

Original Research Article

Academic Achievement and Challenges of Students in Learning Christian Living Education 8 in a Philippine Catholic High School

ABSTRACT

This paper determined the academic achievement of students in Christian Living Education (CLE) 8 in terms of gospels, acts of the apostles, epistles, and sacraments in a Philippine Catholic High school. Likewise, it identified the challenges in learning CLE 8 relative to teachers, students, learners' environment, facilities and resources, and subject. Also, it investigated the difference in their academic achievement when grouped according to sex and religion. Using a quantitative research design, this study was responded to by 127 stratified sampled students through a validated and reliability-tested researcher-made multiple-choice test-type questionnaire and checklist. In data analysis, frequency count, percentage, mean, standard deviation, and Mann-Whitney U test were employed. Generally, the student's academic achievement is satisfactory. In terms of demographics, sex and religion were rated as satisfactory. Meanwhile, there was no significant difference in their academic achievement when grouped according to demographics. The top issues faced by the students in learning the subject are the use of traditional strategies by the teachers, difficulty in understanding the lesson, lack of encouragement for library use, and the perceived insufficient time in the subject. Hence, there is a need to address these challenges and continuously improve the learning of Christian living education.

Keywords: Academic achievement, learning challenges, students, Christian Living Education 8, descriptive-comparative, Philippine Catholic high school

1. INTRODUCTION

Christian Living Education (CLE) subjects in Catholic schools play a significant role in students' character development and value formation [1]. Also, this education aims to develop students to practice Christian morality and the social teachings of the Church [2]. Likewise, living this education is aligning oneself with Catholic principles [3]. Hence, in these institutions, these subjects are mandatory to be taken up by the students since they are expected to pioneer Christian characters [4,2]. However, high school students often face numerous difficulties and challenges in learning religious education subjects [5,6,7]. These are influenced by secularization, modernization, and societal attitudes [6]. In the United States, Catholic students struggle with reconciling their faith teachings with the secular environment in public discourse which often leads to feeling isolated or misunderstood by peers who do not share their beliefs [8,9]. Also, there are students, despite deep Catholic roots, who are increasingly critical of traditional religious education, often viewed as outdated and irrelevant in a modern and progressive society [10]. In addition, some frequently report a lack of engagement with religious education, finding the curriculum overly focused on doctrine rather than practical or ethical applications of faith [11].

In Asia, students learning Catholic religious education encountered varied experiences shaped by their cultural, societal, and political contexts. In Vietnam, Catholic religious education often takes place in informal settings like parishes due to restrictions on religious teaching in public schools, where students balance their faith practices with state-imposed secular values [12]. In Indonesia and Thailand, minority Catholic schools integrate religious education into their curriculum, but students sometimes face societal pressure from the predominantly Muslim population [13]. In South Korea, Catholic students benefit from well-organized catechism programs supported by the Church, but they often find it challenging to settle traditional Catholic values with the pressures of a highly secularized and competitive society [14]. Lastly, in China, where religious activities are closely monitored, Catholic students often receive religious education discreetly through Church-led initiatives, facing challenges in openly practicing their faith [15].

In the Philippines, Filipino Catholic students face challenges in learning religious education. One issue is the diversity of religious affiliations among students, which can create difficulties in addressing different beliefs in a single classroom [16]. Also, outdated teaching materials and methods in the subject often fail to resonate with students [17]. In private schools, limited resources, class size, and traditional teaching methods impede the effective delivery of religious education lessons [18]. In addition, the prioritization of core academic subjects in an extensive curriculum often leaves religious education subjects with insufficient focus and just supplementary [19]. Moreover, many students perceived the subject as overly dogmatic, hence, reducing their interest and engagement [20]. Furthermore, the growing influence of secularism and modern technology has introduced competing values, which challenge traditional religious teachings [21]. Lastly, the lack of proper teacher training in religious education often results in a gap between faith-based instruction and its relevance to students' real-life experiences [22].

