

Assessment in religious education through learning outcome levels

Research Article

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Abstract: The article analyzes the evaluation process in Religious Education through the lens of learning outcomes, emphasizing the qualitative-appreciative dimension over traditional quantitative methods. It advocates for the replacement of rigid grading systems with evaluative practices centered on the cognitive, volitional, and affective-attitudinal dimensions of student development. The study promotes a shift from control-based assessment to one rooted in metacognition, reflection, and personal transformation. Anchored in theological, pedagogical, and psychological perspectives, the article combines formative and summative assessment while highlighting the importance of students' moral and spiritual development. Based on a qualitative educational research project – questionnaire and focus groups conducted with students, teachers, and parents – this article demonstrates the effectiveness of outcome-based assessment in fostering responsibility, empathy, and internalized values. It argues for the redefinition of Religious Education as a discipline oriented toward the integral formation of the individual, through a meaningful, student-centered assessment process. Furthermore, the research confirms the compatibility of this model with current curricular and legislative provisions, proposing practical implementation tools and frameworks.

Keywords: *Religious education • Learning outcomes • Qualitative assessment • Student-centered evaluation • Moral and affective development*

1. Introduction

Choice, value, ordering, and relating all lead to evaluation.

“Observations made on human actions have led to the conclusion: the more complex an activity is, the more necessary evaluative actions become ... and amplify their roles.”

By observing evaluation within human interaction as an objective fact (ibid.), Ioan T. Radu identifies within the logic of actions the notion of “interest” – throughout and at the end of the activity – as the degree to which the intended goal has been achieved, and as the “legitimate desire to accomplish set goals and the necessity to adjust activity accordingly” (op. cit., p. 10).

Evaluation is a managerial action specific to socio-human systems, requiring the comparison of obtained results in a given activity to a set of domain-specific criteria, to make optimal decisions.

There is no uniform or universally accepted definition of evaluation – just as with other terms used in the social sciences, notes G. Mățăuan. Instead, there is a wide variety of interpretations depending on the goals, methodologies applied, and even the understanding of terms associated with evaluation (article in *Calitatea vieții*, p. 151).

Evaluation may involve “determining the value or success in achieving predetermined objectives,” thus referring back to what was initially planned. It includes at least the following steps: setting objectives, establishing criteria for measuring success, determining and explaining the degree of success, and recommending future actions (cited in G. Mățăuan).

Other times, evaluation may aim to redefine the means used to achieve the objectives or even to redefine some objectives according to research results.

In a context specific to this field, educator D. Lawton stated that evaluation decisions is based on values. He approached evaluation as a complex process within the

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pedagogical endeavor, unfolding over time, and necessary for three other characteristics: “evaluation aims to provide information on the probable success or failure of educational programs (or individuals); this information is or should be useful as a basis for making educational decisions; such decisions should be made in a context broader than the school or educational institution” (Lawton, op. cit., p. 16).

In conclusion, Webster’s Dictionary defines evaluation as “the examination and judgment of the value, quality, quantity, significance, level, or condition of something” (cited in G. Mățăuan).

“Value” refers to quality, conformity, compliance with a standard – meaning appreciation, but also attribution or association, expressing a comparison.

“Evaluation” refers to calculation, estimation (quantitative or qualitative), and determination.

The common perspective of appreciation unites the two concepts: from the standpoint of “value,” appreciation means recognition; from the standpoint of “evaluation,” it means analysis. These perspectives shape the direction of evaluating education as a qualitative-appreciative process.

2. Why outcome-based evaluation in religious education?

The added value lies in the shift from the traditional linear system of evaluation – based on cause and effect and a mechanistic vision – to one based on differentiation: a comprehensive, integrative approach.

This transition can be understood in terms of transformation and process, moving from the inertia of evaluation as measurement and control of memorized knowledge to the emergence of evaluation as metacognition and metaevaluation.

