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Original Article

Perspectives of Senior High School Students on Religious Education at Saint Mary's University

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Abstract

This study investigates the perspectives of Senior High School students at Saint Mary's University, Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya, Philippines on Religious Education, locally implemented as Christian Living and Values Education (CLVED), with the aim of informing curriculum enhancement. Grounded in student-centered learning and participatory pedagogy, the research employs a descriptive approach and integrates quantitative survey data with qualitative thematic analysis. Findings reveal that students demonstrate a highly positive orientation toward core Catholic beliefs, particularly regarding prayer, belief in God, and moral living. However, areas such as doctrinal depth and trust in Church authority received relatively lower affirmation, indicating emerging gaps in catechetical understanding and institutional perception. Qualitative findings highlight key student needs, including moral guidance, mental and spiritual well-being, the practical relevance of lessons, and interfaith awareness. Furthermore, CLVED is perceived as contributing significantly to students' holistic development, particularly in fostering character formation, spiritual maturity, and social responsibility. Despite these strengths, some responses suggest the need for greater engagement and contextualization of learning experiences. The study underscores the necessity of a more responsive, learner-centered Religious Education curriculum that integrates doctrinal fidelity with contemporary relevance. It advocates for pedagogical innovation, enhanced teacher formation, and the inclusion of psychosocial and intercultural dimensions to ensure that CLVED remains transformative in addressing the evolving realities of today's youth.

Keywords: Catholic Faith, Participatory Pedagogy, Religious Education, Spiritual Formation, Student-Centered Learning

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Introduction

Religious Education (RE) has long been a fundamental component of the curriculum in Catholic institutions (Baring, 2015). The Catholic Church consistently emphasizes its role in the mission of evangelization, as reflected in various magisterial documents. *Evangelii Nuntiandi* (Paul VI, 1975), *Gravissimum Educationis* (Vatican II, 1965), and the General Directory for Catechesis (Congregation for the Clergy, 1997) underscore the essential function of RE in fostering Christian formation. Pope Francis (2013) further affirms this in *Evangelii Gaudium*, stating that "Education and catechesis are at the service of this growth in Christ" (#163). This perspective has influenced the revision of the Directory for Catechesis (Pontifical Council for Promoting the New Evangelization, 2020), which seeks to address the challenges posed by contemporary historical, social, and cultural contexts.

As an academic discipline, RE aspires to deepen students' understanding and commitment to their faith. Historically, RE traces its origins to the Church's catechetical tradition, initially aimed at evangelization and conversion. However, over time, the objectives of catechesis have evolved, shifting toward a more holistic approach that integrates faith formation, moral development, and critical engagement with religious traditions (John Paul II, *Catechesi Tradendae*, 1979).

The Impact of Religious Education

A growing body of research has examined the effectiveness of Religious Education across various dimensions of human development. Estrada et al. (2019) found that engagement in RE significantly contributed to students' mental well-being, fostering resilience and psychological stability. Similarly, Batool et al. (2021) explored the relationship between RE and ethical behavior among university students, demonstrating that those who had taken RE courses exhibited higher moral integrity compared to their counterparts who had not.

In the Philippine context, Baring et al. (2024) provided empirical evidence suggesting that RE serves as a catalyst for environmental consciousness, positively influencing students' attitudes and behaviors toward ecological stewardship. Furthermore, Burrus et al. (2023) identified a correlation between RE and economic ideology, indicating that students educated in Catholic schools and raised in Catholic families tend to support capitalism more than those who were not. This finding has significant implications for students' beliefs regarding private property and economic freedom.

Challenges in the Implementation of Religious Education

Despite its numerous contributions, RE continues to encounter significant challenges across various contexts. Mąkosa (2023) observed a growing disillusionment with religious instruction in Poland, highlighting that the catechetical and evangelistic objectives of RE are only partially achieved. Furthermore, many societies report a decline in religious engagement, particularly among young people. The effectiveness of RE is also shaped by socio-cultural and legal factors, as demonstrated in comparative studies of Ireland and South Korea.

Cho et al. (2023) analyzed the differing approaches to RE in these two nations, revealing key contextual challenges. In Ireland, Catholic schools are legally permitted to implement a denominational religious curriculum prioritizing faith formation. However, educators' religious affiliations vary, and an increasing number express discomfort teaching content that contradicts their personal beliefs. Consequently, there is a growing movement among Irish educators advocating for a more inclusive RE curriculum that explores multiple religious traditions. In contrast, South Korea

adheres to a government-mandated neutral approach to RE, reflecting the country's religious pluralism, where Catholicism is a minority faith. Consequently, Catholic schools in South Korea—often staffed by clergy—tend to diverge from national policies to uphold their own religious missions. This comparative analysis underscores the influence of legal frameworks and cultural contexts on the pedagogical approaches and overall effectiveness of RE.

Empirical studies further highlight the limitations of RE in achieving religious literacy. Conroy et al. (2011) found that many students exhibit a fundamental lack of understanding of basic religious concepts, attributed to factors such as conflicting expectations, inadequate resources, and limited time allocation for the subject. Additionally, the practice of integrating examination and non-examination students within the same classroom presents further instructional challenges. The effectiveness of RE is also highly dependent on local conditions and the competency of educators, resulting in inconsistencies in its implementation across different settings.

In the Philippines, similar concerns have been raised regarding the efficacy of RE in Catholic institutions. Cornelio (2017) examined the declining religiosity among Filipino youth, presenting a complex picture through an analysis of myriads of studies that either support or challenge this thesis. The Catholic Bishops' Conference of the Philippines (CBCP, 1993) has long expressed concern over the apparent disconnect between Catholic education and the lived faith of its graduates, noting that many individuals fail to internalize and apply Christian values in their daily lives. Peckson (2017) attributed this issue to the overemphasis on Church law, doctrine, and abstract theological concepts, which often render RE inaccessible and unengaging for students. Learning is often centered on rote memorization rather than critical engagement, leading to passive reception rather than meaningful integration of faith.

