



## Implementation Of Gadamerian Hermeneutics In Contextual Bible Learning For Digital Native Generation In Senior High Schools

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### ABSTRACT

*The digital native generation faces unique challenges in biblical interpretation, characterized by rapid information consumption, short attention spans, and digital-mediated communication preferences. This study explores the implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutics as a pedagogical framework for contextual Bible learning in senior high schools. Using a qualitative case study approach, this research involved thirty-five students and five Bible teachers from three Christian senior high schools in North Sumatera, Indonesia. Data were collected through classroom observations, semi-structured interviews, focus group discussions, and analysis of students' hermeneutical products. The findings reveal that Gadamerian hermeneutic principles, particularly the fusion of horizons, effective history, and dialogical understanding, significantly enhanced students' ability to engage with biblical texts in contextually relevant ways. Students demonstrated increased critical thinking, deeper personal connection with Scripture, and improved capacity to bridge ancient texts with contemporary issues. The implementation faced challenges including teachers' limited understanding of philosophical hermeneutics, students' initial resistance to slower, reflective reading practices, and institutional pressure for standardized outcomes. This study contributes to biblical pedagogy by offering a theoretically grounded framework that addresses the epistemological preferences of digital natives while maintaining hermeneutical rigor. Recommendations include professional development for teachers in philosophical hermeneutics, curriculum design that integrates digital tools with reflective practices, and assessment methods that value interpretive process over content recall.*

**Keywords:** *Gadamerian hermeneutics; biblical pedagogy; digital natives; contextual learning; fusion of horizons; theological education*



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## INTRODUCTION

The emergence of the digital native generation, a demographic cohort born into a world saturated with digital technology, has fundamentally transformed the landscape of education across all disciplines, including biblical studies and theological education. Prensky's seminal conceptualization of digital natives in 2001 described individuals who have grown up immersed in digital technology from birth, developing cognitive patterns, communication preferences, and learning styles markedly different from previous generations. These students, who now populate our senior high schools, approach texts, authority, and knowledge construction in ways that challenge traditional pedagogical models, particularly in subjects like biblical studies that have historically relied on authoritative transmission and reverential reception of sacred texts.

The challenges of teaching Bible to digital natives extend beyond mere technological adaptation. Research by Carr in 2020 demonstrates that prolonged exposure to digital media

cultivates what he terms "shallow reading" patterns characterized by skimming, rapid information processing, limited retention, and diminished capacity for sustained contemplative engagement with complex texts. For biblical pedagogy, which historically has emphasized deep reading, meditation, and interpretive reflection, these cognitive shifts present profound pedagogical dilemmas. Students accustomed to hyperlinked, multimodal, and interactive digital content often find traditional Bible study methods involving linear textual analysis, historical-critical exegesis, and systematic theological reflection both alienating and incomprehensible.

Furthermore, digital natives exhibit distinct epistemological orientations that complicate biblical instruction. Raised in environments of radical information plurality where Wikipedia coexists with scholarly articles, where social media influencers compete with institutional authorities, and where truth claims are constantly contested and negotiated, these students approach biblical texts without the inherited assumptions of divine authority and textual inerrancy that previous generations often brought to Scripture. Instead, they read the Bible as one text among many, subject to the same critical scrutiny they apply to other information sources, demanding personal relevance, experiential validation, and contextual applicability before according any text authoritative status.

Traditional approaches to biblical pedagogy in Indonesian Christian schools have typically employed what Freire in 2018 critiqued as "banking education," wherein teachers deposit biblical knowledge into passive student recipients who are expected to memorize verses, master historical contexts, and reproduce orthodox interpretations without critical engagement or personal appropriation. This model, while perhaps effective for previous generations socialized into deferential relationships with religious authority, fails catastrophically with digital natives who resist passive reception, demand participatory engagement, and insist on connecting ancient texts with their lived contemporary realities.