Evaluation in Religious Education based on learning outcome levels enables a transfer from a one-dimensional model of control and centralization – a standardized, conformist context – toward a systemic model that recognizes cognitive and affective-attitudinal levels. It introduces a new language and message: student participation in the act of evaluation (cooperation and engagement), accountability, and the possibility for students to be different – without the risk of labeling.

By reaching the levels defined by learning outcomes, students can shift from ambition, competition, and personal interest toward motivation, collaboration, consensus, empowerment, and personal development. They are drawn to contexts in which they can become actively involved. The learning context emerges more readily because it is guided by the student’s own vision, not only that of the teacher. The student

manages the knowledge provided through teaching-learning, while also developing creativity, autonomy, competence, and innovation.

Evaluation based on levels focuses on the student as a person, not merely on the assigned learning tasks. It highlights the strengths of the learning process – not just mistakes, errors, or weaknesses.

3. How is outcome-based evaluation conducted in religious education?

A superposition of two models is proposed – one based on the security provided by student compliance and the teacher’s paternalism, and another focused on the student’s vision and creativity and the teacher’s facilitation.

The goal is to achieve balance and context-appropriate adaptation: moving from binary judgments (right/wrong, true/false, good/bad) to responsibility, from “doing what is required” to “doing it the right way.”

The Religious Education teacher may adopt (and adapt) multiple roles in outcome-based assessment: collaborator in the process, facilitator, and reference point for the student’s transformation through learning.

This type of evaluation is process-oriented and, therefore, requires time. The conscious transformation of the student through Religious Education is one of the key goals of this educational act.

We are witnessing a “hybrid” model in which the student “manages” knowledge, chooses what is necessary, and builds a personal vision of reality, developing the competencies they desire.

- At each grade level, school curricula are organized around major themes, such as:
- God is with us through revelation and love (preparatory class),
- Man is with God through faith and prayer (Grade 1),
- God is love (Grade 2),
- About Christian faith (Grade 4), and
- Christ the Savior, the Perfect Teacher (Grade 5).

These themes aim to familiarize students with the religious domain and guide the formulation of specific competencies and the construction of learning situations in a flexible and creative way, adapted to students’ individual and developmental characteristics. Thus, learning content is aligned both with educational domains and with the major themes.

Methodological suggestions help ensure the success of the teaching process in Religious Education:

- Personalized teaching approaches,
- Development of curriculum-prescribed competencies tailored to each class and student, and
- Progressive competency development through age-appropriate experiences, emphasizing the affective-attitudinal and behavioral dimensions of student personality formation (e.g., emotional, moral-social, character-based, psychomotor dimensions – Neacșu, 2010, p. 275; Curriculum for Religious Education, Orthodox Faith, Grades Prep – II, Ministerial Order No. 3418/19.03.2013).

4. Purpose and objectives of the research

The research aims to identify the benefits brought by the qualitative-appreciative dimension of the evaluation process in Religious Education. The following themes were explored:

- Religion or Religious Education? (as the name of the subject),
- The efficiency of grades or marks in the assessment of Religious Education,
- Evaluation based on levels – components, learning outcomes – in Religious Education, and
- Correlation with the provisions of the evaluation process from the Pre-university Education Law no. 198/2023 (Art. 345).

The research was conducted in-depth – more intensively than extensively:

- Focused on processes,
- Aimed to highlight how students act, and
- Positioned more in the realm of discovery, starting from verification.

Subjectivity was valued, with the goal of understanding and interpreting observed behaviors.

5. Objectives pursued in the study

O1: To analyze the formative-integrative function of Religious Education to highlight the importance of emphasizing the qualitative-appreciative aspect of assessment within this subject.

O2: To collect teachers' opinions on lesson design and implementation (goals, formative values, assessed content, efficiency of evaluation tools) to emphasize the qualitative-evaluative dimension of Religious Education.

O3: To identify the opinions of various respondents (teachers, parents, students) regarding the relevance of

outcome-based assessment in Religious Education as an alternative to traditional quantifications (grades/marks) of student progress.

O4: To formulate a set of observations capable of improving the assessment process in Religious Education and developing teachers' evaluative competencies by using the matrix for assessment based on learning outcomes.