Del Rosario (2017) further critiqued the pedagogical approach to RE in Catholic universities, arguing that there is a fundamental misalignment between the curriculum and the principles of inclusivity, intercultural understanding, and interfaith dialogue. His critical discourse analysis of RE curricula revealed a lack of responsiveness to contemporary socio-religious realities. Cornelio (2018) similarly highlighted the pedagogical challenges of RE, noting that traditional methods often fail to resonate with modern learners. Del Castillo and Cacho (2023) reinforced these observations, emphasizing that centralized decision-making processes in the Philippine education system hinder efforts to adopt more student-centered approaches. They advocate for a shift towards more participatory and inclusive pedagogies that incorporate student perspectives, ultimately fostering a more transformative and meaningful engagement with faith.

Religious Education in Saint Mary's University

The education apostolate has always been regarded by the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM) as a fundamental means of fulfilling its missionary mandate. In every parish, establishing a mission school was considered an essential aspect of this mission (Aduca et al., 2018). Integral to this educational apostolate is the emphasis on Religious Education, which is viewed as a vital component of CICM's missionary activity. Religious Education facilitates the integral Christian formation of students, a commitment exemplified by the efforts of the CICM Philippines Provincial Committee on Education. This commitment was evident in the development of a Religious Education textbook for the tertiary level, ensuring alignment with the mission of CICM schools.

However, the introduction of the Senior High School (SHS) program in the Philippine education system presented an unforeseen challenge for CICM schools. The absence of an established Religious Education curriculum specifically designed for SHS students necessitated the adoption of the textbook originally intended for tertiary education as the primary instructional material for SHS Religious Education courses. This adaptation eventually led to the development of additional Religious Education textbooks across various departments within CICM schools.

The first set of textbooks, covering aligned topics within CICM institutions, was published in 2013 and revised in 2018. The selection of topics was based on the commonality of Religious Education subjects taught across CICM schools, reflecting a predominantly top-down pedagogical approach characteristic of many Catholic universities. While the CICM Religious Education pedagogy was patterned from the See-Discern-Act paradigm, the underlying approach remained hierarchical, focusing primarily on preserving Catholic identity, which may limit broader engagement with contemporary religious and social issues.

Given these circumstances, this study aims to explore the perspectives of Senior High School students at Saint Mary's University regarding their experiences with Religious Education. In CICM basic education, this is known as Christian Living and Values Education (CLVED); in higher education, it is called Christian Formation Education (CFE). Importantly, there is a scarcity of research on CLVED within CICM schools, making this study one of the first to systematically examine students' perspectives in this context. Although data collection was limited to a single institution, the findings are intended to inform the broader CICM Philippine Schools Network (CICM PSN), which comprises five interrelated CICM schools. Specifically, the study seeks to (1) examine students' understanding of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, (2) identify the needs they believe Religious Education should address, and (3) assess how CLVED contributes to their holistic development—encompassing moral, spiritual, intellectual, psychological, and social dimensions. By providing student-centered evidence, the study aims to guide the CICM PSN in reviewing and updating the CLVED curriculum, including potential textbook revisions, ensuring it remains responsive, engaging, and transformative for students across the network.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Student-Centered Learning theories. Geraldine O'Neill and Timothy McMahon (2005) provided a broad definition of this approach in their article. According to them, Student-Centered Learning (SCL), as described by various scholars they cited, centers on the idea that students actively construct their own knowledge while teachers serve as facilitators rather than mere transmitters of information (Kember, 1997; Rogers, 1983b). Rogers emphasized the importance of trust in learners' abilities and granting them meaningful choice in their learning process, a view also supported by Burnard (1999). Harden and Crosby (2000) highlighted that the focus should be on what students do to learn, rather than what teachers do to teach. Lea et al. (2003) outlined key principles of SCL, such as active learning, deep understanding, autonomy, and mutual respect, while Gibbs (1995) expanded on students' decision-making roles in what, how, and when to learn. Brandes and Ginnis (1986) stressed equal learner relationships and integration of affective and cognitive domains.

The theoretical underpinnings of SCL are mainly rooted in constructivist (Carlile & Jordan, 2005), cognitive (Cobb, 1999), and social constructivist theories (Bredo, 1999), which together emphasize the value of activity, reflection, and community in the learning process. These views were also shared by Jeanetta Jones

Miller as expressed in her work *The student-centered classroom: Transforming your teaching and grading practices* (Miller, 2020) and was also highlighted in a publication by Teaching Excellence in Adult Literacy ((TEAL Center Staff, 2008) and mentioned in *Student-centered learning: An insight into theory and practice* by Attard et al. (2010).

This framework is also connected to participative pedagogy, as cited and used by Del Castillo and Cacho in the research. Participatory pedagogy aims to promote the ideals of equity, equality, and co-agency, modelling these effectively in our classrooms so that they reflect and spread across the school community and wider society (Del Castillo & Cacho, 2023). Rooted in Freire's (1970) Pedagogy of the Oppressed, this approach challenges the traditional "banking model" of education, where students passively receive information from teachers. Instead, participatory pedagogy encourages learners to be co-creators of knowledge through discussions, critical reflection, and experiential learning. In the context of religious education, this approach allows students to connect religious teachings with their personal experiences, making faith formation more meaningful and relevant to their lives (Del Castillo & Cacho, 2023). By fostering an interactive learning environment, participative pedagogy empowers students to take ownership of their faith journey rather than merely memorizing doctrines.

