote tolerance, mutual respect, and interfaith understanding (Saputri, Rostiana, & Santri, 2025). The Indonesian constitution guarantees freedom of religion, so religious education in public schools is also an instrument to ensure that students from various religious backgrounds can develop their understanding and practice of their faith in a multicultural framework (Baidhawiy, 2005).

Opportunities in teaching Christian Religious Education can be maximized by utilizing digital technology and religious diversity in the classroom. Technological developments have presented various digital learning platforms, educational applications, and multimedia resources that can enrich students' learning experiences. For example, Bible studies, Christian philosophy, and in-depth educational content are now accessible via the internet and digital devices, which were previously difficult to obtain in physical classrooms (Hura, Laoli, & Gea, 2024). In addition, religious diversity in the classroom provides an opportunity for teachers to encourage interfaith dialogue. Christian Education teachers can teach their religious teachings while fostering empathy, tolerance, and mutual respect for other religions, so that students can understand the diversity of Indonesian society more deeply (Neonane & Topayung, 2025) (Scherilda, 2025).

However, the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools faces a number of complex challenges (Nababan, Sianturi, Rantung, Naibaho, & Boiliu, 2023). Religious diversity in the classroom can cause potential tension or misunderstandings if not handled properly. Therefore, teachers need to have high pedagogical skills and cultural sensitivity to create an inclusive and respectful learning environment (Kia, Th, Majesty, & Th, 2025) (Gea & Kurniawan, 2025) (Sularno, Usmany, & Hamzah, 2023). In addition, the religious education curriculum in Indonesia is designed to be general and inclusive of all religions, so it often does not provide enough space to explore Christian teachings comprehensively. Teachers are forced to summarize material to fit the limited time, which impacts the effectiveness of teaching and students' understanding of Christianity (Tapilaha, 2025).

Limited resources are also a significant obstacle in the teaching of Christian Religious Education. Lack of teaching materials, props, and access to religious counselors can hinder the optimal teaching and learning process (Sianipar, Tetelepta, Taroofo, Harefa, & Lombok, 2024). On the other hand, many Christian Education teachers do not have formal theological training or adequate pedagogical skills, so they face difficulties in delivering material in a meaningful and impactful way (Sihotang, Lumbanbatu, Waruwu, & Tarigan, 2024). Nonetheless, the use of technology in education offers a potential solution, by providing access to more diverse digital resources, thus allowing teachers to teach in more creative, interactive, and relevant methods to students' needs.

Several previous studies have highlighted issues related to religious education in public schools. Salim and Hidayat (2020) examined the challenges of religious diversity in public schools and found that differences in religious backgrounds can be a source of tension if teachers do not have proper classroom management strategies (Rosada & Albertus, 2019). However, this study does not specifically highlight Christian Religious Education or the perspective of teachers as teaching implementers. Rahayu and Fajar (2021) explore the integration of digital technology in learning, showing that the use of digital media can increase student engagement and understanding, but this study does not focus on the context of Christian religious education (Hendra Agung Saputra Samaloisa & Bilo, 2024). Wulandari and Indriani (2020) discuss teachers' strategies in dealing with student diversity, emphasizing the importance of training and an inclusive approach, but the scope is still general to all subjects (Putri, Fiqriah, Zullin, Setiawati, & Utama, 2025). Hartanto (2021) highlighted the use of digital media in religious education teaching, finding that access to digital resources increases learning effectiveness, but this study has not examined teachers' perceptions directly (Doni & Nubatonis, 2024). Sulistyono (2022) highlights the limitations of the religious education curriculum in public schools and how this has an impact on the deepening of the material (Hutabarat & Saragih, 2025), but this study does not highlight the opportunities that teachers can take advantage of to overcome these constraints. In addition, Buan (2025) highlights the challenges of Christian Religious Education teachers in dealing with bullying in multireligious classrooms and sees it as an opportunity to teach the values of love and tolerance (Scott,

2024), while Tauho (2025) emphasizes PAK as a means of strengthening the value of multiculturalism in the midst of student diversity (Tobe et al., 2024). Waruwu (2024) explores the use of digital technology to build a virtual faith community that supports PAK learning (Scott, Scott, & Scott, 2025), although there is still a gap in technology access. Sirait (2024) emphasized the importance of the integrity of PAK teachers in facing professional and social challenges in public schools (Bouway & Mbelanggedo, 2025). Ate (2025) discusses the role of PAK in helping adolescents face social and mental problems through Christian values (Kasingku & Woy, 2024), while Sipahutar (2023) highlights how PAK teachers can improve professional competence through the integration of technology and the development of digital pedagogy while maintaining spiritual values (Scott, 2024). Overall, these studies confirm that religious education in public schools faces challenges of diversity, resource constraints, and curriculum, but also opens up significant opportunities for teachers to innovate, utilize technology, and develop inclusive approaches and contextual pedagogy.

