

Cross-Pressures in the Classroom: A Taylorian Photovoice Analysis of Harmonizing Religious and Secular Curriculum in Faith-Based Schools

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ABSTRACT

Faith-based schools operate within increasingly pluralistic educational environments where religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements intersect and, at times, create tensions for teachers. Anchored in Charles Taylor's theory of secular modernity, particularly the concepts of the immanent frame, cross-pressures, and the buffered self, this study explored how teachers in faith-based schools represent, interpret, and negotiate the relationship between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. Specifically, it examined how these tensions are visually represented through Photovoice, how teachers harmonize competing curricular demands in classroom practice, and what insights their narratives provide regarding the nature of cross-pressures in contemporary education. Using a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) design, the study employed Photovoice as the primary method of data generation. Eight teachers from selected faith-based schools in Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), including General Santos City and the provinces of South Cotabato, Sarangani, and Sultan Kudarat, participated as co-researchers. Data consisted of photographs and accompanying narratives that captured participants' lived experiences of teaching within faith-based educational contexts. Findings revealed that teachers visually represented tensions through five themes: **curriculum as written obligation and professional compliance, faith as institutional identity and moral compass, barriers and balancing and integration of faith and learning**. These themes illustrate how teachers perceive secular curriculum requirements and religious commitments as simultaneously challenging and complementary dimensions of their professional practice. Teachers negotiated and harmonized these demands through two major strategies: **integration of faith and academic content** and **values formation through classroom practices**, demonstrating intentional efforts to connect academic learning with spiritual and moral development. Analysis through Taylor's framework revealed that teachers experience significant cross-pressures arising from the coexistence of secular educational expectations and religious commitments. However, rather than perceiving these as irreconcilable conflicts, participants engaged in reflective meaning-making and curriculum harmonization. Their narratives portrayed teachers as active mediators who bridge faith and academic knowledge, embodying Taylor's concept of the buffered self. The study concludes that curriculum harmonization serves as a practical and context-responsive approach to achieving balanced education that promotes both academic excellence and spiritual formation. The findings contribute to the growing discourse on faith-based education, curriculum integration, and teacher agency in pluralistic societies. They further highlight the importance of supporting educators in navigating competing educational demands while fostering coherent, inclusive, and values-oriented learning environments.

Keywords: faith-based schools, Photovoice, curriculum harmonization, secularization, cross-pressures, Charles Taylor, faith and learning integration, Participatory Action Research

INTRODUCTION

In an increasingly pluralistic and rapidly evolving world, education systems are confronted with the complex task of reconciling diverse worldviews within formal schooling. Faith-based schools, in particular, occupy a unique and often contested space where religious traditions intersect with state-mandated secular curricula.

Globally, these institutions have long contributed to the formation of moral values, spiritual identity, and academic competence; however, they are increasingly challenged by shifting societal norms shaped by modernization, globalization, and secularization (Grace, 2002; Jackson, 2014). This tension is not merely institutional but deeply pedagogical, as teachers navigate the lived realities of balancing doctrinal teachings with standardized academic expectations.

The concept of secularization, as articulated by Charles Taylor (2007), provides a critical lens for understanding these tensions. Taylor argues that secularization is not simply the decline of religion but a transformation in the conditions of belief, where faith becomes one option among many in a pluralistic society. This condition produces what he terms “cross-pressures”—a dynamic tension between religious commitments and secular rationalities. Within faith-based classrooms, these cross-pressures are experienced in concrete ways, as teachers interpret and enact curricula that embody competing epistemologies, moral frameworks, and educational goals.

In response to these tensions, the concept of curriculum harmonization offers both a theoretical and practical lens. While not attributed to a single originator, curriculum harmonization draws significantly from foundational and contemporary curriculum scholarship that emphasizes alignment and coherence. The work of Ralph Tyler (1949) underscores the importance of aligning objectives, content, learning experiences, and assessment in what is now known as the Tyler Rationale. Building on this, Michael Fullan (2007) highlights coherence as a central principle in educational reform, arguing that meaningful change occurs when curriculum, instruction, and assessment are systematically aligned across levels of practice. Similarly, John Buchanan (2015) emphasizes the need for curriculum integration and alignment in ensuring that policy intentions translate effectively into classroom realities. Together, these perspectives frame curriculum harmonization as the deliberate effort to integrate diverse curricular demands—such as religious teachings and secular standards—into a cohesive and pedagogically sound whole.

At the global level, faith-based schools continue to grapple with issues of curriculum standardization, inclusivity, and accountability while maintaining their religious identity (McLaughlin, 2005; Thiessen, 2012). International educational reforms increasingly emphasize competencies such as critical thinking, scientific literacy, and global citizenship, which may at times appear to challenge or reframe traditional religious narratives. As a result, teachers become key agents in negotiating these demands, often mediating between institutional identity and external expectations.

In the Philippine context, faith-based schools play a significant role within the private education sector. National policies such as the Enhanced Basic Education Act of 2013 (Republic Act 10533) mandate the implementation of a standardized K–12 curriculum designed to promote holistic development and global competitiveness. At the same time, sectarian institutions maintain the autonomy to embed religious instruction and values formation within their programs. This dual mandate creates a structural tension, requiring teachers to reconcile competency-based standards with faith-oriented educational goals (Bernardo, 2017). The challenge is not only curricular but ethical, as educators must make decisions that reflect both professional accountability and religious fidelity.

Locally, within the SOCCSKSARGEN Region (Region XII), faith-based schools operate in culturally diverse and socioeconomically varied communities, including General Santos City, South Cotabato, Sarangani, and Sultan Kudarat. These schools serve learners from different religious, linguistic, and cultural backgrounds while responding to national reforms and local educational needs. Emerging challenges include aligning religious content with competency-based frameworks, integrating values education across disciplines, and addressing sensitive issues where religious teachings may appear to conflict with scientific perspectives or inclusive education policies. In such contexts, teachers frequently encounter ethical and pedagogical dilemmas that intensify the cross-pressures described by Taylor.

Despite the significance of these issues, there remains a gap in research that captures how teachers experience and respond to these tensions in their everyday practice. Traditional methodologies often fall short in representing the depth and complexity of such experiences. In this regard, Photovoice offers a participatory and reflective approach that enables teachers to visually document and interpret their realities (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Through the integration of images and narratives, Photovoice provides a powerful means of uncovering how teachers perceive, negotiate, and harmonize competing curricular demands.

