

Teachers' Religious Diversity Readiness: Basis For an Ecumenical Pedagogical Model

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Abstract

This study investigates the religious readiness of teachers and their integration of faith-based practices in the curriculum within the City Schools Division of Antipolo. In light of increasing religious diversity in schools, the research sought to understand how educators foster inclusivity, maintain neutrality, and address challenges associated with teaching in a multi-faith environment.

A mixed-methods research design was employed. Qualitative data were collected through interviews with selected teachers, while quantitative data were obtained using a standardized survey to measure levels of religious readiness. Thematic analysis identified five core themes: interreligious dialogue, teaching Faith, personal religious reflection, integration of Faith in learning, and acceptance of others' beliefs.

Quantitative results showed a "Maximum Readiness" level among teachers, with the highest scores in Teaching Faith and the lowest in Integration of Faith in Learning.

Findings highlight teachers' strong commitment to creating inclusive and respectful classroom environments. They employ strategies such as being role models, establishing ground rules, and initiating inclusive practices like prayer. Based on these findings, an Ecumenical Pedagogical Model was developed to guide faith integration in a diverse educational context. The study recommends targeted professional development and pilot implementation of the proposed model to enhance inclusive religious education and prepare students for respectful interfaith engagement.

Keywords: Curriculum Integration, Ecumenical Pedagogy, Inclusive Education, Religious Diversity, and Teacher Readiness

I. Introduction

Teachers' religious readiness encompasses their ability to integrate their worldview into classroom instruction while respecting and honoring the diverse religious beliefs of their students. Teachers' convictions, shaped by multifaceted belief systems, significantly influence classroom interactions and learning environments. To promote inclusivity, teachers must create educational spaces where all students, regardless of religious background, feel valued

and respected. This task involves facilitating discussions on religion sensitively, allowing students to express their beliefs openly, and fostering a respectful exchange of ideas (Putri et al., 2023).

Religious readiness also requires educators to remain vigilant against biases and stereotypes that could negatively affect their teaching practices. Recognizing and addressing these biases is essential to building a more inclusive, respectful, and harmonious educational setting, supporting every student's personal and academic growth. The importance of such preparation is emphasized by the educational framework that mandates quality, inclusive, and learner-centered education responsive to the diverse needs of Filipino learners, including religious diversity (Woodcock et al., 2023).

Despite the presence of legal frameworks and department directives safeguarding the free exercise of religion, teachers often encounter challenges in fully implementing these directives within the classroom. In practice, the integration of religious diversity remains inconsistently observed, leading to gaps in inclusivity and sometimes inadvertently reinforcing bias or discrimination (Dachlan, 2023).

Furthermore, while modern educational policies advocate for the greater inclusion of religious diversity, rapid technological advancements and evolving educational priorities risk relegating this important aspect to the background. Teachers, especially those in leadership roles, have observed instances where personal religious beliefs inadvertently influence teaching practices, underscoring the need for structured training in religious diversity readiness.

In the Philippine educational context, the Department of Education emphasizes cultural and religious inclusivity through various policies and initiatives. These efforts aim to develop educators' competencies in managing diverse classrooms, ensuring that religious differences are acknowledged and respected. Teachers are expected to foster environments that uphold learners' rights to freedom of religion and cultural expression, making cultural competence — including religious literacy — an essential professional skill.

To meet these demands, educational authorities encourage the use of pedagogical strategies that promote critical thinking, respectful dialogue, and open engagement with diverse religious perspectives. Professional development programs are crucial in equipping teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to address religious diversity effectively.

Recognizing these realities, this study seeks to examine teachers' religious diversity readiness and its implications for curriculum development within the Schools Division of Antipolo City. The ultimate aim is to contribute to the creation of an ecumenical pedagogical model that promotes religious inclusivity and fosters interfaith understanding among learners.

II. Methodology

The methodology employed in investigating the teachers' religious readiness and its influence on curriculum development within the Schools Division of Antipolo City. It details the research design, population and sampling techniques, research instruments, data gathering

procedure, statistical treatment of data, and ethical considerations adhered to in the conduct of the study.

