

BALANCING FAITH AND LEARNING: A SYSTEMATIC REVIEW ON FAITH-BASED CURRICULUM IN CATHOLIC SCHOOLS

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Abstract

Education in Catholic Schools uses faith-based approaches to nurture students morally, intellectually, and ethically for their holistic growth. Catholic Education aims at nurturing the student from all backgrounds, combining faith with schooling. Such an approach also tries to deal with opposing secularization, lack of trained staff, and teacher training constraints alongside dealing with contemporary education challenges. Teaching from a faith-based educational approach is examined and so are the challenges involved through the learner focusing on the moral and character development, teacher perception, and student perception in the Catholic School context. This review literature is comprehensive and employs the PRISMA framework to identify relevant studies focused on the outcomes of a faith-based approach to education in Catholic schools. We searched between 2004-2024 across multiple databases, including J Gate, JSTOR, Science Direct, Scopus ProQuest. Initially, 968 studies were obtained, and after screening titles/abstracts, applying eligibility criteria, and assessing full texts, 26 studies were selected for detailed analysis.

Keywords: Catholic education, faith-based curriculum, religious education, moral education, integrated curriculum.

SDG Keywords: Quality Education, Reduced Inequality

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Faith based education has historically played a very important role in shaping the intellectual development and moral development of an individual and societies. A school is a place where a child spends almost 14-15 years of their life which provide them with learning environment and basically Catholic schools have provided a distinctive learning environment where academic subjects are seamlessly integrated with religious instructions. These institutions not only focus on academic excellence, but also ethical literacy, social possibility and the development of strong compass by aligning spiritual formation with continuous academic achievement, Catholic schools aim to cultivate individuals who are not only well educated but also guided by ethical and religious principles. (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017).

The impact of Catholic education extends beyond the classroom contributing significantly to the formation of responsible and engaged citizens. Previous researches says that the students enrol in Catholic schools have higher level of reasoning compare to their peers in secular institutions. (Horning, 2013). These students are more often engaged in social duties, participating in community service, ethical decision-making and leadership roles that contributes to the society. (Grace, 2009). Catholic School is also associated with implementing self discipline and ethical awareness. Fostering a sense of accountability and moral responsibility that elaborates into adulthood (Wodon 2020).

Instead of these advantages, Catholic school faces significant challenges in maintaining their faith based identity while adapting to involve educational policies and pedagogical trends. One of the major challenges is secularization and curriculum standardisation, as Catholic schools must accomplish with the national education policies while trying to preserve these religious values, governments, and educational policy makers often enforce uniform curriculum standards, which may limit the extent to religious teachings and can integrate into mainstream education (Wodon, 2020).

Another challenge is limited teacher training in faith based pedagogy. Many educators in Catholic schools report, feeling of unpreparedness to integrate theological principles in secular subjects. pedagogical methodologies are often prioritize for teacher training programs over religious instructions. Without sufficient professional development, in faith based teaching strategies, teachers may struggle to effectively based academic toughness with religious education.

Catholic schools are welcoming students from different religious backgrounds, creating a necessity for interfaith devotion strategies. multiculturalism and participation, strength, and community bonds and promote cultural understanding, it also promotes a challenge in maintaining the key religious Identity of Catholic institutions guide a fine line balance by fostering a welcoming environment from students of faith while upholding the basic principle of Catholic education.

As Catholic schools, aspire to balance faith and modern, ongoing researches and creative curriculum strategies are very important in securing that this education is continuous to wish in an everlasting academic landscape. By dealing with the challenges, Catholic schools can maintain their religious mission while remaining academically, competitive, socially, equitable, and morally strong.

2. METHODS

2.1 Study Design

This systematic review was conducted following the PRISMA 2020 (Preferred reporting items for systematic review and meta analysis) guidelines, securing a transparent, replicable and extensive approach okay to identify ,selecting, and analyzing relevant review of related literature. The PRISMA model was selected to provide a structured framework for conducting thorough and unbiased review, improving the reliability and reproducibility of findings.

Systematic search strategy was implemented across four major electronic databases-J gate,Scopus, Science direct, and JSTOR to identify related peer reviewed journal, article articles on faith based curricula in Catholic schools. These databases were selected due to their extensive coverage of social sciences, education, research, and religious studies, ensuring an assorted range of perspectives,methodology were considered.

To manage and analyse the studies, Zotero , reference management tool was used to organise citations, remove duplicates and streamline the data extraction. Zotero assisted the categorization of studies based on relevance, methodology and thematic focus, showing that only high-quality appeared with your journal articles were concluded at the end.

