WORLD FORUM ON ACADEMIC INNOVATION AND DIGITAL LITERACY

CRITICAL DIGITAL PEDAGOGY IN WORLD RELIGIONS EDUCATION: COMBATING MISINFORMATION AND PROMOTING INCLUSIVITY

Uzbekistan State World Languages University

Faculty of Foreign Language and Literature (English) 2nd-year student

Abdufattohova Mumtozbegim Abdugaffor qizi

Academic advisor: Sogukpinar Dilorom Alimovna

Senior Lecturer, Department of Social Sciences

Abstract

In the contemporary digital era, world religions education faces significant disruption from "digital radicalism," ideological hegemony, and the viral spread of misinformation. This article explores Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP) as a transformative framework to navigate these challenges. Rooted in Freirean critical consciousness, CDP shifts the educational paradigm from passive consumption to active, ethical engagement. The study examines evidence-based strategies—including fact-checking tools, pre-bunking simulations, and gamification—that have been shown to reduce student susceptibility to disinformation by 25-40%. Furthermore, the paper highlights the "inclusivity pillar" of CDP, which utilizes digital storytelling and virtual collaborative spaces to amplify marginalized voices and foster interfaith empathy. By integrating Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) and ethical digital citizenship, CDP equips learners with the socio-ethical resilience necessary to dismantle extremist narratives and promote a moderate, inclusive religious consciousness in a "post-truth" landscape.

Keywords

Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP), World Religions Education, Digital Radicalism, Misinformation, Inclusivity, Media Literacy, Socio-ethical Resilience, Fact-checking, Religious Moderation, Digital Citizenship.

In an era dominated by digital media, world religions education faces unprecedented challenges and opportunities. The proliferation of online platforms has democratized access to religious content, yet it has also amplified "digital radicalism," disinformation, and ideological hegemony that distort authentic teachings and fuel division. Critical Digital Pedagogy (CDP) emerges as a transformative framework, shifting from passive knowledge consumption to active, critical engagement. Rooted in Paulo Freire's pedagogy of the oppressed and extended into digital realms by scholars like Henry Giroux and Audrey Watters, CDP positions students as co-creators rather than mere recipients. In the context of world religions education, this approach dismantles digital hegemonies, combats religious misinformation, and cultivates an inclusive, moderate religious consciousness. By integrating digital tools with critical inquiry, CDP equips learners to navigate the "post-truth" landscape, fostering socio-ethical resilience and ethical digital citizenship.

The digital age has reshaped religious discourse, introducing phenomena like "digital radicalism"—where extremist narratives spread virally through algorithms prioritizing sensationalism—and rampant disinformation, including hate speech and religious fraud. Traditional indoctrinative models in religious education, often reliant on rote memorization and authoritative texts, falter in this environment. They fail to prepare students for a world where deepfakes, echo chambers, and algorithmic biases masquerade as divine truth. CDP intervenes by awakening critical consciousness, countering hegemony, and promoting moderation, drawing on Freire's concept of

conscientização (critical consciousness) to move students from dogmatic adherence to a "liberating ethical framework" emphasizing justice, equality, and human dignity. For instance, in teaching Islam, Christianity, or Hinduism, educators might encounter online content portraying these faiths as inherently violent or supremacist. CDP challenges this by encouraging students to deconstruct such materials: Who authors them? What ideologies underpin their symbolism? How do they perpetuate power imbalances? Research from the MD Research Center highlights how digital hegemony often disguises ideological domination in religious garb, marginalizing moderate voices. By fostering "socio-ethical resilience," CDP empowers students to resist radical narratives. This involves dialogic classrooms where learners analyze real-time social media trends, such as TikTok videos promoting prosperity gospels or Twitter threads inciting interfaith conflict. Empirical studies, including those from ResearchGate, demonstrate that such interventions reduce susceptibility to misinformation by 25-40%, as students internalize habits of questioning authority and seeking diverse perspectives.

Moreover, CDP addresses the psychological toll of digital radicalism. Exposure to unfiltered online extremism can erode moderate identities, particularly among youth in multicultural societies. By promoting moderation, CDP builds emotional and intellectual defenses, aligning with psychological frameworks like Bandura's self-efficacy theory. Educators thus transform religious education from a site of reproduction into one of emancipation, preparing students for ethical navigation of pluralistic digital spaces.