In Central Philippines, there is a certain Catholic high school that highlights their mission goals which is to provide programs and services to students founded and shaped by the Catholic faith and teachings. Also, many Catholic high schools integrated Christian living education subjects into their curriculum to respond to the call that is to produce students who are shaped by Catholic teachings. However, high school students often encounter various challenges in learning the subject offered by the institution. Bual and Madrigal [23], highlighted that students are often influenced by secularistic and modernistic attitudes which impede the acquisition of the competencies. Also, high school students in a Catholic high school have low-rated life skills coping with emotions and coping with stress which hinder them from learning fully the subject [24]. Aside from this, Rios et al. [25] found out that traditional teaching strategies and time management in accomplishing tasks were the learning challenges among high school students. Hence, improvement in instruction is highlighted by the study.

There were several studies conducted relative to the context of challenges among students in religious education. Horwitz [26] conducted a study on religion and academic achievement spanning secondary school and higher education. Rossiter [11] accomplished a study on re-contextualizing Catholic religious education and educating young people spiritually, morally, and religiously. In addition, Lapsley and Kelley [3] studied the Catholic identity of students and schools valuing Catholic Education. Mudge [27] published a study about cultivating religious education, in years 9 and 10. However, given all the available literature, there is a limited study focusing on determining the academic achievement and challenges among high school students in learning the Christian Living Education subject. Hence, this is the gap that this study would like to fill in.

Thus, the paper determined the academic achievement of students in Christian Living Education 8 in a Philippine Catholic high school during 2024-2025 in terms of gospels, acts of the apostles, epistles, and sacraments when taken as a whole and grouped relative to sex and religion. Likewise, it identified the challenges encountered in learning the subject. Also, it investigated the difference in their academic achievement when grouped according to the demographics. The findings may serve as a basis for formulating Strategic Intervention

Material (SIM) for low-academic achievement areas and challenges of students to improve Christian Living Education.

2. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

The study theoretically assumed that the academic achievement among students in the Christian Living Education 8 subject differs based on their sex and religion. Likewise, it is assumed that the respondents have obtained a specified level of cognitive development as far as this institutional subject matter is concerned since they have already finished the subject. Hence, these theoretical assumptions were based on Piaget's cognitive development theory [28]. This theory argues that the individual's cognitive abilities and perception of concepts develop or improve as they mature and grow. When the person progresses through the various stages and develops cognitive abilities. Meanwhile, this theory believes that a person's cognitive development varies according to the demographic profile. In the context of the study, cognitive development has something to do with the academic achievement of the students in the Christian Living Education 8. Given that these respondents have already completed the subject, it is assumed that they have achieved the full acquisition of the learning competencies that the subject matter requires.

3. METHODOLOGY

This study utilized a quantitative research design, specifically a descriptive-comparative approach. The chosen methodology statistically measured a set of variables to answer the theory-guided research questions or problems and hypotheses [29]. On one hand, the descriptive approach assessed the level of academic achievement of students in Christian Living Education 8 when taken as a whole and grouped according to sex and religion. Also, it identified the challenges encountered in learning this subject. On the other hand, the comparative approach examined the difference in their academic achievement when grouped according to the demographics. Meanwhile, the respondents were 127 Grade 9 students who already finished the Christian Living Education 8 in a Philippine Catholic high school. They were determined using stratified random sampling.

Table 1. *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

Variable	f	%
Sex		
Male	58	45.7
Female	69	54.3
Religion		
Catholic	109	85.8
Non-Catholic	18	14.2
Total	127	100.0

This study utilized a 37-item researcher-made multiple-choice test-type questionnaire to assess the level of academic achievement. These items were spread across areas of gospels, acts of the apostles, epistles, and sacraments. It was subjected to Lawshe's [30] Content Validity Ratio (CVR) and yielded a valid score of 0.88. Meanwhile, regarding the reliability, it was pilot-tested and obtained a KR-20 reliable result of 0.83. In addition, test item analysis was done to identify the item's difficulty, how the item discriminates between students, and investigate the response frequency. Results obtained 76.7% of retained questions and 23.3% of rejected questions. The scale of interpretation employed poor, needs improvement, satisfactory, very good, and excellent. In identifying the learning

challenges, it used a researcher-made checklist relative to teachers, students, learner's environment, resources and facilities, and subject.