Anchored in Charles Taylor's theory of secularization and informed by curriculum theories of alignment and coherence, this study seeks to explore how teachers in faith-based schools represent, interpret, and negotiate the relationship between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. Specifically, it examines how these cross-pressures are visually represented through Photovoice, how teachers narrate and make meaning of these tensions, and how they enact strategies of curriculum harmonization in their classroom practices.

Furthermore, this study contributes to the broader agenda of the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4: Quality Education, which advocates for inclusive, equitable, and holistic learning opportunities for all. By examining how faith-based schools can harmonize religious and secular curricula, the study supports the promotion of education that is both academically rigorous and values-oriented. It also aligns with SDG 16: Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions, as fostering dialogue, ethical understanding, and respect for diverse perspectives within the classroom contributes to building more inclusive and peaceful societies. Through this lens, the research not only addresses local educational challenges but also advances global efforts toward sustainable, inclusive, and transformative education systems.

Statement of the Problem

This study aims to explore how teachers in faith-based schools represent, interpret, and negotiate the relationship between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements in classroom practice, using Photovoice as a lens to understand the cross-pressures they experience and how these are harmonized toward achieving balanced education.

Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. How do teachers in faith-based schools visually represent the tensions between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements through Photovoice?
2. In what ways do teachers negotiate and harmonize religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements in their classroom practices?
3. What insights do teachers' Photovoice narratives provide about the nature of cross-pressures, in relation to Charles Taylor's theory of secular modernity?

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Cross-Pressures in the Classroom

In the field of curriculum studies, teachers are often positioned at the intersection of multiple competing demands, from policy requirements to ethical considerations, all of which affect their approach to curriculum enactment. Research has identified several forms of cross-pressure that teachers face in their day-to-day practice, which significantly influence how they interpret and implement curriculum guidelines.

One significant form of cross-pressure involves the tension between competing policy logics, where teachers must balance centralized educational standards with decentralized local practices. In South Korea, teachers face the challenge of navigating these competing forces, resulting in various teaching stances such as standards-driven and standards-conscious approaches (Cho et al., 2025). Similarly, Chinese teachers wrestle with balancing curriculum integration with the pressures of high-stakes testing, which leads to varying degrees of acceptance or rejection of integrated teaching approaches (Xu & Lu, 2022). Such experiences underscore the broader issue of how educational policies impact teachers' curricular decisions, pushing them to either prioritize certain goals over others or find ways to hybridize these demands.

In addition to these structural and policy-related tensions, there are also emotional and ethical dimensions involved in curriculum enactment. Teachers frequently experience value misalignment between their personal

educational ideals and the mandates imposed by the state. According to Newberry and Snyder (2024), this misalignment often leads to emotional dissonance, where teachers engage in surface acting and emotional regulation to reconcile their personal beliefs with the expectations placed upon them. This emotional burden can affect teachers' self-efficacy, diminishing their ability to fully engage in their teaching practice. De Graaf (2020) argues that these tensions can initially cause confusion but also present opportunities for growth when teachers are able to negotiate and collaborate across disciplines.

Furthermore, curriculum interpretation is an essential site where these tensions are actualized. Ross (2023) suggests that teachers' "curriculum potential" – their subject knowledge, pedagogical approaches, and understanding of their students – plays a key role in determining how they translate curriculum guidelines into practice. For example, McNeill et al. (2017) observed that teachers' interpretations of an educative science curriculum varied significantly, with some teachers aligning closely with the curriculum's epistemic goals, while others reduced the content to superficial structures due to personal beliefs or external pressures.

Religious Curriculum in Faith-Based Schools

Religious education has increasingly been viewed not merely as the transmission of religious doctrines, but as a holistic process of character, moral, spiritual, and identity formation. Across Islamic, Christian, and plural educational settings, scholars emphasize that religious education plays an important role in shaping learners' values, virtues, behavior, and social responsibility. This shift highlights the need to examine religious education not only through curriculum content, but also through pedagogy, school culture, teacher modeling, and legal-ethical considerations.

In Christian Religious Education, character formation is commonly anchored on Christ-centered teaching. Christian education seeks to integrate biblical principles into learning experiences in order to form virtues such as love, humility, integrity, compassion, and moral responsibility. Jacob (2025) emphasized that biblical teaching in Christian Religious Education contributes to the development of Christ-centered character among learners. Similarly, Ndruru et al. (2024) explained that Christian religious education provides theological foundations that guide modern educational practice toward spiritual maturity and moral integrity. These studies suggest that Christian Religious Education is not limited to biblical knowledge, but also aims to transform learners' values and conduct.

Curriculum design is one of the major concerns in religious education. Religious education curricula are expected to integrate doctrine, ethics, values, and practice. However, studies show that misalignment often occurs among curriculum objectives, learning activities, and assessment methods, especially when the goal involves spirituality and character formation. Ansyari et al. (2023) and Lafrarchi (2020) found that religious education curricula may state holistic aims but still rely heavily on knowledge-based instruction and assessment. This creates difficulty in measuring moral development, spiritual growth, and actual character transformation.

Several studies also emphasize that religious curriculum development is context-sensitive. Khakim et al. (2023) explained that religious education curriculum development involves the interaction of institutional identity, educational goals, and social realities. Al-Farisy et al. (2024) discussed the integration of religion into curriculum design and institutional identity, while Supadi et al. (2025) examined the implementation of an independent curriculum in faith-based primary education. These studies reveal that religious education must adapt to national curriculum standards, institutional resources, and social changes.

Teacher modeling is another essential factor in religious education. Religious values are more effectively developed when teachers serve as living examples of the virtues they teach. Metcalfe and Moulin-Stožek (2020) found that religious education teachers view character education as closely connected to their role as moral and spiritual models. Sultmann et al. (2021) also emphasized that teacher reflection, collaboration, and curriculum implementation are important in strengthening religious education programs. In Christian settings, Jacob (2025) highlighted that Christ-centered pedagogy requires teachers to use experiential, relational, and reflective methods that connect faith with lived experience.

Secular Curriculum in Faith-Based Schools

Faith-based schools are increasingly under pressure to integrate secular curricula while maintaining their religious identity. This integration often involves balancing religious content with secular subjects, such as mathematics and science, which has been a subject of extensive research. European public schools face their own challenges, with religious education often dominating in a way that limits the secular study of religion. Alberts (2019) argues that in many European countries, even integrative religious education tends to carry a hidden confessional bias, rather than presenting a truly secular perspective. Flensner (2015, 2018) discusses how Swedish secular education often treats non-religious views as the neutral norm, which can marginalize religious perspectives.

