



JOURNAL

OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH,
INNOVATION, AND
MULTIDISCIPLINARY STUDIES

An Academic Journal Publication



Website: | <https://jerimspublication.com>

INTERNATIONAL STANDARD SERIAL NUMBERS



PRINT ISSN

3116-5559



ONLINE ISSN

3116-5567

Volume 1, Issue 7, pp 34-48, September
2026

Research Article

Religious Education Teachers' Experiences in Archdiocesan Commission on Education (ACE) Schools

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Article History:

Submission: August, 2026
Revised: August, 2026
Accepted: September, 2026
Published: September, 2026

Originality: 97%
Similarity Index: 5%
Grammarly Score: 98%

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Recommended Citation:

Castillon, S. C. (2026). Religious education teachers' experiences in Archdiocesan Commission on Education (ACE) schools. *Journal of Educational Research, Innovation, and Multidisciplinary Studies*, 1(7), 34-48.

<https://doi.org/10.67001/jeri.2026.07.N1T5XV>

ABSTRACT

This qualitative phenomenological study explored the lived experiences of Religious Education teachers in Archdiocesan Commission on Education (ACE) schools in Misamis Occidental during School Year 2025–2026. Sixteen Religious Education teachers were selected through purposive sampling and participated in semi-structured interviews. Thematic analysis was used to identify recurring patterns across their narratives. Findings showed that teachers experienced fulfillment through students' spiritual growth, transformation of values and behavior, application of faith in real-life contexts, trusting teacher–student relationships, student engagement, a sense of purpose, and personal spiritual fulfillment. Challenges included learner motivation, diverse faith backgrounds, external social influences, limited instructional time and resources, classroom management concerns, complex moral issues, institutional support concerns, and teachers' personal and spiritual struggles. Teachers coped through adaptive teaching, patience and professional dispositions, prayer and faith reliance, peer and institutional support, community and ministry engagement, professional development, and reflective practice. Participants identified needs for capacity building, spiritual formation, updated instructional resources, stronger collaboration, program development, and student formation support. The findings emphasize that sustaining Religious Education requires an integrated approach to pedagogical competence, spiritual nourishment, institutional support, and responsive learner engagement.

Keywords: Catholic education, phenomenology, religious education, spiritual formation, teacher experiences

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Introduction

Catholic education is deeply rooted in the mission of the Church to proclaim the Gospel and to form individuals who can integrate faith, life, and culture. The Second Vatican Council emphasized that education is not merely the transmission of knowledge but the integral formation of the human person, oriented toward both temporal well-being and eternal destiny (Galioto & Marini, 2021). Catholic schools, therefore, are not only academic institutions but ecclesial communities where faith is nurtured, values are formed, and Christian witness is lived out. Central to this mission are Religious Education teachers, whom the Church recognizes as key agents of evangelization in schools. Similarly, Pope Francis (2023) highlighted that teachers of religion are not merely transmitters of knowledge but credible witnesses whose personal integrity, theological competence, and pedagogical skill significantly influence students' faith development. In this context, the present study focuses on the experiences and training needs of Religious Education (RE) teachers in selected Archdiocesan Commission on Education (ACE) schools, with the aim of strengthening their capacity to fulfill their crucial ecclesial and educational mission.

Contemporary scholarly literature affirms the increasingly complex role of Religious Education teachers in Catholic schools. Recent studies emphasize that effective Catholic Religious Education (CRE) teaching requires a balanced integration of sound theological understanding, learner-centered pedagogy, and reflective faith practice (Gleeson, 2021). Law-Davis (2023) found that teachers' confidence and instructional effectiveness in Religious Education are strongly associated with access to structured training, mentoring, and ongoing professional formation. Likewise, D'Souza (2022) underscored that RE teachers face heightened expectations as they navigate curriculum demands, diverse student backgrounds, and the call to serve as witnesses of faith within increasingly secular learning environments. These studies collectively suggest that without systematic support and formation, Religious Education teachers may experience role strain, diminished confidence, and difficulty in achieving the integrative aims of Catholic education.

Despite these expectations, recent research points to persistent gaps between institutional ideals and classroom realities in Catholic schools. International studies reveal that Religious Education is frequently assigned to non-specialist teachers who lack formal academic preparation in theology or religious education, resulting in challenges related to content mastery, pedagogical confidence, and faith integration (Ryan & Malone, 2021). Within the Philippine Catholic education context, particularly in ACE schools in Misamis Occidental, this concern is especially pronounced. Based on my pilot survey, around 97% of those teaching RE subjects in ACE schools are not RE majors, and almost every school year many are newly assigned as RE teachers. Recent regional studies note that insufficient pre-service preparation and limited access to sustained in-service formation hinder teachers' capacity to deliver meaningful and authentic RE (Villanueva & De Guzman, 2024). This gap highlights the urgent need for context-specific empirical research that foregrounds teachers' lived experiences and training needs.

