

Original Research Article

Understanding College Students' Perspectives on Religion Classes and Importance of Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao Classes to the Philippine Public School Curriculum

ABSTRACT

Aims: This paper aims to understand the relevance of EsP classes, given that its roots stem from religion, and the current climate of the Philippine public school education system.

Study design: Quantitative Research

Place and Duration of Study: De La Salle University – Manila, social media (i.e., Facebook and Facebook Messenger) between, between March 2024 – May 2024.

Methodology: The author administered surveys to seventy-six (76) non-secular school graduates and asked them about their experiences during religion class, and their perspectives towards EsP.

Results: The major findings of the paper show that religion does have a slight hand in their perspectives towards EsP. From the gathered responses, the research shows that while learning values and morals are still important in society, the basis should be rooted on social morality rather than religion.

Conclusion: Participants believed that the basis of the subject's curriculum must be aligned with the social morality of the Filipino people, or the general common good. To them, the idea of "God" or being "Maka-Diyos" in the subject's objectives is quite aligned with the religious views. This could potentially divide or discriminate public school students who do not identify with the country's major religion. To them, *Edukasyon ng Pagpapakatao* (EsP) should focus solely on values education and ethics.

Keywords: Religion Classes, Values Education, Philippine Education, Importance of EsP

1. INTRODUCTION

The religious social institutions of the country must be acknowledged for its strong, long-standing existence in the Philippine society. This institution's power has been proven through connections and influences over certain facets of society, including education. An example of this was the bill, filed by Former Senator Ramon B. Magsaysay, on the rationalization of teaching religion in the public-school curriculum (Magsaysay, 2004). Although this has been left pending since September 2004, a potential alternative to this could be the Department of Education (DepEd) Order no. 31, which saw the introduction of the *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (EsP) classes (Department of Education, 2013). It was stated by DepEd that EsP, otherwise known as Values Education, would cater to the

student's cognitive, behavioral, and affective dimensions (The Professor, 2023). There are four themes for this subject which includes "...pagkamaka-Diyos at preperensyasakabutihan."

The evident issues toward the Philippine education system gives much doubt towards the subject's effectivity and necessity. Although the country's education sector has an allocated budget of Php 924.7 billion (DBM Press Release, 2023), the Philippines averages about 56.4 percentage points in learning poverty (i.e., pupils below a minimum proficiency of reading), (World Bank, 2022) There is critical need to reform the education system, such as prioritizing major subjects such as Mathematics, Science, and English (Villar, 2005).

Religion does have a positive role, which contributes to academic success (Horwitz, 2021). It has become the basis of character development education, especially in Indonesian schools, wherein the values of education were aligned with the nation's educational goals (Havati, Suyatno, and Susatya, 2020). Religious education is the process of bringing up and developing inherent God-given potentials to make himself useful, especially for the service of the Lord (Ilesanmi, 2024). In the eyes of authors on the subject matter, religious education is seen as a factor towards citizenship formation, rather than mere propaganda (Lovat, 2022). The Philippine education curriculum offered something similar, wherein its objective was to "move students to the next stage in moral learning" (Estrada and Montañez, 2022). EsP was shown to have positive outcomes when education students about moral and integration towards community. However, there is an evident lack of mastery and misinterpretation of the subject's themes. It has been noted that it focused more on spirituality and faith, rather than the overall common good (Felisilda and Parojenog, 2022).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

The author aimed to understand the experiences of the participants in their religion classes. In addition, the author aimed to discover their perspectives towards the importance of EsP classes in the Philippine Public Education System, and how it was influenced by their experience with religion classes.

2.1.1 Research Questions

1. How did their sociodemographic status and enrolment into a non-secular school influence their experiences on religion classes?
2. How do their experiences of religion classes influence their perspectives on the importance of EsP Classes in the Philippine Public School System?

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Population and Sampling

The population of the study consisted of former non-secular students, preferably those who attended non-secular schools for at least 2 years. This limitation was chosen to account for those students who attended Senior High School in a non-secular school, which spans two (2) years. The author was able to acquire seventy-six (76) participants, all of which were undergraduate college students and of legal age. The sample was chosen through a convenient non-random sampling technique due to the lack of perceived time and proximity to other members of the population.

2.2 Measures

A self-administered survey questionnaire was used for the data collection process. It was divided into four (4) key parts, which are the Participant's Profile, their Schooling Profile, their

Experiences in Religion Classes, and their Perceptions towards EsP Classes. The questionnaire consisted of different assessments such as Likert scales, check all that apply, select that best apply questions, and so on

2.3 Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using both descriptive and inferential statistics through Python. Descriptive statistics were used for the participant's demographic profile and schooling profile. Mean was used to calculate the average number of years they were enrolled in a non-secular school. For one of the questions, WordCloud, a Python data visualization package (Wang, 2022), was used to describe the different kinds of activities that were experienced by the population during their time as students at non-secular schools. Inferential statistics were used to determine the correlational relationship between experiences in religion class and perceived importance of EdukasyonsaPagpapakatao (EsP) towards the Philippine Public School Curriculum. Pearson's R was used to determine this relationship.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

3.1 Participant's Profile and Schooling Profile

Table 1.

