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A Spiritual-Transformative Christian Religious Education Learning Model for Preventing Adolescent Moral Decadence in the Digital Era: A Conceptual Construction

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Abstract

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Adolescent moral decadence in the digital era—marked by weakening ethical sensitivity, eroding empathy, and permissiveness toward harmful content—demands a Christian Religious Education (CRE) response that moves beyond cognitive-normative approaches. Dominant CRE practice stops at knowledge transfer and external prohibition, insufficiently addressing the inner transformation that is key to moral resilience in unsupervised digital spaces. This article aims to construct a spiritual-transformative CRE learning model to prevent digital adolescents' moral decadence, while establishing a firm theological demarcation in appropriating cross-disciplinary insights. The study employs an integrative literature review of 27 selected sources analyzed thematically. The result is a model comprising five cyclical learning phases—self-awareness, encounter with God, value internalization, behavioral transformation, and reflection and accountability—grounded in orthodox Christian spirituality within the Reformed tradition. The article's principal contribution lies in a theological demarcation that clearly distinguishes elements adopted from and rejected in transpersonal psychology, enabling CRE to engage critically with secular disciplines without lapsing into syncretism. The model offers a framework for moral formation from within that is relevant to the Indonesian digital adolescent context.

[Dekadensi moral remaja di era digital ditandai melemahnya kepekaan etis, erosi empati, dan permisivitas terhadap konten yang merusak, menuntut respons Pendidikan Agama Kristen (PAK) yang melampaui pendekatan kognitif-normatif. Praktik PAK yang dominan berhenti pada transfer pengetahuan dan larangan eksternal, sehingga kurang menyentuh dimensi transformasi batin yang menjadi kunci ketahanan moral di ruang digital yang lepas dari pengawasan. Artikel ini bertujuan mengonstruksi model pembelajaran PAK spiritual-transformatif untuk mencegah dekadensi moral remaja digital, sekaligus menetapkan demarkasi teologis yang tegas dalam mengapropriasi wawasan lintas disiplin. Penelitian menggunakan metode integrative literature review terhadap 27 sumber terpilih yang dianalisis secara tematik. Hasilnya berupa konstruksi model dengan lima fase pembelajaran siklikal—penyadaran diri, perjumpaan dengan Allah, internalisasi nilai, transformasi perilaku, serta refleksi dan akuntabilitas—yang berpijak pada spiritualitas Kristen ortodoks. Kontribusi utama artikel terletak pada demarkasi teologis yang memilah secara tegas unsur yang diadopsi dan ditolak dari psikologi transpersonal, sehingga PAK dapat berdialog kritis dengan disiplin sekuler tanpa jatuh pada sinkretisme].

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Introduction

The digital era has fundamentally reshaped the landscape of adolescent development. The generation now entering adolescence grows up in an ecosystem marked by ceaseless connectivity, a massive flow of information, and social spaces that have migrated to digital platforms. This transformation opens broad opportunities for learning and relationships, yet it simultaneously gives rise to serious moral problems. Indonesian adolescents now live almost entirely within a digital ecosystem: an APJII (Indonesian Internet Service Providers Association) survey (2025) recorded national internet penetration reaching 80.66%, or 229.4 million users, with penetration among Generation Z (born 1997–2012) at 87.80% and Generation Alpha at 79.73%—age groups in which most adolescents are found. Alongside this massive connectivity, the digital space has also become an arena of moral vulnerability: the annual report of KPAI (the Indonesian Child Protection Commission) (2026) recorded 1,508 complaints covering 2,031 cases of child-rights violations throughout 2025, and highlighted online sexual exploitation affecting more than 24,000 children aged 10–18, alongside cyberbullying, online-game addiction, and the spread of deviant content. Low digital literacy is thought to aggravate the impact of such exposure (KPAI, 2025). These phenomena mark what many describe as digital adolescent moral decadence: weakening ethical sensitivity, eroding empathy, permissiveness toward harmful content, and a shift in value orientation from the transcendent toward the instant and the hedonistic (Novri et al., 2025; Sitanggang, 2024; Frastati et al., 2024).