In data analysis, descriptive and inferential analyses were employed. Specifically, mean and standard deviation analyzed the academic achievement. Frequency count and percentage distribution profiled the demographics and identified the challenges. Meanwhile, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test determined the normality of the variable. It revealed that academic achievement [$KS=0.086$, $p=0.000$] was not normally distributed. Hence, the Mann-Whitney U-test was used to analyze the difference in the level of academic achievement when grouped according to demographics. Lastly, this study adhered to the Philippine Health Research Ethics Board (PHREB) ethical guidelines and addressed the general principles of respect for persons, non-maleficence, beneficence, and justice to ensure the ethical soundness of the study. Specifically, it addressed the respondents' vulnerability, the anonymity of their identity, and the confidentiality of the data.

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Academic Achievement of Students in Christian Living Education 8

Academic achievement refers to the acquisition of learning competencies in Christian Living Education 8. Table 2 presents the level of academic achievement of students in the subject in the areas of gospels, acts of the apostles, epistles, and sacraments. Generally, the level of achievement ($M=18.65$, $SD=7.27$) is satisfactory. Regarding the areas, gospels ($M=4.94$, $SD=2.32$), acts of the apostles ($M=4.31$, $SD=2.01$), epistles ($M=4.28$, $SD=1.77$), and sacraments ($M=5.13$, $SD=2.83$) rated satisfactory. In demographics specifically, when grouped according to sex, male ($M=18.98$, $SD=6.92$), and female ($M=18.38$, $SD=7.59$) rated satisfactory. In religion, Catholic ($M=18.66$, $SD=7.22$), and non-Catholic ($M=18.61$, $SD=7.78$) rated satisfactory.

Generally, the academic achievement result of students indicates that they have acquired a satisfactory level in Christian Living Education 8. This means that the students have an average academic achievement in the subject. However, given the result, there is still room for improvement to fully acquire and reach the ideal academic achievement. Meanwhile, this satisfactory result could be attributed to some topics in the subject that are hard to understand relative to the student's grade level and cognitive development. In fact, this finding is consistent with the study of Zuck [31] and Gorman [32], that high school students in particular have a hard time understanding biblical texts, and the same through with theological concepts. Studies showed that the subjects should resonate with the cognitive level of high school students to fully understand the lessons [33,34,24]. Not to mention, some topics in this subject require in-depth reading and familiarizing numerous characters and events in the bible as supported by the study of Ghiloni [35] and Alberts [36]. This implies the possibility of reassessing the curriculum pacing guide to match the cognitive level of high school students. Also, enhancement of teaching strategies in delivering the subject to elicit motivation and engagement among the students.

In addition, this could be because students might perceive this subject as irrelevant, which for them cannot be practically applied in their day-to-day lives. Also, this could be attributed to the CLE subject as just supplementary leading students to approach it with a causal attitude. These claims are consistent with the findings of Kavonius and Ubani [37], Thelma et al. [38], and Itolondo [39]. Likewise, this kind of perception by students might indicate a gap between the value of the CLE subject and the core subjects like Math or Science leading to a weaker participation and engagement on the subject. This finding implies that the students should realize the value of Christian Living Education subjects [40,41], and let them fully understand that as Catholic high school students, they have to be pioneers of Christian identity.

