

Prospective Christian Religious Education Teacher: Helping Students Find the Meaning of Life with Existentialism

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Abstract

To become a Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher candidate, they must have a strong understanding of theology and pedagogy, as well as the ability to help students find meaning in their personal contexts and lives. As a philosophy that emphasizes freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning, existentialism can be a reflective approach to Christian education. In this article, we discuss how Christian Religious Education (PAK) teacher candidates can integrate the principles of existentialism with the values of Christian faith to help students answer fundamental questions about existence, purpose, and hope in life. PAK teachers are expected to be able to build a learning environment that encourages students to find the true meaning of life in the light of Christ by using approaches such as discussion, critical reflection, and faith experiences. This study emphasizes the importance of teachers helping people grow spiritually and existentially, so that Christian religious education is not only cognitive, but also transformational for students' lives.

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1. INTRODUCTION

In the context of modern life, students often face a crisis of meaning in life arising from social, cultural, and technological pressures. Globalization and digitalization have brought about significant changes in the mindsets, lifestyles, and values held by the younger generation. This often leads to existential confusion, where students feel a loss of direction, purpose, and identity. They are faced with fundamental questions about who they are, what life goals they should achieve, and how to responsibly face the challenges of the times. This situation demands mentorship that can help students find a meaning in life that is authentic and relevant to the realities they face. (Sanjaya, 2025).

Christian Religious Education (PAK) plays a strategic role in addressing these needs. It serves not only as a means of transferring theological knowledge but also as a platform for the formation of faith, character, and existential reflection. Through PAK, students are encouraged to understand that the true meaning of life is found not only in worldly achievements but in a deep relationship with Christ. Christian Religious Education teachers, especially prospective teachers in preparation, are required to be able to integrate Christian faith values with relevant philosophical approaches, such as existentialism. Thus, Christian religious education can become a transformative space that helps students find an authentic, responsible, and hopeful direction in life, in the light of faith. (Mulyadi et al., 2024).

This article aims to explain how prospective Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers can integrate the principles of existentialism with Christian faith in the learning process, so that students are able to find authentic meaning in life. Existentialism, which emphasizes freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning, can be a philosophical approach that enriches Christian religious education, especially

when combined with Christ-centered faith values. By prioritizing reflection, dialogue, and faith experiences, prospective PAK teachers are expected to play a role not only as teachers of theological knowledge but also as facilitators who help students face fundamental questions about existence and the purpose of life. Thus, Christian religious education can be a transformative reflection platform, guiding students to live authentically, responsibly, and hopefully in the light of Christ.

In educational practice, many Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers still emphasize solely the cognitive aspect, limited to the theoretical delivery of teachings and doctrines. This overly knowledge-oriented approach often neglects students' need for deeper existential reflection. As a result, Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning lacks the transformative dimension that should help students confront fundamental questions about existence, the purpose of life, and the meaning of their existence. Ideally, Christian education should not only equip students with intellectual understanding but also open up space for authentic experiences of faith, dialogue, and the search for meaning in life. Without this reflective dimension, PAK risks becoming merely an academic routine that lacks relevance to students' real-life struggles, thus failing to fully guide them toward a meaningful life in the light of Christ. (Hutapea, 2019).

2. METHOD

This research employed a qualitative-descriptive method with a literature review approach. Data were obtained from primary sources (the Bible, the works of existentialist figures such as Kierkegaard, Sartre, and Heidegger, as well as Christian education literature) and secondary sources (journals, academic articles, and Christian Education curriculum documents). Content analysis was conducted to identify key themes, followed by a theological-pedagogical synthesis to connect the principles of existentialism with Christian faith.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Existentialism and the Search for the Meaning of Life

Existentialism is a philosophical school that emphasizes individual freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning in life. In the existentialist view, humans are not entirely determined by existing social structures or value systems, but rather have the freedom to determine their own direction in life. This freedom is not merely a right but also carries consequences in the form of responsibility for every choice made. Therefore, existentialism encourages humans to bravely face the realities of life, including anxiety and uncertainty, as part of the process of finding authentic meaning. (Dian et al., 2022).