The integration of secular and religious content in schools varies widely across regions, with different countries adopting unique models. For instance, in Bangladesh, Khondoker et al. (2024) argue that the inclusion of secular disciplines helps students pursue diverse careers, but the challenges of resource allocation and teacher preparedness persist. On the other hand, faith-based schools in Pakistan use secular, faith-inspired, and madrasa-based frameworks for peace education, highlighting the different moral bases that each model can bring to the table (Amin, 2023). This tension between secular and religious education also extends to legal and ethical concerns, particularly in countries where state neutrality and the rights of students to opt out of religious instruction are debated. Ergeshov (2025) and Uriarte & Rodríguez (2023) highlight how secular states have varying approaches to incorporating religion into the curriculum, from strict separation to multi-faith models, each with its own implications for students' educational experiences.

Despite these challenges, the benefits of integrating secular and religious content are evident. Integrated educational models can produce students who are not only academically capable but also spiritually grounded, with a strong moral or religious identity that prepares them for modern careers. Khondoker et al. (2024) and Al-Farisy et al. (2024) suggest that such models provide students with robust academic skills while also fostering ethical behavior. However, the challenges of scarcity of trained teachers in secular subjects, a lack of effective tools to assess spiritual outcomes, and time pressures from dual curricula continue to impede the full realization of these benefits (Khondoker et al., 2024; Nurfaisal et al., 2024). Legal debates over the state's role in religious education and whether secular approaches should be compulsory further complicate the issue (Cush, 2007; Löffler, 2020).

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative Participatory Action Research (PAR) design using Photovoice as the primary method of data generation. PAR is appropriate for this study because it positions teachers as co-researchers who actively reflect on and interpret their classroom experiences while navigating the relationship between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements.

Photovoice, developed by Caroline Wang and Mary Ann Burris (1997), enables participants to document lived experiences through photographs and accompanying narratives. In relation to the first research question, it allows teachers to **visually represent the tensions** between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements as experienced in classroom practice. These visual outputs serve as concrete expressions of the *cross-pressures* described by Charles Taylor (2007), where educators navigate competing demands between faith-based commitments and secular educational expectations.

To further deepen interpretation, the SHOWeD framework is used during Photovoice discussions. Through the prompts *See, Happening, Our lives, Why, and Do*, teachers critically reflect on their photographs. This directly supports the **second research question**, as it enables teachers to explain how they negotiate and **harmonize religious and secular curriculum requirements** in their classroom practices by moving from description to critical meaning-making and identifying practical strategies of integration.

For the **third research question**, the narratives produced through SHOWeD-guided Photovoice discussions provide insights into the nature of cross-pressures within the framework of Taylor's theory of secular modernity. These narratives reveal how teachers experience and make sense of tensions between religious and secular

knowledge systems, and how these tensions influence their pedagogical decisions, ethical reflections, and curriculum choices.

Overall, the combination of PAR, Photovoice, and the SHOWeD framework allows this study to systematically explore how teachers **visually represent, interpret, and negotiate cross-pressures**, and how these experiences lead to the practical process of **curriculum harmonization** in faith-based school contexts.

Research Setting

This study will be conducted in selected faith-based schools across Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), specifically in General Santos City and the provinces of South Cotabato, Sarangani, and Sultan Kudarat. These schools are private or sectarian institutions that operate within faith-based educational frameworks where religious instruction is integrated with academic learning.

The setting is particularly appropriate for this study because it reflects the lived reality of teachers who navigate the intersection of religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. In these contexts, teachers are expected to uphold institutional religious identity while also complying with national curriculum standards. Guided by Charles Taylor's concept of secular modernity, the setting illustrates how *cross-pressures* emerge within the immanent frame where religious and secular worldviews coexist.

Participants

The participants of this study will be eight (8) teachers from selected faith-based schools across Region XII (SOCCSKSARGEN), including General Santos City and the provinces of South Cotabato, Sarangani, and Sultan Kudarat. Using purposive sampling, participants will be selected based on the following inclusion criteria: they must be currently employed as teachers in private or sectarian faith-based schools, have at least five (5) years of teaching experience, be actively engaged in classroom instruction, and be willing to participate in the Photovoice process, including providing informed consent. Excluded from the study are teachers not affiliated with faith-based schools, non-teaching personnel or administrators, those with less than five (5) years of teaching experience, and individuals who are unwilling or unable to participate or who withdraw consent during the study.

Instrument

This study uses **Photovoice** as the primary research instrument, implemented through a structured five-phase process. First, an online orientation via Google Meet will be conducted to introduce the purpose of the study, ethical considerations, and the concept of **cross-pressures between religious and secular curriculum demands**.

Second, participants will take photographs using mobile devices to capture real classroom experiences that reflect tension, conflict, or integration between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. Third, they will write reflections for each photo using the **SHOWeD framework** (See, Happening, Our lives, Why, Do) to guide deeper interpretation.

Fourth, an online Focus Group Discussion (FGD) will be conducted where participants will share and discuss their photographs and narratives, allowing collective reflection on how curriculum tensions are experienced and addressed. Finally, all data will be organized and stored securely in Google Drive, and selected outputs will be prepared for a Photovoice exhibit to present teachers' lived experiences.

Data Gathering Procedure

Data collection follows the six phases of Photovoice research, adapted to explore how teachers in faith-based schools experience cross-pressures between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements, grounded in Charles Taylor's concept of secular modernity.

Phase 1: Planning and Preparation

The researcher first identifies the research problem and target participants. In this study, teachers in faith-based schools experiencing the cross-pressures of implementing both religious and secular curriculum requirements are selected. Ethical clearance is secured, and informed consent is obtained prior to data collection. Research goals, expectations, and ethical responsibilities are clearly communicated to participants (Wang & Burris, 1997).

Phase 2: Training and Orientation

Participants take part in an orientation session that explains the study's purpose, basic photography skills, and ethical rules regarding privacy, permission, and respect. The concept of cross-pressures in classroom practice is introduced to help participants frame their experiences in relation to tensions between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. The SHOWeD reflection method is also explained to guide later discussions. The session emphasizes participants' role as co-researchers, following participatory research principles (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Phase 3: Photo-Taking (Data Collection)

Participants are instructed to capture photographs representing their lived classroom experiences of curriculum cross-pressures, particularly moments where religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements intersect, conflict, or are integrated. Each photograph is accompanied by a brief written explanation describing its relevance to the research questions and how it reflects their experiences of curriculum negotiation. This approach aligns with Photovoice methods that emphasize participant-generated visual data (Mitchell, 2011).

