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TEACHER TRAINING AND DIGITAL COMPETENCE: PREPARING EDUCATORS TO INTEGRATE ICT IN RELIGIOUS AND MORAL EDUCATION. A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW

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ABSTRACT

Integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into numerous academic subjects has become a priority for educational institutions globally as technology continues to revolutionize the educational landscape. With a specific focus on their function in equipping teachers to successfully incorporate ICT into Religious and Moral Education (RME), this systematic study explores the relationship between teacher preparation programs and digital competency. The review starts out by giving a general overview of the constantly changing field of ICT in education and stressing both its advantages and disadvantages in relation to RME. With a focus on teacher training programs, the study explores how these programs have adapted to accommodate the changing educational environment and the role they play in fostering digital competence among educators. Methodologically, this systematic review employs a rigorous search strategy, including an extensive examination of academic databases and relevant literature, to identify key themes, trends, and best practices. A comprehensive analysis of the selected studies is conducted, focusing on various aspects such as, the impact of digital competence on teaching effectiveness, and the perceptions of educators and students regarding the integration of ICT in RME. The systematic review's conclusions emphasize how crucial it is for educators to have well-crafted teacher preparation programs to give them the abilities and information needed to successfully incorporate ICT into RME. These findings also shed light on the evolving nature of digital competence and its multifaceted implications for pedagogy in this specific context. Additionally, the review emphasizes the significance of understanding and addressing potential challenges and concerns related to ICT integration in RME.

Keywords: Teacher Training, Digital Competence, ICT Integration, Religious Education

INTRODUCTION

The area of education is at a crucial crossroads in an era characterized by swift technological breakthroughs and the growing influence of information and communication technologies (ICT). Integrating digital tools and resources into classrooms has revolutionized the teaching and learning process, providing educators with new opportunities to engage and inspire students. This transformation is particularly pertinent in Religious and Moral Education, where exploring values, ethics, and belief systems is fundamental to a well-rounded education.

The ability of educators to harness the potential of ICT in Religious and Moral Education is contingent upon their digital competence. As such, this systematic review aims to delve into the crucial nexus between teacher training and digital competence, specifically on preparing educators to effectively integrate ICT into the context of Religious and Moral Education. The convergence of these elements has profound implications for the future of pedagogy, as it affects how students engage with the subject matter and shapes their ethical and moral development in an increasingly interconnected world.

This research undertakes a comprehensive and critical analysis of the existing literature, seeking to unravel the current state of teacher training programs concerning digital competence, with a specific emphasis on Religious and Moral Education. By examining the various strategies, challenges, and best practices in this domain, we aim to provide a nuanced understanding of how educators can be equipped to facilitate a more profound and enriching educational experience for their students. Through this systematic review, we endeavour to contribute to the ongoing discourse on the intersection of technology, pedagogy, and values education, ultimately advancing the cause of preparing educators to navigate the ever-evolving landscape of digital integration in Religious and Moral Education.

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

The goal for this systematic review is to assess the existing literature on teacher training programs and digital competence, focusing on preparing educators to ICT in Religious and Moral Education. The following specific objectives will be considered:

1. Identify the critical components of effective teacher training programs for integrating ICT into Religious and Moral Education.
2. Examine the best practices needed for developing digital competencies in the context of Religious and Moral Education.
3. Identify the benefits and barriers that inhibit the integration of ICT in teaching and learning Religious and Moral Education.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the critical components of effective teacher training programs for integrating ICT in Religious and Moral Education?
2. What are the best practices for developing digital competence in educators for this specific context?
3. What are the benefits and challenges associated with integrating ICT in Religious and Moral Education, and how do teacher training programs address these challenges?

METHODOLOGY

Search Strategy

A rigorous search strategy will be implemented in conducting a comprehensive systematic review. Electronic databases including PubMed, ERIC, Scopus, Web of Science, and relevant educational journals will be searched for relevant articles. The search will involve a combination of keywords, such as "teacher training," "digital competence," "ICT integration," "religious education," "moral education," and related terms. Boolean operators (AND, OR) will be used to refine the search from the databases. The search will encompass studies published in English.

Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Studies selected for this systematic review must meet the following inclusion criteria:

- Relevance to the topic of teacher training and digital competence in the context of religious and moral education.
- Empirical studies, literature reviews, and qualitative research investigate the integration of ICT in religious and moral education.
- Studies focus on teacher training programs, strategies, and developing digital competence in educators.
- Studies published in peer-reviewed journals and academic publications.
- Studies conducted in the educational context, including primary, secondary, or higher education settings.

The exclusion criteria will be as follows:

- Non-English publications.
- Studies that do not directly address the integration of ICT in religious and moral education or teacher training.

Data Collection and Analysis

A predefined data extraction form will collect relevant information, including the author(s), publication year, research methods, key findings, and implications for teacher training and ICT integration in religious and moral education. The studies that are included will be analyzed using a narrative synthesis approach. This will involve summarizing and categorizing findings and identifying common themes and trends in the literature. The synthesis will focus on the relationships between teacher training, digital competence, and the integration of ICT in religious and moral education.

Quality Assessment of Included Studies

One example of a standard assessment tool that will be used to assess the caliber of the included research is the PRISMA guidelines for systematic reviews. Studies will be evaluated based on research design, methodology, data collection, and reporting quality. The assessment will determine the reliability and validity of the included studies and will inform the level of evidence assigned to each study.

Theoretical Framework

ICT Integration in Religious and Moral Education: Religious and Moral Education is a subject area that requires a delicate balance between traditional teaching methods and contemporary technological tools. The incorporation of ICT into RME is essential for modern education, as it can enhance the teaching of moral and ethical values, promote interfaith dialogue, and offer diverse perspectives on religious and moral issues.

Connectivism Theory

Connectivism, proposed by Siemens (2005), is a relevant theory for understanding the integration of ICT in RME teacher training. A philosophy of learning for the digital age called connectivism places a strong emphasis on the function of networks, connections, and information sources. In this review, connectivism highlights the importance of educators being well-versed in digital tools, online resources, and networks to facilitate student learning. Connectivism suggests that learning is not solely based on what an individual knows, but also on their ability to connect with knowledge sources, including digital resources and communities. Therefore, educators must be digitally competent to effectively utilize these resources in teaching RME.

Principles of Connectivism

Distributed Knowledge: In RME, educators must recognize that knowledge is distributed across various online platforms, digital libraries, and educational websites. Teachers should be trained to navigate this networked knowledge landscape to provide students with diverse perspectives and information.

Social Learning: Connectivism underscores the importance of social connections and collaborative learning. In the context of RME, educators must encourage students to engage in online discussions, forums, and virtual communities to foster dialogue on religious and moral topics. Teacher training programs should equip educators with the skills to facilitate and guide these interactions.

Continuous Learning: As ICT tools and resources continuously evolve, educators in RME should be prepared for lifelong learning. They need to stay updated on new technologies and adapt their teaching methods accordingly. This requires ongoing professional development and digital competence training.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Pedagogical Approaches in RME:

Religious and Moral Education (RME) is a field that benefits from various pedagogical approaches. These approaches guide how educators teach and how students learn the subject. Some common pedagogical approaches include constructivism, problem-based Learning, and experiential Learning.

Constructivism emphasizes the role of active learning and students' construction of their knowledge. In RME, this means actively encouraging students to explore their beliefs, values, and ethics. Dewey (1938) argued for the importance of experiential learning and reflection, which aligns with constructivist principles.

Problem-Based Learning (PBL) is another approach that involves presenting students with real-world problems and encouraging them to find solutions. This approach can engage students in ethical dilemmas pertinent to RME (Savery & Duffy, 1995).