To address this gap, the present study employs qualitative-method research design to investigate the experiences and training needs of RE teachers in selected ACE schools. The research explores teachers' lived experiences, perceptions, and narratives, providing deeper insight into how they understand and enact their role as RE teachers. Recent methodological literature supports the use of qualitative methods in educational research to capture the contextualized human experiences, particularly in studies addressing professional practice and identity (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2023). Through this approach, the study seeks to generate a comprehensive understanding of Religious Education teaching within the ACE context.

The findings of this study are expected to contribute significantly to Catholic education in several ways. First, the results will provide evidence-based insights that diocesan education offices, school administrators, and policy-makers can use in designing responsive and needs-based training and formation programs for RE teachers. Second, the study will offer insights into how teachers' experiences shape their professional identity and instructional practices, informing more holistic formation programs that integrate faith, pedagogy, and personal development. Finally, this research will add to the limited body of Philippine-based studies on CRE, serving as a reference for future researchers and practitioners committed to strengthening the evangelizing mission of Catholic schools.

The study was anchored on Experiential Learning Theory, complemented by Reflective Practice Theory and Teacher Professional Identity Theory. These perspectives frame teachers' experiences as sources of professional learning, reflection, identity formation, and continuing development. The study specifically asked about teachers' positive and fulfilling experiences, challenges and struggles, coping mechanisms, and the needs and forms of

support required to sustain and improve their teaching ministry in ACE schools.

Methods

The study employed a qualitative phenomenological research design to explore the lived experiences of Religious Education teachers in ACE schools during School Year 2025–2026. The setting comprised sixteen archdiocesan schools under the Archdiocesan Commission on Education in Misamis Occidental, where Religious Education forms part of the schools’ Catholic formation and curriculum. Sixteen Religious Education teachers were selected through purposive sampling based on the study’s inclusion criteria. Data were gathered using an adopted and modified semi-structured interview guide patterned after phenomenological interview protocols. Individual interviews were conducted after securing formal permission and informed consent, with scheduling and interview arrangements designed to support participants’ comfort and openness. The interview transcripts were analyzed through thematic analysis. The researcher repeatedly read the transcripts for familiarization, coded significant words, phrases, and statements, clustered related codes into categories, developed and refined themes, and interpreted the themes in relation to the study framework and relevant literature. Bracketing or epoché was practiced to reduce the influence of the researcher’s prior assumptions. Ethical safeguards included informed consent, voluntary participation and withdrawal, confidentiality, use of codes or pseudonyms, private interview settings, and secure storage and eventual disposal of research records.

Results and Discussions

Positive and Fulfilling Experiences of Religious Education Teachers

Table 1. Codes and Themes: Positive and Fulfilling Experiences of Religious Education Teachers

Code	Themes
Major Theme: Positive and Fulfilling Experiences of Religious Education Teachers in ACE Schools	Major Theme: Positive and Fulfilling Experiences of Religious Education Teachers in ACE Schools
Students becoming more prayerful and engaged in faith practices	Students’ Spiritual Growth and Faith Development
Development of personal relationship with God	
Increased participation in prayer, Mass, and religious activities	
Deepened understanding and appreciation of faith	
Students demonstrating respect, compassion, and kindness	Transformation of Values and Behavior
Positive change in students’ attitudes and decision-making	
Practice of Christian values in daily life	
Moral development and character formation	
Students applying lessons to real-life situations	Application of Faith in Real-Life Contexts
Acts of charity, forgiveness, and reconciliation	
Faith influencing students’ choices and relationships	
Reflection on personal life experiences through lessons	
Students opening up and sharing personal struggles	Teacher–Student Relationship and Trust Building
Teacher as mentor, listener, and role model	
Establishment of safe and supportive learning environment	
Emotional and spiritual connection with students	
Students expressing gratitude and appreciation	Student Engagement and Appreciation
Active participation in discussions and activities	
Positive feedback on lessons and teaching approach	
Students valuing Religious Education classes	
Students entering religious vocation or becoming responsible individuals	Perceived Impact and Sense of Purpose in Teaching
Teaching influencing students’ life choices and direction	

Teaching seen as ministry and service to God	Personal and Spiritual Fulfillment of Teachers
Realization of meaningful impact beyond classroom	
Teachers experiencing joy, peace, and fulfillment	
Strengthening of teachers' own faith	
Teaching as a vocation and calling	
Personal growth through teaching experiences	

Theme 1. Students' Spiritual Growth and Faith Development.