The pedagogical crisis is further compounded by the reality that many Bible teachers in Indonesian Christian schools lack training in contemporary hermeneutical theory, relying instead on devotional reading practices or simplistic proof-texting methodologies that cannot address the sophisticated questions digital natives bring to biblical texts. When students ask why biblical gender roles should apply in contemporary contexts, how biblical cosmology relates to scientific knowledge, or whether biblical ethics can inform social media behavior, teachers often respond with appeals to faith or tradition rather than providing hermeneutical frameworks that help students navigate the complex work of interpretation across temporal and cultural distances.

Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics offers a potentially transformative framework for biblical pedagogy with digital natives. Developed in his magnum opus "Truth and Method" published in 2013, Gadamer's hermeneutics moves beyond the methodological positivism of historical-critical approaches and the subjectivism of purely devotional readings to articulate a dialogical, historically-conscious model of interpretation that acknowledges both the alterity of texts and the productive role of the interpreter's historical situatedness. Central concepts including the fusion of horizons, whereby the interpreter's present horizon merges with the text's historical horizon to create new understanding; effective history, which recognizes that tradition shapes our interpretive possibilities; and the hermeneutical circle, which describes the reciprocal relationship between part and whole in understanding, provide sophisticated tools for navigating the interpretive challenges digital natives face.

Gadamerian hermeneutics is particularly suited to digital native pedagogy because it legitimates the interpreter's contemporary context as essential to meaning-making rather than an obstacle to overcome. Unlike historical-critical methods that position contemporary context as bias to be eliminated, Gadamer argues that understanding always occurs from within one's historical situation and that attempting to bracket one's horizon is both impossible and undesirable. This resonates with digital natives' insistence on personal relevance and contextual connection, transforming what traditional pedagogy views as hermeneutical deficiency into hermeneutical opportunity.

Moreover, Gadamer's emphasis on dialogue as the fundamental structure of understanding aligns with digital natives' participatory orientation and preference for interactive, collaborative learning. The Gadamerian interpreter does not dominate texts through methodological mastery but enters into conversation with them, allowing texts to challenge contemporary assumptions while simultaneously bringing contemporary questions that the text's original authors never anticipated. This dialogical dynamic creates space for the kind of authentic engagement digital natives seek while maintaining the integrity and otherness of the biblical witness.

Despite the theoretical promise of Gadamerian hermeneutics for biblical pedagogy, empirical research exploring its practical implementation with digital native students remains severely limited, particularly in non-Western contexts. While Western biblical scholarship has engaged extensively with Gadamer's philosophy, these discussions occur primarily at graduate theological education levels and rarely address the specific pedagogical challenges of teaching adolescents. In Indonesian contexts, research on biblical pedagogy has focused largely on curriculum content or devotional outcomes rather than on hermeneutical methodology or the interpretive capacities students develop.

This study addresses this gap by investigating the implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutic principles in contextual Bible learning for digital native students in Indonesian Christian senior high schools. The research questions guiding this investigation are: How can Gadamerian hermeneutic principles be adapted into pedagogical practices appropriate for digital native adolescents? What impact does Gadamerian hermeneutic pedagogy have on students' biblical interpretation capabilities, engagement with Scripture, and ability to connect biblical texts with contemporary issues? What challenges emerge in implementing philosophical hermeneutics in institutional contexts shaped by devotional and doctrinal expectations? And how do students and teachers experience the pedagogical shift from traditional to Gadamerian approaches?

By addressing these questions, this research aims to contribute both theoretically and practically to biblical pedagogy. Theoretically, it extends Gadamerian hermeneutics from philosophical abstraction into concrete pedagogical application, demonstrating how these principles can structure learning experiences for students whose cognitive and epistemological orientations differ markedly from those assumed in traditional hermeneutical theory. Practically, it provides empirically-grounded insights for Bible teachers and curriculum designers seeking to engage digital natives authentically while maintaining theological and hermeneutical integrity. Ultimately, this study contends that Gadamerian hermeneutics offers not merely a method for biblical interpretation but a comprehensive pedagogical philosophy that can bridge the widening gap between ancient sacred texts and contemporary digital natives.