O5: Practical/applicative objectives: enabling students to make progress by becoming aware of their own feelings, emotions, values, and attitudes; increasing empathy and tolerance for others' opinions; improving interpersonal trust and sincerity; optimizing emotional responsibility; and enhancing knowledge, communication, and interaction skills.

6. Presumed variables in the research

Within the investigative project, the research variables were based on personal or shared teaching experiences. These were defined by the educational realities in which the respondents operate – realities that required, and still require, a thorough and relevant analysis.

The aim was to express more concretely and operationally those socio-educational factors that directly and intrinsically influence the didactic approach in Religious Education.

Types of variables:

- Sampling variables are as follows:
 - Residential environment,
 - Educational level of the school, and
 - Characteristics of the respondents (gender, age, teaching experience).
- Dependent variables are as follows:
 - Values,
 - Beliefs,
 - Attitudes,
 - Motivations,
 - Behaviors, and
 - Effects (judgments, consequences).
- Independent variables are as follows:
 - Gender (of teachers, parents of students attending Religion classes, and students themselves),
 - Residential environment (of teachers, parents, and students),
 - Students' age (depending on class level: 9, 10, 11, or 12 years old – with the possibility of analyzing overlapping age responses),

- Teachers' professional grade,
- Teaching experience,
- Parents' educational background, and
- Educational level in which their children are enrolled.

7. Research hypotheses – guidelines for the investigation

7.1 Primary hypotheses

H1: If evaluation in Religious Education targets learning outcomes (knowledge, skills, competencies), then the assessment process is more effective.

The focus will be on the quality of acquisitions, the process through which they are formed, and the values and attitudes cultivated and promoted by each student.

In Religious Education, assessment based on learning levels (cognitive and affective-attitudinal domains) is more effective – in terms of objectivity and usefulness for personality development – than assigning grades or marks.

If the forms and tools used in evaluating students in Religion classes target learning outcomes in the affective-attitudinal and behavioral domains, then assessment is truly consistent (reliable), concordant (objective), and applicable (in terms of administration and interpretation).

H2: If Religious Education, in addition to religious knowledge acquisition, encourages autonomy, emotional development (awareness, emotional experiences, authentic religious understanding), and students' civic-social competencies, then students' motivation to attend Religion classes will increase, along with higher levels of parental satisfaction and appreciation.

Assessment through learning outcome levels highlights the benefits of reflection – not only on the evaluation process but also on students' work and development – in both cognitive and affective domains (behavioral objectifications).

7.2 Secondary hypotheses

H3: The more activity planning is centered on objectives, the more the personal dimension of the student is ignored.

If the focus is on personal development and individuality, then Religious Education (through applying Christian principles in personal and community life) extends beyond the schooling period and becomes a foundation for lifelong values.

H4: Highlighting each student's individual nature and personal values is preferable to standardized evaluation in Religious Education.

Religious Education could evaluate based on the fulfillment of specific conditions (levels of appreciative-qualitative expression) and individual characteristics of each student.

8. Sample groups and their characteristics

The selected respondent categories were determined based on two key perspectives:

The potential for transferring the conclusions – ensuring replicability (see E. Stănculescu, 1998/2002, pp. 31–32 and Stănculescu, 2005, pp. 104–105):

“So that, starting from the results, we can determine whether the experience can and should be replicated elsewhere.”

Theoretical dimensions of the research subject – the idea that “the conclusions refer not to a population, but to a model of action” (idem, ibidem).

Thus, the sampling has theoretical value: the research is aimed at the purpose, not merely the population. However, the categories' relevance in educational settings and their influence on the Religious Education process give the study theoretical generalizability and also make it a useful practical model that can be replicated.

9. Sample representativeness and consistency

From the perspective of sample size and representativeness, the study is coherent and consistent in terms of sample categories and spread:

Four respondent categories (students, teachers, parents from two environments);

Geographic spread:

- Students: urban (1 school), rural (3 schools),
- Teachers: urban (15 schools), rural (20 schools), and
- Parents: from both urban and rural environments.