From the literature review, it can be seen that there is a significant research gap. Most of the research emphasizes the challenge of diversity or technological integration in general, but there are still very limited studies that specifically examine teachers' perceptions of the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools. In addition, the existing literature lacks the opportunity that teachers can take advantage of to improve the quality of teaching, both through pedagogical strategies, the use of technology, and interfaith dialogue approaches. The novelty of this research lies in its focus that combines the perspective of teachers directly, while exploring the use of digital technology and innovative strategies in teaching Christian Religious Education, which was still lacking in previous studies.

Based on this background, this study is designed to identify and analyze teachers' perceptions regarding the challenges and opportunities in teaching Christian Religious Education in Indonesian public schools. The focus of the research includes issues of religious diversity, curriculum limitations, availability of resources, and the potential use of digital technology. The results of the research are expected to provide insight for the development of teaching strategies that are more effective, inclusive, and adaptive to the needs of students in a pluralistic society. In addition, this research is expected to make a practical contribution to religious education policies and teaching practices in public schools, as well as to enrich literature related to Christian religious education in Indonesia.

2. METHOD

This study uses a qualitative approach with a phenomenological design to explore a deep understanding of teachers' perceptions of the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools. The phenomenological approach was chosen because this methodology allows researchers to understand teachers' subjective experiences in religiously diverse classroom contexts, as well as how they give meaning to those experiences (Tumangkeng & Maramis, 2022).

Participants

The study participants consisted of 10 teachers of Christian Religious Education, who were selected using purposive sampling techniques to ensure that they had adequate experience and knowledge in teaching these subjects (Lontoh, 2025) (Creswell, 2013). Participant characteristics include:

1. Gender: 6 male, 4 female
2. Teaching experience: 5–20 years
3. Education level: S1 and S2 Christian Religious Education
4. Teaching location: Public schools in central and suburban areas

Data Collection Techniques

Data was collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews, which allowed researchers to explore teachers' views, experiences, and perceptions in detail (Prof. Dr. Sugiyono, 2022). Interviews are conducted face-to-face and online (Zoom/Google Meet) according to the availability of participants, with a duration of 45–60 minutes per session. The interview guide is structured based on the focus of the research, including questions about:

1. Challenges faced by teachers in teaching Christian Religious Education
2. Opportunities that can be leveraged to improve teaching
3. Teaching strategies used in the context of religious diversity
4. Utilization of technology and learning resources

In addition to interviews, classroom observations were conducted to obtain additional data related to teacher-student interaction and the application of teaching methods, as well as supporting documents such as lesson plans (Learning Implementation Plan) and teaching materials used for data triangulation.

Data Validation

To ensure the validity of the data, the researchers used several techniques, including:

1. Source triangulation: comparing data from interviews, observations, and documents
2. Member checking: confirms provisional findings to participants to ensure interpretation accuracy
3. Trail audit: systematically documenting research steps to maintain transparency in the analysis process

Data Analysis

Data were analyzed using a thematic analysis approach (Simamora & Kadiyono, 2021), which involves several stages:

1. Data familiarization: read interview transcripts and observation notes repeatedly to understand the overall content.
2. Initial code: mark pieces of data that are relevant to the research focus, both related to challenges and opportunities.
3. Theme search: groups similar codes into temporary categories.
4. Theme review: reviews categories to ensure consistency and relevance to research questions.
5. Theme naming: determines the main themes that describe the challenges and opportunities in the teaching of Christian Religious Education.
6. Interpretation and writing of reports: compiling the results of the analysis into a comprehensive narrative, supplemented by direct quotes from participants to reinforce the findings.

