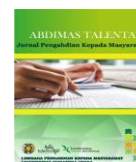


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Technology-Driven Community Empowerment through Digital Religious Education

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ABSTRACT

The rapid development of digital technology has changed the way people access information, communicate, learn, and participate in religious activities. However, the availability of technology does not automatically ensure that it is used effectively, critically, and responsibly. Digital education is therefore important for strengthening community capacity, particularly in religious communities where technology can support learning, communication, access to religious information, and community engagement. This community service activity aimed to strengthen community awareness and understanding of the appropriate use of digital technology in the context of religious education. The activity was conducted at HKBP Hutaraja through a participatory educational approach consisting of preparation, seminar delivery, interactive discussion, question-and-answer sessions, and documentation. The seminar introduced participants to the opportunities and challenges associated with digital technology, particularly its application to religious learning and daily community life. The activity showed active participation from the congregation, especially during the discussion and question-and-answer session. The interaction indicated that digital education is not limited to technical skills but also requires critical thinking, ethical awareness, and responsible behavior when accessing and sharing digital religious information. The activity also strengthened cooperation between higher education institutions and religious communities. Community-based digital education conducted through churches can therefore serve as a practical approach to developing digitally aware, responsible, and empowered communities.

Keyword: Community Empowerment, Digital Education, Digital Literacy

1. Introduction

Digital technology has become an integral part of contemporary society. Smartphones, social media platforms, online communication applications, search engines, and various digital learning resources have transformed how individuals obtain information and interact with one another. This transformation also influences religious life because religious information, learning materials, sermons, discussions, and community communication can increasingly be accessed through digital media.

The integration of technology into religious education provides opportunities for expanding access to learning resources and creating more flexible forms of learning. In Christian education, digital technology can support the delivery of religious knowledge beyond conventional face-to-face learning. Digital theology and technology-supported Christian education have also become increasingly relevant as religious communities attempt to maintain theological and ethical values while adapting to technological developments [1].



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Digital transformation, however, should not be understood merely as the ability to operate digital devices. Religious communities also need the capacity to select reliable information, understand digital ethics, communicate responsibly, and critically evaluate religious information obtained from online sources. Digital literacy in Christian education can contribute to the development of responsible technology use while simultaneously strengthening spiritual and moral values [2], [3]. The widespread availability of digital content presents both opportunities and challenges. People can access religious materials rapidly, but the credibility, context, and accuracy of digital information may vary. Digital religious education therefore requires an approach that combines technological literacy with ethical and spiritual considerations. Christian education can play an important role in helping individuals develop responsibility, honesty, empathy, and critical awareness when interacting within digital environments [4].

Community empowerment provides an appropriate framework for addressing this issue. Rather than positioning community members merely as recipients of information, empowerment activities encourage active participation, discussion, reflection, and the practical application of knowledge. Previous community-based digital literacy initiatives have demonstrated that education and direct community engagement can strengthen people's ability to use technology and access information more effectively [5]. Based on these considerations, a community service activity entitled “Technology-Driven Community Empowerment through Digital Religious Education” was conducted at HKBP Hutaraja. The activity was designed to introduce the community to the role of digital technology in religious education while encouraging responsible, critical, and ethical engagement with digital information. The community service team originated from Institut Agama Kristen Negeri (IAKN) Tarutung. The activity location can be illustrated through the travel route between Campus I of IAKN Tarutung and HKBP Hutaraja. Campus I of IAKN Tarutung is located in Tarutung, North Tapanuli, while HKBP Hutaraja served as the partner and location for the implementation of the community service activity.



Figure 1. Distance and Travel Route from Campus I of IAKN Tarutung to HKBP Hutaraja

The activity was expected to strengthen community understanding of digital technology not only as a communication tool but also as a resource for religious education, learning, and responsible participation in the digital environment.

2. Methods

This community service activity employed a participatory educational approach in which community members were actively involved in the learning and discussion process. The activity was conducted at HKBP Hutaraja and involved members of the church community together with the community service team from Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung. The implementation consisted of four main stages: preparation, educational seminar, interactive discussion, and evaluation through observation and participant responses.

2.1. Preparation

The preparation stage included communication and coordination with the church community, identification of the main topic, preparation of educational materials, and organization of the technical implementation of the activity. The material was designed using language that could be understood by participants with different levels of experience in using digital technology. The educational content focused on the role of digital technology in contemporary life, the use of digital resources for religious learning, responsible access to information, digital communication, and ethical considerations when sharing religious information through digital platforms.

The main activity was delivered through a seminar. The seminar method was selected to provide participants with a structured understanding of digital technology and its relationship with religious education. The presentation emphasized that technology should be regarded as a supporting tool for learning and communication rather than as a replacement for interpersonal relationships, direct religious guidance, or community interaction.

2.2. Interactive Discussion and Question-and-Answer Session

Following the presentation, an interactive question-and-answer session was conducted. Participants were encouraged to raise questions related to their experiences with technology, digital communication, online information, and religious content available through digital platforms. This stage was important because it provided opportunities for two-way communication. Participants were not only recipients of information but were also able to relate the seminar material to situations encountered in everyday life.

The activity was evaluated descriptively through direct observation of participation, interaction during the seminar, questions raised by participants, and responses during the discussion. Documentation in the form of photographs was also used to record the implementation of the activity. Because the activity focused primarily on education and community engagement, the evaluation emphasized qualitative observations rather than statistical measurement. The results were therefore interpreted based on participant involvement and the learning interactions that occurred during the activity.