Phase 4: Group Dialogue and Reflection

Participants engage in guided group discussions using the SHOWeD method to critically reflect on their photographs. This process helps teachers move beyond description to deeper interpretation of their experiences of cross-pressures and curriculum harmonization. Through dialogue, participants connect personal classroom experiences to broader institutional, curricular, and systemic influences, allowing richer understanding of how tensions are experienced and managed in faith-based schools (Wallerstein & Bernstein, 1988; Wang, 1999).

Data Analysis

Data analysis is conducted in a collaborative and iterative manner, consistent with the participatory nature of Photovoice. Both visual data (photographs) and textual data (captions, SHOWeD reflections, and focus group discussion notes) are analyzed together to preserve context and ensure accurate interpretation of teachers' lived experiences of cross-pressures between religious and secular curriculum requirements.

To strengthen methodological transparency, the Photovoice analytical process follows a clear sequence of preparation, coding, theme development, and validation. The unit of analysis consists of each participant's photograph together with its caption, SHOWeD reflection, and related focus group explanation, so that visual symbols are interpreted alongside the teacher's own narrative rather than in isolation.

First-cycle coding is conducted through open and descriptive coding. The researcher reads the captions and SHOWeD responses, examines the photographs for recurring visual symbols, and assigns initial codes such as curriculum compliance, faith symbol, classroom barrier, integration strategy, moral formation, institutional support, and unresolved tension. A preliminary codebook is then developed, containing code names, operational definitions, inclusion criteria, and sample excerpts or photo descriptions.

The analysis begins with repeated examination of the photographs and narratives to identify recurring patterns, meanings, symbols, and classroom situations that reflect tensions and interactions between religious teachings and secular curriculum demands. These initial observations are then organized into preliminary codes that capture experiences of curricular tension, interpretation of conflict, and strategies of harmonization.

These codes are further refined and grouped into broader themes related to: (1) visual representations of curriculum cross-pressures, (2) narrative interpretations of these tensions, and (3) teacher practices in negotiating and harmonizing religious and secular curriculum requirements in classroom settings. The process ensures that

the analysis remains grounded in participants' lived experiences while also allowing for conceptual interpretation guided by Charles Taylor's framework of secular modernity, particularly the concepts of cross-pressures and the immanent frame.

Second-cycle coding is used to compare and cluster related codes into categories and themes. Codes that refer to policy requirements, lesson plans, and academic standards are grouped under curriculum obligation, while codes referring to religious symbols, prayer routines, and moral guidance are grouped under faith identity and values formation. Codes that show difficulty, resistance, ambiguity, or incomplete integration are retained as negative or contested cases so that the analysis does not overstate harmony where participants describe real tension.

Importantly, participants are actively involved in validating the emerging themes to ensure that the interpretations accurately reflect their intended meanings. This member-checking process strengthens the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings (Wang & Burris, 1997; Mitchell, 2011).

Validation is strengthened through member checking, peer debriefing, triangulation, and an audit trail. Participants are invited to review the emerging themes and confirm whether the interpretations represent their intended meanings. Peer debriefing may be conducted with a research adviser or qualitative research peer to examine coding consistency and possible researcher bias. Triangulation is achieved by comparing photographs, written captions, SHOWeD reflections, and FGD statements. An audit trail of coding decisions, theme revisions, and representative excerpts is maintained to support dependability and confirmability.

The SHOWeD framework further strengthens the analysis by structuring reflection on each image through guided questions (See, Happening, Our lives, Why, Do). This allows each photograph to be connected not only to personal classroom experiences but also to broader institutional and curricular conditions. It also supports the identification of possible actions teachers use to respond to curriculum tensions, linking reflection with practical strategies of curriculum harmonization (Catalani & Minkler, 2010).

Overall, this analytical approach allows the study to move beyond simply describing classroom challenges. Instead, it highlights how teachers visually represent, interpret, and actively negotiate cross-pressures, demonstrating how curriculum harmonization is enacted in real educational contexts within faith-based schools.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical concerns are very important in this Photovoice study because of the visual data and the setting of faith-based schools. Permission is obtained not only from participants but also from anyone who might appear in photos. Participants are told to avoid taking identifiable pictures of students or coworkers without clear permission to protect privacy and confidentiality (Wang & Redwood-Jones, 2001).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The participants identified four (4) themes to answer the three problem statements during the photo analyses and interpretation sections of this research study. For Research Question 1 (a), which refers to participants' view about tensions between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements, the themes that have been realized include (a) curriculum as written obligation, (b) faith as institutional identity, (c) barriers and balancing and (d) integration of faith and learning. For Research Question 2, in what ways do teachers negotiate and harmonize religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements in their classroom practices, they revealed as (a) Integration of Faith and Academic Content and (b) Values Formation through Classroom Practices. Lastly, for Research Question 3, the insights do teachers' Photovoice narratives provide about the nature of cross-pressures, in relation to Charles Taylor's theory of secular modernity.

Tensions Between Religious Teachings And Secular Curriculum Requirements

The participants viewed tensions as curriculum as written obligation, faith as institutional identity, barriers and balancing, integration of faith and learning, and dialogue and institutional support.



Photo #1- Paper

Curriculum as Written Obligation and Professional Compliance. One participant photographed a piece of paper and explained that it represents “lessons, curriculum and written requirements.” The participant further stated that “*the paper shows how teachers follow written lessons and requirements in school while still respecting religious values*” (Par. 1). This suggests that the curriculum is perceived as a formal guide that teachers are expected to follow. The paper symbolizes the secular curriculum as an official and written mandate. It represents lesson plans, activities, documents, and compliance requirements that shape the teacher’s daily work. However, the participant emphasized that values influence how lessons are taught. This implies that teachers recognize the secular curriculum as an official and professional responsibility. The curriculum is viewed as a written mandate that guides lesson planning, assessment, and classroom instruction. However, the participants also show that compliance does not mean the absence of faith. Rather, teachers follow required lessons while allowing religious values to shape the manner, tone, and purpose of instruction. A strong claim from the literature is that teachers are not passive users of curriculum; they translate official curriculum into actual classroom practice. Catholic and faith-based schooling, where curriculum is often understood as a space of negotiation between academic excellence and religious identity (Garcia-Huidobro, 2017). Quirke, Espinoza, and Sensevy (2023) emphasize that teacher agency and professional identity affect how curriculum reforms are locally implemented. Therefore, this study supports the idea that teachers in faith-based schools enact the curriculum through both professional accountability and institutional values.



