



Exploring the Integration of ChatGPT in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development: Students' Experience and Use Patterns

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Abstract: This study aims to explore the integration of ChatGPT in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development, focusing on students' learning experiences, usage patterns, levels of awareness, and reasons for adopting the tool as a learning support. A qualitative phenomenological approach was employed to capture students' lived experiences in using generative artificial intelligence in learning activities. The participants consisted of six junior high school students from Grades VII, VIII, and IX who were purposively selected based on their experience using ChatGPT in academic contexts. Data were collected through in-depth interviews, classroom observations, documentation, supplementary questionnaires, and field notes. Data credibility was ensured through method and source triangulation, as well as member checking. The data were analyzed thematically through the stages of data reduction, data display, and conclusion drawing and verification. The findings indicate that students use ChatGPT to deepen their understanding of learning materials and to support the completion of academic tasks. Two main patterns of use emerged, namely reflective and pragmatic, which shape how students engage with the technology. The integration of ChatGPT appears to contribute more strongly to the development of integrity-related values than relational values, underscoring the importance of sustained pedagogical guidance from teachers. These findings suggest that the purposeful integration of generative artificial intelligence, supported by reflective educational guidance, can promote both academic understanding and character formation. This approach also offers a transferable framework for the responsible integration of AI in faith-based educational institutions.

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Introduction

Digital transformation has fundamentally reshaped educational practices in the 21st century by introducing advanced information and communication technologies, particularly artificial intelligence (AI) (Kasneji et al., 2023). AI now directly impacts how students access information, engage with materials, and construct knowledge through adaptive systems and conversational agents, such as ChatGPT (Chocarro et al., 2021). This integration enables personalized, flexible learning experiences where students can learn independently, receive instant feedback, and adapt content to their individual needs, driving a shift toward more effective, student-centred education (Holmes et al., 2019).

Building on this evolution, recent research demonstrates that AI chatbots serve not merely as technical tools but as active supporters of learning through responsive, dialogic interactions (Lim et al., 2023). Studies consistently show that AI-based chatbots enhance learning engagement, deepen conceptual understanding, and boost student motivation,



particularly when positioned as companions rather than substitutes for critical thinking (Kasneji et al., 2023). In the context of Catholic Religious Education, ChatGPT's capacity to deliver tailored explanations, pose probing questions, and adapt to user contexts makes it pedagogically promising for exploring scripture and moral reasoning (Salkeld, 2024).

Theoretically, AI's role in learning aligns with connectivism, which conceptualizes knowledge construction as a networked process that draws from diverse digital sources (Siemens, 2005). Rather than unidirectional transmission from teacher to student, connectivism emphasizes dynamic interactions within information ecosystems, where ChatGPT functions as a vital node enabling ongoing dialogue with faith-based resources (Mahsun, 2024). This framework proves especially relevant for character development, as AI can simulate ethical scenarios aligned with Catholic teachings, fostering nuanced moral discernment (Luckin et al., 2016).

When integrated reflectively, digital technologies like ChatGPT hold transformative potential by prompting critical self-examination and meaning making (Mezirow, 1991). Mezirow emphasizes that critical reflection is central to transformative learning, enabling learners to reframe their experiences and forge new understandings, a process that AI can augment through open-ended dialogue and exploratory prompts (Selwyn, 2019). In Catholic character education, this reflective dimension cultivates virtues such as empathy and ethical responsibility, bridging traditional doctrine with contemporary digital realities (Pantan, 2023).

Yet, integrating AI into Catholic Religious Education and Character Development demands careful alignment with holistic faith formation goals (Freire, 1998). While ChatGPT can illuminate scriptural insights and link doctrine to modern life, unchecked reliance risks prioritizing efficiency over depth, potentially eroding the reflective dialogue vital to spiritual growth (Luckin et al., 2016). Existing literature predominantly examines cognitive and technical outcomes, leaving gaps in analyses of ChatGPT's specific effects on junior high students' faith experiences and character building (Mahsun, 2024).