The PRISMA process was applied info key stages-

1. **Identification**-Abroad search was conducted across J Gate, Scopus, ScienceDirect , JSTOR, ProQuest. using specified keywords. Zotero was used to automatically import and organise all the collected references.
2. **Screening**- Duplicate records were removed using Zotero's duplicate detection, tool, and articles were screened by title and abstract to explore their relevance.
3. **Eligibility**-Full text articles were viewed against specified inclusion and exclusion, Irrelevant, non-empirical, or non peer reviewed performance studies were excluded at this stage .
4. **Inclusion**- A final selection of 26 studies were included in the review, which were further analysed and categorized based on these methodology, keep finding and thematic relevance.

By integrating PRISMA guidelines with Zotero for data management. This review ensures a thorough, systematic and transparent approach to literature selection and synthesis the combination of multiple database and advance with reference management tools, enhance the capability of the finding and minimise the risk of selection bias.

2.2 Search Strategy

A systematic and comprehensive database search was conducted to identify relevant literature on faith based in Catholic schools. The search was performed using for major academic databases Scopus, JGate , JSTOR, and Science Direct, ProQuest..These database were chosen due to their broad inter display, coverage of educational research, villages, studies, and social sciences, ensuring a high-quality selection of beer reviewed journal articles. To ensure reliability, authenticity and replicability, prearranged set of search terms and Boolean operators was used across all four databases. The search questions included variations of the following keywords:

“Faith-based curriculum” AND “Catholic education” – to study specific studies focused on faith-integrated academic instruction within Catholic schools.

A systematic database search was conducted using JGate, JSTOR, ScienceDirect, and Scopus,ProQuest.

Search terms included:

- *Faith-based curriculum*
- *Catholic education*
- *Catholic schools*

Filters applied:

- Publication years: 2004–2024
- Language: English
- Discipline: Social Sciences
- Source Type: Peer-reviewed journal articles, Doctoral thesis

2.3 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

To ensure the importance, quality, and thoughtfulness of the selected study this systematic review, applied, strict inclusion and exclusion criteria. These years were designed to focus on empirical, peer reviewed research that directly examine is faith based curriculum Catholic schools while eliminating the studies that was not methodological sound or lack empirical evidences.

Inclusion Criteria

Only those studies were included if they met the following conditions:

1. Publication Type:

- Articles thesis, and dissertations published in renowned education, theology, and social science journals were only taken.
- Only peer reviewed journal article were included to make sure studies underwent thorough academic observation and testing.

2. Study Design:

- Studies using qualitative, quantitative, or mixed-methods approaches were included.
- Some Studies like case study, longitudinal studies, ethnographic research, and controlled experiments were taken under consideration if they provided understanding on faith based curriculum in catholic schools.

3. Focus Area:

- The studies clearly examine faith-based curricula in Catholic schools.
- It also includes research on teacher training, curriculum development, and faith-based educational policies in Catholic schools .

4. Language and Timeframe:

- Only studies published in English between 2004 and 2024 were included.
- It makes it clear that the research reflects modern educational policies and challenges faced by Catholic schools.

Exclusion Criteria

Studies which were excluded based on following factors:

1. Publication Type:

- Conference proceedings, book chapters were excluded because they often lack peer review and may not meet Academic standards.
- Non-academic sources, magazines, or blogs were also excluded.

2. Study Design:

- Essay, theoretical paper and conceptual articles without empirical data were excluded.
- Philosophical discussion of religious education without empirical validation was also not considered.

3. Focus Area:

- Studies that focus on faith based education in non-Catholic schools such as Islamic protestant, Hindu or Jews schools were also excluded.
- Researchers that examine secular education models or did not include any faith based instructional components was also not included.
- Studies which broadly discuss about general religious education without specifically focusing on a Catholic based curriculum was also excluded.

4. Study Design:

- Studies not available in English were excluded to maintain the consistency in data extraction and analysis.
- Articles behind pay walls with no institutional access was also not included unless accessible to academic library services.

By applying these face size inclusion and exclusion priority, these reviews ensure that the final selection of 26 studies provides high-quality empirical evidence on faith based curriculum, implementation, challenges, and outcome in Catholic schools.

2.4 PRISMA Flow Diagram

Below is the **study selection process** reflecting the **968 initial studies** screened.

Identification
Records identified through database search: 968 JSTOR- 679 Science Direct – 241 Scopus – 15 J Gate- 27 ProQuest- 06
Duplicate records removed: 32
Screening

Records screened:	930
Records excluded based on title/abstract: 867	
Eligibility	
Full-text articles assessed for eligibility:	69
Articles excluded due to irrelevant focus: 43	
Included	
Studies included in final review: 26	

. Table 1: PRISMA Based search process and selection of records.