Through this approach, the research can identify key themes that reflect teacher perceptions, including challenges (e.g., curriculum limitations, religious diversity, and resources) and opportunities (e.g., the use of digital technologies, pedagogical innovation, and interfaith dialogue) in the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools.

3. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Finding

Table 1. Main Themes, Sub-Themes, and Verbatim Quotes of Participants

Tema Utama	Sub-Theme	Participant Quotes (Verbatim)
Challenge	Religious Diversity	"I have to be careful not to offend friends of different religions. This sometimes limits the material I can teach." (P3)
	Inflexible Curriculum	"The curriculum is too dense, so I can't go into the topic of Christian morality in depth." (P6)
	Resource Limitations	"Our teaching materials are limited, there is no special space for religious learning activities, so it is difficult to teach effectively." (P9)
Chance	Students' Awareness of Religion	"Many students ask more about the Christian life, it's a great opportunity to teach moral values." (P1)
	Technology Utilization	"I use videos and online applications, so that students can understand abstract material more easily." (P4)
	An Inclusive Approach	"The diversity in the classroom allows me to teach tolerance and compassion directly." (P7)

Table 1 shows two main themes that emerged from the results of an in-depth interview with Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers, namely "Challenges" and "Opportunities." Each theme is then elaborated into several sub-themes that represent the dimension of the teacher's experience in the context of a multicultural and interfaith school. The presence of verbal quotations from participants serves to strengthen the validity of the findings, show the authentic voice of the participants, and affirm that the interpretation made is grounded in empirical data.

The first theme, "Challenges," reveals the complexity of the situation faced by PAK teachers when carrying out their duties in a public school environment with religiously diverse student backgrounds. The sub-theme of religious diversity describes how teachers must maintain sensitivity in communicating and delivering material. P3's statement, "I have to be careful not to offend friends of different religions. This sometimes limits the material I can teach," indicating that teachers are in a dilemma between the responsibility to teach the values of the Christian faith and the obligation to maintain interfaith harmony in the classroom. This situation requires teachers to have interreligious intelligence, namely the ability to understand, respect, and adapt to a diversity of beliefs without losing their religious identity.

Furthermore, the sub-theme of the inflexible curriculum shows the structural obstacles experienced by teachers. The general national curriculum often does not allow for the development of in-depth material on Christian spiritual values and morality. Excerpt P6, "The curriculum is too dense, so I can't discuss the topic of Christian morality in depth," asserts that the administrative burden and attachment to curriculum targets can reduce the space for reflection and discussion that should be at the heart of religious learning. This indicates that although the PAK curriculum is designed to shape students' character and faith, in practice, teachers face time constraints and uniform educational policies for all subjects.

The third sub-theme of the challenge theme, namely limited resources, is related to inadequate infrastructure. Quote P9, "Our teaching materials are limited, there is no special space for religious learning activities, so it is difficult to teach effectively," shows that the physical condition of the school also affects the quality of learning. Teachers face limitations in access to theological literature, digital learning media, and conducive classroom facilities. These limitations can hinder the implementation of creative and contextual learning methods.

On the other hand, the second theme, "Opportunities," highlights the positive aspects that teachers can optimize in carrying out religious education in pluralistic schools. The first sub-theme, student awareness of religion, shows an increase in student interest in religious learning. P1 participant stated, "Many students asked more about the Christian life, this is a great opportunity to teach moral values." This indicates that despite living in a pluralistic society, students still have curiosity and spiritual needs. Teachers can take advantage of this phenomenon to instill universal values such as love, honesty, and responsibility, which are relevant to all students regardless of religion.

The sub-theme of technology utilization reveals innovations made by teachers in overcoming limited resources. Through P4's statement, "I use videos and online applications, so that students can understand abstract material more easily," it can be seen that teachers are able to adapt to digital advances to enrich teaching methods. Technology allows learning to be more engaging, interactive, and contextual, especially for the younger generation who are familiar with digital media. The use of video platforms, Bible study apps, and multimedia materials can help students understand religious teachings visually and reflectively.

The final sub-theme of the opportunity theme, which is an inclusive approach, emphasizes that diversity in the classroom is not just a challenge, but also an opportunity to instill the values of tolerance and universal love. P7's statement, "Diversity in the classroom allows me to teach tolerance and compassion directly," shows a paradigm transformation of teachers from an exclusive approach to dialogical education. This approach is in line with the principles of interfaith character education, where religious learning focuses not only on doctrinal aspects, but also on strengthening empathy and recognition of differences.