## **RESEARCH METHODS**

This research employed a qualitative case study methodology, which Yin in 2018 defines as an empirical inquiry investigating contemporary phenomena within real-life contexts, particularly when boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. The case study approach was selected because it enables in-depth, holistic exploration of the complex dynamics involved in implementing Gadamerian hermeneutics in actual classroom settings, attending to the interplay of pedagogical practices, student responses, institutional contexts, and interpretive outcomes that quantitative methods cannot adequately capture.

The research was conducted in three Christian senior high schools in North Sumatera, Indonesia, selected purposively based on criteria including institutional openness to pedagogical innovation, presence of teachers willing to participate in intensive professional development, student populations representative of digital native characteristics, and administrative support for curriculum modification. The three schools represented different denominational backgrounds (one Reformed, one Pentecostal, one non-denominational) and socioeconomic contexts (one urban upper-middle class, one peri-urban middle class, one semi-rural mixed class), providing variation that enriched the case study's analytical depth.

Participants included thirty-five students aged sixteen to eighteen from eleventh and twelfth grade classes, and five Bible teachers with teaching experience ranging from three to fifteen years. Students were selected through criterion sampling to ensure representation of different academic abilities, levels of religious involvement, and degrees of digital technology engagement. All students had grown up with smartphones and regular internet access, meeting Prensky's operational definition of digital natives. Teachers were recruited based on their willingness to engage with philosophical hermeneutics and implement new pedagogical approaches, recognizing that this self-selection might produce findings less applicable to teachers resistant to change.

The research proceeded through three phases. Phase one involved intensive professional development for participating teachers, conducted through weekly three-hour workshops over six weeks where teachers studied Gadamer's key concepts, examined their implications for biblical pedagogy, collaboratively designed lesson plans implementing Gadamerian principles, and engaged in reflective discussions about their own interpretive assumptions and pedagogical habits. This phase was crucial because Gadamerian hermeneutics cannot be reduced to simple techniques but requires deep philosophical understanding that reshapes teachers' entire approach to biblical texts and learning.

Phase two consisted of curriculum implementation lasting one full semester, during which teachers taught biblical texts using Gadamerian pedagogical approaches while the research team conducted regular classroom observations. The curriculum focused on four biblical texts selected for their relevance to contemporary adolescent concerns and their hermeneutical richness: the creation narratives in Genesis chapters one and two addressing questions of human identity and environmental responsibility; the Sermon on the Mount in Matthew chapters five through seven engaging contemporary ethics and social justice; the parable of the Prodigal Son in Luke chapter fifteen exploring themes of family, forgiveness, and grace; and selected Psalms of lament addressing suffering, doubt, and authentic faith.

The pedagogical approach implementing Gadamerian principles involved several key elements. First, horizon articulation activities where students explicitly explored their own

contemporary questions, assumptions, and contexts before encountering the text, making visible the interpretive horizon they brought to Scripture. Second, historical horizon reconstruction where students investigated the ancient contexts of biblical texts not to master objective historical facts but to appreciate the alterity and strangeness of the text's world. Third, dialogical engagement structured as conversations between students' questions and the text's witness, allowing genuine interaction rather than predetermined applications. Fourth, fusion of horizons exercises where students articulated new understanding emerging from the interaction of their contemporary concerns with the biblical text. Fifth, effective history reflection where students considered how tradition had shaped both the biblical text's reception and their own interpretive possibilities.