This study was conducted at SMP Stella Duce 2 in Yogyakarta, a Catholic junior high school excelling in integrating character education into its faith-based curriculum, making it an ideal site for exploring AI's role in Catholic moral formation. With a diverse population of digital-native students aged 13-15 and a robust Religious Education framework, the school offers an authentic context for analyzing ChatGPT's dual potential as both a cognitive enhancer and moral influencer in everyday learning dynamics.

Adolescence is a crucial period for character formation, as described by Erikson in the "identity versus role confusion" stage, where adolescents shape their self-concept through peer interactions and authority structures (Erikson, 1968). Kohlberg's moral development theory indicates that at this age, students progress from conventional morality (Stages 3-4: interpersonal accord and law/order orientation) toward post-conventional reasoning (Stages 5-6) that considers universal ethical principles (Kohlberg, 1984). ChatGPT has the potential to accelerate this transition through contextual moral dilemmas such as navigating digital honesty or balancing personal conscience with communal norms but also risks reinforcing moral relativism without a structured Catholic ethical framework (Power et al., 1989).

Fowler's stages of faith framework complements this analysis, with junior high students typically at Stage 3 (Synthetic-Conventional Faith), reliant on authority and peer conformity (Fowler, 1981). Here, ChatGPT can expedite progress to Stage 4 (Individuative-Reflective Faith) through personalized Biblical exegesis and ethical simulations that spark critical faith reasoning. However, if students prioritize algorithmic responses over magisterial



teaching, authority-mediated tradition risks erosion (O'Connell Killen & de Beurs, 1996). Additionally, Gilligan's ethic of care highlights that adolescent girls tend to process morality relationally via AI, while boys focus on justice a dynamic that Catholic pedagogy must proactively address (Gilligan, 1982).

Thus, integrating ChatGPT into Catholic Religious Education and Character Development illustrates both the promise and complexity of harnessing AI for holistic, student-centred learning (Zawacki-Richter et al., 2019). While ChatGPT offers opportunities to make faith teachings more accessible and contextually relevant, its use must remain anchored in ethical pedagogy and reflective dialogue (Kasneci et al., 2023); Freire, 1998). This study contends that to realize digital transformation's full potential, ChatGPT's educational role must be critically examined not just for cognitive outcomes, but for its effects on faith, character, and the dynamics of teacher-student relationships. To that end, this study aims to analyze student experiences and usage patterns to inform contextually grounded, ethical practices in Catholic education (Chocarro et al., 2021).

Research Method

This study employs a qualitative approach using phenomenology. Phenomenological research is a qualitative method that uncovers the essence of individuals' lived experiences regarding a phenomenon, as proposed by Husserl, the founder of phenomenology (Harbiansyah, 2019). In the Indonesian educational context, this method effectively explores students' subjective experiences with technological innovations, such as AI, by employing bracketing techniques to minimize researcher bias (Suyanto, 2019). The phenomenological approach was selected to gain a deeper understanding of students' learning experiences and awareness when using ChatGPT in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development, including their interpretations of artificial intelligence in faith learning and character formation processes (Miles et al., 2014).

The research was conducted at SMP Stella Duce 2, Yogyakarta. Subjects consisted of six main informants, male and female students from grades VII, VIII, and IX, who had direct experience using ChatGPT. Selection used purposive sampling based on criteria: frequency and intensity of ChatGPT use, understanding of its function as a learning tool, and verbal reflective ability. Informant identities are presented concisely to provide background context while upholding research ethics and data confidentiality.

