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The Subjectivity of the Grading Evaluation System in the Religious Class in Greece - A New Approach

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Abstract:

Introduction: The grading process in secondary education is always challenging to navigate since the subjective dimension of the human parameter always seems to interfere dynamically in combination with the variety of the submitted assessment questions grounded on the grading teacher's style. The central questions asked are: a) what are the applied assessment styles among Greek Religious Education (RE) teachers? b) What are their main assessment criteria? Moreover, c) What kind of evaluation plans are used to benefit the students? The above assessment issue is affected by the culture and mentality of each teacher.

Methods: The method uses a quantitative survey designed by Google Forms to research the grading and topic patterns used by RE teachers and colleagues of humanities during their class assessments, both oral and written.

Results: RE teachers have particular inclinations concerning the students' assessment issues. They consider their discipline demanding and often prefer to apply written form assessments in class. Moreover, more methods emerged, which belong to the new school perception but are still placed statistically as auxiliary assessment weaponry. Microsoft Excel was also used for data visualization and quantitative analysis.

Discussion: The assessment point of view might differ in each subject's nature and, indeed, be planned by the objectives of each teacher. However, RE teachers and affiliated colleagues (literature teachers – affiliated colleagues should prioritise adjusting knowledge to the social realm.

Limitations: The present research paper aims to stimulate educational interest regarding RE evaluation subjectivity by converting some subjective elements into precise statistical questions. Therefore, the questions used were a few but

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accurate, while the magnitude of the participants needed to be bigger, hindering the accumulation of more statistical information.
Conclusions: Written-test assessments are prioritized, though oral inquiries are vital to the RE teachers' methodology because of time scheduling issues explained throughout the text. The whole assessment scenery is grounded on the fact that RE discipline is considered demanding and essential. Some statistical inconsistencies undergird the necessity of applying knowledge in the social praxis to benefit Greek society. The latter lack is a drawback.

Key words: subjectivity, evaluation, quantitative method, communication.

Introduction

When the semester is about to end, and grades need to be submitted, students of (upper) secondary education experience a stressful occurrence during the schooling assessment (Trueba et al., 2013, p. 206). However, the assessment process emerges as necessary to improve cognitive and teaching functions and keeps vital data measurements archived for future comparisons (Scheerens, 2000, p. 5). In Greece, the evaluation culture and processes were subdued for numerous decades. There has been no teaching evaluation process or educational statistical measurement archives in Greek Middle Education on a systematic basis since 1980. Only via the New Democracy party on power (2019-2020) did the vertical and horizontal assessment process in the education field revive from the political agenda and be implemented despite the peculiar political and union opposition or other application defects that emerged. The assessment process, though in the present context, adheres to the specific logic by which Religion Education teachers and affiliated disciplines (RE&aff) assess their (upper)secondary students orally or in written form, determining their studentship performance (Scheerens, 2000) without disregarding the importance of the assessment of the teaching processes (Tucker & Stronge, 2005, p.1). On the other hand, RE discipline is not examined at the end of the semester[1] as it used to; thus, RE teachers have all the necessary time to plan their curriculum didactics creatively and sufficiently instead.

In the present context, the student's performance evaluation approach was considered critical in upgrading the RE didactics and advancing the RE teacher's role and effectiveness during class (Hord, 1997, p. 2). Their cumulative assessment was divided into two essential categories: a) oral performance examination and b) written performance evaluation. The former assessment is

[1] Presidential Decree 126/2016

considered a simple tool for checking the students' studying readiness and critical capacity (Burris, 2011, p. 215)[2]. RE teachers usually draw on their student's oral permanence to formulate their grading portrait. However, there might still be other additional criteria to be considered. The grading portrait is also assessed by their written performance (Sattler, 2008), which might be diverted into two branches: a) fifteen minutes written tests (forty-five minutes is the complete class duration in each discipline in Greek public schools) and b) forty-five minutes written tests, which cover a group of teaching material assessment.

Of course, developing pedagogical teamwork tasks, one-to-one assignments groups of two or more projects, interactive work groups, theatrical or role-play performances, or even producing table games concerning the central teaching plan style is more than welcome to enhance the studying vibration of the class and facilitate in great respect the learning effect (Larson & Keiper, 2013, pp. 8-9). The means mentioned above are more than sufficient to evaluate the students' participation and stance on learning and self-development. Therefore, the assessment process of students becomes more complicated and should be focused on when the criteria seem to be increased; on the other hand, while the learning requirements appear to be decreased, the assessment process is proposed to be simplified on a grand scale accordingly.