This decadence cannot be reduced to a mere surface-level behavioral problem. Its roots reach a deeper dimension: an emptiness of meaning, a weak awareness of God's presence, and the absence of the inner formation that could serve as a moral compass when adolescents face a permissive digital space. It is precisely in this context that Christian Religious Education (CRE) is called to take a role not merely as a conveyor of doctrinal knowledge, but as a means of forming the whole person rooted in a relationship with God (Pazmiño, 2008; Groome, 1980; Tobe et al., 2024; Hasugian, 2023). However, CRE practice thus far faces significant limitations. Most CRE learning is still dominated by a cognitive-normative approach, namely an emphasis on the transfer of biblical knowledge and the external imposition of moral rules (Tambunan & Arifianto, 2024). This approach is important, but it is inadequate for addressing the moral problems of the digital era. External prohibitions are easily violated when adolescents are in private digital spaces free of supervision, and doctrinal knowledge does not by itself transform into character. What is needed is formation from within—a transformation of consciousness, the inner life, and life orientation—that grows moral resilience out of a personal relationship with God rather than mere compliance with rules (Tambunan et al., 2024). Unfortunately, this dimension of inner transformation has not been systematically developed in existing CRE learning models.

Various disciplines outside theology have long attended to the dimension of the transformation of consciousness and transcendent experience in human formation. Transpersonal psychology, for instance, emphasizes the importance of the spiritual dimension, transcendent experience, and holistic integration in human development (Maslow, 1971; Assagioli, 1965). Although this framework is rooted in philosophical assumptions that differ from, and are in part opposed to, the Christian faith, its attention to the inner and transcendent dimensions offers analytical tools that, after rigorous theological filtering, could enrich the construction of a CRE

model that reaches greater depth. Here lies a space for critical dialogue that has not been adequately explored in Indonesian CRE literature.

A review of the literature reveals a clear gap. Studies of adolescent moral decadence generally stop at mapping the problem or offering normative solutions (Frastati et al., 2024; Sitanggang, 2024), while studies of CRE learning in the digital era tend to focus on methods and media (Tambunan et al., 2024; Meilani & Fernando, 2022). No CRE learning model has yet systematically integrated the dimension of inner transformation while critically appropriating cross-disciplinary insights to address, specifically, the problem of digital adolescent moral decadence. It is this gap that the present article seeks to fill, which also marks its novelty: not merely offering a transformative model, but building it upon a firm theological demarcation so that CRE can engage critically with secular disciplines without lapsing into syncretism.

On the basis of this background, the study aims to construct a CRE learning model that integrates the spiritual-transformative dimension to prevent adolescent moral decadence in the digital era, while establishing a firm theological demarcation in appropriating cross-disciplinary concepts. Specifically, the article addresses three questions: (1) What is the map, and what are the roots, of the problem of adolescent moral decadence in the digital era? (2) To what extent can existing CRE approaches address this problem, and where do their limitations lie? (3) How can a spiritual-transformative CRE learning model grounded in orthodox Christian spirituality be formulated to prevent digital adolescent moral decadence?

Method

This study uses a qualitative approach with the integrative literature review method, that is, a review that synthesizes findings from diverse types of sources to construct a new conceptual framework for a problem (Torraco, 2016; Snyder, 2019). This method was chosen because the study's aim is constructive—building a model rather than testing hypotheses empirically—so that no statistical tests or quantitative comparisons were used. As a literature review, the “population” of this study is the entire body of scholarly publications relevant to the problems of digital adolescent moral decadence, CRE learning, spirituality, and the transpersonal dimension, while the “sample” consists of selected sources determined through purposive sampling based on inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Sources were searched through the Google Scholar, DOAJ (Directory of Open Access Journals), Portal Garuda, SINTA (Science and Technology Index), and Scopus databases using the keywords “Christian religious education,” “adolescent moral decadence,” “digital spirituality,” “moral transformation,” and “transpersonal psychology,” together with their equivalents and combinations in Indonesian. The publication range was limited to 2014–2026 to preserve currency, with the exception of classic sources that serve as primary references for the concepts, whether from transpersonal psychology (e.g., Maslow, 1971; Assagioli, 1965) or from the theology and learning theory underpinning the model's construction (e.g., Calvin, 1960; Kuyper, 1931; Kolb, 1984). The principal instrument in this study is the researcher as a human instrument, supported by a search protocol (keywords, year range, databases) and a thematic coding sheet linking each source to the three research questions.