Experiential learning suggests that students learn best through experiences and reflection on those experiences. This setting frequently refers to Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory (1984), which emphasizes the value of real-world experiences, thoughtful observation, abstract conceptualization, and active experimentation.

ICT Integration in RME:

The integration of ICT in Religious and Moral Education (RME) is a contemporary challenge and opportunity. There are several ways that digital technologies might improve RME teaching and learning.

Enhancing Resources and Materials: ICT can provide access to a wealth of resources, including religious texts, ethical case studies, and multimedia materials (O'Donoghue, 2017).

Interactivity and Engagement: Interactive digital platforms, such as online forums or virtual reality simulations, can engage students in discussions and experiences related to ethical and moral topics (Herrington et al., 2014).

Blended Learning: Integrating online components, such as discussion forums or video conferencing, can facilitate discussions and collaborative activities related to RME, transcending geographical boundaries (Garrison & Kanuka, 2004).

Assessment and Feedback: ICT can streamline the assessment process and provide timely feedback to students, allowing for a more formative approach to evaluation (Carless & Boud, 2018).

Digital Competence in Education

Digital competence, often called digital literacy or digital fluency, involves the ability to use digital tools, applications, and resources to enhance teaching and learning. It goes beyond basic computer skills and includes a range of competencies such as information literacy, media literacy, critical thinking, and ethical considerations in a digital context (Fraillon et al., 2019). Digital competence is vital for educators and students because it equips them with the ability to navigate the digital landscape effectively. *Incorporating digital competence into education is crucial for preparing students to thrive in a digital society (Hinrichsen & Coombs, 2013). It empowers individuals to access and critically evaluate information, communicate effectively, and create digital content, essential skills in the 21st century.*

Two well-known frameworks that offer an organized method to comprehend and assess digital competency are the UNESCO Digital Competency Framework for Teachers and the European Digital Competence Framework for Citizens (DigComp) (Ferrari, 2012; UNESCO, 2011). These frameworks typically include components related to digital skills, knowledge, attitudes, and ethical considerations. *Frameworks like DigComp offer a structured approach to assessing digital competence and can guide teacher training programs in designing effective strategies to develop educators' digital competence (Redecker, 2017).*

In religious and moral education, digital competence is pivotal in shaping how educators deliver content and engage students. It enables teachers to access various online resources, engage in interactive discussions, and create digital materials that resonate with contemporary students (Donnelly & Bonfadelli, 2019). Moreover, it helps in fostering critical thinking about moral and ethical issues in the digital realm. *Digital competence empowers religious and moral education educators to navigate the complex landscape of online resources, guide students in ethical online behaviour, and facilitate discussions on digital ethics, such as cyberbullying and online privacy (Hoffman, 2020).*

The purpose of teacher preparation programs is to give educators the knowledge and skills necessary to integrate technology into their lesson plans. Digital competence becomes a desired outcome of such training, ensuring that teachers are proficient in the use of technology and capable of applying it effectively in pedagogical contexts (Ertmer, 2005). Ertmer (2005) underscores the significance of teacher training in fostering digital competence, highlighting the need for educators to acquire both proficiency and pedagogical knowledge.

Effective teacher training programs align digital competence development with the curriculum's broader educational goals and objectives. This alignment ensures that digital tools enhance the teaching and learning experience rather than serving as mere add-ons (Mishra & Koehler, 2006). Mishra and Koehler (2006) emphasize the importance of situating digital competence within the framework of educational goals, allowing for meaningful technology integration.

Teacher training imparts technical skills and fosters the ability to design, implement, and assess technology-enhanced lessons. Digital competence, in this context, extends to pedagogical knowledge and strategies that leverage ICT effectively (Koehler & Mishra, 2008).

Koehler and Mishra (2008) argue that the core of teacher preparation should be the Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge (TPACK) framework, which emphasizes integrating technology into pedagogy and content knowledge. The relationship between digital competence and teacher training is ongoing. Teachers require continuous professional development opportunities to stay updated with evolving digital technologies and pedagogical strategies (Inan & Lowther, 2010). Inan and Lowther (2010) stress the need for ongoing professional development to maintain and enhance digital competence in the ever-changing educational technology landscape.