The data reveal that Religious Education teachers consistently experience fulfillment when they witness students becoming more prayerful, reflective, and engaged in their faith. A recurring pattern shows that students move from passive reception of religious concepts toward active participation and personal appropriation of faith practices. This transformation is evident in increased involvement in prayer, deeper reflections, and a growing sense of spiritual awareness. This theme strongly aligns with Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2022), which posits that learning becomes meaningful when individuals critically reflect on their experiences. In this context, students' engagement in prayer and reflection signifies a transformation in their worldview and beliefs. The shift from passive learning to active faith practice demonstrates perspective transformation. Thus, Religious Education facilitates not only knowledge acquisition but deep personal change.

Theme 2. Transformation of Values and Behavior.

The data consistently show that teachers find fulfillment in observing tangible behavioral changes among students. These changes include increased respectfulness, kindness, and moral sensitivity. A pattern emerges where students begin to align their actions with the values discussed in class, indicating that learning has moved from cognition to application. This theme is grounded in Moral Development Theory, which explains how individuals progress in their ability to reason ethically and act according to moral principles (Nucci, 2021). The observed behavioral changes among students reflect movement toward higher levels of moral reasoning and ethical conduct.

Theme 3. Application of Faith in Real-Life Contexts.

The data reveal that teachers experience fulfillment when students apply religious teachings beyond the classroom. A recurring pattern shows that students use lessons as a framework for addressing personal challenges, resolving conflicts, and engaging in acts of service. This theme is anchored in Experiential Learning Theory, which posits that knowledge is created through the transformation of experience (Kolb, 2021). The students' actions demonstrate that learning becomes meaningful when applied in real-life contexts.

Theme 4. Teacher–Student Relationship and Trust Building.

The data show that teachers derive fulfillment from building meaningful relationships with students. A pattern emerges where students feel comfortable sharing personal struggles, indicating a high level of trust. This relational dynamic enhances the effectiveness of Religious Education. This theme is grounded in Humanistic Education Theory, which emphasizes the importance of empathy, trust, and personal growth in learning (Rogers, as cited in Freiberg, 2022). The teacher's role extends beyond instruction to facilitating holistic development.

Theme 5. Student Engagement and Appreciation.

Analyzing the intersection of engagement and appreciation reveals that academic success is deeply rooted in the relational quality between students and institutions. While engagement is often measured through metrics like participation rates, the underlying catalyst is frequently the "appreciation" factor—the social validation students receive from peers and faculty. When students feel overlooked or undervalued, cognitive barriers arise, leading to disengagement and higher dropout rates regardless of curriculum quality. Conversely, a culture of appreciation fosters a "growth mindset," where students are more willing to take intellectual risks because they feel supported. Therefore, fostering engagement is not just a pedagogical challenge but a strategic effort to build an appreciative community that honors diverse student contributions. This theme is grounded in Student Engagement Theory (Fredricks et al., 2021), which highlights the importance of active involvement in learning. Students' enthusiasm and appreciation reflect deep engagement. Such engagement enhances both understanding and personal connection to content. Therefore, Religious Education becomes effective when it actively involves learners.

Theme 6. Perceived Impact and Sense of Purpose in Teaching.

The data reveal that teachers experience fulfillment when they see long-term outcomes of their teaching, such as students entering religious vocations or living value-centered lives. This reflects a deep sense of purpose and commitment. This theme aligns with Self-Determination Theory (Deci & Ryan, 2021), particularly the concept of intrinsic motivation. Teachers' sense of fulfillment reflects autonomy, competence, and purpose. Their commitment indicates internalized motivation rather than external rewards. Thus, Religious Education teaching is sustained by deep personal meaning.

Theme 7. Personal and Spiritual Fulfillment of Teachers.

The data show that teaching Religious Education enriches teachers' own faith and personal development. A pattern emerges where teaching becomes a reciprocal process of growth.

This theme is grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 2021), which posits that individuals learn through observation and imitation. Teachers serve as role models whose behaviors influence students. The integration of faith into teaching provides observable examples for students to emulate. Thus, learning occurs through both instruction and modeling.