Table 2. Academic Achievement of Students in Christian Living Education 8

Variable	Gospels			Acts of the Apostle			Epistles			Sacraments			Achievement		
	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int	M	SD	Int
Sex															
Male	5.12	2.58	S	4.34	1.85	S	4.26	1.64	S	5.26	2.79	S	18.98	6.92	S
Female	4.78	2.07	S	4.28	2.15	S	4.29	1.88	S	5.03	2.87	S	18.38	7.59	S
Religion															
Catholic	4.99	2.32	S	4.28	1.99	S	4.27	1.76	S	5.12	2.81	S	18.66	7.22	S
Non-Catholic	4.61	2.33	S	4.44	2.18	S	4.33	1.85	S	5.22	3.00	S	18.61	7.78	S
Whole	4.94	2.32	S	4.31	2.01	S	4.28	1.77	S	5.13	2.83	S	18.65	7.27	S

Note: S- (Satisfactory)

4.2 Challenges of Students in Learning Christian Living Education 8

Table 3 presents the learning challenges of students in the Christian Living Education 8. The students' learning challenges are categorized into four factors namely teachers, students, learners' environment, facilities and resources, and subject. Based on the teacher, the students are challenged by the teachers who utilized traditional strategies (f=52, 40.94%) and inability to explain complex concepts (f=51, 40.15%). In the student factor, they are challenged with difficulty in understanding the lessons (f=74, 58.26%) and poor time management in accomplishing the tasks (f=70, 55.11%). Meanwhile, in learners' environment, resources, and facilities, the students perceived a lack of encouragement for library use (f=50, 39.37%) and a lack of administrative support for the activities (f=42, 33.07%). Lastly, in subject, the students are challenged in their learning because of insufficient time (f=61, 48.03%) and topics that demand many activities (f=57, 44.88%).

Based on the teacher factor, the respondents perceived traditional teaching strategies by teachers are their major challenge in learning the subject. It indicates that they find these methods less engaging or ineffective in helping them understand thoroughly the topics. Hence, this means that the teachers often involve lectures, a teacher-centered approach, and passive learning. Thus, these may not foster engaging and interactive learning experiences [42,43]. As a matter of fact, Al-Mubireek [44], Moreira and Rodríguez [45], and Rios et al. [25] mentioned that traditional teaching strategies are indeed learning challenges among high school students. Also, this could be because traditional teaching strategies may not stimulate active participation leading to disengagement from the subject matter [42,43,25]. In addition, religious education teachers opted for traditional teaching strategies since most of them were not in the first place trained as educators and most of them just received a certificate in teaching and had not trained in a four-year program which hindered them from performing various teaching strategies and integrating theories in education. In fact, according to some studies, if the teacher is not an education major graduate, they opt for a teacher-centered approach [46,47,48]. This implies professional development training and seminars for non-education graduate teachers so they to enhance their teaching skills to compete with the demands of the professions.

The second challenge for students in learning the subject is their inability to explain complex concepts. This means that the students struggle in understanding the lessons which leads to their inability to explain the concepts. This could be because the religious education teachers have no doubt imbibe the mastery of the subject matter, but they deliver or discuss it in a way that goes beyond the level of the students. In fact, according to the studies by Heinrich and Kupers [49] and Yoon et al. [50], if the lessons are too complex and are not congruent with the cognitive level of students, most probably they will have a hard time understanding them. This implies the need to innovate and diversify teaching strategies to elicit motivation and engagement that will ensure the transfer of learning as suggested also by Rios et al. [25]. Also, modifying teaching methods to align with the interests and

learning preferences of students is essential which could improve the overall academic achievement.

In students, the number one learning challenge in Christian Living Education 8 is their difficulty in understanding the lessons. This indicates that the subject matter may be too complex or not adequately tailored to their level of understanding. This means that the students are struggling to grasp key concepts which could hinder their overall learning and engagement in the subject [51,52]. This could be because the subject covered abstract theological concepts or terminology [53,54,55]. Also, traditional or one-size-fits-all teaching strategies may not be effective in transferring learning [56,57]. Aside from this, this could be because the student's knowledge of the subject matter is limited or poor prior knowledge [58]. Even third-year college students in Catholic Universities and Colleges have limited knowledge of religious education which is also a need for improvement [59]. This implies simplifying the contents and strategizing the teaching pedagogy to be easily understood by the high school students.