In the context of searching for the meaning of life, existentialism emphasizes that every individual must dare to ask and answer for themselves the fundamental questions of existence: "Who am I? Why do I live? What is the purpose of my existence in this world?" These questions cannot be answered instantly, but rather through deep reflection and real-life experiences. Existentialism sees that the meaning of life is not given from the outside automatically, but must be discovered and lived by humans through their freedom and responsibility. Thus, the search for the meaning of life becomes a dynamic process, full of struggle, and requires the courage to face the reality of oneself and the world. (Emilia, 2023).

Søren Kierkegaard, one of the key figures in existentialism, emphasized that faith is the path to true existence. For Kierkegaard, human freedom without direction will lead to despair, so faith in God becomes the foundation that guides humans to find the true meaning of life. He emphasized that faith is not merely intellectual belief, but an "existential leap" that leads humans to a personal relationship with God. From this perspective, the search for the meaning of life does not stop at human freedom and responsibility alone, but reaches its peak when humans surrender their existence to God. Thus, existentialism in the light of Christian faith teaches that true freedom can only be found in a relationship with Christ, who gives direction, purpose, and eternal meaning to human life.

Besides Kierkegaard, other existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Martin Heidegger offer different perspectives. Sartre emphasized the radical freedom of humans without God, which could potentially lead to relativism and nihilism. Heidegger, on the other hand, emphasized human existence as a "being-in-the-world" that constantly grapples with limitations and death. This difference in perspective is important for prospective Christian Religious Education teachers

to understand, as it demonstrates that the search for meaning in life can lead to despair if not guided by faith. (Wahid, 2022).

The practical implication for students in the modern era is that crises of meaning often manifest themselves in the form of anxiety, alienation, or a loss of direction. This is where Christian Religious Education plays a role as a space for reflection, helping students confront existential questions from a faith perspective. (Legi et al., 2025). PAK teachers can use an existentialist approach as a gateway to dialogue with students about freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning, then direct them to Christ as the source of true meaning.

Christian Religious Education as a Space for Reflection

Prospective Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers play a crucial role in helping students grapple with fundamental questions about life, such as "Who am I? Why do I live?" and "What is the purpose of my existence?" This role is not fulfilled solely by teaching skills; it also requires the teacher to act as a companion, guiding students to discover the meaning of life in the light of faith. Therefore, prospective Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers need to possess a comprehensive set of skills: a deep theological understanding, pedagogical skills for designing creative learning, and existential sensitivity to understand students' struggles and dare to engage in honest dialogue with them.

In practice, prospective Christian Education teachers can use various methods to make learning livelier. For example, inviting students to write reflective journals about their faith experiences, connecting stories from biblical figures like Job, Ecclesiastes, or Paul to contemporary struggles, or holding group discussions about modern issues like social media, academic pressure, and identity crises. Other creative methods, such as drama, simulations, or case studies, can also be used to help students experience the relationship between freedom, responsibility, and faith. (Wahid, 2022).

More than just a method, a teacher's life example is crucial. Catholic Religious Education teachers not only convey teachings but also demonstrate a life consistent with faith. Their authenticity, integrity, and sincerity serve as concrete examples for students in navigating their freedom and responsibilities. Through their teachers' example, students learn that faith is not merely a theory, but something to be lived out daily. (Always, 2020).

The implication is that the education of prospective Catholic Religious Education teachers must be designed not only to equip them with theory, but also with reflective practice and spiritual formation. The Catholic Religious Education teacher education curriculum should incorporate elements of character development, existential reflection practices, and concrete faith experiences, so that prospective teachers are truly prepared to become facilitators who help students discover authentic meaning in Christ. (Boiliu, 2021).

The Role of Prospective PAK Teachers

The role of prospective Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers is very important in guiding students to face fundamental existential questions, such as "*Who am I?*" And "*What do I live for?*" This question often arises during adolescence and young adulthood, when students begin to search for identity and purpose in life. (YUNARDI KRISTIAN ZEGA, 2020) Prospective Christian Education teachers are required to not only provide cognitive theological answers but also guide students through a process of deep reflection. With an empathetic approach, teachers can help students understand that the search for meaning in life is not a sign of weakness, but rather part of a journey of faith that brings them closer to Christ.

