

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 administrated 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. Most of the questions that have been prepared in the survey questionnaire were based on the author's own experiences as a catholic school student. The surveys were both printed and published on a Google Form, which were distributed simultaneously to ensure a larger number of respondents. Due to the lack of perceived time and manpower, the researcher was not able to do a thorough validity of the respondents. However, the participants were given the freedom to request a copy of the paper once it has been published.

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	<i>f</i>	%
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%). Conversely, there were zero participants from the Visayan region of the Philippines (n=0, 0.00%). A low number of students were found to be Agnostic (n=9, 11.84%). In addition, an interesting finding from the paper saw that there were only a few participants who attended a public Catholic school. Perhaps, this could indicate an interesting dynamic between the catholic church and its connection with potentially socioeconomically thriving populations. 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.

3.2 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
Enrolment	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
Enrolment	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
Enrolment	-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
Enrolment	-0.00	0.93	0.02	0.81	0.11	0.33

Senior High School	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.

3.3 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		0.51	0.000	0.50	0.000	-0.42	0.000

Class

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 *EdukasyonsaPagpapakatao* (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.

3.4 Discussion of the Findings

A study conducted by del Castillo and Cacho (2023) explored the perspectives of the Filipino Youth towards Religious Education in the Philippines. As stated in the study's abstract, there may be a need to revise the current religious education curriculum. It needs to be more dynamic, engaging, and must be grounded in the lived experiences of its students for it to remain relevant to its learners. Their paper's general findings reflect the current findings of this paper, because some of its participants explained that their experiences weren't as fruitful. A lot of them shared sentiments that spoke about how its repetitive nature, overexaggerated requirements, and at times, the conservative views of their teachers were a big turn off for them.

However, this does not stop them from having objective perspectives on *EdukasyonsaPagpapakatao* (EsP) classes. Based on the study's findings, these students found that EsP classes are important and understood its purpose towards shaping the minds of the Filipino youth. A lot of them shared that this subject could be essential for character building and promote values that aren't based on religious belief, but rather, are based on the common good. They perceive EsP to be a fundamental subject for its students, however, it should not carry the same weight as academic subjects. For them, EsP or Values Education, for that matter, should not be measured through grades. They should be more focused on developing the moral compass of its learners. Findings from this study also align with Felisilda and Parojenog (2022). The participants believe that it should be focused more on application, rather than just pure lectures. They mentioned in their sentiments towards their Religion Class experience how they disliked the number of projects it produced. It could be stated that the projects in Religion class made them feel like the subject's purpose was to just be an academic requirement, rather than an avenue for them to learn about their belief system and appreciate it more.

Nurul Komariah and IshmatunNihayah (2023) conducted research on the importance of Islamic Religious Education to the improvement of its student's personality character. According to their findings, the purpose of Islamic Religious Education is for its students to improve their Islamic faith by means of fostering knowledge and appreciation towards the religion, which would potentially produce young Muslims who wish to continue their faith or even, increase their level of devotion. To liken this to the Philippines' religious education context, the purpose of Religious Education in the respective schools must be inclined to educating its students about their faith by means of creating an environment (i.e., classroom) that encourages knowledge and appreciation. For the participants, the current state of their Religion Classes does not necessarily serve this role. Thus, they turn to EsP classes, as a potential alternative or a better way for students to acquire and appreciate values that are aimed towards the common good.

It must be noted, however, that a portion of the participants noted that EsP classes should be separate from any religion, as it could contain bias or be heavily influenced by a major religion. Thereby, it could potentially discriminate other students who do not follow that belief system. Given this premise, the researcher believes that EsP classes should be molded based on social morality, which is more concerned with the collective group. According to Ellis (2023), its purpose is to enable citizens of an area to live and work together in a peaceful and beneficial manner. EdukasyonsaPagpapakatao (EsP) classes should be the avenue for that, concerned with teaching its students the social morality of the Philippine society.

An interesting finding from the paper also notes the participants opinions on replacing EsP classes. Although some of the participants said "No" to the matter, most of the participants were in favor of replacing the subject, or at the very least, considering the prospect of replacing the subject. A lot of the participants suggested to allocate the time to the more "essential" subjects, such as the Math and Sciences. This suggestion from the participants ties in with the findings of a study conducted by Jessie Barrot (2021), who stated that there must be effective reforms to the Philippine education system. Perhaps these participants were coming from the perspective of preparing their fellow Filipino students to be "future ready" by giving more priority to Science and Mathematics. However, there were some students who also suggested to replace EsP classes with "Ethics" or "Philosophy" classes, as to avoid any major connections to a specific religion. Through this, the beliefs of the students were not molded based on "Catholic" belief, but rather formed through their own fruition.

Overall, the findings of the study saw that experiences from religion classes may have a slight hand towards forming the perspectives about EdukasyonsaPagpapakatao (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.

4.1 Recommendations

The researcher recommends that future studies should gather more participants to increase and experiment with the validity of the questionnaire, and the study. Due to the limitations experienced by the researcher, the study was only able to collect seventy-six (76) samples. Not all aspects of the sociodemographic profile were represented properly. For example, there was a lack of participants from the Visayan region and an imbalanced representation towards participants from the Metro Manila area. Thus, it is best practice for future research to gather more participants.

Aside from participants, the researcher also recommends future research to refine the questionnaires more. As seen from the previous chapter, there was an imbalance of questions between the positive, neutral, and negative spectrum. In addition, there is a significant lack of questions in the EsP section. Thus, it is recommended to refine and include more questions to further increase the study's detail and potential understanding towards the correlation of the two variables.

Finally, the researcher suggests adding follow-up interviews for future research on this subject matter. This subject is heavily reliant on the experiences of former non-secular school students towards their religion classes, and their perceptions towards EsP classes. This requires more detail to deepen the study's understanding towards the participant's reasoning. Although the questionnaires included justification portions for select questions in the study, the researcher believes that their opinions on certain, lengthy experiences deserve more attention. A simple Likert scale may not be able to capture the holistic experience.

CONSENT

All participants voluntarily participated in the study and accomplished an written 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.

Ethical Approval:

As per international standards or university standards written ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the author(s).

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