1 Purpose

The purpose of the present research is: a) to emerge the necessity of the quantitative or even qualitative evaluation during religion classes as well as the subjective criteria of the teachers used each time (Zaviš & Procházka, 2020, p. 32), b) The evaluation process regarding subjectivity is complex and involves considering various pieces of information about the students. This information plays a significant role in forming a dynamic school strategy, which the religious teacher should keep in mind and adjust accordingly in each student case. c) to illustrate the geographical grading culture diversion of the secondary school units involved in the research and d) to frame a necessary context of a broader evaluation mentality giving students a chance to learn and make progress. (Dojčár, Zaviš, & Pinčeková, 2022, p. 216).

[2] An exciting form of critical capacity implementation is PBL (Problem-Based Learning) in Burris (2017).

2 Methodology

Since RE teachers dispose of a vast teaching creativity freedom during their class (Elton-Chalcraft, 2014, p. 6), the assessment subjectivity issue is gradually increased, making the assessment process feel more relative. The latter holds a lot more during the oral assessment than written because the evaluator-teachers can assess further fundamental cognitive and psychological facts of their students, e.g., judgmental and synthesis capacities, memorising and understanding skills, problem-solving capacities, communication effectiveness, and social stances and character sensitivities. Nevertheless, from a methodological aspect, the examination test inquiries, their combination utility for students' evaluation, and their enhancement by supplementary cognitive questions consist of several objective areas, which have been critically considered for shaping a research survey via Google Forms. The latter was initiated from 11-5-2023 until 30-5-2023 and included nine (9) questions based on multiple choice and Likert scale methodology. The research survey is quantitative (Sukamolson, 2007, pp. 1-20). It accumulates statistical data from (upper) secondary school RE Teachers from South and North Greece, searching for the assessment style adopted in the RE students' evaluation process. Several (upper)secondary schools of Greek islands also participated in the survey. The schools were randomly selected, and the researcher sent the survey link via e-mail to the principal offices accordingly, assuring the recipients of its academic research character and anonymity. The participation of the teacher colleagues was voluntary. The school units that participated are listed below:

Table 1

Survey schools

	SURVEY SCHOOLS
1	KASTELLI SECONDARY SCHOOL (C.R.E.T.E.)
2	ARKALOCHORI HIGH SCHOOL (CRETE)
3	ANTIKYRA VIOTIA HIGH SCHOOL
4	28th SECONDARY SCHOOL OF THESSALONIKI
5	5th SECONDARY SCHOOL OF RODOS
6	1st HIGH SCHOOL OF IOANNINA
7	5th HIGH SCHOOL OF IOANNINA
8	36th SECONDARY SCHOOL OF ATHENS
9	9th SECONDARY SCHOOL PIRAEUS
10	2ND SECONDARY SCHOOL OF FARSALA
11	LEPTOKARYA HIGH SCHOOL
12	1st PYRGOS HIGH SCHOOL
13	PYLIS SECONDARY SCHOOL (DERVENOHORIA)
14	1st SECONDARY SCHOOL OF VOLOU
15	TINOS SECONDARY SCHOOL
16	SECONDARY SCHOOL OF MILEON (P.E.L.I.O.N.)

17	1st HIGH SCHOOL OF CORFU
18	ITHAKA SECONDARY SCHOOL
19	RIZION EVRO'S SECONDARY SCHOOL
20	2ND SECONDARY SCHOOL OF ATHENS

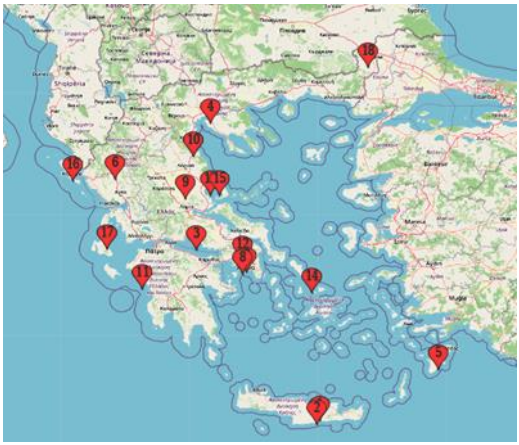


Figure 1. Geographical illustration of schools' location.