Data collection proceeded in stages. Inclusion criteria comprised: (1) the source addresses adolescent moral decadence, CRE learning, spirituality, or the transpersonal dimension; (2) it is relevant to the context of education or faith formation; and (3) it is fully accessible. Exclusion criteria covered non-academic sources, cross-database duplication, and articles judged irrelevant after abstract screening. Following staged screening—removal of duplicates, screening of titles and abstracts, and full-text reading—27 sources meeting all criteria remained for analysis.

Data were analyzed thematically. Each source was coded according to its contribution to the three research questions; the codes were then grouped into themes, synthesized across sources,

and integrated into the construction of the learning model. Data validity was maintained through source triangulation—comparing and cross-checking findings from diverse disciplines and publication types—and through consistent application of the theological demarcation criteria, which functioned as a filtering lens throughout the analysis, clearly distinguishing elements adopted from those rejected in secular disciplines.

As a conceptual study, this research has limitations that must be acknowledged. The resulting model is theoretical and has not been tested empirically in the field, so that its effectiveness in preventing digital adolescent moral decadence still requires further testing through action research, quasi-experiments, or implementation studies. In addition, the scope of sources is limited to literature fully accessible within the defined range and databases, so that the possibility of relevant references not yet reached cannot be excluded.

Result

Because this study is a conceptual literature review, the findings below should be understood as the product of a thematic synthesis of the reviewed literature rather than empirical findings derived from field data. The synthesis yields four interrelated results, presented in the following subsections.

The Map and Roots of Digital Adolescent Moral Decadence

The synthesis of the literature shows that adolescent moral decadence in the digital space does not appear as a single symptom, but as a cluster of interwoven problems. At least four forms stand out and recur across sources, which this study groups into two broad patterns: a pattern of self-dysregulation and a pattern of relational erosion. The first encompasses device addiction and exposure to harmful content, while the second encompasses cyberbullying and the weakening of empathy. These two patterns are not neatly separate categories but two sides of the same inner vulnerability.

The self-dysregulation pattern is most evident in device addiction. Nearly uninterrupted connectivity—reflected in the high internet penetration among adolescent age groups (APJII, 2025)—becomes fertile ground for compulsive usage patterns that erode self-control, disrupt the rhythms of sleep and study, and dull sensitivity to deeper life priorities. At a more serious level, a digital space loose from supervision magnifies the likelihood of exposure to online pornography and deviant content; KPAI (2026) recorded online sexual exploitation affecting more than 24,000 children aged 10–18. Such exposure does not stop at the outward event; it shapes habits, shapes taste, and in turn shifts the moral standards deemed acceptable.

The relational-erosion pattern appears in cyberbullying and thinning empathy. The anonymity and distance created by the screen make it easier for adolescents to commit or witness verbal violence without feeling a commensurate moral burden; KPAI (2025) places cyberbullying as one focus of supervision in the digital space. When the suffering of others is reduced to text on a screen, the capacity to feel with them—the core of empathy—gradually erodes. The two patterns reinforce each other: self-dysregulation weakens inner control, while the erosion of empathy loosens the social brake, so that adolescents become increasingly vulnerable to moral permissiveness.