Phase three involved intensive data collection through multiple sources and methods to achieve triangulation and depth. Classroom observations were conducted using semi-structured observation protocols focusing on student engagement patterns, types of questions asked, quality of interpretive dialogue, and manifestations of hermeneutical principles. Twenty-four classroom sessions were observed, with detailed field notes and selective video recording for later analysis. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with all five teachers and twenty selected students, exploring their experiences of Gadamerian pedagogy, perceived changes in biblical understanding, challenges encountered, and comparisons with previous Bible learning. Focus group discussions were held with student groups of six to eight participants, facilitating peer interaction that often revealed insights not emerging in individual interviews. Student hermeneutical products including written interpretive essays, creative responses to biblical texts, and digital multimedia projects were collected and analyzed as evidence of interpretive capabilities developed through Gadamerian pedagogy.

Data analysis followed Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis methodology outlined in 2019, involving familiarization with data through repeated reading and review, generation of initial codes capturing interesting features, searching for themes by grouping codes into potential patterns, reviewing themes to ensure they work in relation to coded extracts and the entire dataset, defining and naming themes by identifying their essence, and producing a scholarly report weaving together analytic narrative and data extracts. Analysis was conducted iteratively throughout the research, with emerging insights informing subsequent data collection, allowing the case study to develop depth and theoretical sophistication.

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research. The study received approval from the ethics committee of Sekolah Tinggi Teologi Sumatera Utara. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, with parental consent secured for minor students. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, with all identifying information removed from research reports. Students were explicitly informed that their participation was voluntary, that choosing not to participate or to withdraw would not affect their grades or standing, and that the research team rather than their teachers would analyze their hermeneutical products to prevent coercion. Teachers received assurance that findings would be reported in ways that did not expose individual inadequacies but focused on systemic insights.

The research acknowledges several limitations that inform interpretation of findings. First, the purposive selection of schools and teachers willing to innovate likely produces more positive results than would emerge in random sampling of typical Indonesian Christian schools. Second, the semester-long timeframe, while substantial, may not capture long-term impacts on students' interpretive capabilities or faith development. Third, the lead researcher's

background as a biblical scholar and theologian potentially influenced data collection and interpretation despite efforts at reflexivity and bracketing. Fourth, the focus on implementation feasibility and immediate outcomes meant that deeper theological questions about the compatibility of Gadamerian hermeneutics with evangelical doctrines of biblical authority and inspiration received limited attention.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutic pedagogy produced significant transformations in students' engagement with biblical texts, interpretive capabilities, and understanding of the hermeneutical enterprise itself. Analysis of data revealed five major themes: the development of dialogical rather than monological reading practices, increased capacity for navigating interpretive plurality, enhanced ability to bridge biblical and contemporary contexts, transformation of students' relationship with biblical authority, and emergence of metacognitive awareness about interpretation.

The first major theme concerns the development of dialogical reading practices. Traditional Bible pedagogy observed in the pre-implementation baseline period positioned students as receivers of textual meaning delivered through teacher exposition or predetermined study guide questions. Students read biblical texts to extract information or find applications, with success measured by accuracy of content recall and conformity to orthodox interpretations. In contrast, Gadamerian pedagogy structured reading as genuine dialogue where students brought questions to texts while remaining open to being questioned by texts.

Classroom observations revealed dramatic shifts in student engagement patterns. In traditional pedagogy, student contributions typically consisted of brief factual answers to teacher questions, with minimal elaboration or genuine inquiry. One typical exchange involved a teacher asking "What did Jesus say about anxiety in Matthew chapter six?" to which a student responded "Don't worry about tomorrow" before the teacher moved to the next question, with no exploration of why Jesus made this claim, whether it resonates with or challenges contemporary experiences of anxiety, or what understanding might emerge from sitting with the tension between the text's counsel and lived reality.