RE teachers and RE&aff[3] were encouraged to participate in the survey from the above school units. Thirteen (13) RE&aff finally filled out the questionnaire form, providing a statistical glance at the qualitative (upper) secondary school assessment issues. The above reply pool could not be representative because of its small magnitude. Still, it focuses on the school and academic interest in the study evaluation matter and, therefore, was considered high in this research, providing helpful hints and information. As it would be further depicted, there was and still is an occupational taboo in the education system in Greece regarding mainly the personal adoption or even sharing of a teaching (or evaluation) method (Alstyne & Marshall, 2005, pp. 24-28) among colleagues regardless the best practices culture gradually emerging. Teachers seem unwilling to share teaching methods with others, especially older associates. The study hypothesis was successfully confirmed due to the low participant turnout and lack of analytical response. The school units were randomly selected but still based on the bow logic (the map pointers are shaping a geographical bow)

[3] RE teachers and affiliated colleagues.

illustration as depicted on the map). Microsoft Excel and the pivot tables produced were used to extract results.

3 Results

Interestingly, most of the replies provided descend from secondary schools (76.9%) in contrast with high schools (23.1%). The latter (Table 4.1) is emphasised as normality since most participating schools were categorised as secondary, regardless of the colleagues filling in the survey form (besides, Secondary schools were mostly preferred as survey recipients, after all). Furthermore, when asked about the difficulty of the RE discipline (Table 4.2) or of the one related to it, most participants (38.5%) considered it quite demanding (Ene & Barna, 2015, pp. 50-51), while 30.5% categorised it as requiring (Ene & Barna, 2015). Therefore, the difficulty of the RE issue spectrum is created by focusing on the teaching demands of the RE discipline.

Table 2

School units' participation

Where do you teach?	*Where do you teach?*	*%*
High School	3	23.08
Secondary School	10	76.92
Total	13	100

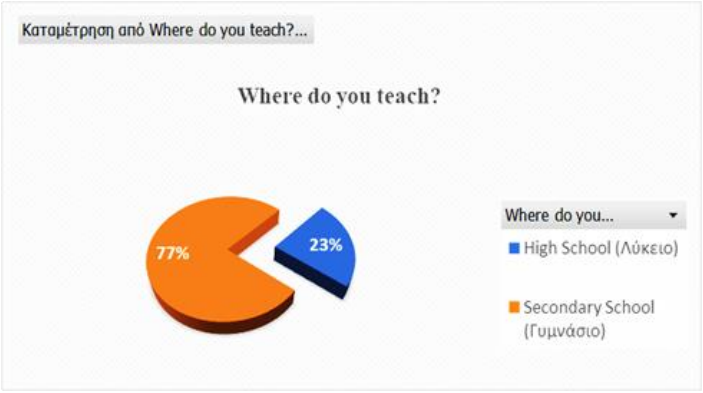


Figure 2. School units' participation

The second researched issue adheres to the range of difficulty of RE discipline (or RE&aff discipline) according to the subjective estimation of each colleague participating in the survey. It emerges that there is a high-difficulty evaluation as follows:

Table 3

Difficulty range

	Number	*%*
In what degree of difficulty would your subject be positioned?		
average	1	7.69
demanding	4	30.77
easy	3	23.08
very demanding	5	38.46
Total		100.00

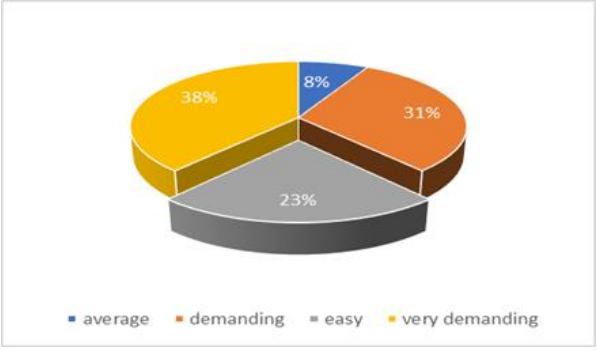


Figure 3. Difficulty grade.