Photo #2- Altar and Vision-Mission



Photo #3- NDTC Logo

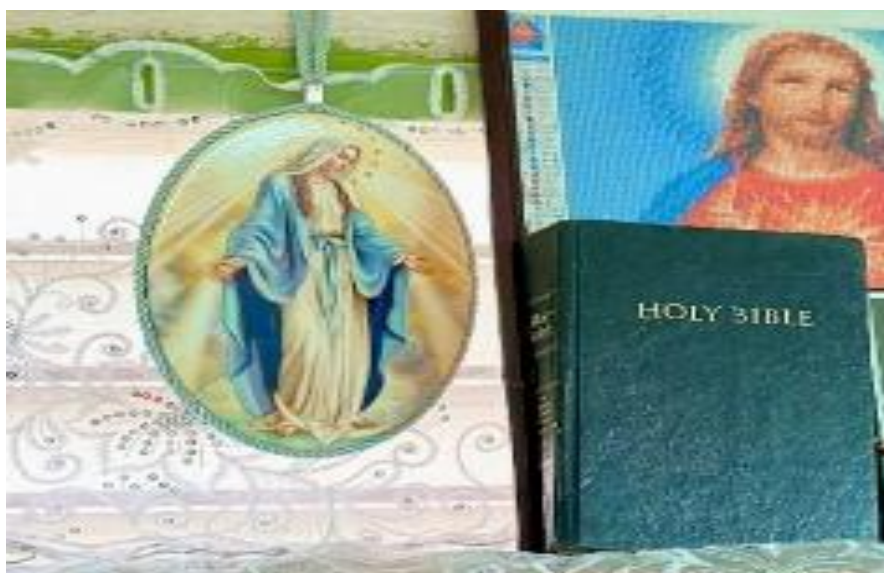


Photo #4- The Bible

Faith as Institutional Identity and Moral Compass. Several participants used religious and institutional symbols to represent the role of faith in schooling. One participant photographed an altar and the school’s vision-mission statements, explaining that, *“These symbolize faith, institutional dreams, and aspirations”* (Par. 3). Another participant photographed the NDTC logo, noting the presence of the cross, open book, hands, and torch. She stated, *“It represents the logo of NDTC. On top of the shield is a cross and within the shield is an open book with two hands and lighted by a small torch”* (Par. 4). The participant interpreted these symbols as Christianity, education, and service. Another participant photographed a Bible and connected it with faith, guidance, morality, love, forgiveness, and hope. The participant stated, *“The Bible is widely connected with faith, guidance, morality and spiritual teachings. The Bible is important in teaching academic subjects because it can help develop both mind and character of pupils”* (Par. 5). These photographs show that religious identity is not hidden in faith-based schools. It is visible in symbols, institutional spaces, and official statements. The altar, Bible, school logo, and vision-mission statements function as moral anchors. They remind teachers that their role is not only academic but also formative. Teaching is viewed as a mission that develops both mind and character. D’Agostino and Asadullah (2025) note that faith-based schools continue to play a significant educational role, and their contributions must be understood in context. Garcia-Huidobro (2017) argues that Catholic identity should permeate the entire curriculum, not just religious education. Teachers visually represent tension by placing religious identity beside academic and institutional responsibilities. Faith provides direction, but it may also create pressure when curriculum requirements appear secular. The data suggest that teachers interpret faith as integral to teaching, guiding pedagogy and professional decision-making.



Photo #5- Wall as Partition



Photo #6- Water in the bucket

Barriers, Balance, and the Work of Negotiation. One participant photographed a wall and described it as a symbol of “barriers or separation between two ideas” (Par. 2). The participant connected the wall to the possible division between religious teaching and secular curriculum. He stated “*teaching sometimes face challenges when trying to connect faith-based values with school values*” (Par. 2). Another participant used water to symbolize life, cleansing, flexibility, and balance. The participant said, “*The water reminds us that learning should from smoothly but sometimes beliefs and requirements may not easily mix*” (Par. 1).

Further, another participant used a puzzle to show how religious teaching and secular curriculum may represent different ideas and values but can still be fitted together toward a good outcome. The participant said, “*Looking at this photo makes me feel thoughtful and balances. It reminds me that faith and knowledge are both important and should go hand-in-hand*” (Par. 6). Teachers visually represent tension as both separation and possibility. The wall suggests barriers, water suggests flexibility, and the puzzle suggests integration. Teachers do not reject secular curriculum; instead, they reconcile it with faith-based values.



Photo #7- Puzzle

The wall, water, and puzzle reveal three different but related ways of understanding tension. The wall represents separation and difficulty. Water represents flexibility and openness. The puzzle represents the possibility of integration. Together, these symbols show that teachers experience the faith-curriculum relationship as a process of negotiation. It implies that teachers experience real challenges when connecting faith-based values with secular curriculum demands. But teachers do not necessarily reject secular curriculum; instead, they actively negotiate between faith and academic requirements. The literature supports this by describing Catholic curriculum as a bridge between Catholic worldview and other intellectual traditions. Davis and Franchi (2021) explain that curriculum in Catholic education speaks to both internal and external audiences, making it a space for dialogue rather than separation. This strengthens the claim that the participants' experiences reflect negotiation, not opposition.



Photo #8- Science Lab with religious symbol



Photo #9- Parallel Truths

Integration of Faith and Learning in Academic Subjects. Participants photographed a science laboratory with a religious symbol and a poster merging the Creation story with Human Body topics. They described these as spaces where teachers integrate faith and science in their lessons. One participant said, “*The presence of the cross in a science laboratory made me think about how religion and science coexist in educational spaces.*” She also added, “*It can help people understand that schools may integrate religious values even in science settings, encouraging reflection on how different belief systems and academic subjects interact*” (Par. 7). Another participant shared, “*It deeply resonates with my lived experience in a Catholic and faith-based schools. On a daily basis, I face the quiet but persistent tension of holding two roles simultaneously, as a faithful servant of the Church's mission and as a professional educator accountable to DepEd's secular curriculum standards*” (Par. 8). She also added “*The poster in the image reflects what many teachers do instinctively: they find creative ways to bridge the gap, to make both worlds feel whole and coherent for their students.*” The science lab and posters illustrate the most visible tension between faith and curriculum. Teachers merge knowledge systems: religious doctrine and biological science. Erduran, Guilfoyle, & Park (2022) explain that argumentation bridges faith and

science, while Chan & Erduran (2023) show collaboration helps teachers break subject barriers. Alexander et al. (2025) note that teachers must navigate complex knowledge systems ethically and creatively. Teachers attempt to teach both academic rigor and religious truth, framing learning as holistic. They aim to help students grow intellectually and spiritually. The tension produces both pride and unease, reflecting the emotional labor of integration.