SCL recognizes the importance of student readiness and development, suggesting that learners absorb knowledge best when they are internally motivated and developmentally prepared. By prioritizing the student needs, interests, and learning styles, SCL fosters not only academic achievement but also moral growth, emotional intelligence, and social awareness—making it highly relevant to subjects like Christian Living Education (CLVED), which aim to shape both the mind and character of learners.

To put this framework into practice in Religious Education, the study used a questionnaire developed by Del Castillo and Cacho (2021). The instrument examined students' understanding of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, the needs they believe Religious Education should address, and how the subject contributes to their holistic development and engagement in faith-based learning. The information gathered from this tool is intended to guide improvements and contextual updates to the Religious Education (CLVED) curriculum.

To address these objectives, the following research questions were formulated:

1. What are the perceptions of Senior High School students of Saint Mary's University on the fundamentals of the Catholic faith?
2. What are the needs of Senior High School students of Saint Mary's University that the Religious Education (CLVED) curriculum should address?
3. How does Religious Education (CLVED) contribute to the holistic development of senior high school students?

Methodology

This study employed a descriptive quantitative survey design to examine students' perceptions of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith within the Christian Living and Values Education (CLVED) curriculum. The primary data were gathered through structured survey items and analyzed using statistical methods to identify trends and patterns.

To supplement the quantitative data, the questionnaire included two open-ended questions: one to determine the students' perceived needs that Religious Education should address, and another to explore how CLVED contributes to their

holistic development. These responses were used to provide additional insights and support the interpretation of the quantitative findings.

The research was conducted at Saint Mary's University Senior High School (SMU-SHS) in Bayombong, Nueva Vizcaya. As a Catholic institution under the Congregation of the Immaculate Heart of Mary (CICM), the school provides an appropriate setting for examining faith formation within a structured Religious Education program. The participants in the study were Grade 12 students ($N = 418$), representing the exit level of the basic education Religious Education curriculum.

A purposive sampling technique combined with self-selection (voluntary response) was employed. All Grade 12 students were invited to participate to ensure inclusive representation across age groups (17–18 years old). From the total population, 129 students voluntarily completed the survey. To determine statistical validity, Slovin's Formula $n = \frac{N}{1+Ne^2}$ was applied, resulting in a margin of error of 7.32%, which is acceptable within the 5%–10% range for descriptive research. The instrument demonstrated high reliability with a Cronbach's Alpha of .963, indicating excellent internal consistency.

Grade 12 students were selected due to their developmental maturity and cumulative curricular experience. As graduating students, they are capable of critical reflection and uniquely positioned to evaluate the effectiveness and relevance of the CLVED subject. Profile variables, such as prior school background, were included only for descriptive purposes and not as selection criteria.

The study utilized a three-part survey questionnaire. Part I consisted of a 22-item Likert-scale instrument adapted from Del Castillo and Cacho (2023) to measure students' perceptions of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, using a 4-point scale to eliminate neutral responses. Part II included an open-ended question asking students about the needs they believe Religious Education should address, while Part III featured another open-ended question assessing how Christian Living and Values Education (CLVED) contributes to their holistic development. Although the instrument was originally developed for college students, no modifications were made, as the items reflect foundational Catholic teachings and moral values consistently covered from elementary through Senior High School, making it appropriate for the current respondents.

To ensure validity and reliability, the quantitative instrument underwent face validation to confirm clarity, coherence, and alignment with core Catholic teachings. A pilot test with 30 students excluded from the final sample yielded a Cronbach's Alpha of .963, categorized as "excellent" reliability. The two qualitative items were content-validated to align with the study's objectives and to elicit reflective responses about students' perceived needs and the formative impact of CLVED, thereby ensuring relevance for the secondary-level context.

Data collection was conducted with the school principal's approval and administered via a secure online platform. Participation was voluntary, with an initial screening question requiring students' consent before proceeding. Students aged 18 and above provided implied consent, while parental consent was obtained for those under 18. The survey was administered after final examinations to reduce bias. All responses were collected anonymously, and confidentiality was maintained at all times.

Data analysis followed a mixed-methods approach. Quantitative data were analyzed using frequency and percentage distributions for demographic profiling, and weighted mean and standard deviation to assess students' perceptions. Qualitative data were analyzed through thematic analysis, involving inductive coding, identification of recurring patterns, and clustering into themes. The analysis focused

on two key areas: (1) students' Religious Education needs and (2) the role of CLVED in holistic development. The interpretation of quantitative results followed this scale: 3.26–4.00 (Strongly Agree/Highly Positive), 2.51–3.25 (Agree/Positive), 1.76–2.50 (Disagree/Negative), and 1.00–1.75 (Strongly Disagree/Highly Negative).

Ethical standards were strictly observed throughout the study. Participation was voluntary, with no coercion, incentives, or penalties involved. Participants were fully informed of the study's purpose and their right to withdraw at any time. Anonymity and confidentiality were ensured by not collecting personal identifiers, and the timing of data collection after final examinations minimized potential academic pressure, ensuring that responses reflected genuine student perceptions.

Results

The results and data analysis are presented below.