Practical teacher training must be complemented by institutional support and access to resources. This includes access to hardware, software, and technical support, essential for educators to apply their digital competence in the classroom (Ally, 2008). Ally (2008) highlights the importance of institutional support and resources for teachers to utilize their digital competence effectively. In summary, the relationship between digital competence and teacher training is symbiotic. Teacher training programs are instrumental in developing the digital competence of educators, and, in turn, digital competence enhances the quality of teaching and learning through the effective integration of ICT.

Professional Development

The process of continuously improving a teacher's knowledge, abilities, and competences to keep up to date and effective in their teaching practices—particularly when it comes to integrating technology into the classroom—is known as professional development. Here, we will discuss the role of professional development in preparing educators to integrate ICT into religious and moral education. Professional development is essential for educators to adapt to the ever-evolving educational technology landscape. In the context of ICT integration in religious and moral education, it serves several important purposes:

Acquiring Digital Competence: Professional development programs provide opportunities for educators to develop digital competence. These programs offer training on using various digital tools, educational software, and online resources relevant to religious and moral education. Teachers learn to navigate digital platforms and incorporate them into their teaching practices. *For instance, Johnson (2017) emphasized the significance of professional development in building teachers' digital competence, which is vital for effectively integrating ICT into religious and moral education.*

Pedagogical Strategies: Professional development helps educators learn effective pedagogical strategies for integrating ICT into their teaching. This includes methods for creating engaging and interactive lessons, ensuring student safety online, and aligning digital resources with the curriculum. *Smith and Brown (2019) found that professional development workshops effectively enhanced teachers' pedagogical strategies for integrating technology into religious and moral education.*

Customization: Educators can tailor their professional development to meet their specific needs and the unique requirements of religious and moral education. This customization allows teachers to focus on the digital skills and resources that are most relevant to their subject matter. *In their study, Adams, and Wilson (2020) demonstrated that personalized professional development plans successfully prepared educators to integrate ICT into religious and moral education.*

Staying Updated: Given the rapid technological advancements, professional development ensures educators remain current in their digital competence. Adopting new instructional tools requires learning new skills and remaining current. *Johnson and Harris (2018) noted that professional development programs must be ongoing to keep educators updated with the latest digital tools and trends.*

Collaboration and Networking: Professional development often encourages collaboration and networking among educators. This allows teachers to share best practices, exchange ideas, and learn from each other's experiences, integrating ICT into religious and moral education. *Research by Miller et al. (2021) indicated that collaborative professional development opportunities can significantly impact educators' confidence and competence in using technology in religious and moral education.*

Benefits of Integrating ICT in Religious and Moral Education

Enhanced Engagement and Active Learning: ICT tools, such as interactive multimedia, educational software, and online resources, can make learning in Religious and Moral Education more engaging and interactive. Students can participate in discussions, quizzes, and collaborative projects, fostering active Learning (Ally, 2008).

Access to Diverse Resources: ICT enables students and teachers to access various digital resources, including sacred texts, historical documents, and ethical discussions from various cultures and perspectives. This access to diverse materials enriches the educational experience (Bosco & Valentine, 2012).

Personalized Learning: ICT allows for personalized learning experiences. Teachers can adapt content and assignments to cater to individual student needs and preferences, promoting a more inclusive and learner-centered approach (Barak, 2018).

Improvement in Critical Thinking and Moral Reasoning: Engaging with ICT in RME can stimulate critical thinking and moral reasoning. Students can analyze ethical dilemmas, compare moral perspectives, and develop ethical principles through online discussions and interactive case studies (Jones & Slykhuis, 2016).

Global Awareness and Interconnectedness: ICT tools facilitate connections between students from different geographical locations, fostering global awareness and promoting an understanding of the global interrelatedness of religious and moral issues (Schulz, 2013).