Table 1. Research Informant Identities

No.	Initials of Informant Identities	Gender	Religion	Class
1.	Student A	Female	Catholic	VII Arsana
2.	Student B	Male	Christian	VII Arsana
3.	Student C	Female	Catholic	VIII Nisita
4.	Student D	Male	Islam	VIII Nisita
5.	Student E	Male	Catholic	IX Abinaya
6.	Student F	Female	Catholic	IX Abinaya

Data collection involved observation, in-depth semi-structured interviews, and documentation. Observation captured learning contexts, student-ChatGPT interactions, and classroom responses. Interviews explored subjective experiences using flexible guides. Documentation supplemented with lesson notes and assignments. Instruments included observation guides (focusing on learning activities and ChatGPT contexts) and interview guides (targeting experiences, awareness, and reasons for usage). Following data collection, data analysis proceeded using the interactive model by Miles, Huberman, and Saldana



(2014). The process comprised data collection, reduction (screening and initial themes), display (matrices, narrative quotes, thematic tables), and conclusion drawing/verification (critical reflection, triangulation, informant confirmation). These stages formed a cyclical and non-linear process that enabled deeper exploration of meaning.

Results and Discussion

Data analysis utilized a thematic framework to facilitate the interpretation of students' learning experiences. Based on interviews with the six informants, this study reveals how ChatGPT is integrated into Catholic Religious Education and Character Development learning activities and how its usage relates to the subjects' objectives and characteristics. The following presents the research findings across five identified themes:

1) Catholic Religious Education and Character Development in Schools

Catholic Religious Education and Character Development play a crucial role in shaping students' faith and character. Parents serve as the primary and foremost educators in nurturing children's Catholic faith. Through the family, children begin to know Jesus Christ, build a relationship with God, and internalize the value of love for others in church and community life (cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*, art. 3). These faith experiences are then deepened and systematized through school education and church life. In the educational unit context, Catholic faith formation is specifically embodied through the subject of Catholic Religious Education and Character Development.

The Catholic Religious Education and Character Development curriculum is designed progressively, based on students' competency achievement phases, from Phase A to Phase F. This phase-based approach enables students to grow in piety and faith maturity in accordance with Catholic Church teachings. The learning process is also directed toward fostering mutual respect among religious communities, embodying religious moderation in Indonesia's pluralistic society (Kemdikbud, 2023).

In general, this subject aims to equip students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes to live morally based on the Catholic faith. Students are guided to build a Christian life faithful to Jesus Christ and the Gospel of the Kingdom of God, emphasizing values of peace, justice, fraternity, common welfare, and responsibility for environmental sustainability. Additionally, Catholic Religious Education and Character Development contribute to shaping students' character to become independent individuals, critical thinkers, creative, collaborative, and aware of global diversity, in line with the example of Jesus Christ's life (Kemdikbud, 2023).

The characteristics of Catholic Religious Education and Character Development are reflected in four main elements: the students' personhood, Jesus Christ, the Church, and society. These four elements interconnect to introduce the merciful God through Jesus Christ, enabling students to live out faith through prayer, worship, and sacramental celebrations. Faith education not only focuses on mastering religious knowledge but also on internalizing faith in personal life, church life, and social engagement (Kemdikbud, 2023).

In Phase D (Grades VII–IX), learning outcomes emphasize students' understanding as unique images of God, recognition of Jesus Christ's person and salvific work, appreciation of the Church as the people of God, and active involvement in social life. Students are directed to uphold human dignity, develop attitudes of justice and honesty, preserve the environment as our common home, as affirmed in the encyclical *Laudato Si'*, and build dialogue and cooperation with adherents of other religions and beliefs in the spirit of *Nostra Aetate* (Kemdikbud, 2023).



These learning outcomes can be analyzed through Bloom's Taxonomy framework, encompassing cognitive, affective, and psychomotor dimensions (Bloom et al., 1956). In the cognitive dimension, students are guided to progressively understand Catholic faith teachings until they can think reflectively and critically. In the affective dimension, learning emphasizes internalizing faith values into attitudes and life commitments. Meanwhile, in the psychomotor dimension, students are encouraged to embody faith in concrete actions through behaviors, habits, and active involvement in church and community life.