Table 1: Profile of Student Respondents based on the Demographic profiles

	f (n=129)	%
Gender		
Male	41	31.78
Female	83	64.34
Prefer not to say	5	3.88
Age		
17 and below	20	15.50
18	107	82.95
19 and above	2	1.55
Religion		
Roman Catholic	94	72.87
UECFI	3	2.33
UCCP	1	0.78
Pentecostal	1	0.78
Methodist	5	3.88
Lutheran	1	0.78
Iglesia Ni Cristo	5	3.88
Baptist	4	3.10
Evangelical	1	0.78
Espiritista	1	0.78
Born Again	13	10.08
Educational Background		
Attended JHS Private School with Religious Education Classes	84	65.12
Attended JHS Private School without Religious Education Classes	2	1.55
Attended JHS Public School with Religious Education or Catechetical Classes	7	5.43
Attended JHS Public School without Religious Education or Catechetical Classes	36	27.91

The study analyzed a sample of 129 respondents, with a female majority (64.34%) and a predominant age of 18 years (82.95%), indicating a group transitioning into tertiary education. Religious affiliation is notably centered on Roman Catholicism (72.87%), followed by Born Again Christians (10.08%). Furthermore, 65.12% of respondents attended private Junior High Schools that offered formal religious education. This demographic profile suggests that the respondents' perceptions of faith are likely shaped by a combination of strong

Catholic doctrinal influences and prior systematic exposure to faith-based curricula in private institutional settings.

Table 2: Senior high school students' perception of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith

Statements	Mean	SD	QI
Belief in the Holy Trinity/Triune God	3.29	0.82	Very Positive
Belief in Jesus as the Christ (or Savior)	3.54	0.75	Very Positive
Belief in God as creator and source of life on earth	3.49	0.77	Very Positive
Belief in God's constant presence in one's life through the Holy Spirit	3.43	0.75	Very Positive
Belief in Jesus' resurrection from the dead	3.40	0.75	Very Positive
Belief in the Church as a sacrament of God's presence in the world	3.40	0.77	Very Positive
Belief in the Sacraments of the Church as essential to Christians' relationship with God	3.42	0.78	Very Positive
Belief in Jesus' second coming	3.29	0.82	Very Positive
Belief in the necessity of the Bible in developing one's faith as Christian	3.37	0.75	Very Positive
Belief in faith that does justice and participates in social transformation	3.40	0.76	Very Positive
Belief in the integrity of Bishops, Priests, and Religious Authorities as leaders of the Church	3.23	0.79	Positive
Responding to the call of the Church in showing active concern for the poor and the marginalized	3.45	0.75	Very Positive
The need to integrate one's beliefs into the practical/ethical aspects of daily life	3.39	0.82	Very Positive
Belief in the Saints' intercessory role in the Church	3.20	0.80	Positive
Belief in the important role of Mary in Salvation history	3.31	0.80	Very Positive
Belief in the power of prayer	3.57	0.75	Very Positive
Belief in the blessings obtained when celebrating the sacraments with the Church	3.46	0.77	Very Positive
Faith in God's pure positivity and kindness toward people and the rest of creation	3.54	0.77	Very Positive
Faith and good works as necessary for salvation	3.50	0.74	Very Positive
Faith is a personal and private matter	3.33	0.84	Very Positive
Faith in God (or religious faith) as a powerful means to living sound ethical principles	3.50	0.75	Very Positive
Faith in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting (make it in first person)	3.36	0.79	Very Positive
OVERALL	3.40	0.78	Very Positive

Legend: 3.25-4.00 (Very Positive); 2.50-3.24 (Positive); 1.75-2.49 (Negative); 1.00-1.74 (Very Negative)

Table 2 presents the senior high school students' perceptions of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith, with an overall mean of 3.40 (SD = 0.78), indicating a "Very Positive" qualitative interpretation. The highest level of agreement was observed in the belief in the power of prayer (M = 3.57, SD = 0.75), followed closely by belief in Jesus as the Christ (M = 3.54, SD = 0.75) and faith in God's pure positivity and kindness (M = 3.54, SD = 0.77). These results indicate that students hold a deep conviction regarding the personal and relational aspects of spirituality.

Conversely, although still yielding positive results, the lowest mean scores were recorded for belief in the Saints' intercessory role (M = 3.20, SD = 0.80) and for the integrity of Bishops, Priests, and Religious Authorities (M = 3.23, SD = 0.79). These were the only two items to fall within the "Positive" range rather than "Very Positive". This suggests a slight variance between the students' strong adherence to core theological doctrines and their relatively more cautious perception of the Church's hierarchical and intercessory traditions. Overall, the data reflect a robust foundation in Catholic faith fundamentals among the respondents

Table 3: Themes and Sample Responses on Students' Needs in Religious Education

Theme	Sample Responses	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Moral Guidance & Decision-Making	"Help and guide me in making my decisions, especially when I'm confused or pressured."	34	26.36%
	"Developing strong values such as respect, honesty, and compassion."		
	"Religious education should address our need for guidance in making good decisions and understanding what is right and wrong..."		
Mental & Spiritual Well-being	"In giving me comfort and the feeling of calmness through the teachings instead of fear and more anxiety."	27	20.93%
	"mental and spiritual well- being"		
	"Probably need for hope and resilience, like helping me cope with struggles, fears, and uncertainties."		
Practical Relevance & Relatability	"Use Jesus' experiences and parables to connect religion with real life... without forcing religion into them."	15	11.63%
	"Start using videos... almost all students nowadays prefer visual learning."		
	"Include activities that strengthen an individual's faith. For us to engage and better understand the faith we believe in."		

Interfaith Awareness & Diversity	"Cultivate cultural understanding and tolerance, enabling us to appreciate diverse beliefs." "Teachers should include other religions. Do not just focus on Catholic." "The awareness about other religious beliefs."	8	6.20%
Non-Substantive / Already Addressed	"None, since it provides all the things I should know." "It's addressed enough." "N/A"	45	34.88%
TOTAL		129	100%

The qualitative analysis of Table 3 identifies the specific areas where students seek further growth, revealing a clear shift from "learning about" religion to "applying" it to the complexities of modern life. Most significantly, the largest portion of the respondents (34.88%, f=45) indicated that they had no further needs or were already satisfied. This high frequency suggests that the current CLVED program is successfully meeting the fundamental spiritual needs of more than one-third of the student body, validating the "Very Positive" quantitative results reported in Table 2.