Sample structure summary:

- Grade IV students: mostly aged 10, from an urban school,
- Grade V students: mostly aged 11, from rural schools,
- Teachers: predominantly with over 9 years of experience, teaching primary level in rural areas, holding the highest teaching qualification, and

- Parents: majority with secondary education, living in rural areas, with children in lower secondary (gymnasium) education.

10. Methods, techniques, and research instruments

The methods used – directive, semi-directive, and non-directive – sought to establish relationships between variables and to test the hypotheses.

The study focused on small groups at different educational levels:

- Opinion questionnaires applied to fourth- and fifth-grade students (from both urban and rural areas),
- Questionnaires for Religion teachers, and
- Questionnaires for the parents of students attending Religion classes.

These aimed to capture both the consistency and intensity of the opinions expressed.

Triangulation and data collection tools:

A convergent application of multiple investigative approaches was used – combining questionnaires with focus groups, alongside participatory observation and document analysis – to identify key issues and formulate questionnaire items.

Questionnaires included closed-ended multiple-choice questions.

The final item in the student questionnaires (Grades IV and V) was open-ended, assessing students' awareness, motivation, and values.

The teacher questionnaire (CHCD) included a reproduction-based open-ended question near the end.

The parent questionnaire (CHP) contained a recognition-based open-ended item at the end.

10.1 Questionnaire structure

Introductory questions: gender, age, residential area, teaching experience, qualifications (CHCD and CHP only).

Transition questions: to establish the frame of reference.

Control questions: to ensure comprehension of the questionnaire content.

Questionnaire design techniques:

- For student questionnaires (CH4 and CH5): funnel technique (general to specific) and
- For teacher and parent questionnaires: inverted funnel technique (specific to general) (Chelcea, 2007, p. 218).

11. Operationalized concepts in questions

- The purpose of Religion classes (knowledge, values, Christian living),
- Practical aspects of content, priorities, learning styles, and lesson time allocation,
- Development of other competencies (autonomy, emotional self-regulation),
- Perceptions of grades/marks,
- Limitations of grades in reflecting student knowledge and experience,
- Effective forms of assessment, and
- Evaluation through learning outcome levels.

12. Rationale behind the questionnaires applied to students and educational stakeholders

As early as the seventeenth century, Comenius emphasized in his work *The Mother School* the educational role of the family (Radu & Ezechil, 2002, p. 99). In the context of Religious Education, the educational importance of the family lies in its affective and moral proximity to the child-student.

Significant pedagogical elements, referred to by Gaston Mialaret as “facts and situations of education” (in Radu & Ezechil, 2002, p. 99), must also be considered – these informal environments are a source of learning for students.

School promotes “education in accordance with moral values” and has a value-oriented (axiological) mission that arises from the teleological nature of education itself (idem, pp. 101–115).

13. Questionnaire design intentions

- The wording of items aimed to be accessible and relatable, using students' own language, not highly technical or abstract, but clearly positive or negative, to generate meaningful responses.
- The questions aimed to detect the presence or absence of general yet integrative traits, skills, and attitudes, without requiring respondents to issue complex value judgments.
- Items for students were formulated prescriptively or exploratorily, while for parents and teachers, they were shaped around frequency and perceived usefulness.

14. Quality criteria for the questionnaires

- **Validity:** The extent to which the tool measures what it is intended to measure (e.g., motivation, interest, engagement, relationships). The questionnaire for students was administered before and after evaluation using the outcome-level matrix.
- **Reliability:** Ensured through the use of the equivalence method, such as observing students' post-evaluation behavior and progress (cited in Stoica, 2001, p. 49).
- **Applicability:** Achieved through congruence between question design and respondents' understanding levels – particularly important for students – and ease of administration across diverse contexts.
- Questionnaires were confidential and administered by Religion teachers from the sample schools, following prior technical training. They were distributed in printed format, with identical versions for each respondent.

15. Presentation of the applied questionnaires

15.1 Questionnaire for fourth-grade students

A questionnaire focused on the students' perception, encouraging reflection on what is interesting and enjoyable during Religion class.