In the learning context, integrating ChatGPT has the potential to support achieving these three dimensions, particularly cognitive and reflective aspects. Based on interviews with junior high school students at Stella Duce 2, Yogyakarta, ChatGPT is utilized as a learning partner for searching information, summarizing material, formulating questions, and expanding insights. ChatGPT use also contributes to forming critical attitudes, social concern, and awareness of acting in accordance with Church teachings, provided it is directed and under teachers' pedagogical control (primary data, 2025).

2) Catholic Religious Education and Character Development Values

Catholic Religious Education and Character Development at SMP Stella Duce 2, Yogyakarta, play a strategic role in forming students' holistic personal integrity. This subject is not merely understood as a medium for transferring religious knowledge, but as a character education process rooted in Catholic faith and manifested in daily life practices. Based on observation and interview results, the values developed include CC5+ values (compassion, celebration, competence, conviction, creativity, and community), Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPKC) values, as well as practical values such as discipline and honesty (primary data, 2025).

The value of compassion serves as the primary foundation in educational practices at this school. This value is lived out as a tangible sense of mercy through empathy, care, and solidarity toward others, especially those facing difficulties. Teachers consistently connect learning materials with students' concrete life situations, so care is understood not merely as social action, but as a faith responsibility. Interview results show that ChatGPT utilization helps students understand concrete examples of acts of love, which are then personally reflected upon (primary data, 2025). Thus, compassion shapes students' moral integrity through awareness that faith must be realized in concrete actions.

The value of celebration manifests in attitudes of gratitude and joy throughout the learning process. Learning is understood as a gift rather than a burden, inviting students to give thanks for every step, including small successes and challenges encountered. Practices such as communal prayer, brief end-of-lesson reflections, and the use of learning technologies like ChatGPT serve as supportive tools that still demand personal responsibility. This value cultivates humility, resilience, and awareness that effort, discipline, and perseverance form part of living faith.

The value of competence emphasizes balance between intellectual skill and moral maturity. Students are encouraged to think critically, selectively, and responsibly when accessing information, including through digital technologies and artificial intelligence. Observation results show teachers granting limited, guided freedom in ChatGPT use, paired with requirements to critically and reflectively reprocess responses. This approach fosters recognition that true competence lies not just in obtaining answers, but in evaluating truth through faith and conscience guidance (primary data, 2025).

The value of conviction relates to students' steadfastness in upholding faith and moral principles amid technological conveniences. Students are trained to act honestly, avoid



complete reliance on technology, and courageously make consistent moral decisions, such as refusing to cheat and taking responsibility for their own work. Interviews reveal students' awareness that technology cannot replace faith reflection and teacher guidance. This value forms personal integrity characterized by fidelity to truth, whether supervised or not.

The value of creativity enables students to express faith contextually and relevantly to contemporary developments. Students receive space to develop ideas through various works like presentations, written reflections, and digital media. ChatGPT utilization serves as an initial idea spark rather than a substitute for personal creativity. Thus, creativity is understood not merely as expressive freedom, but also as moral responsibility for the resulting work. The value of community appears in communal life, emphasizing togetherness, cooperation, and mutual support. School culture promoting shared responsibility in learning activities, prayer, and daily routines fosters a spirit of *communio*. Students learn to view themselves as part of a complementary and affirming community. This togetherness provides concrete means to live out faith in relationships with others.

Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation (JPKC) values are consistently integrated into learning and school culture. Students are led to recognize that the Catholic faith demands social and ecological responsibility. Environmental care manifests through eco-friendly habits and involvement in concrete creation and preservation activities. JPKC values affirm that faith extends beyond personal spheres to impact social life and environmental sustainability. Additionally, discipline and honesty serve as highly emphasized practical values in school life. Discipline is evident in rule compliance and learning responsibility, while honesty focuses particularly on learning technology use, guiding students to express personal understanding rather than directly copying ChatGPT answers, demonstrating faith integrity through daily fidelity to truth.