Tracing deeper than these surface forms, the synthesis of the literature points to three roots that are inward in nature. First, an emptiness of meaning: when life is not anchored in a transcendent purpose, the digital space easily fills that void with instant pleasure and momentary validation. Second, a weak awareness of God's presence: without the awareness that one always stands before God (*coram Deo*)—an echo of the awareness of God that Calvin (1960) regarded as implanted in every human being (*sensus divinitatis*)—adolescents lose the internal compass that guides behavior precisely when no one is watching. Psalm 139:7–12 affirms that no space, including

the private digital space that seems free of supervision, lies outside God's presence; it is this awareness that ought to serve as inner control when external control is absent. Third, the absence of inner formation: moral education that stops at knowledge and prohibition fails to grow a character structure able to endure in private digital spaces. Proverbs 4:23 places the heart as the wellspring from which all of life flows, so that true moral formation must reach the heart as the center rather than stopping at regulating outward behavior.

Thus the key argument of this subsection can be affirmed: digital adolescent moral decadence is essentially rooted in the inner dimension, not merely in surface behavior. The outward forms—addiction, exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, and the erosion of empathy—are symptoms flowing from deeper roots in an emptiness of meaning, a weak transcendent awareness, and an absent inner formation. The methodological consequence is clear: interventions that only add prohibitions or multiply doctrinal knowledge will touch the symptoms without reaching the roots. What is needed is an approach that reaches transformation from within—a renewal of consciousness, the inner life, and life orientation—as the spiritual-transformative CRE learning model offered in the following subsections proposes.

Evaluating the CRE Approach and Its Limitations

The CRE learning literature shows that the dominant approach thus far rests on a cognitive-normative paradigm. This pattern emphasizes mastery of biblical knowledge, the delivery of doctrine, and the inculcation of moral rules sourced from external authority. In practice, CRE is often conducted by relying on learners' engagement across three dimensions—cognitive, affective, and psychomotor—as a measurable framework of assessment outcomes. Without an adequate cognitive foundation, faith formation loses its content and easily slides into groundless sentimentality.

However, a number of studies have begun to affirm that authentic Christian education does not stop at the transfer of knowledge. Christian learning is essentially a holistic endeavor to form and transform learners' personhood so that they become increasingly like Christ, not merely the transfer of dogmatic knowledge (Sihite & Sitohang, 2025). In other words, authentic Christian education targets character formation and spiritual transformation, not merely mastery of material (Tasya et al., 2025). When this is set alongside the problem of digital adolescent moral decadence mapped in the previous subsection, the limitations of the cognitive-normative approach become plain.

That limitation is felt most keenly precisely at the point most decisive for digital adolescents, namely the private space free of supervision. Externally imposed moral rules presuppose the presence of control and sanction; when both are absent—as is common in personal and anonymous digital spaces—compliance becomes fragile. Doctrinal knowledge mastered cognitively does not by itself become moral resilience when adolescents face the temptations of the screen alone. Thus an approach emphasizing knowledge transmission and external prohibition tends to be effective in supervised spaces, yet—as the synthesis of the reviewed literature suggests—loses its power precisely in the space that most demands moral autonomy, namely the unsupervised private digital realm.

This limitation points to a conclusion that serves as a bridge to the model's construction in the following subsection: what has not been systematically developed in existing CRE approaches is the dimension of inner transformation. As long as moral formation operates only at the cognitive and normative level, it will not reach the root of the problem, which is inward in nature. What is needed is an approach that grows a character structure from within through a personal relationship with God, so that adolescents possess a moral compass that continues to function even when no one is watching; it is this spiritual formation that can transform the inner life so as to form Christlike character (Prawiromaruto & Stevanus, 2023). Such transformation is essentially the work of God, who grants a new heart and a new spirit (Ezek. 36:26), not merely the result of enforcing rules from

without—an affirmation that explains why the cognitive-normative approach is inadequate to reach the root of the problem.

Theological Demarcation: A Critical Appropriation of Transpersonal Psychology

The construction of this model appropriates transpersonal psychology's attention to the inner and transcendent dimensions, but doing so demands theological caution. Transpersonal psychology is rooted in a humanistic framework and is in part monistic/New Age in content: self-transcendence without a personal God, cosmic union, and an understanding of the self as a divine source (Adams, 2002). Appropriation is therefore carried out through a demarcation that subjects every concept to the authority of Scripture and to Christocentrism. Such demarcation rests on the principle of common grace in the Reformed tradition, which permits taking partial truth from disciplines outside the Christian faith without adopting their worldview framework (Kuyper, 1931); methodologically, this step aligns with the transformationist model of integration in the relationship between psychology and theology (Johnson, 2010). Its filtering principles are: (1) God as a person, transcendent yet immanent, not an impersonal energy; (2) transformation as sourced in the work of the Holy Spirit, not self-actualization; and (3) self-transcendence as meaning self-denial and obedience to Christ, not self-deification. Table 1 sorts the elements adopted, adopted-with-transformation, and rejected.