Likewise, poor time management in accomplishing the task is the second top learning challenge of high school students. This could be because time management is the main problem of high school students nowadays across all schools [60,25]. Obiekwe [61] highlighted time management and academic achievement among high school students are positively associated. Also, this could be because the high school students are bombarded with various activities given the fact that they have ten subjects in their grade level. Hence, because of this, it affects their learning and acquisition of competencies in the CLE subject [62,63,24]. Aside from this, high school students experienced widespread stress and were not limited to academic overload, peer pressure, and family responsibilities [64]. This implies possible adjustments to the curriculum pacing guide allowing students to have adequate time to grasp key concepts and accomplish various academic tasks.

In the learner's environment, resources, and facilities, the top learning challenge for students is the lack of encouragement from teachers to utilize library time. This indicates that the students wanted to have an opportunity to engage in both independent learning and collaborative work where the library could serve as a space for utilizing various resources and engaging in group activities [65,66]. Also, this could be because students prefer hands-on activities that involve collaboration with peers or independent work, which they feel the library can offer [67,68]. Likewise, this could be attributed to the fact that teachers are not encouraged by the academic administrators to let their students go to the library. In fact, there is a stigma that if the teachers let the students proceed to the library during their class hours, it signifies they are not prepared for their classes. However, according to some studies, library work can be utilized to enhance the student's knowledge of the subject matter [69,70]. This finding suggests the need for religious education teachers to actively encourage and guide students in utilizing library learning activities to understand the topics in Christian Living Education.

In addition, the second challenge among high school students in learning the subject relative to environment, resources, and facilities is the lack of administrative support for the activities. This means that students wanted to be supervised throughout the activity. This could be because the students have difficulty understanding the instructions or the steps in accomplishing the activity. High school students demanded to be guided during the activity as supported by the studies of Potier [71] which reinforce student progress and engagement. Meanwhile, this could be attributed to the prioritization of lectures by the teachers rather than providing collaborative activities. Maybe because of the limited time provided for this subject hence, they opted to have lectures to finish all the topics [72,73]. Hence, it reduces the opportunity for conducting various activities that elicit engagement and motivation. This implies the integration of varied activities to stimulate attention and participation among the students.

In a subject as a factor, the students rated insufficient time as their top challenge in learning the subject. This means that the students feel they do not have time to fully engage

in the subject matter, complete various activities, and thoroughly understand the lessons. This could mean that the pacing of the topics given with the limited time is not adequate for students to understand the content and complete all the activities. Nikmah et al. [72] and Khoiri [73] mentioned that most often religious education subjects have less time in the curriculum than major subjects. Studies have shown that enough time for the subject matter provides in-depth discussions or hands-on activities that can reinforce learning among students [74,72]. This finding indicates a need to reconsider the number of hours of the CLE subjects to ensure that students have enough time to adequately grasp the complex concepts and accomplish the various activities required by the subject.

In addition, another challenge for the students in learning the subject is that the topics demand many activities. This means the students cannot cope with the various activities. This could be because the subject demands activities that require enough time for the students to accomplish. This means the teachers gave activities like reflection papers, essays, and projects that consumed more time. Various studies mentioned that essays and reflection papers are activities that challenge high school students [75,76]. Aside from this, struggling with accomplishing the activities can be associated with the reality that the major problem of high school students is time management [60,61]. This implies minimizing the activities because of the limited allotted time for the subject and activities that can be accomplished within a short time.