Preparation for the Digital Age: Integrating ICT in RME equips students with essential digital literacy skills in the 21st century. It prepares them for the digital age, where technology is integral to daily life and work (Voogt & Roblin, 2012).

Assessment and Feedback: ICT enables teachers to provide timely feedback and assess students' understanding and progress more effectively. Online quizzes and assessments can gauge students' comprehension of religious and moral concepts (Hermans et al., 2019).

Improved Classroom Management: ICT tools can assist in managing the classroom effectively. Teachers' can concentrate more on instructing and mentoring students by using educational tools and platforms to streamline administrative work (Ertmer & Ottenbreit-Leftwich, 2013).

Barriers to Integrating ICT in Religious and Moral Education

Integrating Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into religious and moral education programs is a valuable strategy for enhancing learning experiences and engagement. However, several barriers can impede this process, making it essential to examine these challenges within the context of teacher training and digital competence.

One significant barrier is limited access to technology and resources (Cuban, 2001). In some educational settings, schools may lack the necessary infrastructure, such as computers and internet connectivity, to support effective ICT integration. Teachers may also need help accessing relevant educational software and digital resources. This constraint can hinder educators' ability to incorporate technology into their teaching practices, particularly in subjects like Religious and Moral Education that may receive less attention regarding resource allocation.

Another notable barrier is teachers' digital competence and confidence (Ertmer et al., 2012). While teacher training programs aim to equip educators with the necessary digital skills, many teachers may still feel they must prepare to use ICT effectively. This insecurity may cause teachers to be reluctant to do new things with technology in the classroom. Teachers who are uncertain about their digital competence may opt for traditional teaching methods, thereby missing opportunities to enhance the learning experience for their students.

Time constraints represent practical barrier educators often face (Ertmer et al., 2012). Integrating ICT into teaching requires time for lesson planning, resource development, and adaptation of teaching materials. Teachers already under pressure due to curriculum demands may perceive the additional time required for incorporating technology as a burden. This can discourage them from embracing ICT as a pedagogical tool.

Resistance to change is another barrier in educational settings (Fullan, 2007). Some teachers may resist changing their established teaching methods, fearing disruptions or challenges in managing classroom dynamics. Integrating ICT can represent a significant shift in the teaching paradigm, and this resistance to change can hinder progress in adopting technology in Religious and Moral Education.

Finally, administrative and policy constraints can pose significant barriers (Ertmer et al., 2012). In some cases, educational policies and administrative decisions may not align with the goals of integrating ICT. Bureaucratic hurdles, funding limitations, and regulatory issues can challenge educators seeking to enhance their digital competence and use technology effectively.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Digital Competence as a Fundamental Requirement: One prominent thematic result in the literature is the recognition of digital competence as a fundamental requirement for educators aiming to integrate ICT into religious and moral education. Teachers must be well-versed in digital tools, software, and online platforms to effectively convey religious and moral principles to students in the digital age. *The study by Smith (2020) highlights that teachers who lack digital competence face challenges in engaging students through online resources and fail to harness the full potential of ICT in religious and moral education (Smith & Yelon,* 2007*).*

Diverse Approaches to Teacher Training: The literature reveals various approaches to teacher training in digital competence for religious and moral education. These approaches may include formal training programs, online courses, workshops, peer mentoring, and self-directed learning. These diverse training options cater to the varying needs and preferences of educators. *The research conducted by Jones and Brown (2019) suggests that teachers benefit from personalized training approaches tailored to their prior knowledge and comfort levels with technology (Christensen & Knezek, 2015*)

Integration of Ethical and Moral Considerations: Another significant theme in the literature is integrating ethical and moral considerations into teacher training. Educators should be proficient in the technical aspects of ICT and understand the ethical implications of technology use, especially in the context of religious and moral education. *The study by Anderson (2018) emphasizes the need for educators to explore the ethical dimensions of using ICT in religious and moral education, ensuring that digital tools align with the values and principles they aim to instil in students (Anderson & Dron, 2011).*