Research findings conclude that Catholic Religious Education and Character Development at SMP Stella Duce 2, Yogyakarta, functions as a space for forming students' moral and spiritual integrity. CC5+, JPKC, discipline, and honesty values are not only taught conceptually but also lived in real practice. While personal integrity formation proves very strong, these findings also invite reflection for developing broader social solidarity dimensions in future learning. Overall, these values shape students into faithful, intelligent, responsible individuals capable of facing contemporary challenges without losing moral direction.

3) Typology of SMP Stella Duce 2, Students Integrating ChatGPT in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development

Based on observations, in-depth interviews, and document analysis, the researcher identified two main student tendencies at SMP Stella Duce 2 Yogyakarta in using ChatGPT for Catholic Religious Education and Character Development: reflective students and pragmatic students. This typology is not a rigid category but a pattern of learning behavior when interacting with ChatGPT, influenced by learning orientation, attitudes toward tasks, and teacher guidance.

Table 2. Comparison of Typologies Between Reflective and Pragmatic Students in Using ChatGPT

Aspects	Reflective Students	Pragmatic Students
ChatGPT Usage	Support tool to deepen material & develop critical thinking. Reflect first, compare with books/teachers/peers, rewrite in own words + personal	Instant answer source. Direct copy-paste without reprocessing.



	reflections.	
Observation Example	Class VII Arsana, Sept 10, 2025: Used when material is absent from books, but reprocessed to avoid plagiarism.	Class VII Tikswara, Sept 9, 2025: Upload questions, take answers quickly to complete tasks.
Influences & Impact	Aware of honesty & learning responsibility; ChatGPT as a thinking partner.	Driven by time limits/task pressure/comprehension difficulties; not always dishonest intent.
Teacher Redirection	-	Can be redirected: instructed to reread, understand, rewrite own words via consistent reprimands & guidance.

These findings affirm that ChatGPT's effectiveness depends on teachers' pedagogical strategies and value formation in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development processes.

4) **ChatGPT Integration in Catholic Religious Development and Character Development Activities: Forms Integrity Values**

Catholic Religious Education and Character Development at SMP Stella Duce 2 Yogyakarta reflects the school's commitment to critically responding to technological developments. ChatGPT is positioned not merely as an information tool, but as a learning partner to foster integrity values honesty, responsibility, and discipline within a Catholic faith framework that emphasizes conscience formation and ethical attitudes.

Observations and interviews show that teachers act as value companions, guiding students to think not only quickly but also correctly and conscientiously. Students are encouraged to verify information, relate it to Catholic teachings, and reflect on its meaning, integrating critical thinking with moral awareness so that integrity becomes a lived learning experience. In Class VII Arsana (September–October 2025), ChatGPT was used in a controlled manner, with teachers limiting access to specific learning purposes. Students were required to understand, interpret, and rewrite information in their own words rather than copy it directly. This approach fostered honesty and responsibility, while restrictions on social media and gaming reinforced discipline and focus on learning objectives.

Student interviews confirm that ChatGPT helps them understand difficult material, yet they must cross-check it with books, teachers, or other sources. They recognize that copying without understanding is dishonest. Over time, students became more careful and reflective, with teachers emphasizing originality and depth rather than mere correctness. In Class VIII (Mandaya and Nisita, November 2025), reflective assignments invited students to connect ChatGPT findings with real-life experiences as followers of Jesus. ChatGPT functioned as an initial reference, while a deeper meaning emerged from personal reflection. Teachers emphasized that honest reflections are more meaningful than well-written but inauthentic ones. Class discussions further created dialogue between faith and technology, where AI-generated answers were critically examined against Catholic teachings. This process fostered responsibility, self-awareness, and deeper thinking, while also guiding more pragmatic students toward ethical technology use.

Overall, integrity values were formed through conscious learning processes rather than rigid rules. Students were continually faced with choices accept or evaluate, copy or understand, speed or honesty. With proper pedagogical guidance, ChatGPT supports the formation of holistic, faithful, and integrous individuals in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development.