Among the students seeking further development, the most prominent active need identified is Moral Guidance and Character Formation (26.36%, f=34). This indicates that senior high school students view Religious Education as a practical "moral compass," directly supporting the high quantitative mean in Table 2 regarding faith as a means to sound ethical principles (M=3.50). Students are explicitly asking for a curriculum that helps them navigate peer pressure, ethical dilemmas, and the transition into adulthood.

Furthermore, a notable trend emerged regarding the need for Mental Support and Spiritual Formation (20.93%, f=27). Students are increasingly looking to Religious Education for "comfort," "calmness," and "hope" amidst stress and anxiety, indicating that the value of religion is shifting toward psychological resilience and emotional well-being.

The demand for Practical Relevance and Relatability (11.63%, f=15) highlights a request for modern pedagogical methods. Students in this category seek a move away from "preaching" toward dialogue and visual learning, suggesting that traditional delivery can feel detached from the "Gen Z" context, particularly where faith intersects with science and politics. Finally, the need for Interfaith Awareness (6.20%, f=8) reflects the institution's multicultural reality. Even in a Catholic setting, students expressed a desire to appreciate diverse beliefs and to move beyond a purely denominational focus, aligning with the student body's diverse demographic. Collectively, these findings suggest that students desire a holistic, relatable, and emotionally supportive religious experience.

In Table 4, the qualitative data reveal that 89.15% of Senior High School students recognize a specific positive impact of Religious Education on their lives, suggesting the subject is a vital component of their identity formation rather than a mere academic burden. The most dominant contribution identified is Character and Moral Integrity (43.41%), which students describe as the "moral glue" that instills honesty, respect, and better decision-making. This is closely followed by Spiritual

Maturity (27.91%), which marks a shift from rote learning of religious facts to a personal, purposeful relationship with God.

Table 4: Perspectives of the respondents to the Contributions of Religious Education to students' holistic development

Theme	Sample Responses	Frequency (f)	Percentage (%)
Character & Moral Integrity	"It teaches me important values that shape my character and guide my behavior toward others."	56	43.41%
	"...helps me reflect on my values and reminds me to stay humble, responsible, and respectful."		
Spiritual Development	"Helps students form a personal relationship with God rather than just educating."	36	27.91%
	"It deepens my faith that builds a stronger relationship between God and me." By strengthening my faith		
Non-Substantive (None/NA)	"None," "N/A," "na"	14	10.85%
Social Responsibility	"Encourages me to be a better person who contributes positively to society."	10	7.75%
	It teaches me to trust in God, take care of his creation, and respect others		
	It enables me to be of service to others and helps me develop a sense of faith		
Cognitive Perspective	"It makes us reflect... and pushes us to be more critical thinkers and compassionate beings."	10	7.75%
	"Religious education opens new perspectives on life that leads to better outcomes"		
	"For me, religious education contributes to my holistic development because it helps me think critically about values, reflect on my own beliefs, and understand others with respect. It guides me in making moral decisions, strengthens my empathy, and teaches me to live with integrity. Through it, I grow not only in knowledge but also in character, becoming more responsible, compassionate, and purposeful in life."		
Psychological Resilience	"It provides a sense of inner peace, resilience, and direction as I face academic pressures."	3	2.33%

"It sometimes helps me cope."

It helped me reflect all throughout the year whether I'm struggling or enjoying. It also helped me appreciate eucharistic celebrations, parables, and other religious activities more

TOTAL

129

100%

Beyond individual character, the subject fosters "outer growth" through Social Responsibility (7.75%) and Cognitive Perspective (7.75%). These themes indicate that Religious Education encourages students to look outward with empathy and think critically about their actions, developing them into well-rounded graduates who are both socially aware and intellectually curious.

Interestingly, while the frequency is lower in this specific table, faith also serves as a "stability factor" through Psychological Resilience (2.33%), acting as a support system that offers inner peace against academic stress. Although 10.85% of the responses were non-substantive, the overwhelming majority of the feedback underscores that Religious Education is perceived as a foundational element in shaping the students' holistic development—spiritually, morally, and socially.

Discussion

Perceptions of SHS Students on the Fundamentals of Catholic Faith

The findings indicate that senior high school students in a CICM school demonstrate a *very positive* perception of the fundamentals of the Catholic faith ($M = 3.40$, $SD = 0.78$). Among the indicators, the highest-rated belief is the power of prayer ($M = 3.57$), underscoring its central role in students' spiritual lives. This supports the findings of Del Castillo, Del Castillo, and Koenig (2023), who characterize prayer among Filipino Christian youth as a deeply personal and meaningful practice that provides comfort and emotional stability, particularly in times of distress. In contexts where access to formal mental health services may be limited, prayer functions as a significant coping mechanism.

This result, however, contrasts with Del Castillo and Cacho (2023), where faith was largely perceived as a private matter. Such divergence may be explained by contextual differences, as rural populations tend to exhibit stronger adherence to traditional religious practices compared to their urban counterparts (Nikkhah et al., 2015). The high ratings for beliefs such as Jesus as the Christ ($M = 3.54$) and faith in God's goodness ($M = 3.54$) further reinforce a strong orientation toward relational spirituality, where faith is experienced as personal and dynamic rather than merely doctrinal.

Moreover, the data reveal a clear integration of faith and ethical living. The high ratings for faith as a guide to moral decision-making ($M = 3.50$) and the necessity of good works ($M = 3.50$) indicate that students perceive religion as central to their moral framework. This supports the findings of Baring et al. (2024) and Madrigal et al. (2020), which emphasize the role of religious education in shaping value formation and moral responsibility among Filipino youth.