Variables:

Age: 10–11 years (standard); occasionally 9 years,

Gender: male/female, and

Environment: urban/rural.

Eight items:

Item 1 (content/behaviors) – three choices linked to curriculum units exploring Christian identity, Jesus's life, Old Testament characters, and divine commandments.

Item 2 (theoretical/factual knowledge) – two choices aimed at religious knowledge and desired behaviors.

Item 3 (fear of grades vs desire to know) – three choices to explore learning motivation.

Item 4 (learning for school vs life) – three choices exploring life purpose.

Item 5 (authority vs personal interest) – five choices examining what the student values most in being graded.

Item 6 – three choices on what should be appreciated in evaluation.

Item 7 – three choices about what grades should reflect (knowledge, behavior, etc.).

Item 8 – open-ended question asking for a justification of the preferred evaluation method (focusing on attitudes, values, and formed capacities).

15.2 Questionnaire for fifth-grade students

A similar perception-based questionnaire was adapted for the next developmental stage.

Variables:

Age: 10–11 years (standard); occasionally 12 years,

Gender: male/female, and

Environment: urban/rural.

Seven items:

Item 1 – five choices about general curriculum topics-identity, religious knowledge, behavior, Church affiliation, and historical context.

Item 2 – two choices on interests in religious teachings vs moral norms.

Item 3 – four choices on goals for religious education-civic, spiritual, both, or no interest.

Item 4 – three choices on motivation for grades (includes “no opinion”).

Item 5 – five choices on how students perceive the importance of grades and their sources (self, parents, teacher).

Item 6 – three choices on what the grade reflects.

Item 7 – open-ended question on whether behavior and values should be assessed – and why.

15.3 Questionnaire for religion teachers

Focuses on teachers' perceptions and satisfaction, and encourages self-reflection on what is valued and pursued in Religion classes.

Variables:

Gender,

Teaching experience: 1–3, 4–8, and 9–15 years,

Professional grade: definitive, Grade II, and Grade I,

School level: primary/lower secondary, and

Environment: urban/rural.

Twelve items include:

Frequency of prioritizing practical content,

Frequency of improving teaching based on evaluation,

Personalized approaches aligned with students' learning styles,

Readiness to change based on student performance,

Concern for in-depth understanding of curriculum topics,

Understanding the character-building mission of Religious Education,

Concern for developing student autonomy,
 Alignment between students' thoughts, emotions, and behaviors,
 What grades/marks actually assess,
 Opinion on outcome-based assessment (knowledge, skills, competencies),
 Tools used and frequency of use, with space for additional methods, and
 Ranking of learning outcomes based on frequency of evaluation (with space to add new outcomes).

15.4 Questionnaire for parents

Aims to understand parents' perceptions and satisfaction regarding their children's experience and progress in Religion class.

Variables:

Gender: male/female,

Education: secondary/higher,

Environment: urban/rural, and

Child's educational level: primary, lower secondary, upper secondary.

Eight items are as follows:

Views on moral/character education in Religion class,

Perceived value of religious-spiritual learning,

Views on Religion's role in civic/social development,

Frequency and usefulness of knowledge acquired,

Importance attributed by the child to grades in Religion,

Importance of learning outcomes for the child,

Perception of Religion class values (axiology: values and attitudes), and

Preferred and relevant evaluation forms (closed + open response options).

16. Focus group method

The focus group method offers participants the opportunity to engage in both evaluating the significance of the gathered information and in the subsequent effort for intervention and change proposed by the issues discussed.

It was used as a qualitative research method addressing the educational approach in Religious Education from the perspective of the student's inner transformation and development, specifically in the context of evaluation through learning outcome levels (knowledge, skills, and acquired competencies).

