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IRENE

Innovative Religious Education NETwork:
educating to the religious diversity
KA2 - Agreement Number: 2020-1-RO01-KA204-080071

IRENE-PROJECT

IRENE IO1 COMPARATIVE RESEARCH - FINLAND

UNIVERSITY OF EASTERN FINLAND

Sisällys

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Background to the study

The survey data was collected between 22.3-30.4.2021. The interviewer was Tino Sarkamies-Uutela, a student of classroom teaching at the University of Eastern Finland and a senior student of pedagogy. The interviews were conducted using the Zoom application, because the interviewees were from different parts of Finland and the pandemic situation prevented face-to-face interviews. The data was also transliterated by a research assistant, and the country-specific report was compiled by Risto Aikonen, KL, FM, Ptyhiouhos Theologias, from the Department of Applied Educational Science and Teacher Education at the University of Eastern Finland.

The interviews were conducted as part of the interview schedule developed for this project. People from different educational backgrounds with experience of teaching religion to children and young people in different contexts (e.g. in general education) and to adults (e.g. in a church or other institution in the form of adult education) were recruited as interviewees. However, not all interviewees currently teach in schools, but some teach mainly adults in universities and church settings. Some have no direct connection with practical educational work at the time of the interview.

The interviews were conducted with 14 interviewees. Of these, 5 were women and 9 men. The interviewees belonged to different religious communities. These included the Orthodox, Lutheran and Catholic Churches, the Methodist Church and the Jewish and Islamic faiths. One interviewee did not belong to any religious community. Interviewees worked in universities (3), church organisations (6) and general education (5). The interviews took between 40 and 90 minutes. They were conducted anonymously in Finnish.

The study coordinator selected the educational and teaching backgrounds of the interviewees in order to obtain the most diverse picture possible. All 14 interviewees selected for the study participated in this study without refusal.

PART I - Description of the interviewees and their teaching situations



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As this is a case study, the background of the interviewees and their teaching situations will be presented in more detail (interview questions 1-18). The following are brief descriptions of these.

Interviewee 1.

Male, 49 years old. Worked in religious education for 26 years. Doctor of Theology. Doctor of Theology, Associate Professor of Theology, University Pedagogy. Teaching experience in the public sector in a church-related organization, in university and in non-governmental organisation (NGO). Layman. Associate professor. Christian: Orthodox. Teaching: in a large city, predominantly mono-ethnic, with predominantly one religion.

Background of students in the last 5 years. Student composition has been mono-ethnic with predominantly one religion/denomination, but some students from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have been mainly single people, with roughly equal numbers of children and young people and adults aged 25+. The majority had religious affiliations and a fairly good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. /.../"The majority have a positive attitude towards religion, are able to see its importance both in personal and social terms and consider religion to be important in the Finnish social context." /.../ "There should be stronger permanent expressions of the Christian tradition and thus show a connection and continuity in time with previous times, and on the other hand there are ideas that things should be renewed and changed"/.../. /.../Attitudes of tolerance towards those who interpret the Christian tradition differently /.../

In education, the target group has become more diverse and heterogenized: "group identity has been constructively dispersed, and we are clearly one heterogeneous group of people, with a group of different people who do not form two separate groups". (Lutherans/Orthodox).

He considers his doctoral studies, i.e. the doctorate he has obtained, to be important. (Q29).

Interviewee 2.

Female, 63 years old. Worked in religious education for 40 years. Master of Theology. Systematic theology, teacher of Orthodox religion, class teacher (specialisation: physical education, history and Orthodox religion. Teaching experience in the public sector in primary and secondary schools and in church organisations. Laywoman. Coordinator of Educational Affairs. Christian: Orthodox. Teaching: in a large city, mainly mono-religious, with one main religion/denomination but with significant representation of others (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been mono-ethnic and predominantly of one religion/denomination. Pupils were mainly adults over 25 years of age. The majority have had religious affiliations and have a good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. Correcting a poor textbook situation. Responses and solutions towards the model of Religious Education.



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She has experienced as important a course on online teaching, which was an experiment in online teaching of Orthodox religious education, i.e. religion was partly taught at a distance in the mid-2000s. (Q29).

Interviewee 3.