In Gadamerian pedagogy, exchanges became substantively different. For instance, when studying the same Matthew text, the teacher began by asking students to articulate their own experiences and questions about anxiety. Students shared pressures about academic performance, social media comparison, family expectations, and future uncertainties. The teacher then invited students to enter into dialogue with Jesus's teaching, asking not "What is the right interpretation?" but "What happens when we bring our contemporary anxiety into conversation with Jesus's first-century counsel?" This simple reframing produced rich dialogue where students wrestled with apparent contradictions between the text's seemingly naive optimism and their complex realities, explored how cultural differences between agrarian Palestinian Judaism and contemporary Indonesian contexts might inform interpretation, and ultimately articulated nuanced understandings that neither dismissed the text as irrelevant nor forced artificial harmonization.

Student interview data confirmed the pedagogical shift. One student, Sofia, explained: "Before, I always felt like I was trying to find what the teacher wanted me to say about the Bible. Now I feel like I'm actually talking with the Bible, and sometimes it surprises me by saying things I didn't expect. It's like the Bible is a person I'm getting to know rather than a

textbook I'm memorizing." Another student, David, noted: "I used to think interpretation meant finding the one correct meaning. Now I understand that interpretation is more like a conversation where I bring my questions and the text brings its witness, and meaning happens in between." These responses indicate movement toward Gadamerian understanding of interpretation as dialogical encounter rather than methodological extraction of pre-existing meaning.

Teachers reported that cultivating dialogical reading required significant pedagogical adjustment. Teacher Maria reflected: "My instinct is to give answers, to tell students what texts mean. Learning to hold back, to structure conversations rather than deliver content, to trust that meaning will emerge from dialogue rather than my exposition, this challenged everything I thought teaching was about." This acknowledgment points to the deep paradigm shift Gadamerian pedagogy demands, requiring teachers to reconceptualize their role from authoritative interpreters to facilitators of interpretive dialogue.

The second theme concerns students' increased capacity for navigating interpretive plurality. Digital natives, as noted earlier, inhabit epistemological spaces characterized by radical plurality where multiple truth claims compete for allegiance. Traditional Bible pedagogy often responded to this plurality defensively, either asserting single correct interpretations or dismissing alternative readings as heretical. Gadamerian pedagogy, recognizing that understanding always occurs from within particular horizons and that different horizons produce different understandings, offered students frameworks for engaging plurality productively rather than anxiously.

When studying the creation narratives, for example, students encountered not only the biblical texts but also scientific cosmology, alternative creation myths from Indonesian indigenous religions, and various theological interpretations ranging from young-earth creationism to theistic evolution. Rather than adjudicating between these perspectives to determine the single truth, Gadamerian pedagogy invited students to understand how different horizons and questions produced different readings. Students explored how ancient Hebrew cosmology shaped Genesis's depiction of creation as bringing order from chaos, how modern scientific questions about material origins produce readings focused on historical accuracy, how environmental crises make ecological interpretations compelling, and how personal struggles with purpose generate existential readings focused on human dignity and calling.

Through this process, students developed what might be termed "hermeneutical flexibility," the ability to recognize that interpretive plurality does not necessarily indicate that some interpretations are true and others false but may reflect the richness of texts and the diversity of legitimate questions interpreters bring. Student Marcus articulated this: "I used to think that all the different interpretations of Genesis meant that someone had to be wrong. Now I see that different questions produce different interpretations. If I'm asking 'How did the physical universe begin?' I'll read Genesis differently than if I'm asking 'What does it mean to be human?' Both questions are legitimate, they just produce different readings."

This hermeneutical flexibility did not collapse into absolute relativism where all interpretations are equally valid. Students also developed critical capacities to evaluate interpretations based on textual warrant, coherence with broader biblical witness, and fruitfulness for faith and life. The Gadamerian concept of effective history proved particularly valuable here, helping students recognize that some interpretive traditions have

demonstrated enduring power to generate meaningful understanding across diverse contexts while others prove historically contingent or theologically problematic.

The third theme addresses students' enhanced ability to bridge biblical and contemporary contexts, operationalized through Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons. One of the perennial challenges in biblical pedagogy is helping students see connections between ancient texts and contemporary life without forcing artificial applications or collapsing historical distance. Gadamerian pedagogy's emphasis on fusion of horizons provided conceptual resources for this bridging work.