Purpose of the focus group:

The method was applied after the opinion questionnaires to:

- Reinforce and verify the researched concepts and

- Enrich and dynamize the research process.
- The approach was two fold:
 - From the perspective of the "problem" being researched and
 - From the perspective of the "solutions" proposed by participants.
- In addition to collecting spontaneous and personal responses, the method allowed the observation of non-verbal behaviors, which enhanced the depth and quality of the information.
- Focus points of the group discussions:
- Changed attitudes resulting from persuasive opinions by a single skeptical participant,
- Spontaneity and authentic disclosures,
- Conflicts or competition of ideas to uncover opposing viewpoints,
- Unfiltered input from participants,
- Situational elements that either enable or hinder generalization,
- Direct impressions of participants' attitudes and beliefs (Hy Miriampolski in Chelcea, 2007),
- Examination of values, and
- Assessment of consequences, advantages, and disadvantages of different choices (Iluț, 1997, p. 95).

Operational details are as follows:

- Moderator: the project author,
- Data collection and analysis: two additional individuals,
- Duration: 1–1.5 h,
- Participants: 8–9 individuals, and
- Participant profiles: mixed backgrounds but connected to Religious Education (beneficiaries, practitioners, monitors, decision-makers).
- Selection criteria are as follows:
 - Adequate knowledge of the field,
 - Familiarity with the topic,
 - Decision-making capacity in education, and
 - Direct involvement (e.g., as parents, teachers, or stakeholders).
- Number of discussion subgroups: 3.

Indicators observed are as follows:

- Motivation,
- Interest,
- Involvement/pro-activity, and
- Promptness.
- Data analysis:
- Based on notes and audio recordings.
- Interview guide:
 - Issues discussed: seven, aligned with the operationalized concepts in the opinion questionnaires,
 - Major areas of interest: Religious Education, holistic child development,

- Question design: logical sequencing, exploratory and key questions, “sensitive” items,
- Moderator approach: neutral, naïve questioning, active listening, effective communication, and
- Final step: sorting data for content analysis (Krueger & Casey, 2005, p. 126).

17. Statistical methods for data processing and interpretation

The connection between the data obtained and the research goals/objectives required a process of correlation, hierarchical structuring, and a multi-perspective approach, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative dimensions.

Data processing approach – iterative steps:

- Reading and annotation,
- Classification and categorization (defining categories and assigning data to them),
- Linking and connecting data,
- Holistic interpretation of data and interrelations, and
- Drafting the research report, which validates the hypotheses (Iluț, 1997, p. 162).

Types of statistical indicators used are as follows:

- For nominal variables, common statistical indicators were used, such as distribution and structure of responses.
- For quantitative items, indicators were selected to provide information about central tendency (means) and dispersion (variability).
- In the case of multiple-choice items (with multiple coded responses), the average number of responses per item was also tracked (Potolea et al., 2008, pp. 71–72).

The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 18 (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences, version 18) (Labăr, 2008).

18. Research limitations

The limitations of the research are linked to the following dimensions:

- The role of the research (purpose/objectives)
 - The need to solve a critical issue: “What is being assessed in the Religion subject?,”
 - The opportunity to valorize the European paradigm of outcome-based evaluation,
 - The pioneering nature of this type of research in the field, and
 - The inability of subject-specific pedagogy to integrate components from other research domains.
- The research process (methodology)

- The correlated/interrelated activities required for specifying, measuring, collecting, interpreting, and communicating results and
- The generalized empiricism of educational stakeholders (especially religious education representatives).
- Objectivity of research results
 - Challenges in selecting the most appropriate research methods and tools,
 - Potential data collection distortions,
 - Influence of personal subjectivity or overreliance on individual experiences,
 - Imprecision or confusion between what is familiar and what is truly known,
 - Errors from ordinary phenomena: e.g., bias from the order in which information is presented or the belief that one’s own perspective is the only valid one, and
 - Risk of overgeneralization from the surveyed population to a broader context.
- Utilization of research results
 - The results are optional in character,
 - They are descriptive, focused on depicting the current state of evaluation practices, and
 - They are explanatory, highlighting causes of current shortcomings and only proposing an instrument (learning outcome matrix) that is not yet validated at the macro level (see Ghe. Orzan, Defining Coordinates of Marketing Research).
- Time constraints
 - The relatively short time frame (6 months) for piloting and applying the questionnaires and
 - The evaluation matrix was applied only twice during the study.
- Functional and spatial (factual) limitations
 - Student respondents came from four schools (one urban, three rural) and
 - Teachers were from 35 schools (15 urban, 20 rural).