Challenges and Struggles in the Teaching Ministry

Table 2. Codes and Themes: Challenges and Struggles in the Teaching Ministry

Code	Themes
Major Theme: Challenges and Struggles of Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Ministry	Major Theme: Challenges and Struggles of Religious Education Teachers in Teaching Ministry
Students showing low interest in Religious Education	Learner Engagement and Motivation Challenges
Perception of subject as less important	
Short attention span and distraction (gadgets, social media)	
Limited participation and responsiveness	
Diverse levels of faith, beliefs, and background	Diversity of Learners' Faith and Background
Students from different religious affiliations	
Difficulty connecting lessons to students' experiences	
Varied levels of understanding and spiritual readiness	
Students influenced by social media and secular culture	External Influences on Students' Values and Attitudes
Peer pressure and modern trends affecting behavior	
Family background affecting values formation	
Conflicting beliefs and moral perspectives	
Limited time for discussion and reflection	Time Constraints and Curriculum Limitations
Insufficient time for deep processing of lessons	
Scheduling conflicts with other subjects	
Interruptions due to school activities	
Lack of instructional materials and resources	Resource and Instructional Limitations
Limited access to teaching tools and multimedia	
Need for more engaging and updated materials	
Difficulty in making lessons interactive	
Difficulty in maintaining discipline and focus	Classroom Management and Student Behavior Issues
Students' inappropriate behavior during prayer/liturgy	
Learners' lack of seriousness toward the subject	
Managing diverse attitudes and participation	
Difficulty addressing sensitive moral and social issues	Complexity of Teaching Faith and Moral Issues
Questions on controversial topics (e.g., morality)	

issues)	
Balancing doctrine with students' perspectives	
Need for sensitivity and inclusivity in discussions	
Limited support or follow-up from some stakeholders	Institutional and Collegial Support Challenges
Lack of coordination among teachers	
Focus on academic subjects over Religious Education	
Need for stronger institutional reinforcement	
Teachers' personal struggles and self-doubt	Personal and Spiritual Struggles of Teachers
Feelings of inadequacy or lack of preparation	
Challenges in living out what they teach	
Emotional and spiritual fatigue	

Theme 1. Learner Engagement and Motivation Challenges.

The data reveal that one of the most persistent struggles among Religious Education teachers is capturing and maintaining students' attention. A recurring pattern shows that students often perceive Religious Education as secondary to academic subjects, resulting in minimal participation and reduced engagement. This issue is compounded by the digital environment in which students are immersed, where distractions such as gadgets and social media significantly affect their focus. This theme is anchored in Student Engagement Theory, which emphasizes the role of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral involvement in learning (Fredricks et al., 2021). The observed disengagement reflects gaps in these dimensions, necessitating strategies that foster active participation.

Theme 2. Diversity of Learners' Faith and Background.

The data indicate that teachers face challenges in addressing the diverse religious backgrounds and varying levels of faith among students. A consistent pattern shows that some students are deeply rooted in their faith, while others are less engaged or come from different religious traditions. This diversity requires teachers to balance doctrinal instruction with inclusivity and sensitivity. This theme is grounded in Constructivist Learning Theory, which posits that learners construct knowledge based on their prior experiences and beliefs (Schunk, 2022). The diversity of backgrounds influences how students interpret and internalize religious teachings.

Theme 3. External Influences on Students' Values and Attitudes.

The data reveal that teachers struggle with the strong influence of external factors on students' moral and spiritual development. A recurring pattern shows that social media, modern trends, and family backgrounds often conflict with the values taught in Religious Education. This theme is grounded in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 2021), which emphasizes the role of environmental influences on behavior. Students learn not only from teachers but also from media and peers. The challenge is to provide positive models and critical frameworks. Thus, Religious Education must engage with the realities of students' social contexts.

Theme 4. Time Constraints and Curriculum Limitations.

The data show that teachers frequently struggle with limited time for delivering lessons. A recurring pattern indicates that Religious Education requires more time for reflection and discussion, yet is often constrained by scheduling conflicts and competing academic demands. This theme is anchored in Transformative Learning Theory (Mezirow, 2022), which emphasizes reflection as essential to meaningful learning. Limited instructional time constrains opportunities for critical reflection and discourse. Without these elements, transformation in learners' perspectives is unlikely to occur. Thus, adequate time is necessary to support deep and transformative learning.

Theme 5. Resource and Instructional Limitations.

The data reveal that teachers face challenges due to insufficient instructional materials and limited access to multimedia tools. A pattern emerges where teachers struggle to make lessons engaging without adequate resources. This theme aligns with Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 2021), which emphasizes that learners construct knowledge through meaningful experiences. Instructional materials play a crucial role in facilitating this process. Without appropriate resources, learning becomes less effective. Thus, adequate materials are

essential for meaningful knowledge construction.

Theme 6. Classroom Management and Student Behavior Issues.