Table 1. Matrix of theological demarcation of transpersonal-psychology concepts within the model's construction.

Concept from Transpersonal Psychology	Original Content / Philosophical Assumption	Stance	Theological Counterpart / Transformation
Self-transcendence	Going beyond the ego toward cosmic unity; the self as the source of attainment	Adopt with transformation	Self-denial and life in Christ (Gal. 2:20; Mark 8:34); transcending the self means submitting to God, not dissolving into the cosmos
Transcendent peak experience	A heightened consciousness attainable through technique, without a personal God	Adopt with transformation	Encounter with the personal God through the Word and the Holy Spirit (Exod. 33; Isa. 6); grace, not a technical achievement
Transformation of consciousness	A shift in the state of consciousness as the goal of growth	Adopt with transformation	Renewal of the mind by the Spirit (Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:23); transformation is God's work, not manipulation of consciousness
Holistic integration (cognitive-affective-spiritual)	Human wholeness within a humanistic framework	Adopt	The human as a whole imago Dei (Gen. 1:27; 1 Thess. 5:23); consonant with biblical anthropology
Practices of silence and inner reflection	Meditative techniques for accessing higher consciousness	Adopt with filtering	Reflective silence and lectio divina centered on the Word (Ps. 46:10); a means of hearing God, not emptying the self
Self-actualization as the source of meaning	The self as the center and source of life's meaning	Reject	Meaning originates in God and His calling (Eccl. 12:13; Eph. 2:10)

Monism/ pantheism	God as an impersonal energy; the self as potentially divine	Reject	A personal God, both transcendent and immanent, distinct from creation (Isa. 55:8–9)
Altered states detached from the Word	Mystical experience as an end in itself	Reject	Spiritual experience is always tested and guided by the Word (1 John 4:1; Acts 17:11)
Value relativism	Values as subjective, determined by individual experience	Reject	Objective moral values rooted in God's character and Word (Ps. 119:160)

Source: author's synthesis (2026).

Thus the model uses the transpersonal conceptual apparatus merely as an analytical bridge, rejects all of its monistic-humanistic assumptions, and rests fully on orthodox Christian spirituality.

Constructing the Model: Foundation, Principles, and Syntax

The spiritual-transformative CRE learning model is built upon the theological foundation of the human being as the imago Dei, the image of God (Gen. 1:27), called to grow toward spiritual maturity (Eph. 4:13) through the renewal of the mind by the Spirit (Rom. 12:2). This growth is progressive and continuous: the human being is changed to become increasingly like the image of God “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18)—a dynamic that provides the theological basis for the model's cyclical nature, in which each turn brings the learner to increasing depth rather than repetition in place. Its principle: true moral formation is born of inner transformation within a personal relationship with God, not merely external compliance; the internalization of Christian values becomes a key strategy in forming adolescents' character and spirituality (Lahagu & Widjaja, 2024). The model is realized in five learning phases that are cyclical, not linear—the output of the fifth phase feeds back into the first for continuous growth—a principle consonant with the experiential learning cycle (Kolb, 1984) yet placed within a framework of spiritual formation. This cyclical structure is visualized in Figure 1.



Figure 1. The five-phase, cyclical spiritual-transformative CRE learning model; the output of the fifth phase feeds back into the first for continuous growth “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18)

Phase 1 — Self-Awareness. Foundation: Ps. 139:23–24. Objective: adolescents become aware of their own moral condition and the influence of the digital ecosystem on their thoughts, feelings, and behavior. Teacher's role: facilitate honest reflection through prompting questions, creating a safe space without judgment. Student activities: fill in a self-reflection journal (an audit of digital

habits), identify points of moral struggle, and write down inner unease. Output: a map of self-awareness as a point of departure.