The cross-pressure in the study refers to the simultaneous pull experienced by teachers between two important expectations: the need to follow the secular curriculum requirements and the need to uphold the religious identity and moral mission of the faith-based school. The tension does not appear as total conflict. Rather, it is experienced as a continuous effort to comply, respect, balance, and integrate both sides. Overall, the themes reveal that teachers in faith-based schools experience curriculum tension as a dual responsibility: they must remain professionally compliant with secular curriculum standards while also preserving the school's religious identity and formative mission. The findings show that this tension becomes manageable when teachers exercise agency, use reflective judgment, and receive institutional support. Thus, the study concludes that the relationship between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements is best understood as a process of faith-informed curriculum enactment, where teachers bridge compliance, identity, negotiation, and integration in their daily teaching practice.

At the same time, the findings should not be interpreted as suggesting that curriculum harmonization is always smooth or uncontested. The wall image, the participant's description of beliefs and requirements that may not easily mix, and the reported emotional labor of holding two roles simultaneously point to moments where integration remains difficult. These cases show that faith-based teachers may sometimes experience uncertainty about how far religious interpretation can be connected to secular subject matter, especially in areas such as science, assessment standards, and policy compliance. Recognizing these contested moments provides a more balanced understanding of faith-based education because it presents harmonization not as automatic agreement, but as an ongoing process shaped by negotiation, institutional expectations, teacher agency, and classroom realities.

Curriculum Negotiation and Harmonization

Based on the responses of the participants, there are two emerging themes revealed: (1) Integration of Faith and Academic Content and (2) Values Formation through Classroom Practices.

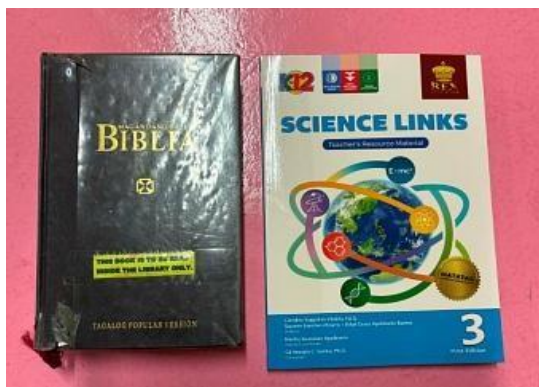


Photo #1- Opening the day with God and Goals

Integration of Faith and Academic Content as Negotiation Strategy. Teachers address cross-pressures by integrating faith with academic content rather than treating them as competing domains. This reflects an active process of negotiation where religious beliefs and secular knowledge are combined to reduce tension. One participant described this integration through photo as a deliberate balance between religious and academic priorities as stated by Participant 3, *"The teacher is trying to balance religious values with the required curriculum... the Bible and academic books are both needed... education is not only about academics but also values and respect for beliefs."* (Par.3). This indicates that teachers respond to cross-pressure (faith vs. academic demands) by positioning both as equally important sources of learning, thereby avoiding conflict and promoting harmony.



Photo #2- The Woven Basket

Similarly, Participant 6 highlights that faith is “woven” across all subjects, suggesting that integration serves as a practical method to resolve the tension. Instead of choosing between belief and secular knowledge, teachers create a unified learning experience where both interact meaningfully. As Participant 6 said, *“The curriculum represents integrating faith and learning in all subjects... moral and spiritual values are woven into lessons, activities, and discussions to shape character.”* (Par.6). The metaphor of “weaving” suggests that faith is intricately interconnected with learning, forming a unified educational experience. This supports the idea that values are not taught in isolation but are integrated into the entire curriculum.

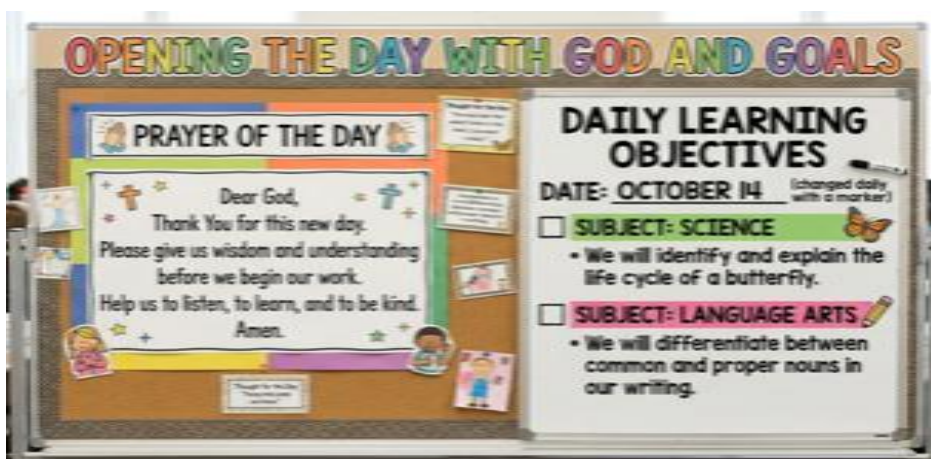


Photo #3- Opening the day with God and Goals

Lastly, one participant highlighted the intentionality of teachers in linking faith to lesson content, emphasizing a key strategy in negotiating cross-pressures within the classroom. As stated *“The teacher makes a deliberate faith-based connection within a DepEd lesson... showing a conscious effort to connect academic content with God as Creator.”* (Par.7) This demonstrates that harmonizing religious teachings and secular curriculum is not automatic but requires purposeful effort, planning, and reflective instructional design. In response to the cross-pressure described by Charles Taylor where individuals navigate tensions between faith and secular knowledge teachers actively bridge this divide by integrating spiritual perspectives into academic content. Through this, they transform potential conflict into a coherent and meaningful learning experience.

Moreover, this practice shows that teachers function as mediators of cross-pressure, guiding students in reconciling religious beliefs with academic concepts. By making explicit connections between faith and subject matter, teachers help learners understand that these domains are not opposing, but rather complementary sources of meaning and knowledge.

Overall, this theme suggests that teachers negotiate and harmonize religious and secular demands by intentionally integrating faith into instruction, thereby addressing the tension between belief and secular expectations. This integrative approach supports the holistic development of learners, shaping both their cognitive abilities and moral values. It positions teachers as facilitators who help students navigate cross-pressures by connecting knowledge with deeper meaning and purpose.

Supporting literature reinforces this finding. Berkowitz and Bier (2021) emphasize that integrating values into academic instruction enhances ethical reasoning and decision-making. Cooling (2022) further argues that linking faith perspectives with curriculum content strengthens students' worldview formation and critical thinking, while Fisher (2023) notes that spiritual integration contributes to meaningful learning experiences and well-being. These studies affirm that teachers' deliberate efforts to integrate faith and academics serve as an effective strategy in resolving cross-pressures and harmonizing competing curricular demands, resulting in more well-rounded learners.