Male, 59 years old. Worked in religious education for 33 years. Licentiate in theology, religion teacher. Teacher of religion (high school), teacher of history (secondary school). Has held teaching posts in the public sector at university. Member of the clergy. Lecturer. Christian: Lutheran. Teaches: in a large city, predominantly mono-ethnic, with predominantly one religion.

Background of students in the last 5 years. Composition of pupils has been mono-ethnic with mainly one religion/denomination, but some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have been mainly single people, mainly children and young people under 25 years of age. Predominantly pupils with religious affiliations, with a smaller number of non-religious pupils with a relatively poor background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. *"Varies from neutral to negative, with very few purely positive attitudes. Expectations broad and comparative, not just from the perspective of one religion."*

She has perceived the teacher training she has received as important. (Q29).

Interviewee 4.

Female, 59 years old. Worked in religious education for 35 years. Master of Theology, subjects taught history, philosophy of life, philosophy and religion. Teaching experience in the public sector in primary and secondary schools. Laywoman. Lecturer. Christian: Lutheran. Teaching: in a large city, predominantly mono-religious, with one main religion/denomination but with significant representation of others (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been mainly mono-ethnic, but with some pupils from other ethnic groups and mainly one religion/denomination, but with some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been in groups/teams, mainly children and young people under 25 years of age. Mainly pupils with religious affiliations, with a smaller number of non-religious pupils with a fairly good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. Attitudes towards religion are not aversive. It is good to know and understand religion. There is an expectation of a deeper understanding of the world. *"The typical pupil who studies religion does not consider himself religious but is reasonably interested in religion as a phenomenon. However, he does not feel that he practices it himself."*

"Maybe I'm a bit surprised at how interested this research is in people's faith."

He has found several small training courses important (Q29).



Interviewee 5.

Male, 60 years old. Worked in religious education for 29 years. Master of Theology, class teacher, teacher of Orthodox religion. Teaching experience in the public sector in primary, secondary and university education. Member of the clergy. Full-time class teacher. Christian: Orthodox. Teaching: in a large city, predominantly mono-ethnic, with predominantly one religion.

Background of students in the last 5 years. Pupil composition has been predominantly mono-ethnic with some pupils from other ethnic groups. Predominantly one religion/denomination. Pupils have mainly been in groups/teams, mainly children and young people under 25. Most have religious affiliations, with a fairly good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. There is a positive attitude towards RE: *".../that it is one subject among others and that this will be dealt with from the bottom up /.../*.

The importance of ICT training related to learning environments is perceived as important" (Q29).

Interviewee 6.

Male, 44 years old. Worked in religious education for 18 years. Master's degree. Master of Theology. Has worked in the public sector in the university teaching profession. Member of the clergy. University teacher. Christian: Orthodox. Teaches: in a large city. One main religion/denomination, but others are also significantly represented (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been mainly mono-ethnic, but with some pupils from other ethnic groups and mainly one religion/denomination, but with some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been in groups/teams, mainly adults over 25 years of age. Mainly pupils, most with religious affiliations and with a really good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. *"Mostly positive attitudes of course, as the forthcoming contents of studies are known."*

He perceived the master's degree in Theology and the university's online pedagogical trainings as important (Q29).

Interviewee 7.

Male, 53 years old. Worked in religious education for 12 years. Master's degree. Master's degree in philosophy. Teaching experience in the public sector in church organisations, primary and secondary schools, universities and NGOs, and in the private sector in primary and secondary schools. Layman. Director of Education. Christian: Catholic. Teaching: in a large city. The region is multicultural (more than 50% of the inhabitants belong to an ethnic group different from the majority group in the country). One main religion/denomination, but others are also significantly represented (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).



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Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been predominantly multi-ethnic and predominantly of one religion/denomination. Pupils have been mainly in groups, mainly children and young people under 25 years of age. Predominantly pupils, most of whom have religious affiliations and have a relatively poor background knowledge of religion.

Attitudes and expectations of pupils. Attitudes are acceptable and positive. "*Pupils expect the teacher to have expertise, personal knowledge of religion.*" The teacher must be an expert on religion from within.

He has perceived higher education as important. (Q29).

Interviewee 8.