Phase 2 — Encounter with God (Transcendent Encounter). Foundation: Exod. 33; Rom. 12:2. Objective: bring adolescents to an experience of God's personal presence, not merely information about God. Teacher's role: lead *lectio divina*, reflective prayer, and guided silence grounded in the Word; ensure the practice remains Christocentric and does not drift into mystical experience detached from Scripture. This practice is rooted in the spiritual-formation tradition that affirms transformation through an encounter mediated by the Word and worked by the Spirit (Mulholland, 2016; Willard, 2002; Peterson, 2005). Student activities: Scripture meditation (read–reflect–pray–be still), listening to God's voice through the text, noting what is disclosed. Output: notes of a personal encounter with the Word.

Phase 3 — Value Internalization. Foundation: Deut. 6:6. Objective: connect spiritual experience with biblical moral principles so that values move from the head to the heart—a process that is not merely cognitive but the formation of the heart's longing and habit through repeated practice (Smith, 2009). Teacher's role: guide dialogue that bridges the text of the Word with the concrete digital reality adolescents face. Student activities: discuss cases of digital moral dilemmas, link biblical principles to real situations, and formulate personal convictions. Output: a statement of the values/convictions the student holds.

Phase 4 — Behavioral Transformation. Foundation: James 1:22. Objective: translate conviction into commitment and concrete action in digital life. Teacher's role: accompany the drafting of specific, measurable commitments rather than general resolutions. Student activities: draw up a personal action plan (limits on device use, an attitude toward content, ethics on social media) and apply it over a set period. Output: a commitment contract and evidence of practice.

Phase 5 — Reflection and Accountability. Foundation: Heb. 10:24–25; Prov. 27:17. Objective: evaluate growth and sustain continuity through the community of faith. Teacher's role: facilitate accountability groups and give constructive feedback. Student activities: share progress in small groups, pray for and strengthen one another, and evaluate the fulfillment of commitments. Output: a reflection report and a further cycle of commitment.

An operational summary of the five phases is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Operational syntax of the spiritual-transformative CRE learning model

Phase	Objective	Teacher's Role	Student Activities & Output
1. Self-Awareness	Become aware of one's moral condition and the influence of the digital ecosystem	Facilitate honest reflection; create a safe, non-judgmental space	Journal auditing digital habits; a map of self-awareness
2. Encounter with God	Experience the personal presence of God, not merely information	Lead <i>lectio divina</i> , reflective prayer, guided silence grounded in the Word	Scripture meditation; notes of personal encounter
3. Value Internalization	Move values from the head to the heart	Guide dialogue bridging the Word with digital reality	Discussion of digital moral dilemmas; statement of personal conviction
4. Behavioral Transformation	Translate conviction into concrete action	Accompany specific and measurable commitments	Personal action plan; commitment contract and evidence of practice
5. Reflection & Accountability	Evaluate growth; sustain continuity through community	Facilitate accountability groups; give constructive feedback	Sharing progress in small groups; reflection report and further cycle

Source: author's synthesis (2026).

The Model's Applicability in Digital CRE Learning

This spiritual-transformative CRE learning model is designed to be applicable in real learning practice, not to remain a theoretical construction. At the level of planning, the model's five phases may be adapted for integration into CRE teaching modules and lesson plans (RPP) as a single cyclical whole, with each phase translated into measurable opening, core, and closing activities. The operational syntax in Table 2 can function as a framework for arranging learning steps, while the output of each phase—from the journal auditing digital habits to the reflection report—can potentially serve as an authentic-assessment instrument that gauges growth rather than mere mastery of material.