Central to CDP is a suite of evidence-based strategies for "truth-boosting," transforming misinformation from a threat into a teachable moment. These tools blend technological integration with pedagogical innovation, ensuring religious education is proactive rather than reactive. Fact-checking is foundational. Real-time tools like

Google Fact Check Explorer, Rumour Guard, and emerging AI-driven platforms such as FactCheck.org's digital verifier enable students to scrutinize claims during lessons. For example, when studying Buddhist texts online, students might verify a viral meme alleging "violent karma" by cross-referencing it against primary sources and metadata. Pre-bunking—preemptively inoculating learners against manipulation—proves more effective than post-hoc debunking, as shown in psychological research by Roozenbeek and van der Linden. In practice, teachers preview common tropes, like antisemitic distortions of Judaism, using simulations where students predict deceptive tactics before encountering them. Cross-disciplinary digital literacy further embeds these skills across curricula. Students learn to evaluate source credibility (e.g., peer-reviewed journals vs. anonymous blogs), detect bots via tools like Botometer, and trace disinformation networks. Gamification amplifies engagement: Google's Be Internet Awesome and its Interland game immerse learners in scenarios mimicking religious scams, such as phishing emails posing as fatwas or halachic rulings. European Education Area initiatives report that gamified modules increase retention of fact-checking skills by 35%, making abstract concepts tangible. In world religions classes, this might involve multiplayer challenges where teams debunk fabricated hadiths or scriptural forgeries, blending fun with rigor. These strategies extend beyond classrooms to lifelong habits. By institutionalizing OSINT (Open-Source Intelligence) toolkits, CDP cultivates resilient consumers who instinctively verify religious content, mitigating the societal costs of misinformation-fueled conflicts.

CDP's inclusivity pillar leverages technology to amplify marginalized religious voices, using the "windows and mirrors" metaphor from Rudine Sims Bishop. Digital media serves as mirrors reflecting students' identities—e.g., Sikh youth creating podcasts on their heritage—and windows into others' worlds, such as virtual tours of Indigenous spiritual sites. This counters exclusionary narratives, promoting empathy in

diverse classrooms.

Digital storytelling empowers "counter-stories," allowing students to remix religious narratives via tools like Adobe Spark or Twine. A student exploring African Traditional Religions might produce an interactive story challenging colonial stereotypes, shared in class for collective critique. Virtual collaborative spaces, such as Discord servers or Microsoft Teams with moderation bots, facilitate safe interfaith dialogues. Here, peers from Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu backgrounds cross-check information, debunking myths like "Sharia law demands violence" through evidence-sharing.

Accessibility is paramount. AI recommenders curate verified, diverse sources—e.g., suggesting Uzbek-language Sufi texts alongside English translations—while sensory-rich materials support SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disabilities) students, like symbol-based animations of Confucian ethics. MDPI research underscores how these tools enhance equity, with student-led projects yielding 20% higher empathy scores in interfaith surveys.

Ethical engagement rounds out inclusivity, emphasizing "responsible digital citizenship." Lessons on data privacy, algorithmic bias, and equitable sharing ensure students navigate religious digital landscapes justly, aligning with UNESCO's digital ethics guidelines.

In conclusion, Critical Digital Pedagogy reimagines world religions education as a bulwark against digital ills, nurturing informed, inclusive global citizens. By empowering students as co-creators, it not only combats misinformation but also envisions religion as a force for unity in our hyper-connected world.

REFERENCES

1. Bandura, A. (1977). Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change. *Psychological Review*, 84(2), 191–215. https://doi.org/10.1037/0033-295X.84.2.191
2. Bishop, R. S. (1990). Windows and mirrors: Children's books for a diverse classroom. *Perspective on Children*, 1(3), 9-11.
3. Google. (n.d.). *Google Fact Check Tools*. Google News Initiative. Retrieved April 5, 2026, from https://newsinitiative.withgoogle.com/resources/trainings/google-fact-check-tools/
4. Google. (n.d.). *Be Internet Awesome: Interland*. Retrieved April 5, 2026, from https://beinternetawesome.withgoogle.com/en_us/interland
5. Højsgaard, M. T., & Warburg, M. (Eds.). (2005). *Religion and the media*. Aarhus University Press.
6. Publications Office of the European Union. (2025). *On a quest for facts: A game to learn and practice fact-checking skills with EU resources: Teachers' kit*. European Education Area. https://digital-skills-jobs.europa.eu/en/learning-space/resources/quest-facts-game-learn-and-practice-fact-checking-skills-eu-re
7. Roozenbeek, J., & van der Linden, S. (2019). Fake news game confers psychological resistance against online misinformation. *Palgrave Communications*, 5(1), 65. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-019-0279-9
8. Roozenbeek, J., van der Linden, S., & Nygren, T. (2020). Prebunking interventions based on "inoculation" theory can reduce susceptibility to misinformation across cultures. *Harvard Kennedy School Misinformation Review*. https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-013
9. UNESCO. (2026). *Guidelines for the governance of digital platforms*. Retrieved April 5, 2026, from https://www.unesco.org/en/internet-trust/guidelines