Values Formation through Classroom Practices the second theme reveals that teachers negotiate and harmonize religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements through the integration of values in everyday classroom interactions, routines, and activities. This reflects how teachers respond to the cross-pressures, where individuals must navigate tensions between religious beliefs and secular expectations.



Photo #1: Helping Hand

As one participant noted *“The teacher assists learners while guiding them with values and school requirements... showing support, cooperation, and respect for both faith and curriculum.”* (Par.1). This highlights how teachers manage cross-pressure by embodying both academic and moral roles simultaneously. Rather than treating religious and secular demands as conflicting, teachers merge them through guided support and modeling of values, allowing both domains to coexist harmoniously in practice.



Photo #2: Praying before the class

Furthermore, another participant emphasized the role of spiritual routines in shaping classroom culture: *“The teacher incorporates spiritual practice before academic learning... showing that religious practices are part of*

school culture.” (Par.4) In Taylor’s terms, this reflects an effort to sustain religious meaning within a predominantly secular framework. By normalizing spiritual practices alongside academic instruction, teachers reduce the perceived divide between faith and formal curriculum requirements.



Photo #3: Frienship/Handshake

Additionally, the importance of relationships and social interactions in values formation was evident: *“Relating values to all subjects... helping students develop behavior, relationships, and responsibility to others and to God.”* (Par.5). This shows that teachers harmonize competing expectations by linking moral development with academic engagement. Through these interactions, students learn responsibility not only to academic tasks but also to others and to God, illustrating how teachers transform cross-pressure into a relational and ethical learning experience rather than a source of conflict.



Photo #4: Pair Work Activity

Finally, collaborative learning activities were also identified as opportunities for values formation: *“Academic activities also promote cooperation, discipline, and respect... showing that learning develops both knowledge and values.”* (Par.8) By promoting cooperation, discipline, and respect within academic tasks, teachers align secular learning goals with religious values. This approach shows that academic activities become avenues for moral formation, effectively bridging the gap between secular objectives and faith-based principles.

Overall, this theme indicates that teachers negotiate and harmonize religious and secular curriculum demands by embedding values into everyday classroom practices, including routines, relationships, and collaborative learning experiences. In doing so, they actively respond to cross-pressures by transforming potential tensions into integrated, lived experiences of learning, where faith and academic requirements support rather than contradict each other.

Supporting literature reinforces this interpretation. Lickona (2021) emphasizes that character education is most effective when integrated into daily school culture, while Nucci and Narvaez (2022) highlight that moral development emerges through social interaction and guided participation. Damon (2023) further notes that reflection, cooperation, and spiritual routines enhance students’ sense of purpose. These findings affirm that embedding values in classroom practices is a key strategy for resolving cross-pressures and achieving harmony between religious and secular educational goals.

Cross-Pressures in Taylorian Perspective

The analysis of teachers' Photovoice narratives revealed several patterns that illustrate how educators experience and respond to the tensions between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. Interpreted through Charles Taylor's theory of secular modernity, these patterns provide insights into the nature of cross-pressures and the ways teachers negotiate, harmonize, and construct meaning within faith-based educational contexts.

Table 1 Triangulation of Photovoice Themes and Taylorian Interpretation of Cross-Pressures

Pattern Emerging from SOP 1 and SOP 2	Taylorian Themes (Charles Taylor, 2007)
SOP 1 Curriculum as Written Obligation and Professional Compliance "The paper shows how teachers follow written lessons and requirements in school while still respecting religious values" (Par. 1).	Theory of Secularity as Institutional Differentiation Taylor's idea that modern institutions operate through secular systems, rules, and standards. Teachers follow DepEd curriculum requirements and written obligations, but this does not automatically remove faith. Instead, faith is practiced within the limits of professional and institutional expectations.
SOP 1 Faith as Institutional Identity and Moral Compass "These symbolize faith, institutional dreams, and aspirations" (Par. 3) "It represents the logo of NDTC. On top of the shield is a cross and within the shield is an open book with two hands and lighted by a small torch" (Par. 4). "The Bible is widely connected with faith, guidance, morality and spiritual teachings. The Bible is important in teaching academic subjects because it can help develop both mind and character of pupils" (Par. 5).	Theory of Moral Sources Taylor's idea that people and institutions draw their moral direction from "moral sources." In this case, the Bible, cross, torch, shield, and school logo serve as sources of faith, identity, guidance, and moral formation. Faith becomes the foundation for shaping learners' character and values.
SOP1 Barriers, Balance, and Negotiation "Teaching sometimes face challenges when trying to connect faith-based values with school values" (Par. 2). "The water reminds us that learning should from smoothly but sometimes beliefs and requirements may not easily mix" (Par. 1). "It reminds me that faith and knowledge are both important and should go hand-in-hand" (Par. 6).	Theory of Cross-Pressure Represents the essence of cross-pressures , where teachers are pulled between competing systems of meaning. Rather than choosing one side, they continuously negotiate between secular reason and religious belief. Taylor explains that modern individuals often experience "cross-pressure" between belief and secular expectations. In the theme, teachers experience tension between faith-based values and curriculum requirements. They must balance religious mission and professional accountability.
SOP1 Integration of Faith and Learning "The presence of the cross in a science laboratory made me think about how religion and science coexist in educational spaces." (Par. 7)	Theory of the Immanent Frame Taylor's "immanent frame" refers to the modern setting where life is often explained through secular, human, and institutional terms, yet openness to transcendence or faith can still remain. This theme fits because religion and academic learning coexist