At the level of implementation, the digital space that has thus far been a source of problems can in fact be repurposed as a means of learning. Studies on the integration of technology in CRE map diverse strategies—from platform-based learning, interactive multimedia content, and online learning communities to digital project-based learning such as producing devotional videos and spiritual podcasts (Nugroho et al., 2025). These strategies can support particular phases of the model: digital platforms and online reflective journals support the self-awareness phase, while creative-content projects can become a concrete expression of the behavioral-transformation phase. Nevertheless, the use of technology must be subject to the principles that safeguard the essence of CRE, namely the supremacy of the Word, learning centered on a relationship with God, the importance of the community of faith, digital integrity, and a balance between digital experience and direct spiritual experience (Nugroho et al., 2025). This last principle is important so that the encounter-with-God phase is not reduced to mere media activity.

The model also requires a supporting ecosystem beyond the classroom, especially the community of faith and the family. The reflection-and-accountability phase presupposes small groups that support one another, while the sustainability of transformation requires the family's companionship in adolescents' everyday digital life. Christian Religious Education within the family has been shown to play an important role in guiding adolescents to use social media wisely (Meilani & Fernando, 2022), so that synergy among school, church, and family becomes a condition for the model's effectiveness. Without this network, the fifth phase loses its vessel and the growth cycle is difficult to sustain.

Implementing this model is also not free of challenges to be anticipated. Infrastructure gaps, the varied digital literacy of teachers, and the risk of reducing spiritual practice to technical routine are real constraints. The model's success therefore depends on the readiness of teachers as facilitators and exemplars, not merely conveyors of material. With all these considerations, the spiritual-transformative CRE learning model answers the three research questions in an integrated way: it departs from the map and roots of digital adolescent moral decadence, closes the limitations of the cognitive-normative approach by developing the dimension of inner transformation, and offers a framework of moral formation from within grounded in orthodox Christian spirituality.

Discussion

This study produced three interconnected findings. First, digital adolescent moral decadence is essentially rooted in the inner dimension—an emptiness of meaning, a weak awareness of God's presence, and an absent inner formation—so that outward forms such as device addiction, exposure to harmful content, cyberbullying, and the erosion of empathy are merely surface symptoms. Second, the dominant CRE approach is cognitive-normative and therefore loses its power precisely in the private digital space free of supervision, where compliance with external rules is most fragile. Third, in response to this gap, the study constructs a spiritual-transformative CRE learning model comprising five cyclical phases—self-awareness, encounter with God, value internalization, behavioral transformation, and reflection and accountability—built upon a firm theological demarcation of transpersonal psychology. These three findings directly answer the three research questions posed in the introduction.

Meaning and significance of the findings

The principal significance of this study lies in shifting the center of gravity of moral formation from controlling outward behavior toward the transformation of the heart as the center of life (Prov. 4:23). As long as intervention only adds prohibitions and knowledge, it touches the symptoms without reaching the roots; by contrast, this model places a personal relationship with God—the awareness of living *coram Deo*—as the internal compass that continues to function when external control is absent. Thus the study's contribution is not merely offering a new model, but providing a framework that systematically integrates the dimension of inner transformation into CRE learning, while affirming theological demarcation as a condition for responsible cross-disciplinary dialogue. This is what distinguishes the model from a mere addition of methods or digital media to existing practice.

Relationship to prior research and theory

These findings both strengthen and extend the existing literature. They align with studies affirming that authentic Christian education targets character formation and spiritual transformation, not mere mastery of material (Sihite & Sitohang, 2025; Tasya et al., 2025), and that spiritual formation is the path to forming Christlike character (Prawiromaruto & Stevanus, 2023). Yet this study goes further: where prior studies generally stop at affirming principles or mapping technology strategies in CRE (Nugroho et al., 2025; Meilani & Fernando, 2022), this study translates those principles into an operational learning syntax. Theoretically, placing the five-phase cycle within a framework of spiritual formation extends the logic of experiential learning (Kolb, 1984) with the theological foundation of progressive growth “from glory to glory” (2 Cor. 3:18), so that the cycle is not repetition in place but continuous deepening. In relation to the literature on moral decadence, which tends to stop at mapping the problem (Frastati et al., 2024; Sitanggang, 2024), this study contributes a bridge from diagnosis to the construction of a solution.