The data indicate that managing student behavior, particularly during prayer and liturgical activities, is a significant challenge. A pattern shows that some students display lack of seriousness or inappropriate behavior. This theme is grounded in Behaviorism (Skinner, 2021), which focuses on shaping behavior through reinforcement. Classroom management strategies often rely on consistent application of rules and consequences. Positive reinforcement can encourage appropriate behavior. Thus, structured and consistent approaches are necessary for effective classroom management.

Theme 7. Complexity of Teaching Faith and Moral Issues.

Analyzing this complexity reveals that teaching faith and morals is inherently tied to the cultural and emotional landscape of the educational environment. The primary difficulty arises from the "non-neutrality" of these topics, where every lesson carries the risk of conflicting with a student's home-grown values or religious identity. Research suggests that when teachers encounter these friction points, they often experience "pedagogical anxiety," leading them to either over-simplify the issues or avoid them altogether to prevent controversy. Furthermore, the effectiveness of such instruction depends heavily on the teacher's ability to maintain a "safe space" that encourages dialogue without descending into relativism or proselytization. Consequently, addressing these issues requires more than just content knowledge; it demands a high level of emotional intelligence and a robust ethical framework from the educator. This theme is grounded in Situated Learning Theory (Lave & Wenger, 2021), where learning occurs within social and cultural contexts. Faith and moral understanding are shaped by real-life experiences and interactions. The complexity arises from the dynamic interplay of beliefs and contexts. Thus, teaching must be adaptive and context sensitive.

Theme 8. Institutional and Collegial Support Challenges.

Analyzing these challenges reveals that the quality of a teacher's output is deeply contingent upon the strength of their professional safety net. When institutional support is weak, educators often face "burnout" as they are forced to compensate for systemic deficiencies with their own personal time and resources. Furthermore, the lack of collegial synergy can lead to a siloed teaching experience, where the absence of shared expertise prevents the resolution of complex classroom issues. Data often suggests that even highly motivated teachers struggle to maintain standards when they feel "orphaned" by their leadership or alienated by their peers. Therefore, addressing these challenges is not just an administrative task but a necessity for ensuring long-term teacher retention and overall school morale. This theme is anchored in Systems Theory (Bertalanffy, 2021), which views the school as an interconnected system. The effectiveness of one component depends on the support of others. Lack of institutional alignment affects overall outcomes. Thus, Religious Education requires systemic integration.

Theme 9. Personal and Spiritual Struggles of Teachers.

Analyzing these struggles reveals that a teacher's internal state is a primary, though often ignored, factor in pedagogical effectiveness. When educators face "spiritual dryness" or personal crises, their ability to project empathy and maintain classroom authority can be significantly compromised. Research suggests that these struggles are often exacerbated by a professional culture that expects teachers to be "invulnerable," leaving little room for authentic vulnerability or self-care. Consequently, if these personal and spiritual tensions are left unaddressed, they typically manifest as chronic stress or a total detachment from the vocational calling of teaching. Teachers need access to spiritual formation and pastoral support. Institutions should provide retreats, mentoring, and counseling opportunities. Creating a supportive community among teachers is essential. Addressing personal struggles can enhance both teacher well-being and effectiveness. This theme is grounded in Reflective Practice Theory (Schön, 2021), which emphasizes self-awareness in professional growth. Teachers reflect on their experiences to improve practice. Personal struggles become opportunities for deeper understanding and development. Thus, reflection is essential in sustaining the teaching ministry.

Coping Mechanisms for Managing Challenges

Table 3. Codes and Themes: Coping Mechanisms for Managing Challenges

Code	Themes
Major Theme: Coping Mechanisms of Religious	Major Theme: Coping Mechanisms of Religious

Education Teachers in Managing Challenges	Education Teachers in Managing Challenges
Use of interactive activities (group sharing, storytelling, real-life applications)	Adaptive and Creative Teaching Strategies
Integration of multimedia, videos, and real-life examples	
Student-centered and flexible teaching approaches	
Encouraging participation and open discussions	
Practicing patience and understanding toward students	Personal Dispositions and Professional Attitudes
Being approachable and building rapport with students	
Continuous self-reflection and improvement	
Maintaining positive and supportive classroom environment	
Turning to prayer, faith, and spiritual reflection	Spiritual Coping and Faith Reliance
Attending Mass, praying the Rosary, and personal prayer	
Seeking guidance and strength from God	
Viewing teaching as a mission or vocation	
Seeking advice from fellow teachers and mentors	Peer and Institutional Support Systems
Collaboration with colleagues and coordinators	
Consulting school heads, principals, or guidance personnel	
Participation in school or ministry support groups	
Participation in ministry and church-related activities	Community and Ministry Engagement
Guidance from campus ministry, priests, or religious leaders	
Involvement in faith communities and organizations	
Strengthening support through shared religious practices	
Improving teaching through research and learning	Professional Development and Reflective Practice
Attending seminars, trainings, and workshops	
Learning from experiences and challenges	
Adapting strategies based on student needs	

Theme 1. Adaptive and Creative Teaching Strategies.