Table 3. *Challenges of Students in Learning Christian Living Education 8*

Areas	f	%
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Teachers		
Utilizes traditional strategies	52	40.94
Inability to explain complex concepts	51	40.15
Depends on textbooks	47	37.00
Lacks student support and encouragement	44	34.64
Pressures the students to accomplish tasks	43	33.85
Misses giving feedback	42	33.07
Teaches the lesson that is out of their expertise	39	30.70
Lacks the confidence to teach	24	18.89
Lacks mastery of the subject	21	16.53
Student		
Difficulty in understanding the lessons	74	58.26
Poor time management in accomplishing tasks	70	55.11
Lack motivation	66	51.96
Poor interest in the subject	48	37.79
Poor background in Christian living education subject	32	25.19
Learner's Environment, Resources, and Facilities		
Lacks encouragement for library use	50	39.37
Lacks administrative support for the activities	42	33.07
The classroom is unfavorable for to study	38	29.92
Inadequate facilities like technology for instruction	31	24.40
The classroom is unconducive for learning	29	22.83
Outdated textbooks and references	25	19.68
Subject		
Insufficient time	61	48.03
Topics demand many activities	57	44.88
Objectives are difficult to understand	50	39.37
Competencies are too high to achieve	45	35.43
Some topics are irrelevant	39	30.70
The subject demands unachievable performance tasks	34	26.77

4.3 Difference in the Level of Academic Achievement of Students in Christian Living Education 8

Table 4 presents the difference in the level of academic achievement of students in Christian Living Education 8. Hence, there was no significant difference in the academic achievement of Grade 9 students in Christian Living Education 8 when grouped according to sex [$U=1907.500$, $p=0.651$] and religion [$U=980.500$, $p=0.997$].

The no significant differences in the level of academic achievement of students in Christian Living Education 8, when grouped according to sex and religion, indicate that both male and female students, as well as Catholic and Non-Catholic students, perform equally in the subject. This indicates that factors such as sex and religious affiliation do not significantly differ in students' academic achievements as supported by Karimzadeh [77] and Sarchami et al. [78]. This could be because all students regardless of sex and religious affiliation have equal access to learning materials, teaching resources, and support provided by religious education teachers [79,80,81,82]. Also, this could be attributed to both male and female students, as well as Catholic and Non-Catholic students, who may have similar levels of motivation and interest in the subject, leading to similar performance and perception. It implies that teachers and administrators should continue to reinforce inclusive practices and ensure that all students, regardless of background, receive the same opportunities for academic success.

Table 4. *Difference in Academic Achievement of Students in Christian Living Education 8*

Variable	U	z	p
Sex	1907.500	-0.453	0.651
Religion	980.500	-0.003	0.997

Note: the difference is significant when $p \leq 0.05$

Given the result of no significant differences in students' academic achievement in the Christian Living Education 8 relative to their sex and religion, this study nullified Piaget's cognitive development theory [28]. This principle underscores the student's development through unique developmental stages, and their cognitive capacity is progressively enhanced within each stage and differs according to individual differences. The findings did not support the notion that the student's academic achievement and cognitive development differ according to their sex and religion. However, with these findings in place, the subject's areas and contents, pedagogy, and assessment, further studies are encouraged to validate the mentioned claims.

5. CONCLUSION

Given all the findings, the study emphasizes the price of continuously improving teaching strategies, methods, pedagogy, and assessments to achieve optimal academic achievement in Christian Living Education 8. Also, it underscores the need to address challenges faced by the students in learning the subject and spotlight these as opportunities to enhance teaching practices among religious education teachers. Likewise, the findings underline the importance of reassessing the curriculum pacing guide to ensure it aligns with the student's cognitive level. It also highlights the value of simplifying the contents, providing relatable examples, and interactive activities. Additionally, the study stresses the ongoing professional development for teachers to utilize and maximize the use of available learning environments and facilities such as the library that would help to foster learning opportunities.

Meanwhile, this paper acknowledges certain limitations. This was conducted in a private school on a single grade level. Also, this was limited to sex and religion as the respondent's demographics and utilized the quantitative research design specifically the descriptive-comparative approach. Likewise, the study utilized a researcher-made multiple-choice test-type questionnaire and checklist. Given these boundaries of the paper, further studies are encouraged utilizing similar or other research designs and methodology, additional demographics, assumptions, standardized instruments, and theory to validate the findings of this study.

DISCLAIMER (ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE)

Authors hereby declare that NO generative AI technologies such as Large Language Models (ChatGPT, COPILOT, etc.) and text-to-image generators have been used during the writing or editing of this manuscript.

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