5) **ChatGPT Integration in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development Activities: Inadequately Form Human Values**

The integration of ChatGPT in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development activities at SMP Stella Duce 2 Yogyakarta introduces new learning approaches that allow students to access explanations of faith-related material more quickly and directly. Through this technology, students receive additional information that enriches their conceptual understanding of religious teachings. However, the findings of this study indicate that such cognitive benefits are not always accompanied by the development of humane values, particularly empathy, social sensitivity, and relational awareness among students.

The use of ChatGPT tends to encourage more individualized learning patterns. When interacting with AI tools, students' attention is primarily directed toward their personal devices rather than toward peers or teachers. While several students describe this process as efficient and helpful for completing tasks, classroom interactions become less dialogical. Group discussions and shared reflections occur less frequently, and learning activities increasingly emphasize obtaining answers rather than engaging in relational meaning-making. This tendency may reflect what some scholars describe as "digital desolation," a condition in which technologically mediated learning environments unintentionally reduce opportunities for interpersonal encounters and empathetic engagement (Turkle, 2015; Selwyn, 2019). In such contexts, students may gain access to information more rapidly but experience fewer meaningful interactions that cultivate empathy and mutual understanding.

From a theological perspective, this shift also raises concerns about the potential "loss of *communio*," a concept central to Catholic educational philosophy that emphasizes the importance of relationships, community, and shared faith experiences in the formation of moral and spiritual identity (Groome, 2011). Catholic education traditionally understands learning not merely as the transmission of knowledge but as a communal process in which faith is deepened through dialogue, shared reflection, and lived encounters with others. When learning activities rely heavily on AI-mediated interactions, the communal dimension of faith education may become less visible, potentially weakening opportunities for students to experience faith as a relational and communal reality.

Similar patterns appear in students' written reflections on faith topics. Although ChatGPT-assisted reflections are often structured and conceptually accurate, they frequently remain general and less connected to students' personal experiences. Several participants acknowledged that ChatGPT responses helped them understand the meaning of certain faith values, yet they also felt that these responses did not fully represent their own spiritual reflections. This suggests a gap between cognitive comprehension and the deeper process of personal appropriation that is essential to faith formation. While AI technologies can effectively support intellectual exploration, they may struggle to stimulate authentic spiritual reflection because the algorithms that generate responses are fundamentally amoral systems designed to predict patterns in language rather than to cultivate moral discernment or spiritual insight (Floridi et al., 2018). As a result, the reflective process risks becoming informational rather than transformational.

These findings highlight an important pedagogical challenge. The integration of ChatGPT in Catholic Religious Education offers clear benefits for accessing information and supporting academic understanding. However, if used without careful pedagogical guidance, it may unintentionally reduce opportunities for empathetic dialogue, communal learning, and reflective encounters that are central to character formation. Therefore, AI technologies



should be positioned as supportive learning tools rather than substitutes for relational pedagogy. Teachers remain essential in facilitating dialogue, encouraging students to connect faith concepts with lived experiences, and nurturing the interpersonal relationships through which empathy and spiritual reflection can genuinely develop.

Discussion

Research findings reveal that integrating ChatGPT into Catholic Religious Education and Character Development at SMP Stella Duce 2, Yogyakarta, enhances students' cognitive comprehension while creating opportunities for cultivating integrity (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). This integration demonstrates that digital tools can foster meaningful learning when embedded in a clear, values-driven pedagogical framework. Within Catholic education, technology serves as a supportive instrument, always aligned with faith education's core aim: character formation and holistic personal development (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014).