The data reveal that teachers actively respond to classroom challenges by modifying their teaching strategies to suit students' needs and contexts. A recurring pattern shows that teachers move away from purely lecture-based instruction toward more interactive and experiential approaches. These include integrating real-life scenarios, using digital tools, and facilitating group discussions that allow students to actively participate. This theme aligns with Constructivist Learning Theory (Piaget, 2021). Learners actively construct knowledge through meaningful experiences. Adaptive strategies create opportunities for such engagement. Thus, flexible teaching enhances learning construction.

Theme 2. Personal Dispositions and Professional Attitudes.

The data show that teachers rely heavily on their personal dispositions to cope with difficulties. A recurring pattern indicates that qualities such as patience, perseverance, and optimism play a crucial role in managing classroom challenges. Teachers demonstrate a strong sense of responsibility and commitment, which motivates them to continue despite obstacles. This theme is grounded in Humanistic Theory (Rogers, 2021). Personal growth and self-awareness influence professional practice. Teachers' attitudes shape the learning environment. Thus, positive dispositions are essential in teaching.

Theme 3. Spiritual Coping and Faith Reliance.

The data reveal that teachers heavily rely on their faith as a source of strength and guidance. A recurring pattern

shows that prayer and spiritual reflection are integral to their coping process. Teachers view their work as a ministry, which reinforces their reliance on God in times of difficulty. This "vocational framing" suggests that teaching is perceived not merely as a job, but as a divine calling that requires constant spiritual nourishment to sustain. Consequently, when faced with exhaustion, participants utilize their faith to find the resilience necessary to continue serving their students with compassion. The analysis further indicates that this reliance often acts as a protective buffer against burnout, as it provides a narrative of hope that transcends mere professional success. This theme aligns with Spiritual Well-Being Theory (Fisher, 2021). Spiritual connection supports overall well-being. Faith provides meaning and purpose in life. Thus, spirituality strengthens teaching ministry.

Theme 4. Peer and Institutional Support System.

The data indicate that teachers benefit from collaborative relationships with colleagues and support from school leadership. A recurring pattern shows that sharing experiences, seeking advice, and working collaboratively help teachers address challenges more effectively. This synergy suggests that when administrators prioritize open communication and resource-sharing, teachers feel more empowered to innovate and take instructional risks. Furthermore, the presence of a strong collegial bond acts as a buffer against professional stress, turning individual hurdles into opportunities for communal problem-solving. Consequently, the analysis highlights that a healthy institutional climate is not just a luxury, but a fundamental requirement for maintaining high levels of teacher morale and instructional quality. This theme is anchored in Social Learning Theory (Bandura, 2021). Learning occurs through interaction and collaboration. Teachers learn from one another. Thus, support systems enhance professional growth.

Theme 5. Community and Ministry Engagement.

The data reveal that teachers extend their engagement beyond the classroom into community and ministry work. A recurring pattern shows that participation in church activities reinforces their sense of purpose and strengthens their faith. This outward focus suggests that by serving others in a religious context, educators gain a renewed perspective that helps them navigate their own professional struggles with greater humility and patience. Furthermore, the solidarity found within these faith communities offers an emotional support system that compensates for any lack of support found within the school institution itself. Consequently, ministry work serves as a "spiritual battery," recharging the teacher's capacity to lead their students with a heart for service and moral leadership. This theme aligns with Experiential Learning Theory (Kolb, 2021). Learning occurs through experience and reflection. Community engagement provides real-life application. Thus, experience enhances understanding.

Theme 6. Professional Development and Reflective Practice.

The data show that teachers actively seek opportunities for growth through seminars, workshops, and self-reflection. A recurring pattern indicates that reflection helps teachers identify areas for improvement and develop effective strategies. This proactive stance suggests that educators who engage in regular self-critique are better equipped to navigate complex classroom dynamics with confidence. Furthermore, the analysis reveals that professional growth acts as a form of empowerment, reducing the frustration that often stems from stagnant or ineffective teaching routines. Consequently, the synergy between external training and internal reflection creates a robust framework for sustained professional excellence and personal satisfaction. This theme is grounded in Reflective Practice Theory (Schön, 2021). Reflection leads to improved practice. Teachers learn from experience. Thus, reflection is essential for growth. This theoretical grounding suggests that by engaging in "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action," educators transform routine experiences into profound learning opportunities. Such a process moves beyond simple observation, requiring a critical analysis of one's own pedagogical decisions and their impact on student outcomes. Ultimately, this continuous cycle of self-evaluation ensures that teaching remains a dynamic and evolving craft rather than a static repetition of old habits.