19. Results and interpretation of data

19.1 Quantitative variables – interpretation of key data

The analysis of the most relevant quantitative variables from the applied questionnaires reveals the following:

Among the Religion teachers surveyed, the majority have over 9 years of teaching experience, hold the highest

teaching degree, and work at the primary level in rural areas.

Most parents who responded have completed secondary education, live in rural environments, and have children enrolled in lower secondary education.

The fourth-grade students are primarily aged 10 and attend an urban school.

The fifth-grade students are primarily aged 11 and attend rural schools.

The values recorded for these variables show standard deviations above the mean, indicating a positive tendency in responses – supporting the research direction.

Distribution of responses:

- Skewness: Of the ten variables analyzed, five had negative skewness (left-skewed: variables 1, 2, 4, 5, 6) and five had positive skewness (right-skewed: variables 3, 7, 8, 9, 10).
- Kurtosis: Eight variables showed negative kurtosis, resulting in flatter distribution curves, while two (variables 7 and 9) had positive kurtosis, indicating peaked distributions.

20. Correlations between questionnaire variables

Based on theoretical and practical foundations, the research aimed to identify inter-variable relationships across sample categories.

A. Students' perspective (as research resources and beneficiaries)

Questionnaires compared: Grade IV (CH4) vs Grade V (CH5)

Age variable (coded 1–3): values overlap (10–11 years), allowing comparisons across same-age respondents.

Item 1: Investigates student interest/enjoyment in general Religion class themes (curriculum-aligned).

Item 2: Explores the behavioral dimension and the application of religious knowledge.

Item 5: Assesses student motivation for evaluation – appreciation, self-worth, future orientation.

Item 6: Clarifies whether students see evaluation as assessing only knowledge or something more holistic.

Item 7: Subjective insights on whether evaluation should consider values, experiences, and attitudes.

B. Teacher and parent perspectives

Item 6 (teachers): “The purpose of teaching Religion is to shape personalities aligned with Christian values by integrating religious knowledge into moral attitudes and applying doctrine in personal/community life.”

Item 3 (parents): “Religion class helps form students' personalities and develop civic, social, and cultural competencies.”

Item 11 (teachers): Instruments used for assessing student preparedness.

Item 8 (parents): Preferred evaluation forms considered relevant for assessing children's progress in Religion class.

21. Analysis of responses to open-ended items

21.1 Parent questionnaire (CHP) – open-ended item (Item 8)

Question: “What form of assessment do you consider relevant for evaluating your child's performance in Religion class?”

Out of 100 parent respondents, only 54% proposed specific assessment methods.

Among these, 60% were mothers with higher education, urban residence, and a high level of awareness and involvement in their children's schooling.

These parents typically support their children's participation in Religion classes not necessarily from deep religious convictions, but out of a desire to preserve religious memory and transmit basic values, e.g., what is done and what is not, often seeing religion as a “spiritual fallback” in difficult moments (Bănică, Revista 22, October 16, 2012).

They advocate for a Religious Education that provides functional religious culture, open to broader perspectives, yet rooted in identity awareness.

Suggestions included are as follows:

Interdisciplinary and applied approaches: assessing religious knowledge in connection with other competencies and informal experiences (e.g., personal faith, moral behavior).

Extracurricular activities: such as field trips, exhibitions, religious contests, or community service, where teachers assess behavior and participation based on predefined criteria.

Parish-level engagement: informal, pedagogically designed activities conducted in collaboration with religious institutions.

Across responses, there is a consistent call for alternatives to traditional assessment that better reflect internalized knowledge and values.

21.2 Teacher questionnaire (CHCD) – open-ended item (Item 15)

Question: “What form (instrument) of assessment do you use to evaluate students’ performance in Religion class, and how frequently do you use it?”