However, comparatively lower ratings on beliefs such as the intercession of saints ($M = 3.20$), trust in Church authorities ($M = 3.23$), and the Second Coming ($M = 3.29$) point to areas of relative uncertainty. These patterns suggest gaps in doctrinal understanding and a degree of ambivalence toward institutional authority. This is consistent with broader trends among Filipino youth, who increasingly demonstrate

selective religiosity and critical engagement with Church structures (CBCP News, 2019).

A Thematic Analysis of Students' Needs in Religious Education

To identify the specific areas where students seek further growth and support, the researchers employed Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis. This systematic process facilitated the identification of recurring patterns in the qualitative data, ensuring that the resulting themes accurately reflect the students' lived experiences and expectations. By coding the data and reviewing candidate themes, five distinct categories emerged from 129 responses, reflecting a collective call for a curriculum responsive to contemporary challenges.

1. Moral Guidance and Decision-Making

Representing the most significant substantive need, 26.36% of students view Religious Education as a practical "moral compass" for navigating real-life challenges. Students explicitly expressed the need for guidance when feeling "confused or pressured," particularly in developing values such as honesty and compassion. This reinforces earlier findings showing that students rely on faith as a foundation for ethical decision-making.

From a developmental perspective, these responses suggest that students are still developing their moral judgment. Drawing on Kohlberg's framework, many appear to operate at the Conventional Level, where decisions are influenced by social expectations and the desire to act appropriately within given norms. However, the reported sense of "confusion" when facing contemporary issues indicates not weakness, but a form of cognitive tension that signals readiness for more advanced moral reasoning.

This is where the role of Religious Education becomes critical. Using Vygotsky's concept of the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), students can be understood as being on the threshold of higher-level moral thinking but requiring guidance to progress. In this process, educators function as More Knowledgeable Others (MKOs), providing scaffolding through discussion, reflection, and real-life application. Such support enables students to move beyond simply following rules toward developing moral autonomy grounded in internalized and reasoned values (Anwar et al., 2024).

2. Mental and Spiritual Well-being

The second most prominent need, cited by 20.93% of participants, positions the CLVED classroom as a vital source of psychological support. Students expressed a desire for a learning environment characterized by "comfort and calmness" rather than "fear and anxiety," and emphasized the need for "hope and resilience" to cope with the uncertainties of adolescence. These responses indicate that learners are not only seeking cognitive or moral guidance but also emotional security within the context of Religious Education.

This finding aligns with Del Castillo and Aliño (2020), who observed that Filipino Catholic youth frequently rely on faith as a primary coping mechanism in times of stress and uncertainty. In this light, Religious Education functions as a space where students can process personal struggles through a spiritual lens. To respond effectively to this need, the curriculum may benefit from emphasizing a "theology of comfort," which presents faith as a source of strength, healing, and accompaniment rather than fear or judgment (Estrada et al., 2019).

Such an approach can help students internalize religious values that not only guide behavior but also support emotional well-being, ultimately fostering long-term psychological resilience.

3. Practical Relevance and Relatability

Accounting for 11.63% of the responses, this theme reflects students' desire for a shift from passive, lecture-based instruction toward a more experiential or "lived faith" approach. Participants suggested the use of "videos" and reflections on "Jesus' experiences" as ways to make lessons more relatable, emphasizing that faith should be connected to real-life situations without being "forced" upon them. These responses indicate a preference for pedagogical approaches that are engaging, contextualized, and personally meaningful.

This finding supports Del Castillo and Cacho's (2023) assertion that Religious Education must be dynamic and grounded in the lived realities of students. Rather than relying solely on traditional instruction, there is a need to adopt more interactive and student-centered strategies. Integrating multimedia resources, case-based discussions, and contextualized reflections can help bridge the gap between doctrinal content and the realities of contemporary, digital-age life.

By making learning more participatory and relevant, CLVED can foster deeper engagement and enable students to experience faith not merely as a set of teachings, but as a lived and meaningful practice.

4. Interfaith Awareness and Diversity

Reflecting an awareness of a pluralistic society, 6.20% of students expressed a desire to understand and appreciate religious traditions beyond Catholicism. This highlights a growing need for global religious literacy, which can reduce misconceptions, promote empathy, and encourage respectful engagement with diverse beliefs (Adjani et al., 2024). In the Philippine context, integrating interfaith dialogue into the CLVED curriculum has the potential to transform exclusivist attitudes into a commitment to communal harmony and mutual understanding (Cornelio & Salera, 2012).

Such an approach not only broadens students' cognitive and moral horizons but also equips them to navigate increasingly multicultural environments. By fostering awareness and appreciation of diverse religious perspectives, Religious Education can cultivate both tolerance and active social responsibility, reinforcing its role in forming well-rounded, ethically and socially competent individuals.

5. Non-Substantive / Already Addressed

The largest single category, comprising 34.88% of responses, consists of students who either expressed satisfaction with the current curriculum ("It's addressed enough") or provided non-substantive answers (N/A).

While this suggests that the existing program effectively meets the immediate moral needs of a substantial portion of the student body, it may also indicate a limited awareness of the broader dimensions of faith formation. This presents an opportunity for educators to challenge "satisfied" students by expanding the curriculum into more complex areas of social justice, systemic ethics, and deeper theological inquiry.