To support this process, prospective Catholic Religious Education teachers need to use creative methods that can reach students' real-life experiences. Faith reflection, philosophical discussions, drama, and contextual Bible study can be effective tools for creating dialogue and shared experiences. For example, through drama or simulations, students can experience the existential struggles of biblical or historical figures and relate these experiences to their own lives. Philosophical discussions also provide opportunities for students to connect existentialist thinking with Christian faith, so they learn to see freedom and responsibility as part of their calling to life

in Christ. With these creative methods, Catholic Religious Education learning is not only informative but also transformative. (Tjandra, 2020).

In addition to guiding and using creative methods, prospective Christian Religious Education teachers must also be authentic and faithful role models. A teacher's life consistent with Christian values will serve as a concrete example for students in facing life's challenges. This example is more powerful than mere words, as students can see how faith is manifested in everyday attitudes, decisions, and relationships. (Situmorang, 2018) Authentic teachers demonstrate that the search for meaning in life is not abstract, but can be lived with confidence and integrity in the light of Christ. Thus, the role of prospective Catholic Religious Education teachers is not merely that of instructors but also of spiritual companions who help students discover the true meaning of life.

Integration of Existentialism with Christian Faith

The integration of existentialism and Christian faith provides a rich framework for understanding human freedom and responsibility. Existentialism emphasizes that every individual has the freedom to determine the direction of their life, but that freedom does not come without consequences, namely, responsibility for every choice made. From this perspective, humans are seen as beings who must bravely face the realities of life, including anxiety and uncertainty, as part of the search for meaning. This philosophical framework helps students realize that life is not simply going with the flow, but rather a journey that demands a full awareness of personal freedom and responsibility. (Gea, 2020).

However, the existential freedom offered by philosophy is not always sufficient to lead humans to the true meaning of life. This is where Christian faith comes in as a guide, providing a deeper direction and purpose. Christian faith affirms that true meaning in life can only be found in Christ, who is the center of human existence. The freedom that humans possess is not a freedom without direction, but rather a freedom directed toward living out the calling of faith. Thus, Christian faith complements existentialism by providing a transcendent dimension, so that the search for the meaning of life does not stop at philosophical reflection, but culminates in a personal relationship with God. (Tanuwidjaja & Uda, 2020).

In the educational context, Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers play a crucial role in helping students find a balance between existential freedom and the call of faith. Teachers not only teach doctrine but also accompany students in a process of reflection and dialogue about their lives. Through creative methods such as faith reflection, philosophical discussions, and contextual Bible study, teachers can help students understand that their freedom must be lived responsibly and that true meaning in life is found in Christ. (Ruru & Bilo, 2023).

In this way, the integration of existentialism and Christian faith in PAK becomes a transformative tool that helps students live authentically, responsibly, and hopefully in the light of faith.

4. CONCLUSION

The conclusion of this discussion confirms that prospective Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers have a strategic role in helping students discover authentic meaning in life. In addressing the existential crisis experienced by the younger generation, existentialism can serve as a reflective approach that enriches Christian education. By emphasizing freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning, existentialism provides space for students to grapple with fundamental questions about their existence. When these principles are integrated with Christian faith, Christian Religious Education (PAK) learning serves not only as a means of transferring knowledge but also as a transformative platform that guides students toward growth in faith and a more meaningful life.

Therefore, Christian religious education needs to be directed towards the formation of a person who is able to live meaningfully in the light of Christ. Religious Education teachers are required to be facilitators who open up spaces for reflection, dialogue, and faith experiences, while also serving as authentic life models. In this way, students not only understand Christian teachings cognitively but also experience really spiritual and existential growth. The integration of existentialism with

Christian faith makes Religious Education a learning tool relevant to the challenges of our time, while also helping students discover their true identity, purpose, and hope in Christ.

5. SUGGESTION

Based on the results of this study, it is recommended that prospective Christian Religious Education (PAK) teachers continue to develop a reflective approach that integrates existentialist philosophy with Christian faith. This is important so that learning does not only focus on cognitive aspects but also touches the existential dimension of students, enabling them to find authentic meaning in life in Christ. Furthermore, educational institutions preparing prospective PAK teachers are expected to provide training that emphasizes creative methods such as faith reflection, philosophical discussions, drama, and contextual Bible study. Possible obstacles include limited literature sources, a lack of in-depth understanding of existentialism, and resistance to more reflective learning methods. Therefore, further research is needed to enrich the study and provide practical solutions to these challenges.

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