3. RESULTS

A total of 26 reviewed journal articles were included in this systematic review. The methodology is worried across the selected studies including qualitative, quantitative mixed methods and experimental research designs. The studies were conducted across various geographical locations covering North America, Africa , and Asia, providing a global perspective on faith based curriculum in Catholic schools. Most researches is concentrated in Australia Canada UK and US.

Table 2: Study Details

Authors Name	Year	Country	Methodology	Key Findings
Dee, Jay R., Henkin, Alan B., & Holman, Fred B.	2004	United States	Qualitative	The president of catholic College, president, manage conflicts between faculty, the trustees, using avoidance, compromise collaboration, and defensive assertiveness strategies due to the faith-based education.
Glanzer, Perry L., Ream, Todd C., Villarreal, Pedro, & Davis, Edith	2004	United States	Institutional Analysis	Ethics education is present in question higher education, but only third of the institutions require an ethics course.
Blout, Daniel L.	2004	United States	Qualitative	Explore teachers, perception of Catholic identity, faith formation and their role in maintaining Catholic education through reflection on their ministry within High school.
Morris, Andrew B.	2005	United Kingdom	Longitudinal Study	Catholic schools in England, show strong academic attainment, specially among disadvantage, people contributing to common good.

Mellor, Graeme J.	2005	Australia	Qualitative	Catholic schools, principles per perception of school purpose has evolved emphasising holistic education, unity over dualism and roles which we recognise secular challenges.
Collins, I.	2006	New Zealand	Qualitative	Maintaining autonomy becomes the tension in Catholic educational leaders and adapting state mandated curriculum.
Buchanan Michael T.	2007	Australia	Qualitative	Examining religious education coordinates perspective on curriculum shift in Melbourne, Catholic schools highlighting such as insufficient, training, and misunderstanding of the theoretical foundation, along with enablers like reflective practises and leadership support.
Brennan, Terri-Lynn Kay	2011	Canada	Qualitative	Roman Catholic schools in Ontario faces challenges due to faith diversity and dual system, education, legitimacy concerns.
Kim, Young	2011	United States	Quantitative	Catholic schools associated with higher wages, school quality factor like teacher, quality, and math course, impart labour market outcome.
Bryan, Hazel & Revell, Lynn	2011	United Kingdom	Semi-structured Interviews	Question RE teachers struggle with faith, identity and perform teacher, training, neutrality in teacher, teaching presents challenges for faith based educators.
Brennan, Terri-Lynn Kay	2011	Canada	Qualitative	Roman Catholic schools in Ontario faces challenges due to faith diversity and dual system, education, legitimacy concerns.
Donnelly, C.	2012	Northern Ireland	Qualitative	Catholic and protestant teachers

				collaborate on curriculum, despite reluctant to discuss differences.
Butler, Tim & Hamnett, Chris	2012	United Kingdom	Qualitative	Faith schools in East London in increasingly seems as mainstream choice, recruitment, shifting from faith, base to broader social and educational appeal.
Green, Elizabeth	2012	United Kingdom	Qualitative	Christian Academies religious assumption, analyse using Boudieu's concept of habitual cultural capital and symbolic power.
Evangelinou-Yiannakis, A.	2016	Australia	Qualitative	Catholic schools faces resistance from parents and authorities regarding faith base curriculum its a challenge track with administrative strategies.
Jordan, Nancy	2016	United States	Qualitative	Catholic schools principles highlight challenges in School sustainability including external pressures and internal frustration provides a favour for improving School variability and strengthening catholic education
Gleeson, J. & O'Flaherty	2016	Australia & Ireland	Survey & Interviews	Catholic School teachers play critical role in moral education, country specific differences in pedagogical practices and teachers student relationship.
Hawley.Irene A.	2016	United States	Qualitative	Explore a stake holders, perception of Catholic identity in suburban parish School, emphasising the role of service, Parish connection, prayers, academic excellence, and leadership dynamics
Gleeson, I. & O'Neill, M.	2017	Australia	Survey & Interviews	Catholic schools, integrates faith perspective in curriculum faith based instructions are committed to higher authorities, despite