The study utilized a sequential exploratory research design (Creswell, 2015), which began with a qualitative phase to explore teachers' experiences and perceptions regarding religious readiness and curriculum development. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten purposively selected participants. Thematic analysis (Fabros, 2024) was employed to uncover recurring patterns and emerging themes from the qualitative data. Based on the qualitative findings, a quantitative phase followed, using a cross-sectional survey to quantify the insights obtained. Descriptive and inferential statistical analyses were conducted to determine relationships between teachers' religious readiness and their involvement in curriculum development (Pallant, 2019).

For the qualitative phase, purposive sampling was applied to select ten teachers with significant involvement and experience in religious readiness and curriculum integration. In the quantitative phase, stratified random sampling was utilized to ensure proportional representation across three senior high school districts: Antipolo National High School District I–A (58% of the total population, with 46 teachers sampled), San Jose National High School District II–A (26% of the population, with 21 teachers sampled), and San Roque National High School District II–B (16% of the population, with 13 teachers sampled). This sampling method ensured that diverse perspectives were captured, enhancing the generalizability of the study's findings.

Participants in the qualitative phase consisted of ten teachers who had a direct engagement in curriculum development and had experienced religious integration in their teaching contexts. Meanwhile, the quantitative phase involved 80 senior high school teachers, selected proportionally from the three districts mentioned. The stratified sampling procedure ensured that each district was appropriately represented according to its teacher population.

The instruments developed for this research were specific to each phase. During the qualitative phase, a semi-structured interview guide was designed to facilitate in-depth discussions. Part A of the guide gathered demographic information, while Part B focused on teachers' testimonies concerning ecumenical practices and religious integration in curriculum delivery. For the quantitative phase, a structured survey questionnaire was developed based on themes identified from the qualitative results. The survey was divided into two parts: Part A collected demographic data, and Part B measured religious readiness and the extent of religious integration into the curriculum using a four-point Likert scale (4 – Maximum Readiness, 3 – High Readiness, 2 – Increased Readiness, 1 – Normal).

The research instruments underwent a thorough validation and reliability testing process. Initially, the instruments were reviewed by the research adviser and a panel of experts, including the Curriculum Instruction Development Chief and the Education Program Supervisor for Values Education. Their feedback was incorporated to ensure content validity. A pilot test was then conducted among a small group of teachers not included in the main study. The instrument's reliability was evaluated using Cronbach's Alpha, yielding acceptable to excellent results: Interreligious Dialogue (0.790), Teaching Faith (0.757), One's Own

Religious Belief (0.943), Integration of Faith in Learning (0.725), and Acceptance of Others' Beliefs (0.754). These reliability indices indicated that the instruments were both valid and consistent for the study.

Data gathering was systematically conducted in several stages. Initially, collaboration with research experts and teachers helped in refining the interview questions. After the validation process, a pilot test was done to finalize the instruments. During the qualitative phase, interviews were conducted, transcribed, and subjected to member checking to ensure the accuracy of interpretations. Thematic analysis was then applied to identify common themes and insights. For the quantitative phase, permissions were obtained from school principals and division authorities prior to the administration of the survey. Orientation sessions were held to ensure that respondents clearly understood the purpose and mechanics of the study. Completed surveys were collected personally, encoded, and prepared for analysis using IBM SPSS software.

The qualitative data were analyzed through thematic coding, categorization, and synthesis of emerging themes to address the research questions. In the quantitative phase, data were treated using descriptive statistics, primarily the computation of mean scores to determine the levels of religious readiness and integration of Faith in curriculum development. Responses were interpreted using the four-point Likert scale previously described.

Ethical considerations were meticulously observed throughout the research process. Informed consent was obtained from all participants and respondents after explaining the study's purpose, procedures, risks, and benefits. Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly maintained by coding participants' identities and securing data in restricted access files. Participation was voluntary, with respondents given the option to withdraw at any point without penalty. Moreover, efforts were undertaken to minimize any form of psychological discomfort, and participants were provided access to support mechanisms should the need arise.