Overall, the findings indicate a growing demand among senior high school students for a Religious Education (RE) curriculum that is responsive to their lived experiences and immediate needs. This does not suggest that RE educators should set aside the core doctrines and tenets of the Catholic faith; rather, it emphasizes the

importance of meeting students where they are in their spiritual and personal journeys. Addressing their concerns, such as the need for moral guidance, mental health and spiritual well-being, and a relevant, relatable pedagogy to help them better engage in classroom discussion, can serve as an entry point for deeper theological engagement. This is their *locus theologicus* (Gutierrez, 1988, pp. 6-7). Recognizing students' current realities offers educators an opportunity to guide them toward a more meaningful and transformative encounter with God.

A Thematic Analysis of the Contributions of CLVED to Students' Holistic Development

Using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis, the study identified five core dimensions through which Religious Education (CLVED) facilitates students' holistic growth. The following discussion interprets these findings in light of the frequency data and existing literature.

1. Character and Moral Integrity

Character and Moral Integrity emerged as the most dominant theme, cited by 43.41% of the respondents. Students consistently identified the course as a key driver of behavioral change, noting that it *“teaches important values that shape my character”* and reminds them to *“stay humble, responsible, and respectful.”* These responses suggest that Religious Education serves as a moral compass, guiding attitudes and actions. Wenas and Verana (2025) emphasize that Christian Religious Education raises moral consciousness, establishes spiritual principles, and helps individuals navigate social challenges. It fosters a Christ-centered identity, strengthens responsible decision-making, and promotes engagement in meaningful social activities through the teaching of God's Word.

Similarly, Religious Education extends beyond doctrinal instruction to cultivate ethical behavior and character grounded in values such as honesty, responsibility, and integrity (Del Castillo & Cacho, 2023). Students' responses indicate that these principles are internalized and applied beyond the classroom in daily decision-making. This aligns with Astin et al. (2011), who argue that values-based education is most effective when learners bridge the gap between reflective learning and lived experience. By internalizing virtues such as honesty and respect, students demonstrate a transition from cognitive understanding to ethical praxis, highlighting the transformative role of Religious Education in shaping morally grounded individuals.

2. Spiritual Development

The second most significant contribution of CLVED is **Spiritual Development**, identified by 27.91% of the respondents. Students emphasized that the course goes beyond “just educating,” helping them to “form a personal relationship with God” and “deepen my faith.” This indicates a pedagogical shift from mere religious literacy—where faith is understood at a cognitive or doctrinal level—to authentic spiritual maturity, characterized by a lived and relational encounter with the Divine. Such a transition reflects the core vision of Second Plenary Council of the Philippines (PCP II, 1991), which advocates for a “renewed catechesis” that is explicitly Christ-centered, experiential, and transformative rather than purely informative.

The findings suggest that the CLVED curriculum is not confined to the transmission of theological content but actively cultivates students' interiority, fostering practices such as prayer, reflection, and discernment that deepen their sense

of transcendence. In this sense, spiritual development emerges as an integrative process that shapes not only belief but also identity and purpose. Supporting this, Galenka, Ozora, and Amarise (2024) found that students who actively engage in Christian religious education programs demonstrate stronger prayer practices, more sustained spiritual reflection, and a heightened awareness of divine presence—indicators of a more interiorized and dynamic faith.

This perspective is further reinforced by the findings of Imron et al. (2023), who concluded that consistent engagement with religious teachings, liturgical participation, and ethical reflection significantly enhances students' spiritual development. Although situated within an Islamic educational context, their conclusions point to a broader pedagogical principle: authentic religious education, regardless of tradition, functions as a formative discipline that integrates cognition, affect, and praxis. It does not merely inform students about God but facilitates an encounter that shapes their worldview, moral reasoning, and existential orientation.

Thus, the convergence of these findings highlights that CLVED operates not only as an academic subject but as a formative space for spiritual encounter—one that nurtures a coherent inner life, strengthens moral consciousness, and ultimately guides students toward a more meaningful and purpose-driven existence.

3. Social Responsibility

Identified by 7.75% of the respondents, this theme reflects the outward projection of internal values as recognized by the respondents. Students noted that the subject *“encourages me to be a better person who contributes positively to society,” teaching them to trust in God, care for creation, and respect others.* It enables students to serve others while strengthening their faith. The current CLVED curriculum already incorporates community outreach and advocacy programs, in which students are tasked with identifying real problems in their communities and proposing possible solutions. This practical component allows students to apply their faith and ethical principles in real-life contexts.

Supporting this, Katili, Harefa, and Kimki (2023) found that integrating eco-theology and social ethics into religious education fosters a holistic discipleship model in which students engage in environmental projects, social advocacy, and contextual biblical reflection. Activities such as tree planting, waste management, and community service, combined with action-reflection learning cycles and service-learning, significantly enhance students' ethical reasoning, empathy, and civic engagement, demonstrating that connecting faith to practical action cultivates socially responsible and morally grounded individuals.

4. Cognitive Perspective

Tied with Social Responsibility at 7.75%, this dimension highlights the intellectual rigor fostered by the CLVED course. Respondents noted that the subject *“makes us reflect” and “pushes us to be more critical thinkers and compassionate beings,”* indicating that students recognize its role in developing both analytical and affective capacities. This finding supports Wright's (2004) framework on Critical Religious Education, which posits that religious studies should equip learners to reason critically, evaluate truth claims, and construct a nuanced worldview. Although less frequently cited than moral and spiritual themes, this dimension demonstrates that CLVED contributes meaningfully to students' reflective and critical thinking skills.

However, the relatively low frequency suggests that this aspect remains underdeveloped and presents an opportunity for curricular enhancement. In an era

marked by misinformation and ideological manipulation, strengthening critical thinking within Religious Education is not merely beneficial but necessary. This concern is echoed in Go's (2018) study, which underscores the ongoing challenge in Catholic education of balancing faith formation with critical inquiry. The students' reported experiences of increased reflection suggest a positive shift toward addressing this tension, aligning with Go's call for pedagogical re-examination.