				changing education, educational landscape.
D'Agostino, T.J.	2017	Uganda	Qualitative	Government aid affect Catholic schools, autonomy and identity, states policies, constant mission, alignment, goals and leadership.
Baccaï, Stephen F.	2018	United States	Quantitative	Non-Catholic and International students do not significantly impact Catholic identity in secondary school, however, concern arise regarding faculty, availability and lack of community within schools.
Galioto, C. & Manni, G.	2021	Italy	Qualitative	Catholic schools integrate faith, culture, and life. Pedagogical approach focuses on knowledge, teacher, testimony, and school as a community laboratory.
Leonard, S.N., O'Keeffe, L., White, B., O'Leary, M., & Sloan, K.	2022	Australia	Qualitative	Catholic STEM education faces, tension because industrial driven, learning and holistic, educational values.
Roszak, Piotr & Kudta, Weronika	2023	Poland	Qualitative	Religious education in Polish Public School is faded as religious freedom but faces ideological conflict over presence of religious practises and symbols.
Gleeson, I.	2024	Australia	Survey & Action Research	Integration of Catholic social teachers across the curriculum result in positive student outcome.
Rymarz, R.	2024	Australia	Qualitative	Religious education in Catholic schools imparted by declining religious affiliation.

3.2 Key Insights from the study details table

Methodologies Used:

Quantitative studies (2) Examined moral reasoning, market outcomes, and school performance.

Qualitative studies (20) Explore teacher identity, faith based curriculum challenges and school autonomy.

Mixed-methods studies (3) Combined statistical analysis with interviews and case studies.

Institutional analysis (1) Assessed structural and policy aspects of catholic education.

Geographical distribution

The studies span North America, Europe, Asia, Africa, and Australia, offering a global view of faith based education.

Most research is concentrated in Australia, Canada, the United kingdom , and the United States , reflecting a Western focus

Main Themes Identified:

Faith and Professional Identity: Catholic teachers face tensions between faith based values and secular educational frameworks.

Academic Performance: Some studies suggest catholic schools effectively support challenged students and improve educational outcomes.

Policy Challenges: Government regulations effect catholic School curriculum adoption, autonomy, and educators training.

DISCUSSION

The systematic review highlights the diverse impact of faith based curriculum in catholic schools. Several studies confirm that catholic education significantly influences moral reasoning, social responsibility, and ethical values. (Galioto & Manni 2021; Gleeson 2024). Catholic School emphasize community engagement, religious literacy and civic responsibility supporting therefaith based identity.

Moreover, academy performance results are mixed. Some research suggest that catholic School offer advantages in student attainment and engagement ,Particularly for challenged students (Morris ,2005 ; Butler &Hamnett , 2012).Other studies indicate no significant difference in achievement compared to secular schools (Kim , 2011). Differences in curriculum design, teacher training, and regional policy frameworks contribute to these different outcomes.

Another recurring challenge is educator preparing. Many catholic school teachers struggle to integrate religious instruction effectively due to insufficient faith based pedagogical training (Bryan & Revell ,2011 ;Green , 2012). The performative precious of modern education also create tensions for educators navigating their professional identity within faith based institutions.

4.2 Limitations

Despite valuable perception several limitations or disadvantages include :

Limited longitudinal studies :Few studies include long term impacts of catholic schooling on graduate ethical decision making and career paths.

Policy hindrance :Government funding and regulatory policies affect Catholic School autonomy, often shaping machine alignment and curriculum choices (D' Agostino , 2017)

Self-reported biases :Some studies depend on teacher or educator interviews and student service, which may introduce response unfairness.

Western-centric research :Most researches focus on Catholic education in Western regions, limiting broader global perception into multiple faith based schooling approaches.

4.3 Future research directions

To expand research on Catholic education, future studies should Faith consider:

Faith based Teacher training-

- Investigating methods to enhance pathological preparation for Catholic educators, addressing challenges in balancing professional objectivity with faith based instructions.
- School autonomy and government influence-
- Exploring how government funding impact religious school governments and faith based curriculum assessing long-term effect of state policies on Catholic schools identity.

Longitudinal studies on faith based curriculum-

- Examining how moral development in Catholic schools translate into adulthood.
- Following Catholic schools graduate to evaluate carrier success, ethical behaviour and continued religious practice.

Multi faith and inclusive Catholic education-

- Exploring how Catholic schools integrate students of different religious backgrounds.
- Comparing interfaith collaboration models in Catholic educational settings.

CONCLUSION

This review the critical role of faith based curriculum in Catholic education language. Shaping moral values and educational engagement, Catholic schools, successfully, implement faith, culture, and academic instructions, frosting, holistic students development.

Yet enduring challenges, womenincluding teachers, preparedness policy, constant and academic performance variability while some research point to Catholic schools, advantages in engagement and attainment, others find no clear difference compare to secular institutions

Future research should focus on teacher training, school governments and the main term impact of faith based education. By addressing these issues. Catholic schools can navigate modernisation while sustaining their religious identity and educational excellence.

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