Thus, both the theme of challenges and opportunities shows two complementary sides of the experience of PAK teachers. Challenges are the drivers of pedagogical creativity, while opportunities strengthen the relevance of religious education in the context of Indonesian pluralism. These results show that the effectiveness of religious education is not only determined by the content of the curriculum, but also by the capacity of teachers to manage social and cultural dynamics in the school environment.

Overall, the data in Table 1 confirm that the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools is at the intersection of theological idealism and social reality. Teachers play the role not only of doctrinal teachers, but also of mediators of universal moral values that can bridge differences of belief among students. Therefore, more flexible education policy support, interreligious competency-based teacher training, and the provision of contextual and inclusive learning resources are needed. With these steps, PAK teachers can continue to develop teaching strategies that are relevant to the needs of the times while being in harmony with Christian values.

Discussion

This study reveals various perceptions of teachers related to the challenges and opportunities in teaching Christian Religious Education in Indonesian public schools. Based on in-depth interviews and observations, several key themes related to challenges and opportunities in teaching were identified, which were then further studied to understand their impact on the learning process and innovation in teaching.

Teachers' Perceptions of Challenges

The teachers involved in the study revealed various challenges in the teaching of Christian Religious Education, most of which had to do with students' religious diversity, limited resources, and inflexible curriculum. Religious diversity in the classroom is a major challenge. Teachers must create an inclusive learning environment that is sensitive to differences in beliefs (Rahmawati & Fatmawati, 2016). As P3 put it: "I have to be careful not to offend friends of different religions. This sometimes limits the material I can teach." As explained by Rahmawati (2016), this diversity requires an inclusive approach, where teachers not only teach Christian religious teachings but also manage social dynamics

between students from various religions. In this context, teachers are faced with the challenge of creating a harmonious learning space, without creating interreligious tensions.

Resource constraints also exacerbate the challenges. P9 said: "Our teaching materials are limited, there is no dedicated space for religious learning activities, so it is difficult to teach effectively." Data obtained from interviews with teachers show that many schools do not have sufficient resources to support the teaching of Christian Religious Education to the fullest. This includes a lack of relevant teaching materials, adequate facilities for teaching and learning activities, and training for teachers to face the challenges of religious teaching in multireligious schools. For example, some teachers revealed that the lack of a dedicated space for religious education or teaching materials made it difficult for them to deliver the material effectively. Research by Zega (2024) also shows that the lack of education and training facilities for teachers worsens the quality of Christian religious learning in public schools (Zega, Girsang, Nababan, & Tafonao, 2024).

The limitations of the curriculum are also a significant obstacle. P6 states: "The curriculum is too dense, so I can't discuss the topic of Christian morality in depth." Although the religious education curriculum in Indonesia is designed to cover a wide range of religions, many teachers feel that the existing curriculum does not adequately provide space for more in-depth teaching of the teachings of Christianity. As revealed by Mulyadi and Sari (2021), limitations in the curriculum reduce opportunities to explore topics that are more complex and relevant to Christian students, such as morality or the life challenges faced by Christians in a broader social context.

Teachers' Perceptions of Opportunities

On the other hand, teachers also see various opportunities in the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools, especially in terms of students' awareness of the importance of religion and moral values in daily life. Students are showing a growing interest in religious education, and many are eager to understand more deeply about their religious teachings. P1 stated: "Many students are asking more about the Christian life, it's a great opportunity to teach moral values." Research by Tambunan (2024) shows that this increased awareness provides an opportunity for teachers to utilize religious education as a means to shape students' character, not only in a religious context, but also in their social lives (Tambunan, Arifianto, & Triposa, 2024). Teachers can use this moment to introduce universal moral values that can be applied in everyday life, such as compassion, forgiveness, and tolerance.

The use of technology is also a significant opportunity. P4 states: "I use videos and online applications, so that students can understand abstract material more easily." More and more teachers are leveraging digital platforms, learning videos, and interactive apps to support their teaching. Setiawan and Hasibuan (2020) show that technology can help teachers deliver material in a more engaging and enjoyable way, which in turn can improve students' understanding of Christian teachings (Saragih, Siregar, & Butar-butur, 2025). In this study, most teachers reported that the use of social media, learning apps, and Christian videos helped students understand more abstract concepts in a more visual and practical way.