ChatGPT's integration in Catholic Religion Education and Character Development aligns with the school's core values of compassion, competence, conviction, creativity, community, Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation, alongside discipline and honesty (Lickona, 1991). Framing values as a normative guide resonates with character education theory, which insists that technology be directed by shared moral principles rather than dictating them (Hauerwas, 2001; Narvaez, 2010). This mirrors technology ethics, emphasizing humans as responsible moral agents who deliberately steer technological use (Floridi, 2014; Stahl et al., 2016). These results echo Groome's (2015) Shared Christian Praxis, which integrates students' lived experiences with Church traditions in faith education. Catholic Religious Education and Character Development teachers ensure students do not passively accept ChatGPT outputs but engage in critical reflection (Dewey, 1938). Such teacher facilitation positions religious learning as meaning-making, beyond mere information accumulation (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014).

Students are prompted to comprehend, critique, and adapt ChatGPT-generated content to Catholic faith contexts (Groome, 2015). Technology thus sparks faith dialogue and reflection, without supplanting its authentic sources (Hauerwas, 2001). This model highlights the centrality of dialogue in the relational and transformative essence of Catholic faith education (Freire, 1998). Students' routines of paraphrasing ChatGPT responses, fact-checking, and connecting them to personal insights signal a growing sense of honesty and academic accountability (Lickona, 1991; Rest et al., 1991). This embodies character development's triad of moral knowing, feeling, and acting (Lickona, 1991). In religious contexts, integrity extends to conscientious faith discernment and moral choice (Hauerwas, 2001). From social constructivism, the process exemplifies active, reflective learning with students as protagonists (Vygotsky, 1978). Teachers' scaffolding via reflective prompts and ethical guidelines bolsters independent thinking (Vygotsky, 1978). It aligns with critical digital literacy, stressing evaluation, interpretation, and accountability for digital content (Hobbs, 2010; Bawden, 2008).

ChatGPT integration illuminates students' perceptions of technology in learning. Their recognition that it cannot replace teachers, faith experiences, or morals reflects ethical agency (Floridi, 2014). Verifying uncertain outputs with teachers exemplifies moral responsibility in learning choices (Hauerwas, 2001). Yet, challenges emerge in tech-driven learning, including diminished social interaction and collective reflection (Freire, 1972). This validates critiques of efficiency-focused approaches that erode dialogic depth (Freire, 1972). Catholic faith education thrives on communal relationships and encounters (Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). Reduced peer discourse signals suboptimal growth in empathy, solidarity,



and relational awareness (Groome, 2015). Balance is essential between tech tools and relational practices to nurture moral sensitivity (Lynch, 2019; Turkle, 2011). Digital-era Catholic education must safeguard spiritual and emotional dimensions (Lynch, 2019). In sum, ChatGPT bolsters integrity formation when woven into reflective, value-centric pedagogy (Groome, 2015). It requires dialogic-relational balance to sustain humane, transformative faith education (Freire, 1972; Pollefeyt & Bouwens, 2014). Thus, it cultivates intellectually adept, faithful, responsible, compassionate learners (Lynch, 2019).

Conclusion

This study concludes that ChatGPT integration in Catholic Religious Education and Character Development at SMP Stella Duce 2, Yogyakarta, positively contributes to enhancing students' understanding of faith teachings while strengthening learning integrity. ChatGPT serves as a learning partner, helping students obtain initial explanations and broaden perspective on learning materials. The research identifies two distinct user typologies; reflective learners, who utilize AI as a dialogical partner for deep meaning-making, and pragmatic learners, who prioritize algorithmic efficiency over critical reflection.

Recommendation

Based on the research findings, SMP Stella Duce 2 Yogyakarta needs clear guidelines for using ChatGPT and other AI technologies in line with the values of Catholic Religious Education and Character Development. Teachers play an important role in guiding students so that ChatGPT is used not only to obtain answers but also to understand and reflect on faith and life experiences. Learning activities should balance technology use with discussions and collaborative work to maintain relational and humanistic values. Assignments and assessments should emphasize the learning process, honesty, and depth of reflection. Future research may explore teacher guidance models and the use of AI in religious education in different educational contexts.

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