As observed, 38% of the participants regard RE discipline as very demanding, while 31% consider it just demanding. The point is that a challenging subject is usually escorted with test or project assignments regularly[4]. The following results seem to be quite captivating:

[4] Interestingly, Nigel F. argues: "In research about religious education, there has been considerable attention to curriculum, notably in defining the religions(s) and skills to be learned, and some attention to pedagogy, for example, in terms of classroom talk and dialogue; over the years assessment has received somewhat less attention, but is increasingly in the spotlight." (Nigel, 2016, p. 2)

Table 4

Assignments frequency

		%
How often do you assign written tests to your class?		
never	2	15.38
often	3	23.08
rarely	7	53.85
very often	1	7.69
Total	13	100.00

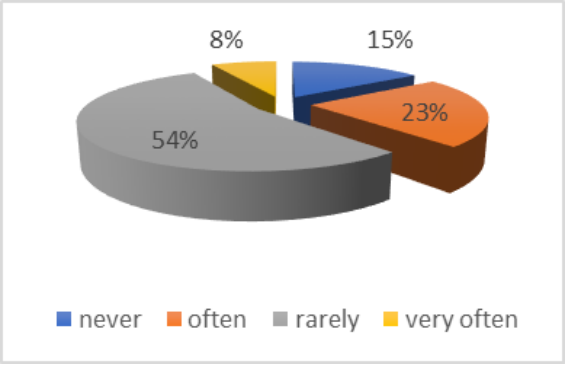


Figure 4. Assignment frequency.

A more dynamic statistical consistency should be applied concerning the correlation between the RE discipline's significance (or the scale of effort) and the test assignment frequency since 54% of the participants confirm that there is no need for systematically written test assignments. Thus, the problem of a high-graded difficulty definition and discipline significance turns out to be more of a theoretical magnitude, or it could even be claimed that there is no such correlation whatsoever. The latter seems odd because essential knowledge (logically correlated with the subject's significance) should be formally assessed for students to have a more concise and solid understanding of their subject. However, as Nigel depicted (2016), systematic assessment in RE was not an initial goal that ultimately corresponds to the Greek educational occasion. The latter includes many truth doses since the RE subject stopped being a final examined one.

Furthermore, the oral examination on an everyday basis consists of an essential tool for the student's assessment, even if at a subconscious level (if not

willingly), by the RE teachers since oral communication stands primary for verbal connection between teachers and students (Lunenburg, 2010, p. 2). Therefore, through verbal links, students can show their daily academic fluency and readiness (Harris, 2020, p. 8). Thus, the statistical research on this point has been regarded as seminal, and the data that emerged are as follows:

Table 5

Oral evaluation

How often do you evaluate your students orally?		
	Numeric frequencies	*%*
never	1	7.69
often	3	23.08
very often	9	69.23
Total	13	100.00

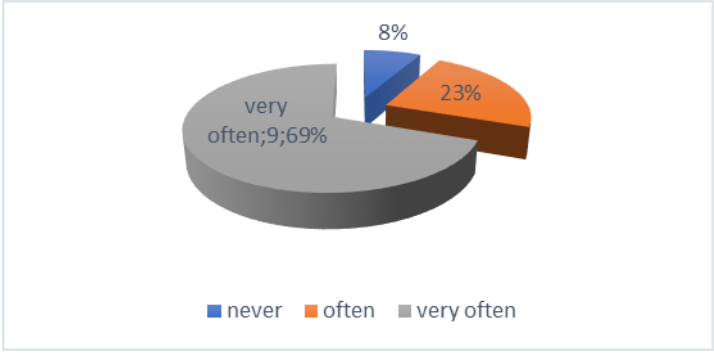


Figure 5. Oral evaluation.

A significant part of the participants, 69%, examine the students orally regularly, while 23% decide to do so just often. In contrast, teachers prefer oral rather than written examinations in praxis. The preference for the oral assessment of the students is logically linked: a) with their everyday systematic preparation and b) with teachers' teaching schedule formation since it is easier and faster for a teacher to assess a student by simply submitting some oral questions on the spot and consequently evaluating their reply.

4 Discussion

The subjectivity of the assessment process could be tricky sometimes unless most of the essential parts of it could be objectified to the maximum grade, purporting to understand better and consolidate the student's progress effectively (Anderman & Maehr, 1994, pp. 287-309). Thus, all Middle Education teachers, especially RE ones, should scrutinise the vital aspects of the assessment progression and convert its data (where feasible) into quantitative or qualitative ones for better assimilation and understanding under the lens of critique (Srnka & Koeszegi, 2007).