A critical review of the point of difference

The sharpest difference emerges in CRE's relationship with transpersonal psychology. Unlike some integrative approaches that adopt transpersonal vocabulary without worldview filtering, this study explicitly rejects its monistic-humanistic assumptions—self-actualization as the source of meaning, monism/pantheism, altered states detached from the Word, and value relativism—while adopting-with-transformation its attention to the inner dimension. This position rests on the principle of common grace in the Reformed tradition (Kuyper, 1931) and on the transformationist model of integration (Johnson, 2010), so that the appropriation does not lapse into syncretism. In other words, this study's critique of the unfiltered use of secular insight is not a rejection of cross-disciplinary dialogue, but an affirmation that such dialogue requires a clear demarcation.

Alternative explanations

A counter-explanation of the mapped problem must be considered. Digital adolescent moral decadence can be read primarily as a structural problem—gaps in digital literacy, weak platform regulation, or environmental pressure—so that the solution is more a matter of policy and protection than of inner formation. This study does not deny these factors; they are real and important. Yet the synthesis of the literature shows that external protection is weakest precisely in the private space that demands moral autonomy, so that structural factors and inner formation are better understood as complementary rather than competing. Another alternative—that more intensive cognitive reinforcement is already sufficient—is refuted by the finding that doctrinal knowledge does not by itself become moral resilience. Considering these alternatives makes the study's core argument more robust, not weaker.

Practical and pastoral relevance

For practice, the model may be adapted for integration into CRE teaching modules and lesson plans (RPP) as a single cyclical whole, with the output of each phase—from the journal auditing digital habits to the reflection report—potentially serving as authentic assessment that gauges growth rather than mere mastery of material. The digital space that has thus far been a source of problems can be repurposed as a means of learning, provided it is subject to the supremacy of the Word and a balance between digital experience and direct spiritual experience (Nugroho et al., 2025). The model's effectiveness requires school–church–family synergy, given the family's companionship role, which has proven important in guiding adolescents on social media (Meilani & Fernando, 2022). Its pastoral implication is clear: teachers and spiritual leaders serve as facilitators and exemplars of formation, not merely conveyors of material.

Limitations of the study

Several limitations must be acknowledged. The resulting model is theoretical-conceptual and has not been tested empirically, so that its effectiveness claim still requires proof through action research, quasi-experiments, or cross-context implementation studies. The scope of sources is also limited to works fully accessible within the defined range and databases, so that the possibility of relevant references not yet reached cannot be excluded; as a qualitative-constructive study, its synthesis is also not free from the researcher's interpretation, though this is guarded through source triangulation and consistent demarcation criteria. Moreover, the model is designed for the Indonesian Christian adolescent context, so that its transferability to other contexts needs to be tested. These limitations at the same time open avenues for further research: empirical testing of the model's effectiveness, the development of assessment instruments for each phase, and studies on the readiness and mentoring of teachers as facilitators of formation.

Conclusion

In line with the study's aim, this article has succeeded in constructing a spiritual-transformative CRE learning model as a response to adolescent moral decadence in the digital era that the cognitive-normative approach inadequately addresses. Answering the three research questions in an integrated way, the study shows that digital adolescent moral decadence is rooted in the inner dimension, that a CRE approach emphasizing knowledge and prohibition loses its power in the private digital space free of supervision, and that this need can be answered through five cyclical learning phases—self-awareness, encounter with God, value internalization, behavioral transformation, and reflection and accountability—grounded in orthodox Christian spirituality. Its principal theoretical contribution lies in a firm theological demarcation in appropriating insights from transpersonal psychology, so that CRE can engage critically with secular disciplines without lapsing into syncretism.

As a conceptual study, the model has a limitation, chiefly that its effectiveness has not been tested empirically. Further research is therefore recommended to validate the model through a Research and Development approach, to test its applicability in CRE classroom learning, and to measure its impact on digital adolescents' moral resilience both quantitatively and qualitatively. Developing assessment instruments for each phase and studying teachers' readiness as facilitators and exemplars of formation are also worthwhile directions so that the model becomes increasingly ready for practice.

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