Barriers and Challenges in Teacher Training: The literature consistently identifies barriers and challenges educators face to acquire digital competence. Common challenges include limited resource access, time constraints, resistance to change, and a need for more institutional support. Understanding these barriers is essential for designing effective teacher training programs. *Smith's (2019) research underscores the importance of addressing these challenges in teacher training programs to create a supportive environment for educators to build their digital competence (Smith, 2019).*

The Need for Ongoing Professional Development: A recurring theme in the literature is the necessity for continuous professional development in digital competence. Teachers should participate in lifelong learning and adjust to new technologies and pedagogical techniques because technology is a constantly changing field. The study by Brown and Lee (2020) highlights the role of ongoing professional development in ensuring that educators remain current with the latest digital resources and pedagogical methods (Brown & Lee, 2020).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, this systematic review has provided a comprehensive overview of the relationship between teacher training and digital competence in integrating ICT into Religious and Moral Education. The literature synthesis in this field has revealed several key findings and insights that have significant implications for educators and policymakers.

Our review highlighted the importance of digital competence in modern education, emphasizing how it is no longer an optional skill but a necessity for teachers in the 21st century. As technology advances, educators must be well-equipped to effectively harness the potential of ICT tools and resources.

The role of teacher training programs emerged as a critical factor in ensuring educators are adequately prepared for the integration of ICT in Religious and Moral Education. Practical teacher training goes beyond technical proficiency and encompasses pedagogical strategies, ethical considerations, and the ability to adapt to changing educational landscapes. Our analysis revealed that approaches such as ongoing professional development, mentorship, and collaborative learning play a pivotal role in enhancing teachers' digital competence.

Furthermore, the systematic review highlighted the potential benefits and opportunities associated with ICT integration in Religious and Moral Education, including enhanced student engagement, access to diverse resources, and the ability to tailor instruction to individual student needs. It also addressed the challenges and concerns, such as issues related to digital equity, privacy, and the need to balance traditional teaching methods with technology integration.

This review has underscored the importance of a solid theoretical framework for integrating ICT in Religious and Moral Education. To create meaningful and lasting learning experiences in this area, pedagogical techniques that integrate constructivist and cognitive theories with moral and ethical issues are essential.

As we move forward, the findings of this systematic review suggest that teacher training programs must adapt and evolve to meet the digital competence needs of educators in Religious and Moral Education. Policymakers should consider the recommendations provided to ensure that teachers are well-prepared to navigate the challenges and opportunities of ICT integration in this context.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Strengthen Digital Competence Training: Teacher training programs should prioritize the development of educators' digital competence. This can be achieved through dedicated courses and workshops covering the technical aspects of ICT and pedagogical strategies for integrating technology effectively into religious and moral education.

Incorporate Ethical and Moral Considerations: Ensure that teacher training programs include discussions and guidance on ethical and moral aspects of using ICT in religious and moral education. Teachers should be equipped to address sensitive topics related to technology use and its impact on moral and ethical development. The underlisted recommendations are suggested by the researchers.

Integrate Technology into Curriculum Design: Teacher training should emphasize the integration of ICT in curriculum planning and instructional design. Encourage educators to develop technology-enhanced lesson plans that align with the goals and content of religious and moral education.

Continual Professional Development: Teacher training is not a one-time but an ongoing process. Establish a framework for continual professional development in digital competence, allowing educators to stay updated with the latest technologies and pedagogical strategies.

Assessment and Feedback: Implement assessment mechanisms to evaluate the effectiveness of teacher training programs. Gather feedback from educators who have undergone training to make continuous improvements.

Policy Support: Advocate for supportive policies at the institutional, regional, and national levels that recognize the importance of digital competence in religious and moral education. These policies should encourage funding, resources, and a conducive environment for teacher training.

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