When studying the parable of the Prodigal Son, traditional pedagogy typically moved quickly from narrating the parable to listing applications such as "God forgives us like the father forgave the son" or "We shouldn't be judgmental like the older brother." While not incorrect, these applications often felt generic and failed to generate deep personal engagement. Gadamerian pedagogy structured the interpretive process differently. Students began by exploring their own experiences and questions about family relationships, forgiveness, shame, reconciliation, and belonging. They then studied the parable in its first-century Palestinian context, investigating cultural dynamics of honor and shame, inheritance practices, Jewish-Gentile tensions, and Pharisaic concerns about ritual purity that shaped the parable's original meaning.

The crucial interpretive move came when teachers facilitated dialogue between students' contemporary concerns and the parable's ancient witness, asking questions like: "What happens when we bring our experiences of family dysfunction into conversation with this parable's depiction of a father who runs to meet his wayward son?" "How might understanding ancient honor culture illuminate contemporary experiences of shame?" "What new understanding emerges when we read the older brother's resentment alongside contemporary struggles with jealousy and comparison?" Through sustained engagement with these questions, students articulated understandings that authentically fused their horizons with the text's horizon, generating insights that neither simply repeated the text nor merely projected contemporary concerns onto it.

Student hermeneutical products demonstrated this fusion capacity. One student, Sarah, wrote a creative retelling of the Prodigal Son parable set in contemporary Indonesian context, featuring a daughter who rejects family expectations to pursue artistic dreams in Jakarta, experiences exploitation and disappointment, and eventually returns to find her father watching for her despite community disapproval. Sarah's retelling demonstrated deep understanding of both the ancient parable's cultural dynamics and contemporary Indonesian family pressures, creating a fusion that illuminated both horizons. In her reflective essay, Sarah explained: "Writing this retelling helped me understand both the original parable better and my own family struggles better. The parable showed me that grace is more radical than I thought, and my own experience showed me how hard it is to receive grace when you feel you've failed."

Teachers reported that facilitating horizon fusion required careful balance between attending to historical context and honoring contemporary questions. Teacher Jonathan reflected: "If I focus too much on ancient context, students feel like the Bible is a museum piece with no relevance to their lives. If I move too quickly to contemporary application, I short-circuit the dialogue and impose meanings rather than allowing fusion to occur. The art is creating space



where students can hold ancient and contemporary together long enough for genuine fusion to happen."

The fourth theme concerns transformation in students' relationship with biblical authority. Traditional evangelical pedagogy in Indonesian contexts typically operates with a propositional understanding of biblical authority where Scripture functions as a collection of true statements to be believed and obeyed. Digital natives, as noted earlier, resist this understanding, experiencing it as authoritarian imposition rather than authoritative guidance. Gadamerian hermeneutics offered an alternative understanding of biblical authority grounded in the text's capacity to address interpreters in ways that challenge contemporary assumptions and disclose truth about human existence before God.

Student interviews revealed significant shifts in how they understood biblical authority. Pre-implementation, when asked "Why is the Bible authoritative?" students typically gave rehearsed answers about divine inspiration, inerrancy, or church tradition, often delivered in formulaic language suggesting minimal personal investment. Post-implementation, students articulated more nuanced and personally appropriated understandings. Student Rachel explained: "I used to think the Bible was authoritative because it was supposed to be perfect and without error. But Gadamerian interpretation helped me see that biblical authority isn't about being a perfect rulebook but about the Bible's power to speak truth into my life, to challenge my assumptions, and to open up new ways of understanding God and myself. The Bible has authority because it addresses me, not just because someone told me it's inspired."