Respondent profile:

Religion teachers from urban secondary schools with 9–15 years of experience and Grade I teaching certification; equal representation of male and female respondents.

Suggestions included are as follows:

- Reflective techniques: encouraging students to process and apply knowledge critically,
- Case studies, real-life situations, and informal learning contexts to demonstrate competency acquisition, and
- Group discussions (“round tables”), pair/group work, and experience sharing to develop communication, empathy, and religious expression.
- These proposals reinforce the reflective nature of Religion as a subject and promote the restructuring and deepening of student knowledge through personal and spiritual engagement.

22. Conclusions from students of other confessions attending Orthodox Religion classes

- It is particularly significant to note that the answers provided by students of non-Orthodox confessions who attend Orthodox Religion classes reinforce the broader conclusions drawn from the overall research.
- According to the provisions of the Romanian Ministry of Education (Notes on the Teaching of Religion in Schools, no. 19283/25.04.2005, and no. 9715/10.04.1996), students from minority religious confessions may choose to attend Religion classes offered by the dominant confession (Orthodox).
- In the Grade V sample from both urban and rural schools, 18 students out of 110 belonged to other denominations: Adventist, Baptist, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Although not the focus group, they were included because of their relevance to lower secondary education – a phase where value systems, aspirations, and autonomous thinking begin to consolidate.

Summary of their responses (Items 1–6 of CH5):

- Item 1 – “What I like learning about in Religion class”
 - Most common response: How I should behave at school, home, and church and
 - Least common: Christian holidays.
- Item 2 – “What is most enjoyable to know about in Religion class”

- Most common: How to be a good Christian and
- Least common: Facts about God.
- Item 3 – “It is important for me to be...”
 - Most common: Both a good citizen and a good Christian and
 - Least common: Just a good citizen.
- Item 4 – “I study in Religion class to get a grade”
 - Most common: No and
 - Least common: Don’t know.
- Item 5 – “The grade in Religion is important to me...”
 - Most common: Because of what I’ll know for life and
 - Least common: To please the teacher or my parents.
- Item 6 – “Grades in Religion show...”
 - Most common: That I know how to behave in church and
 - Least common: That I know how to treat classmates.

Interpretation:

The responses from these non-Orthodox students confirm key ideas proposed in the study’s evaluation model:

Purpose of Religion classes: to provide moral guidance and foster personal development aligned with values, regardless of denomination.

Their answers reflect a practical, behavior-oriented understanding of religious education.

Their reasons for participation echo those of Orthodox peers: the importance of values, not doctrine, and the desire for life-applicable moral knowledge.

23. General conclusions, proposals, and future directions

23.1 General conclusions

- Assessment based on learning outcome levels in Religious Education proves to be more effective, holistic, and student-centered than traditional grades or marks.
- This model allows students to reflect on their inner growth, behavior, and values, fostering not only academic performance but also spiritual and emotional development.
- Teachers who implement this approach develop greater sensitivity to students’ individual needs and become facilitators of self-discovery and transformation.
- Parents express increased satisfaction when evaluation emphasizes meaningful personal development over numeric performance.

- Even students from other religious backgrounds find value in the approach, confirming its inclusive and axiological relevance.

23.2 Proposals for optimization

- Implement teacher training programs focused on designing and applying evaluation tools based on learning outcomes.
- Revise curricular documents to explicitly include affective and attitudinal evaluation descriptors.
- Promote collaborative models of evaluation where students are active participants in assessing their own progress.
- Encourage use of non-formal and informal learning contexts (e.g., service learning, community involvement) as part of evaluative processes.

23.3 Research limitations and future directions

- The research was limited in time (6 months) and geographical scope (4 student groups, 35 schools), which constrains broader generalization.
- The evaluative matrix proposed was not macro-validated across the national system.
- Future research should aim to:
 - o Pilot the learning outcome-based matrix on a wider scale;
 - o Explore interdisciplinary links (e.g., Religion – Civics or Religion – Ethics);
 - o Evaluate long-term impact on student values, civic engagement, and moral decision-making.

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