Needs and Forms of Support for Sustaining and Improving the Teaching Ministry

Table 4. Codes and Themes: Needs and Forms of Support for Sustaining and Improving the Teaching Ministry

Code	Themes
Major Theme: Needs and Forms of Support for Sustaining and Improving Teaching Ministry	Major Theme: Needs and Forms of Support for Sustaining and Improving Teaching Ministry
Need for seminars, trainings, and workshops in	Professional Development and Capacity Building

Religious Education	
Enhancement of teaching strategies and pedagogy	
Continuous learning in theology and doctrine	
Mentoring and peer learning opportunities	
Need for retreats, recollections, and spiritual formation activities	Spiritual Formation and Faith Nourishment
Opportunities for prayer gatherings and reflection	
Strengthening personal relationship with God	
Deepening teachers' faith as foundation of teaching	
Need for updated textbooks, lesson guides, and teaching materials	Instructional Resources and Materials Support
Access to multimedia tools and ICT integration	
Availability of activity guides and curriculum resources	
Provision of adequate classroom tools and facilities	
Need for stronger collaboration among teachers	Collaborative and Institutional Support Systems
Establishment of support groups or communities of practice	
Regular meetings and sharing of best practices	
Support from school administrators and coordinators	
Need for structured formation programs for Religious Educators	Program Development and Organizational Support
Regular and sustained formation programs (e.g., twice a year)	
Institutional initiatives focused on Religious Education	
Organized faith-based and professional activities	
Need for student-centered support and engagement activities	Student Formation and Engagement Support
Activities like retreats, outreach, and team-building	
Programs that enhance students' faith experience	
Opportunities for experiential and values-based learning	

Theme 1. Professional Development and Capacity Building.

The data reveal that Religious Education teachers recognize the need for continuous professional growth to effectively respond to evolving educational demands. A recurring pattern shows that teachers seek updated pedagogical approaches, deeper theological understanding, and innovative strategies to address classroom challenges. This need emerges particularly in relation to engaging students, addressing complex moral issues, and integrating technology into instruction. This theme is anchored in Adult Learning Theory, which posits that adults learn best when they engage in continuous, self-directed, and experience-based learning (Knowles, as cited in Merriam & Baumgartner, 2021). Professional development opportunities enable teachers to refine their practice based on experience.

Theme 2. Spiritual Formation and Faith Nourishment.

The data indicate that teachers view spiritual formation as essential to sustaining their teaching ministry. A recurring pattern shows that teachers experience spiritual fatigue due to the demands of teaching and therefore seek opportunities for renewal and reflection. Spiritual nourishment is perceived not only as personal enrichment but also as a foundation for effective teaching. The analysis suggests that without these periods of spiritual recalibration, teachers risk becoming "functionaries" who deliver content without the transformative power of authentic conviction. Consequently, the data highlights that a teacher's ability to inspire students is directly proportional to the depth of their own ongoing spiritual journey. This underscores the necessity of institutionalizing spiritual support to prevent burnout and maintain the religious mission of the school. This theme is grounded in Spiritual Development Theory, which emphasizes the continuous growth of an

individual's faith and meaning-making processes (King & Boyatzis, 2021). Teachers' spiritual formation enhances their capacity to facilitate students' faith development.

Theme 3. Instructional Resources and Materials Support.

The data reveal that teachers require adequate instructional materials to effectively engage students and deliver meaningful lessons. A recurring pattern shows that the lack of updated and relevant resources limits teachers' ability to implement creative and interactive teaching strategies. When teachers are forced to rely on outdated or insufficient tools, they often face "instructional fatigue," as the burden of clarifying complex topics falls entirely on their verbal delivery without visual or interactive reinforcement. Conversely, participants noted that the presence of diverse digital and non-digital resources empowers them to differentiate their instruction, allowing for a more personalized approach to Religious Education. The analysis further underscores that providing robust material support is a form of professional validation that directly correlates with higher levels of teacher confidence and student participation. This theme is anchored in Instructional Design Theory, which emphasizes the role of appropriate materials and tools in facilitating effective learning (Mayer, 2021). This theoretical framework suggests that the cognitive load of students is significantly reduced when instructional materials are structured to align with how the human brain processes information. Consequently, by intentionally selecting tools that support both visual and verbal learning, educators can ensure that complex theological concepts are not only transmitted but truly internalized and retained by the learner.