Given this, Senior High School CLVED should further prioritize the practical and social relevance of belief systems, enabling students to critically engage with contemporary realities, including what may be described as "death-dealing systems" in society. By integrating more structured reflective and analytical activities, the curriculum can better cultivate informed discernment and social awareness. Such an approach not only deepens personal faith but also empowers students to translate belief into responsible action, effectively bridging the gap between personal piety and transformative social engagement.

5. Psychological Resilience

The final theme, Psychological Resilience, was identified 2.33% of the respondents. Although its frequency is relatively low, its qualitative significance is substantial. Students described the course as providing a "*sense of inner peace, resilience, and direction,*" helping them cope with academic pressures and personal challenges. These responses suggest that CLVED functions not only as a formative academic subject but also as a source of emotional support and psychological stability.

This finding aligns with Shodiq et al. (2025), who found that religious education can moderate the impact of high-stress environments on students' mental health. For these respondents, the subject serves as a protective factor, fostering emotional resilience and a sense of purpose during tough times. Moreover, this pattern is consistent with broader research on adolescent religiosity. Del Castillo and Alino (2020) observed that Filipino Catholic youth frequently engage in positive religious coping strategies, such as seeking spiritual support and practicing benevolent religious reappraisal, which contribute to more favorable psychological outcomes. Their findings indicate that young people often turn to faith when faced with stressors such as academic pressure, financial difficulties, family conflict, bereavement, and relationship struggles.

Grounded in Catholic teachings on suffering and the Church's spiritual tradition, students can interpret adversity through a lens of meaning and hope, seeking forgiveness, discerning purpose in hardship, and finding comfort in prayer. This demonstrates that CLVED, while not primarily designed as a mental health intervention, nonetheless plays a meaningful role in supporting students' psychological resilience by integrating faith-based coping mechanisms into their everyday lives.

6. Non-Substantive Responses:

A notable 10.85% of the respondents provided non-substantive answers such as "*None,*" "*N/A,*" or "*na.*" While these responses do not indicate a specific area of growth, they are significant in offering a more holistic view of the findings and point to a "neutrality gap" in which the curriculum may not effectively resonate with students' personal experiences.

Drawing on Freire's (2000) *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, this lack of perceived relevance may be understood through the lens of the "banking" model of education, in which knowledge is passively transmitted rather than actively constructed through dialogue and critical engagement. The presence of such responses suggests that, for a

minority of students, CLVED may be experienced as mere doctrine transmission rather than as a “problem-posing” form of education that engages with the concrete realities and challenges of contemporary life.

This finding highlights a critical area for curricular reflection. To address this gap, Religious Education must move beyond rote reception and foster participatory, dialogical, and contextually relevant learning experiences. By doing so, CLVED can better ensure that its content is not only understood cognitively but also experienced as meaningful and transformative in the lives of all students.

Taken together, these findings highlight that while CLVED is effectively fostering moral, spiritual, social, cognitive, and psychological development among Senior High School students, there remain areas where the curriculum could be more responsive to students lived realities. The presence of non-substantive or “neutral” responses underscores the importance of engaging learners more actively, ensuring that the content moves beyond passive transmission to meaningful, contextually relevant, and transformative experiences.

By integrating practical applications, reflective activities, and participatory pedagogies, Religious Education can remain a dynamic space where students internalize values, build resilience, and connect their faith to both personal and societal challenges. Ultimately, the study affirms that CLVED has the potential not only to impart doctrinal knowledge but also to nurture well-rounded individuals who are morally grounded, spiritually mature, socially responsible, intellectually reflective, and emotionally resilient.

Conclusion

This study affirms that Religious Education, as implemented through CLVED in a CICM school, remains a significant formative force in the lives of Senior High School students. The findings demonstrate that students possess a strong foundational belief in core Catholic teachings, particularly those emphasizing a personal and relational understanding of faith, such as prayer, trust in God, and moral responsibility. These results confirm that Religious Education continues to serve as an effective source of ethical orientation and spiritual grounding.

However, the study also identifies areas that require pedagogical and curricular attention. Lower levels of affirmation toward complex doctrines and Church authority suggest a need to deepen theological engagement and address questions of institutional credibility in ways that are dialogical and context sensitive. Furthermore, students expressed needs in moral decision-making, mental and spiritual well-being, and the practical application of faith, indicating that Religious Education must move beyond content transmission toward a more integrative and experiential approach. The strong recognition of CLVED’s contribution to character formation, spiritual maturity, and social awareness highlights its role in holistic education. Yet, the presence of non-substantive or disengaged responses suggests that the curriculum does not resonate equally with all learners, reinforcing the need for differentiated and participatory strategies.

In sum, while CLVED is effective in preserving Catholic identity and promoting core values, its transformative potential can be further enhanced through contextualization, inclusivity, and responsiveness to students' lived realities. To this end, it is recommended that this study be expanded to include all Basic Education students across CICM schools, providing broader insights to guide curricular revisions. Such revisions should incorporate student-centered, dialogical, and interdisciplinary approaches to ensure that CLVED classes remain relevant,

meaningful, and impactful in forming morally grounded, spiritually mature, and socially responsible individuals in contemporary society.

Declaration on the Use of AI

The authors declare that artificial intelligence (AI) tools, such as ChatGPT and Grammarly, were used solely to assist with grammar checking, sentence refinement, and language improvement in the preparation of this manuscript. All ideas, analyses, interpretations, and final content were developed and conducted by the authors. The manuscript was carefully reviewed and revised to ensure accuracy, originality, and academic integrity.

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