3. Result and Discussion

3.1. Implementation of Digital Religious Education Seminar

The first major component of the activity was the delivery of the educational seminar. The seminar introduced the community to the changing role of digital technology in learning, communication, and access to religious information. During the seminar, digital technology was explained not merely as a collection of devices or applications but as an environment in which people increasingly communicate, obtain knowledge, and construct their understanding of various issues. This perspective is especially relevant to religious education because religious content is increasingly available through websites, social media, video-sharing services, and other digital sources.

The participants were encouraged to recognize both the opportunities and limitations of digital technology. Digital platforms can broaden access to educational resources, facilitate communication, and provide additional religious learning materials. At the same time, users need sufficient digital literacy to evaluate the credibility and relevance of information. This approach is consistent with the concept of digital theology in Christian education, which emphasizes the importance of maintaining theological values while responding constructively to contemporary technological developments [1]. Digital religious education therefore requires a balance between technological adaptation and the preservation of ethical, spiritual, and community values.

The seminar also emphasized that technology becomes meaningful when it contributes to learning and community development. Technology itself does not automatically create effective education. Appropriate guidance, critical understanding, and responsible use remain essential components of technology-supported religious education [6].



Figure 2. Delivery of the Digital Religious Education Seminar at HKBP Hutaraja

3.2. Interactive Question-and-Answer Session

The second important finding emerged from the interactive question-and-answer session. Participants were given opportunities to discuss issues related to the use of technology in everyday life and to ask questions based on their own experiences. The active interaction during this session demonstrated the importance of creating a two-way learning environment. Community education becomes more relevant when participants can connect new information with problems encountered in their daily lives. The discussion also allowed the presenters to clarify concepts that might otherwise remain abstract when delivered only through a lecture.

Questions and discussions related to digital technology provided an opportunity to reinforce several principles of digital literacy, including critical selection of information, responsible communication, and awareness of the consequences of sharing digital content. In religious contexts, these skills are particularly important because religious information may influence personal beliefs, relationships, and community practices. Digital literacy should therefore include not only technological competence but also moral and ethical judgment. Studies on Christian education and digital literacy similarly emphasize that responsible digital behavior requires the integration of technological skills with values such as responsibility, empathy, and ethical awareness [3], [4].

The question-and-answer session also showed the relevance of participatory approaches in community service. Rather than establishing one-directional communication between lecturers and participants, discussion allows knowledge to be developed through interaction. Such participation is an important element of community empowerment because members of the community are encouraged to become active learners.



Figure 3. Interactive Question-and-Answer Session with the HKBP Hutaraja Community

3.3 Strengthening Digital Awareness within the Religious Community

Another important outcome of the activity was the development of awareness regarding the role of digital technology within religious life. The church can serve not only as a place of worship but also as a social and educational space where members of the community learn, exchange experiences, and develop their capacities. In the digital era, this educational role can be expanded to include digital literacy. Community members need support in navigating the increasingly large volume of information available online. This includes the ability to identify trustworthy information, avoid immediately accepting or distributing unverified material, and use digital communication responsibly.

Digital education within a religious setting offers an important opportunity because technological knowledge can be discussed together with values and ethical considerations. Recent literature on Christian religious education suggests that digital literacy can strengthen spirituality and moral responsibility when technological skills are integrated with Christian values [2]. The seminar at HKBP Hutaraja therefore positioned technology as a means of supporting human and community development. Digital transformation should not reduce social interaction or community solidarity. Instead, digital tools can complement direct interaction by providing additional channels for communication, education, and access to useful information.

At the end of the indoor activity, the community service team and participants took a group photograph inside the church. Besides documenting the activity, this moment represented cooperation between the academic institution and the religious community in promoting education and community development.



Figure 4. Community Service Team and Participants inside HKBP Hutaraja Church

3.4 Strengthening Collaboration between Higher Education and the Community

Community empowerment requires continuous interaction between educational institutions and society. Higher education institutions possess academic resources and expertise, while local communities provide practical contexts in which knowledge can be applied and developed. The collaboration between Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung and the HKBP Hutaraja community represents one form of knowledge transfer through community service. The implementation of digital education within a church setting demonstrates how academic knowledge can be translated into practical educational activities that are directly accessible to community members.

Similar community empowerment programs indicate that direct educational interventions can support the development of digital knowledge and community capacity [5]. However, sustainability remains important. One seminar cannot address all challenges associated with digital transformation. Continued educational activities, mentoring, and collaboration can strengthen the long-term impact of community empowerment initiatives. From this perspective, the activity at HKBP Hutaraja should be understood as part of a broader relationship between higher education institutions and society. Digital education provides one potential area for continued cooperation because technological development will continue to influence communication, education, and religious practices.

The activity concluded with a group photograph outside the church. The photograph documented not only the completion of the program but also the partnership established between the community service team and HKBP Hutaraja.



Figure 5. Community Service Team and HKBP Hutaraja Community after the Completion of the Activity

4. Conclusion

The community service activity entitled “Technology-Driven Community Empowerment through Digital Religious Education” provided an educational platform for introducing and discussing the role of digital technology within religious and community life. Through seminars and interactive discussions, community members were encouraged to understand digital technology not only as a technical tool but also as a medium that requires critical, ethical, and responsible use. The implementation of the seminar and question-and-answer session demonstrated the value of participatory learning in community empowerment. Interaction between presenters and participants enabled digital issues to be discussed in relation to everyday experiences and religious values. The church also provided a relevant setting for digital education because technological literacy could be integrated with ethical, spiritual, and community considerations.

The activity further strengthened collaboration between Institut Agama Kristen Negeri Tarutung and HKBP Hutaraja. Such collaboration illustrates the role of higher education institutions in transferring knowledge and responding to technological changes experienced by society. Future community service programs may expand this initiative through more practical digital-literacy training, continuous mentoring, and additional educational activities adapted to community needs.

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