“I face the quiet but persistent tension of holding two roles simultaneously, as a faithful servant of the Church's mission and as a professional educator accountable to DepEd’s secular curriculum standards” (Par. 8).	in the school setting, such as the presence of the cross in a science laboratory.
SOP 2 Integration of Faith and Academic Content as Negotiation Strategy “The teacher is trying to balance religious values with the required curriculum... the Bible and academic books are both needed... education is not only about academics but also values and respect for beliefs.” (Par.3). “The curriculum represents integrating faith and learning in all subjects... moral and spiritual values are woven into lessons, activities, and discussions to shape character.” (Par.6). “The teacher makes a deliberate faith-based connection within a DepEd lesson... showing a conscious effort to connect academic content with God as Creator.” (Par.7)	Theory of Meaning-Making within Secular Modernity Taylor’s view that people actively create meaning within modern conditions where faith and secular knowledge exist together. Teachers do not simply teach religious values separately. They deliberately connect Bible-based values with DepEd lessons, academic books, and classroom discussions.
SOP 2 Values Formation through Classroom Practices “The teacher assists learners while guiding them with values and school requirements... showing support, cooperation, and respect for both faith and curriculum.” (Par.1) “The teacher incorporates spiritual practice before academic learning... showing that religious practices are part of school culture.” (Par.4) “Relating values to all subjects... helping students develop behavior, relationships, and responsibility to others and to God.” (Par.5).	Theory of Embodied Moral Practice Taylor emphasizes that belief is not only an idea but is lived through practices, habits, and forms of life. This theme shows faith becoming visible through prayer, guidance, cooperation, respect, responsibility, and classroom routines. Values are formed through daily teaching practices.
Teacher Agency and Deliberate Meaning-Making	Corresponds to Taylor's concept of the Buffered Self. Teachers are not passive transmitters of doctrine or curriculum; they actively interpret, negotiate, and construct meaning within competing educational demands.
Holistic Education as the Desired Outcome – Teachers view academic excellence and spiritual formation as complementary goals.	Aligns with Taylor's argument that individuals seek fullness and meaning beyond purely secular explanations. Teachers strive for an educational model that integrates both transcendental and secular dimensions of human development.

The Photovoice narratives reveal that teachers in faith-based schools experience cross-pressures as an ongoing process of balancing competing yet interconnected educational expectations. Drawing on Charles Taylor's (2007) theory of secular modernity, these narratives demonstrate that teachers operate within a secular age where religious belief continues to exist alongside secular systems of knowledge, rather than being displaced by them.

A significant insight emerging from the participants' photographs is that the secular curriculum is perceived as a written and institutional obligation represented through lesson plans, curriculum guides, academic standards, and policy requirements. These symbols reflect what Taylor refers to as the **immanent frame**, a social condition where educational practices are organized around rationality, scientific knowledge, measurable outcomes, and standardized expectations. Teachers recognize the authority of these secular structures because compliance with national curriculum requirements is necessary for professional accountability and educational quality.

At the same time, participants consistently represented faith through photographs of altars, Bibles, religious symbols, vision-mission statements, and institutional emblems. These images demonstrate that religious belief remains a significant source of meaning and identity within the school context. In Taylor's view, the secular age does not eliminate religion; rather, it creates a pluralistic environment where religious and secular worldviews coexist. The teachers' narratives illustrate this coexistence by showing that faith continues to function as a moral compass guiding instructional decisions, character formation, and professional practice.

The photographs of walls, water, and puzzles provide perhaps the clearest representation of Taylor's concept of **cross-pressures**. The wall symbolizes perceived divisions between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. The water symbolizes flexibility and adaptation, suggesting that teachers continually adjust their approaches to maintain harmony between competing expectations. The puzzle symbolizes integration, indicating that although faith and secular knowledge may appear different, teachers believe they can be combined to achieve meaningful educational outcomes. These images reveal that teachers do not perceive tension as a permanent conflict but as a dynamic process of negotiation and reconciliation.

Furthermore, participants' photographs of science laboratories containing religious symbols and instructional materials connecting Creation narratives with scientific concepts demonstrate how teachers actively engage in curriculum harmonization. Rather than treating faith and science as opposing systems, teachers seek ways to bridge them through contextualized teaching practices. This finding suggests that cross-pressures are not merely obstacles but also opportunities for creativity, reflection, and pedagogical innovation. Teachers become mediators who help students navigate multiple knowledge systems while maintaining coherence between faith and learning.

The narratives also provide evidence of Taylor's concept of the **buffered self**. Teachers do not simply implement curriculum policies or transmit religious doctrines without reflection. Instead, they actively interpret, adapt, and negotiate meaning based on professional responsibilities, institutional expectations, and personal beliefs. Their deliberate efforts to integrate biblical principles into academic subjects, connect moral values with classroom instruction, and contextualize learning experiences demonstrate a high degree of professional agency. This reflects Taylor's assertion that individuals in modern societies construct meaning through reflection rather than relying solely on external authorities.

Overall, the Photovoice narratives suggest that the nature of cross-pressures in faith-based schools is characterized not by opposition but by negotiation, adaptation, and harmonization. Teachers inhabit a space where secular curriculum requirements and religious commitments intersect, requiring them to continually reconcile the demands of the immanent frame with the aspirations of transcendence. Their experiences reveal that faith-based education in a secular age is not a matter of choosing between religion and modernity but of intentionally creating coherence between them. Through reflective teaching practices, teachers transform cross-pressures into opportunities for holistic education that nurtures both academic competence and spiritual formation. This finding supports Taylor's argument that modern individuals continue to seek meaning beyond purely secular explanations while simultaneously engaging with the realities of contemporary educational systems.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the findings, it is concluded that teachers in faith-based schools experience a complex but manageable relationship between religious teachings and secular curriculum requirements. The tensions identified by participants do not necessarily result in conflict; instead, they create opportunities for curriculum harmonization and reflective professional practice.

The study further concludes that faith-based educators serve as active mediators between competing knowledge systems. Through intentional integration of faith and academic content, teachers create meaningful connections between spiritual values and secular learning objectives. This demonstrates that religious identity and academic rigor can coexist within contemporary educational settings.

Viewed through Charles Taylor's theory of secular modernity, the findings confirm that faith-based schools operate within a pluralistic environment where religious and secular worldviews intersect. Teachers experience cross-pressures arising from these competing demands but respond through adaptation, negotiation, and creative pedagogical approaches. Consequently, curriculum harmonization emerges as a practical and context-responsive strategy for achieving balanced, coherent, and holistic education that supports both academic excellence and spiritual formation.

Implications and Recommendations

The study recommends that future research intentionally examine cases where curriculum harmonization is difficult, resisted, or only partially achieved. This may include lessons where religious interpretations and secular curriculum standards appear to conflict, situations where teachers feel limited by institutional policy, or classroom moments where students question how faith and academic knowledge should be connected. Exploring these contested cases can prevent an overly positive reading of curriculum integration and can reveal the real tensions that faith-based educators manage in practice.

Future studies should also incorporate the perspectives of students and administrators. Students can provide insight into how curriculum integration is actually received, understood, or questioned inside the classroom, while administrators can explain how institutional mission, school policy, teacher supervision, and curriculum planning shape integration practices. Including these perspectives would enrich the analysis by moving beyond teacher experience alone and by showing how curriculum harmonization is negotiated across the broader school community.

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