This reconceptualization of authority from propositional to dialogical resonates with Gadamer's understanding that texts exercise authority not through coercive imposition but through their capacity to disclose truth that readers recognize as valid. Students described experiences of biblical texts "speaking to" them, challenging comfortable assumptions, and opening new understanding in ways that felt authoritative without being authoritarian. Student Michael shared: "When I read the Sermon on the Mount using Gadamerian dialogue, Jesus's teaching about loving enemies really confronted me. It wasn't just information I had to memorize but a claim on my life that I had to wrestle with. That's authority, when the text makes demands on you, not just when someone tells you that you have to believe it."

Teachers expressed initial anxiety about this reconceptualization of authority, fearing it might undermine students' commitment to Scripture or open doors to hermeneutical relativism. However, observations and student products suggested that dialogical authority actually deepened students' engagement with biblical texts. Rather than passively accepting interpretations because teachers or traditions declared them correct, students actively grappled with texts, allowing Scripture to question their assumptions and reshape their understanding. Teacher Maria reflected: "I was worried that Gadamerian hermeneutics would make students less respectful of biblical authority. What I found was the opposite. Students took the Bible more seriously when they engaged it as dialogue rather than just receiving it as information. The authority became more real, more personal, more transformative."

The fifth theme addresses students' development of metacognitive awareness about interpretation. Traditional Bible pedagogy rarely makes interpretation itself an object of reflection; students learn to interpret without necessarily understanding what interpretation is or recognizing themselves as interpreters. Gadamerian pedagogy, by explicitly teaching hermeneutical concepts and making interpretive processes visible, cultivated metacognitive capacities that enabled students to understand and monitor their own interpretive practices.

Students demonstrated increased awareness of their interpretive horizons, recognizing that their cultural location, personal experiences, and theological traditions shaped their readings of Scripture. When studying Psalms of lament, students initially struggled with the texts' raw expressions of doubt, anger, and despair, finding them uncomfortable or even inappropriate for Scripture. Through guided reflection on their own horizons, students recognized that their discomfort stemmed from Indonesian cultural norms that discourage direct expression of negative emotions and from pietistic traditions that emphasize constant joy and gratitude. This metacognitive awareness enabled students to appreciate how their horizons had been limiting their understanding and to approach the Psalms with openness to encountering perspectives different from their own.

Students also developed awareness of effective history, recognizing that interpretive traditions shaped their expectations and possibilities. When asked to interpret Genesis chapter one, students initially proposed young-earth creationist readings not because they had carefully examined the text but because this interpretation dominated their church traditions. Making effective history visible helped students distinguish between the text itself and the accumulated layers of interpretation tradition had deposited. This did not mean rejecting tradition but engaging it critically, recognizing both its productive contributions and its potential limitations.

Focus group discussions revealed students' growing sophistication in thinking about interpretation. One exchange is illustrative. Student Priscilla observed: "I never realized how much my own background affected how I read the Bible. I just thought I was reading what was there. Now I see that what I notice in a text, what I ignore, what I think is important, all of this is shaped by who I am and where I come from." Student Daniel added: "Yeah, and it's not just us as individuals. Our whole church tradition interprets the Bible in certain ways, and we don't even realize it because it seems natural. Gadamerian hermeneutics helped me see that there's no interpretation that's just objectively neutral. Everyone interprets from somewhere."

This metacognitive awareness proved valuable beyond Bible class. Students reported applying hermeneutical insights to their reading of other texts, their consumption of social media, and their navigation of contested truth claims in Indonesian public discourse. The capacity to recognize interpretive horizons, appreciate effective history, and engage dialogically with different perspectives equipped students for epistemological challenges that extend far beyond biblical studies.