One of the derived problems concerns the oral assessment of Middle Education students, which statistically plays a fixative but not the first role in the classroom context based on the present statistical data. Centered on Western models, the examination style is grounded in the written form (Fenty et al., 2012) due to the philosophy of college preparation. The nature of the question topics is often closed-ended (one answer provided is correct). So, the question emerges immediately: Does oral examination aid in forming a wholistic cognitive personality of the student in Greek Middle Education or not? Or does oral examination even intend to upgrade the holistic students' character? The answer is, unfortunately, depressing for the time being. Greek Middle Education system is oriented to a strict knowledge reproduction (Yusuf, 2010, p. 49), especially in Upper Secondary Education (=high schools), which introduces and sets up the students to the annual general education demands when public examinations are at stake (high school). Unfortunately, primary and secondary education teachers facilitate a similar learning style. RE discipline is a light of exception so far, though, to a not wider extent. However, it must be emphasised that the latter topic is not an object of the present research to be analysed further.

As a result, students learn to memorise correctly and not to digest and criticise effectively (Yusuf, 2010). On the other hand, criticism traits are strongly affiliated with the personality structure, incorporating all family, environmental, and social stimulations. In addition, much research is coming concerning schooling and personality affiliation (Dahmann & Anger, 2014, p. 6). Knowledge could be considered as a system or a net of evaluated information incorporating a possible and dynamic verification mechanism at the disposal of the receiver and could be used to explore the social and material world. That means every social and cognitive item could be an object of research and critique, providing the baselines for further analysis of an individual. Thus, every knowledge item should be reviewed for its value and truthfulness in a verification process grounded on the subjective values of the individual (Oishi et al., 1999). Thus, the verification process embraces a broader application of its mechanism with specific social results for the individual each time. Suppose any learner stays stuck to the content type and memorises it. In that case, critique and

verification processes are inevitably abolished, and the nature of knowledge itself still needs to be improved to benefit the social realm (Nelson & Guerra, 2013, p. 71), which stays helpless until that moment arrives.

Oral assessment processes in Middle Education should drive the scope of education in a different direction. It should lead the students' study work style to discover a particular and personal thinking mode in investigating things around them and discerning the benefits from the nonbeneficial situations. Simultaneously, knowledge should also be converted into a unique mental research tool and stop producing anxiety as the memorisation evaluation system once did (and still does in Greece) without a personal positive impact. Individual imagination and creativity are being introduced into the game of perusing knowledge, perhaps miraculously and extensively. Einstein once said that great things were first born from dreams (Kind, 2018, p. 3); such quotes should inspire future generations. Western schools do not support a Holistic Personality Cognitive Education Approach (H.C.E.A.) yet, which stimulates the brain to produce knowledge and debate it in mutual communication and realisation. The fear of losing the strings attached to the existing knowledge formations as a part of humanity's cognitive history strives against the leading spirit of creating new knowledge in the field of Middle Education. Connections of the past might be better when coming up with change for the better in the future. Better evolution is to enhance the children's flexible personalities through knowledge and social values by incorporating schooling assessment tools heading mostly toward intrinsic improvement rather than democratic or socio-economic enrichment (Postman, 2011, p. 131). An enlightened exception is wide open concerning Western universities in doctoral and post-doctoral studies. However, incorporating knowledge into an umbrella of social and economic benefactor values in a worldwide spectrum still needs much work. At the same time, the case of Middle Education strives between memorisation and free knowledge assessment. The fear of the unknown emerges as the stabling block of the cognitive schooling progress, hindering the application of H.C.E.A. Still, nothing could be inevitable in the human cognitive process. The former stimulating statistical data and the inconsistencies that the reader might find resonate with the previously mentioned possible subjective fear-hoping, though for a quick change for the better.

5 Limitations

The limitations of the present research are primarily twofold: a) The notion of subjectivity was abstract, leading to strict criteria for topic concretisation, and b) the small statistical magnitude of the participants in the quantitative research survey.