Frequency and Percentages for Participant Demographic and Schooling Profile (N=76)

Variables	f	%
Age		
18	3	3.94
19	2	2.63
20	13	15.78
21	33	43.42
22	19	25.00
23	5	6.57
24	2	2.63
Sex Assigned at Birth		
Male	30	39.47
Female	46	60.52
Religious Affiliation		
Roman Catholic	53	69.73
Christian	14	18.42
Agnostic	9	11.84
Enrollment to a Non-Secular School		

Pre-School	52	68.42
Grade School	62	81.57
Junior High School	68	89.47
Senior High School	65	85.52
Location: Pre-School		
Metro Manila	45	59.21
Luzon	16	21.05
Mindanao	3	3.94
Studied Abroad	2	2.63
Can't Recall	10	13.15
Funding: Pre-School		
Private	67	88.15
Public	4	5.26
Can't Recall	5	6.57
Location: Grade School		
Metro Manila	52	68.42
Luzon	15	19.73
Mindanao	3	3.94
Studied Abroad	2	2.63
Can't Recall	4	5.26
Funding: Grade-School		
Private	72	94.73
Public	3	3.94
Can't Recall	1	1.31
Location: Junior High School		
Metro Manila	61	80.26
Luzon	10	13.15
Mindanao	3	3.94
Studied Abroad	1	1.31
Can't Recall	1	1.31
Funding: Junior High School		

Private	71	93.42
Public	5	6.57
Can't Recall	0	0.00
Location: Senior High School		
Metro Manila	60	78.94
Luzon	11	14.4
Mindanao	1	1.31
Studied Abroad	1	1.31
Can't Recall	3	3.94
Funding: Senior High School		
Private	72	94.73
Public	3	3.94
Can't Recall	1	1.31

Table 2.

Frequency and Percentages for Participant's Non-Secular Schooling Years (N=76)

Variables		<i>f</i>	Mean	SD
Pre-School	1 – 2	51	1.71	1.40
	3 – 4	29		
Grade School	1 – 2	14	4.94	2.13
	3 – 4	1		
	5 – 6	65		
Junior High School	1 – 2	13	3.51	1.08
	3 – 4	63		
Senior High School	1	6	1.84	0.54
	2	74		

Table 1-2 showed the profile of the participants, from their demographic characteristics to their schooling profile. The study was able to gather 76 participants. The sample was majority female (n=46, 60.52%) and were affiliated with the Roman Catholic religion (n=53, 69.73%). The respondents age ranged from 18-24, with the frequent age being 21 (n=33, 43.42%). Most of the participants were enrolled in non-secular schools during their Junior High School years (n=68, 89.47%), with a great majority attending private schools (n=71, 93.42%) in the Metro Manila area (n=61, 80.26%). The findings showed that the participants' Grade School years (n=65) were the longest amount of time they were enrolled in a non-secular school.

3.1 Experiences in Religion Classes

Table 3.

Pearson R Correlation Table: Participants' Profile and Religion Class Experience (N=76)

Independent Variables	Religion Class Experience					
	Positive		Neutral		Negative	
	Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value
Age	0.23	0.04	0.08	0.45	-0.20	0.08
Sex	-0.07	0.49	-0.08	0.47	-0.01	0.87
Religious Affiliation	-0.27	0.01	-0.21	0.06	0.31	0.00
Frequency of Religion Class	-0.02	0.82	0.07	0.51	0.03	0.75
Subjects Experienced	0.08	0.44	0.04	0.67	-0.09	0.43
Enrollment	0.07	0.49	0.14	0.22	0.04	0.71
<i>Pre-School</i> Funding	0.21	0.06	0.10	0.37	-0.14	0.22
Years	-0.21	0.91	-0.12	0.27	-0.05	0.62
Location	0.03	0.76	-0.01	0.90	0.07	0.54
Enrollment	0.03	0.75	0.14	0.20	0.08	0.48
<i>Grade School</i> Funding	0.06	0.56	0.10	0.38	-0.07	0.51
Years	0.18	0.10	-0.01	0.92	-0.15	0.17
Location	0.04	0.70	-0.04	0.67	0.01	0.90
Enrollment	-0.01	0.90	0.01	0.87	0.08	0.44
<i>Junior High School</i> Funding	-0.09	0.39	-0.03	0.74	0.04	0.70
Years	0.19	0.08	0.00	0.95	-0.07	0.50
Location	0.01	0.89	0.08	0.45	0.01	0.92
Enrollment	-0.00	0.93	0.02	0.81	0.11	0.33
<i>Senior High School</i> Funding	-0.01	0.88	-0.10	0.38	-0.04	0.71
Years	-0.00	0.95	-0.01	0.93	-0.03	0.79
Location	0.14	0.22	0.08	0.44	-0.05	0.64