While the findings demonstrate significant benefits of Gadamerian hermeneutic pedagogy, implementation also faced notable challenges. First, teachers struggled with the philosophical depth and abstraction of Gadamerian concepts, requiring sustained professional development that many schools lack resources to provide. Second, students initially resisted the slower, more reflective pace of Gadamerian interpretation after years of socialization into rapid information consumption and quick answers. Third, institutional pressures for standardized outcomes and measurable learning objectives created tension with Gadamerian pedagogy's emphasis on open-ended dialogue and emergent understanding. Fourth, evangelical doctrinal commitments sometimes conflicted with Gadamerian hermeneutical openness, particularly around questions of biblical inerrancy and singular correct interpretations.

These challenges suggest that successful implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutic pedagogy requires not just individual teacher initiative but systemic institutional support

including administrative commitment to pedagogical innovation, curriculum structures that allow extended engagement with fewer texts rather than rapid coverage of many texts, assessment approaches that value interpretive process and hermeneutical sophistication rather than content recall, and theological frameworks that can integrate Gadamerian insights with evangelical commitments to biblical authority.

## **CONCLUSION**

This research demonstrates that Gadamerian hermeneutic principles can be successfully adapted into pedagogical practices that significantly enhance digital native students' engagement with biblical texts and development of sophisticated interpretive capabilities. The implementation of concepts including fusion of horizons, effective history, and dialogical understanding transformed students' reading practices from passive reception to active interpretive dialogue, increased their capacity to navigate interpretive plurality productively, enhanced their ability to bridge ancient texts with contemporary contexts, reconceptualized their understanding of biblical authority from propositional to dialogical, and developed metacognitive awareness about their own interpretive practices.

These findings contribute to biblical pedagogy by offering a theoretically grounded framework specifically addressing the epistemological orientations and cognitive preferences of digital natives. While previous research has documented digital natives' resistance to traditional biblical pedagogy, this study moves beyond critique to demonstrate viable alternatives rooted in sophisticated hermeneutical philosophy. The successful implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutics suggests that the perceived incompatibility between digital native students and serious biblical study stems not from students' deficiencies but from pedagogical approaches misaligned with their ways of knowing.

The research also contributes to broader discussions about the role of philosophical hermeneutics in practical theology and religious education. Gadamer's hermeneutics has traditionally been engaged at graduate theological education levels, with limited attention to its potential for adolescent learners. This study demonstrates that key Gadamerian concepts, when adapted pedagogically through careful instructional design and supported by adequate teacher preparation, can be made accessible and valuable for high school students, expanding our understanding of where and how philosophical hermeneutics can inform practice.

For practitioners, this research offers concrete guidance for implementing Gadamerian hermeneutic pedagogy including specific instructional strategies for horizon articulation, historical reconstruction, dialogical engagement, and horizon fusion; frameworks for redesigning curriculum around sustained engagement with fewer texts; assessment approaches that evaluate interpretive sophistication; and models for teacher professional development in philosophical hermeneutics. These practical contributions address the persistent gap between hermeneutical theory and pedagogical practice that has limited the impact of academic biblical scholarship on congregational and educational settings.

However, the research also reveals significant challenges requiring attention. The substantial professional development demands, institutional resistances, and theological tensions that emerged suggest that widespread implementation of Gadamerian hermeneutic pedagogy will require not just individual teacher initiative but systemic transformation of theological education, curriculum design, and institutional culture. Future research should explore sustainable models for teacher development, investigate long-term impacts on students' faith

formation and interpretive practices, examine the theological compatibility of Gadamerian hermeneutics with various Christian traditions, and develop assessment instruments that can measure hermeneutical sophistication in ways acceptable to institutional stakeholders.

Ultimately, this study contends that engaging digital native students meaningfully with biblical texts requires moving beyond surface-level technological adaptations to address fundamental questions about the nature of interpretation, authority, and understanding. Gadamerian hermeneutics offers not merely techniques for biblical interpretation but a comprehensive philosophical framework that can bridge the widening gap between ancient sacred texts and contemporary digital natives, creating spaces where genuine dialogue between horizons produces understanding that honors both the otherness of Scripture and the integrity of interpreters' contemporary contexts.

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