III. Result and Discussion

The results obtained from the study on teachers' religious readiness and its influence on curriculum development within the Schools Division of Antipolo City. The major findings are analyzed in the context of the research questions and objectives, followed by conclusions drawn and recommendations proposed for future practice and research.

The findings revealed that teachers emphasized the importance of sensitivity, openness, and inclusivity when integrating various faiths into the curriculum. Participants consistently highlighted the need to maintain neutrality and respect amidst potential conflicts in religious beliefs. They demonstrated strategies such as setting clear rules, modeling respectful behavior, and initiating inclusive practices like collective prayer, which are crucial in creating a comfortable and welcoming environment for all students. These strategies underline the complexity of addressing religious diversity in educational settings and reflect a commitment to fostering a holistic and inclusive learning environment that respects individual beliefs.

Five main themes emerged from the qualitative data: interreligious dialogue, teaching Faith, personal religious reflection, integration of Faith in learning, and acceptance of others' beliefs. Teachers articulated that promoting interreligious dialogue fosters inclusivity and understanding among students of different faith backgrounds. Furthermore, balancing the teaching of Faith with personal religious reflection and integrating these perspectives into learning activities were seen as central to nurturing students' moral and spiritual development. The emphasis on acceptance of diverse beliefs suggests a proactive stance among teachers toward promoting religious harmony and preparing students for engagement in a multicultural society. These findings are consistent with existing literature that highlights the importance of inclusivity and respect in education (Banks, 2015).

Quantitative analysis of the data revealed that teachers exhibited a "Maximum Readiness" level across all dimensions of religious readiness. The highest mean score was recorded in Teaching Faith, while the lowest was observed in Integration of Faith in Learning. Despite slight variations, the overall high level of readiness suggests that teachers are generally well-prepared to integrate religious themes into their teaching practices while maintaining respect for diversity. This readiness positions teachers to create learning environments that are both inclusive and aligned with students' moral and ethical growth. However, the relatively lower readiness in integrating Faith into learning indicates an area that could benefit from further professional development, particularly in practical strategies for curriculum integration.

To address the findings, an Ecumenical Pedagogical Model was developed. This model is anchored on the five key themes identified in the study and aims to foster mutual respect, understanding, and holistic student development. It proposes structured conversations around interreligious dialogue, encourages personal reflection on Faith, promotes balanced teaching practices that respect diversity, and supports the ethical integration of faith-based perspectives into the curriculum. The model provides a framework for enriching students' educational experiences by integrating spiritual and moral dimensions into academic learning.

In conclusion, the study affirms that teachers in the City Schools Division of Antipolo prioritize sensitivity, openness, and inclusivity as essential values in addressing religious diversity within the classroom. The strategies employed, along with the emerging themes, highlight the proactive approaches teachers are taking to foster a supportive educational environment. High levels of religious readiness among teachers underscore their capacity to navigate religious integration thoughtfully and respectfully. Nevertheless, opportunities exist for strengthening the integration of Faith into learning through targeted professional development initiatives. The Developed Ecumenical Pedagogical Model offers a practical guide for promoting inclusive religious education that supports both academic and moral development.

Based on these conclusions, several recommendations are proposed. First, school administrators and teachers should implement professional development workshops focused on strategies for managing religious diversity. These workshops should provide practical tools for maintaining neutrality, fostering inclusivity, and addressing potential conflicts sensitively. Second, there is a need to develop a comprehensive curriculum guide that incorporates the five key themes identified in this study, thereby ensuring consistent and structured religious

inclusivity practices across schools. Third, further enhancement of professional development opportunities is recommended, particularly sessions focusing on strategies for integrating religious and ethical teachings into broader curricular areas such as literature, history, and social studies. Fourth, piloting the Developed Ecumenical Pedagogical Model in selected schools is advised, accompanied by a clear implementation plan and evaluation framework to assess its effectiveness and allow for refinements before wider application. Lastly, future researchers are encouraged to analyze specific factors that contribute to varying levels of religious readiness among teachers. Such studies could offer deeper insights and guide the design of targeted interventions to strengthen teachers' capacities, particularly in areas where readiness is comparatively lower.

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