The author utilized the Pearson R correlations statistics to evaluate the relationship between demographic factors and religion class. Table 3 showcased the findings across all levels of religion class experience (i.e., positive, neutral, and negative). Results from the study showed that Age has a significant, positive, and very weak correlation to Positive Religion Class Experience ($P = 0.04$). This could indicate that, as students age, they reflect upon their religion class experience in a more positive light. However, due to the weak correlation,

other factors could potentially affect this positive outlook towards the subject. Another correlation that was found was between religious affiliation and positive religion class experience ($P = 0.01$). This had a significant, negative, very weak correlation, indicating that one's religious affiliation has a negative relationship towards their religion class experience. It is further supported by the fact that there was a significant, positive, weak correlation between religious affiliation and negative religion class experience ($P < 0.001$). Given these findings, it could be said that religious affiliation has a great influence towards the experience of non-secular students in their religion class. These were the only significant findings seen in the data.

3.1 Understanding Perspectives towards EsP Classes

Table 4.

Pearson R Correlation Table: Religion Class Experience and EsP Class Perspectives (N=76)

Independent Variable		EdukasyonsaPagpapakatao (EsP) Perspectives					
		Positive		Neutral		Negative	
		Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value	Statistics	p-value
Religion Class Experience	<i>Positive</i>	0.62	0.000	0.62	0.000	-0.55	0.000
	<i>Neutral</i>	0.52	0.000	0.51	0.000	-0.34	0.002
	<i>Negative</i>	-0.48	0.000	-0.48	0.000	0.51	0.000
Importance of Religion Class		-0.30	0.006	-0.30	0.006	0.26	0.021
General Experiences in Religion Class		0.51	0.000	0.51	0.000	-0.48	0.000
Likelihood of Recommending Religion Class		0.51	0.000	0.50	0.000	-0.42	0.000

Table 4 presents the results of the Pearson's R correlation between Religion Class Experiences and EsP Perspective Scores. Findings suggest that positive ($p < 0.001$), neutral ($p < 0.001$), general religion class experience ($p < 0.001$), and the likelihood of recommending others to take religion classes ($p < 0.001$) are seen to have significant, positive correlations with positive EsP Perspective Scores. This shows that students with mostly positive experiences with religion classes are likely to perceive EsP classes as important and have positively significant impacts towards its students. On the other hand, students with negative religion class experience ($p < 0.001$) and deem religion classes as less important ($p < 0.001$) are more likely to have negative perspective scores towards EsP classes.

Overall, the findings of the study saw that experiences from religion classes may have a slight hand towards forming the perspectives about *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (EsP) classes. Although a lot of these participants stated that they had “Neutral” experiences towards their Religion Classes, interpretations from their justification could see a slight sense of negativity. To them, religion classes weren’t there to make them knowledgeable about their belief, but rather, it was treated as another academic subject that held the same weight as their essential subjects. To them, that wasn’t appreciated. However, they perceived EsP as a more religiously neutral alternative to their religion classes. As per their sentiments, they believe that this class could be a way for its students to learn values that are based on the common good. They hope that this class won’t be handled the same way as their religion classes. They hope that this subject would foster a good environment for its students to learn morality, values, and social responsibility that isn’t biased with any religion, and doesn’t carry the same weight as academic subjects.

4. CONCLUSION

The study aimed to understand the correlation between religion class experiences of former non-secular school students, and how these experiences manifest towards their perspectives about *Edukasyon sa Pagpapakatao* (EsP) classes. It theorized that there could be a potential correlation, given that EsP could be considered the equivalent of religion classes in the Philippine public school system. The study noted that there were moderate to strong correlations between the positive, neutral, and negative experiences in religion classes towards the positive, neutral, and negative perceptions towards EsP classes. Furthermore, the study also hoped to understand the importance of EsP classes in the curriculum, given the state of the country’s current education. Findings showed that the participants still see it as an important subject, as it gave its students a moral compass to follow or use to navigate our country’s complex society. However, there were some who still believed that addressing the country’s current learning poverty is a priority, by allotting that time to other subjects.

Given the findings of the study, the current state of EsP classes in the country is perceived to be quite well. However, the participants noted that there must be much to be improved on. They believed that the basis of the subject’s curriculum must be aligned with the social morality of the Filipino people, or the general common good. To them, the idea of “God” or being “Maka-Diyos” in the subject’s objectives is quite aligned with the religious views. This could potentially divide or discriminate public school students who do not identify with the country’s major religion. To them, *Edukasyon ng Pagpapakatao* (EsP) should focus solely on values education and ethics.

CONSENT

All participants voluntarily participated in the study and accomplished an informed consent form. Throughout the study, they were also given the freedom to forfeit as a participant at any time. The author assured their anonymity throughout the study by assigning them with participant numbers and removing their personal information (e.g., name, contact information) from the results of the study. They were also given the freedom to request a copy of the research once it is done.

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