Theme 4. Collaborative and Institutional Support Systems.

The data indicate that teachers value collaboration and institutional support in managing their responsibilities. A recurring pattern shows that collegial relationships, administrative support, and structured programs contribute to teachers' effectiveness and well-being. This finding suggests that when teachers feel backed by a cohesive team and responsive leadership, they are more resilient in the face of classroom challenges and bureaucratic demands. Furthermore, the presence of these robust support networks reduces professional isolation, directly correlating with increased job satisfaction and a stronger commitment to the school's religious and academic goals. This theme is grounded in Collaborative Professionalism Theory, which highlights the importance of collective effort in improving teaching practice (Hargreaves & O'Connor, 2021). This theory posits that true professional growth occurs when teachers work together in a spirit of mutual respect and rigorous inquiry, rather than in competition or isolation. It argues that the "social capital" generated through deep collaboration is more powerful than individual human capital for driving systemic school improvement. Consequently, anchoring the findings in this theory validates the idea that teacher empowerment is inextricably linked to the strength of their professional community.

Theme 5. Program Development and Organizational Support.

The data reveal that teachers need organized and well-structured programs to support Religious Education. A recurring pattern shows that the absence of clear programs and policies limits the effectiveness of teaching initiatives. When educators operate without a formalized program, their efforts often become fragmented, leading to "initiative fatigue" and a lack of long-term impact. The data suggests that teachers feel more confident when they can rely on standardized policies that define their roles and expectations within the school's spiritual life. This theme is anchored in Organizational Theory, which emphasizes the role of structured systems in achieving institutional goals (Fullan, 2021). This theory suggests that the effectiveness of an individual is largely shaped by the health and clarity of the system in which they operate. In the context of teaching ministry, Organizational Theory posits that when the "social and structural architecture" of the school is sound, educators can focus more deeply on their pedagogical and spiritual duties.

Theme 6. Student Formation and Engagement Support.

The data indicate that teachers need support in fostering student engagement and formation. A recurring pattern shows that students require additional motivation and structured activities to deepen their faith and participation. The analysis reveals that when students lack a personal connection to the religious curriculum, their participation remains superficial and disconnected from their daily lives. Furthermore, teachers expressed that without institutional backing for creative activities, they struggle to compete with the distractions of modern secular culture. This theme is grounded in Holistic Education Theory, which emphasizes the development of the whole person—intellectual, emotional, and spiritual (Miller, 2021). This theory posits that education is most effective when it acknowledges the interconnectedness of all aspects of human experience, rather than focusing solely on

cognitive achievement. By anchoring student formation in this theory, the research validates the necessity of nurturing the "inner life" of the student as a fundamental component of the educational mission.

Conclusions

Based on the findings, several conclusions are reached. First, Religious Education in ACE schools is viewed by teachers as a mission and a calling rather than just a job, with their resilience deeply tied to their personal faith and the perceived impact they have on students' eternal lives. Second, the success of Religious Education is measured by behavioral and spiritual transformation rather than academic scores; when students internalize values like forgiveness and charity, the curriculum achieves its true purpose. Third, addressing the secular challenge, there is a recognized gap between classroom teachings and external influences like social media and home environments, requiring a shift from traditional lecturing to more interactive, relatable, and technologically integrated pedagogy. Lastly, the findings highlight a reciprocity of growth, where the teaching ministry is a reciprocal process that strengthens the teacher's own faith through the act of guiding others.

Recommendations

For ACE school administrators and ACE Religious Education coordinators, it is vital to prioritize resource allocation by providing updated multimedia tools and interactive textbooks to help teachers compete with secular distractions. A curriculum review is also suggested to re-evaluate time allotments for Religious Education, allowing more space for deep reflection and faith-sharing sessions. Furthermore, administrators should establish a regular, twice-yearly holistic formation program specifically for religious educators that combines pedagogical training with spiritual retreats. For Religious Education teachers, the study recommends the continued use of creative pedagogy by integrating experiential learning, such as outreach and charity acts, and ICT to make lessons more relatable to digital natives. Teachers should also actively engage in mentorship and peer-learning circles to share classroom management strategies and spiritual encouragement. For parents and guardians, home-school alignment is encouraged, where parents model the Christian values taught in school to ensure students receive a consistent moral message. Finally, future researchers are encouraged to conduct follow-up studies on the long-term impact of Religious Education on ACE graduates to determine if the values practiced in school persist into adulthood and professional life

Conflict of Interests

The author declares that they have no conflicts of interest

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