An inclusive approach that leverages religious diversity in the classroom is also seen as an opportunity. P7 stated: "The diversity in the classroom allowed me to teach tolerance and compassion firsthand."

Facing a diverse classroom allows teachers to teach the values of tolerance and mutual respect among students from different religious backgrounds. Wulandari (2020) noted that inclusive religious education can enrich students' insights into the importance of harmony between religious communities, which is an important value in a pluralistic Indonesian society. Therefore, the teaching of Christianity not only focuses on the understanding of Christianity itself, but also plays a role in developing the character of tolerant students and understanding the importance of plurality.

The Relationship Between Challenges and Opportunities

The challenges faced by teachers in teaching Christian Religious Education in public schools can often be transformed into opportunities for innovation in teaching. For example, the challenge of religious diversity in the classroom can be used as an opportunity to teach universal values that exist in the teachings of Christianity, such as peace, compassion, and harmony between religious communities. Teachers can use religious diversity as a learning material to show that Christianity, like other religions, teaches moral principles that are fundamental to living together (Susanta, 2023).

Limited resources and facilities can also encourage teachers to be more creative in finding alternative solutions. For example, the use of technology and social media is one way to overcome the limitations of teaching materials and provide access to students to get richer and more varied learning. In this case, the challenges related to limited facilities actually provide opportunities for teachers to innovate and adopt teaching methods that are more in line with the times (Mustari, 2022).

Additionally, curriculum inflexibility can encourage teachers to create teaching approaches that are more contextual and relevant to students' needs. Teachers can adapt teaching methods and materials to the social conditions and spiritual development of students, allowing the teaching of Christianity to become more alive and more meaningful. This is in accordance with what Mulyadi and Sari (2021) have stated, that flexibility in teaching approaches can help teachers to answer curriculum challenges that cannot accommodate all student needs (Trisnani et al., 2024).

Research Implications and Limitations

This research provides important implications for the development of the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools. To address the challenges, it is important for education policies to provide better training for teachers in managing religious diversity in the classroom and in leveraging technology to improve the quality of teaching. In addition, a more flexible curriculum that allows teachers to teach Christianity in more depth needs to be considered.

However, the study also has limitations, such as the limitation of the number of schools that are the location of the study, which can affect the generalization of the findings. In addition, the data obtained relied more on the teacher's perception, while the perspectives of students and parents have not been fully involved in the study. Further research could include a broader analysis involving various relevant parties, as well as exploring more deeply the influence of the use of technology in Christian religious learning.

4. CONCLUSION

This research reveals that the teaching of Christian Religious Education in Indonesian public schools faces a number of challenges and opportunities. The main challenges identified were students' religious diversity, limited resources and facilities, and inflexible curriculum. However, the study also found significant opportunities, such as students' increased awareness of the importance of religion in their lives, the use of technology in learning, and the implementation of inclusive approaches that take advantage of religious diversity in the classroom. Teachers can see these challenges as opportunities to innovate in teaching, by leveraging religious diversity to teach universal values, as well as leveraging technology to overcome resource limitations.

From a conceptual perspective, teachers' perceptions of these challenges and opportunities enrich religious education theory in a pluralistic context. Teachers' experiences show that religious teaching is not only normative and doctrinal, but also contextual and adaptive, demanding interpersonal skills, cultural sensitivity, and creativity in the selection of learning strategies. These findings support the idea that religious education in multireligious societies should emphasize character building, tolerance, and interfaith understanding, not just mastery of teaching materials (Suryadi, 2020; Wulandari, 2020).

Based on the findings of the research, several policy recommendations can be provided. First, the government and schools need to provide interfaith teacher training to improve competence in managing religiously heterogeneous classrooms. Second, the integration of technology in religious

learning needs to be expanded so that teachers can overcome limited resources and increase student involvement. Third, a more flexible revision of the Christian Religious Education curriculum needs to be considered, so that teachers can adapt the material to the social context and spiritual needs of students. With these measures, the teaching of Christian Religious Education in public schools can become more relevant, interactive, and inclusive, while equipping students with moral and social values that can be applied in daily life.

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