6 Specific conclusions

The RE teachers' grading subjectivity (Sedan & Svaricek, 2018, p. 120) seems utterly peculiar when a similar inquiry (as assessment -grading) is being researched. Regardless of the setup criteria, a few diversified assessment models were proposed through the handed results, which stimulated the specific derived conclusions. Those conclusions are the following:

a) Secondary schools were the essential target of the present research, shaping a geographical bow on the Greek State.
b) The sample could not be regarded as representative due to its small magnitude; Nevertheless, it provides excellent stimulation for the assessment strategy preferences of the RE teachers in Greece.
c) Oral assessment of the classroom is considered a priority of the RE teachers because of their time scheduling (oral examination is comparatively a faster process) and the readiness setting up of the classroom.
d) RE discipline is regarded on a general basis as a demanding field, considering that the research inquiries were also addressed to related disciplines in the context of open and interdisciplinary research.
e) Concerning the final grade estimation of the students[5], RE teachers prefer to apply the written form of examination (written performance) enhanced by the oral one to formulate the last progress profile of each student. In addition, the following table (7.1) shows the variety of the rest of the criteria used in the present research field, according to which the second listing preference was the use of the average oral and written performance (15.38%).

Table 6

Assessment strategies

Assessment Strategies	numeric	%
Assigned projects	1	7.69
Average oral, written, and notebook assignments	1	7.69
Average of the oral and written performance	2	15.38
I also take into account the workbook and the students' projects in addition to the written and oral performance	1	7.69
Oral performance enhanced by the written one	1	7.69
Written performance enhanced by the oral one	7	53.84
Total	13	100.00

[5] Oral examination seemingly is preferred as the everyday assessment classroom tool.

f) The qualitative table below provides additional assessment methods that could be preferable for the participants, but they were not statistically their first choice. However, they are presented as typed initially during the qualitative part of the research in the table below:

Table 7

Additonal didactic strategies

'I boosted the oral grades of weak students who performed poorly on the exam.'
'I consider the whole picture/situation of the student.'
'I usually apply a research paper related to the taught unit. It is done in groups and remotely using the e-class user groups tool and the contribution of the Assignments tool, where grading is done using a tool rubric.'
'In deriving a score, oral and written performance, as well as diligence at home (workbook) and the social education of the student, are taken into account.'

Based on the above additional criteria, research paper assignments, homework provision on the taught material, and e-class utility are also regarded as supplemental and essential teaching and assessment tools at their teachers' disposal to complete the assessment puzzle of their classrooms. In addition, subjectivity is quite apparent, especially in phrases like: "I boosted the oral grades of weak students who performed poorly on the exam." This minor quote indicates that the teacher's estimation signifies the qualitative result of their school performance (Sedan & Svaricek, 2018).

g) Another intriguing point is that RE teachers use subdivision inquiries in their written test preparation, indicating either additional cognitive exploration motive or even cognitive explications or specifications of the central submitted question inquiries. The latter method could also be implicated in the oral examination process, enhancing the examined students' focus, memory, and cognitive criteria and aiding students with learning disabilities (Fenty et al., 2012, p.28). The latter hypothesis was also statistically confirmed (Fenty et al., 2012).

h) Oral and written assessments have equal significance, but still, the former always depicts additional statements during students' evaluation, which do not necessarily appear in written form (Joughin, 1998, p. 368). Further, it is essential to claim that oral assessment shapes a readiness mode, keeping students on edge during their studies and ready to perform the best of their efforts every day. The latter does not exclude the content methodologies of the table (7.1), which remain as auxiliary assessment techniques and, of course, does not abrogate the written form tests (Fenty et al., 2012, p. 647) and

i) In the context of the assessment process, the whole performance of the student, oral and written, is under the school evaluation lens. Knowledge assimilation is a complex and vital task. Therefore, every assessment method should be oriented towards a twofold aim: a) the sculpturing of the general and critical aspect of the student's personality and b) the wholeness of knowledge assimilation formation; however, adjusting the cognitive environment to the social one should be regarded as the most prominent goal in the schooling culture, especially in the Greek RE situation, which needs it a great deal (Franken & Loobuyck, 2011, p. 151).

Conclusions

A general conclusion derived from the specific conclusions above is the reality that during the oral assessment of the students, the RE teacher is in a position to specify the distinct requirements and potential of the student to penetrate through his/her mental criteria during his/her analytical oral examination and presentation (Frey & Vallade, 2018, p. 27), to see how much students are capable of connecting notions, facts, ideas and criticise if needed and how they react under the pressure of the existence of an audience and time. Most importantly, students can unfold their unique intellectual and psychological persona during oral examinations and assessments. It should be evaluated as the greatest and essential part of the human treasure, which RE has in great esteem.

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