Female, 43 years old. Worked in religious education for 10 years. PhD., Master of Social Sciences. Worked in teaching in the public sector in a church-related organisation. Laywoman. Educator. Christian: Lutheran. Teaching: in a large city, predominantly mono-denominational, with one main religion/denomination, but with significant representation of others (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been mainly mono-ethnic, but with some pupils from other ethnic groups and mainly one religion/denomination, but with some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been single people/individuals, mainly adults over 25 years of age. The respondents could not say anything about the religious affiliations of the pupils and their religious background.

Students' attitudes and expectations. Attitudes are positive because "*to the training courses are generally attended by people who are interested in religious education and religious themes.*"

The importance he has attached to his doctoral studies, i.e. the doctorate he has obtained. (Q29).

Interviewee 9.

Female, 45 years old. Worked in religious education for 20 years. Master's degree. Major in Religious Studies, minors in Cultural History and Philosophy and Psychology. Qualifications: ET (consisting of Religious Studies, Philosophy and Cultural History), Religion, Philosophy and Psychology (subjects to be taught). Teaching experience in the public sector at secondary school level. Laywoman. Lecturer. Christian: Lutheran. Teaches: in a large city, with one main religion/denomination, but with significant representation of other groups (60-80% majority group, 20-40% other ethnic groups), but with significant representation of others (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been predominantly mono-ethnic, with some pupils from other ethnic groups. Predominantly single religion/denomination, but some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been in groups/groups, mainly children and young people under 25. Mainly pupils with religious affiliations, with a smaller number of non-religious pupils with a fairly good background knowledge of religion.



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Students' attitudes and expectations. Attitudes are prejudiced, but " *addressing attitudes with knowledge became really important.*"

She has perceived the importance of education related to the interpretation of images. (Q29).

Interviewee 10.

Male, 54 years old. Worked in religious education for 30 years. PhD. History of the Finnish Orthodox Church. Qualified as a teacher of history and religion. Teaching experience in the public sector in church organisations. Layman. Teacher of theological subjects, vice-principal. Christian: Orthodox. Teaches: in the village. In addition to the majority group, other groups are significantly represented in the area (60-80% majority group, 20-40% other ethnic groups). Predominantly one religion/denomination (over 90%).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been predominantly multi-ethnic and predominantly single religion/denomination, with some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been single people/individuals, mainly adults over 25 years of age. Mainly pupils, most of whom have religious affiliations and have a fairly good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. Highly motivated about religious issues and high expectations about the learning environment (monastery).

Important perceived importance of educational studies. (Q29).

Interviewee 11.

Male, 56 years old. Worked in religious education for 26 years. Master's degree. Major in Finnish and Scandinavian history, minor in education and teaching qualification. Studies in social studies required for the qualification of history teacher. Has held teaching posts in the public sector in church organisations, secondary schools and the National Board of Education, and in the private sector in primary schools. Painter. Subject teacher. Jewish. Teaches: in a large city. In addition to the majority group, other groups are significantly represented in the area (60-80% majority group, 20-40% other ethnic groups). One main religion/denomination, but others are also significantly represented (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been predominantly multi-ethnic with pupils predominantly of one religion/denomination. Pupils have been mainly in groups, mainly children and young people under 25 years of age. Mainly pupils, most of whom have religious affiliations and have a really good background knowledge of religion.

Attitudes and expectations of pupils. Pupils have positive attitudes in terms of ideas but avoid putting things into practice (e.g. regular prayer).

Small and individual training sessions are perceived as important (Q29).



Interviewee 12.

Male, 51 years old. Worked in religious education for 30 years. Master's degree. Speech communication, no teaching qualifications. Teaching experience in the private sector in a church organisation. Member of the clergy. Pastor. Christian: Methodist. Teaching: in a large city. Predominantly mono-ethnic / mono-ethnic (over 80% of residents belong to the same ethnic group). One main religion/denomination, but others are also significantly represented (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been predominantly mono-ethnic, with pupils predominantly from one religion/denomination, but with some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been in groups/teams, mainly children and young people under 25 years of age. Predominantly pupils, most of whom have religious affiliations and have a fairly good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. Pupils have a receptive attitude. Pupils *"want to learn to know and feel who God is and how he works in this world and whether it is possible to live with God in some kind of relationship."*

He has found the Greek language course in theological education important, which enabled him to understand the Bible in a new way. (Q29).

Interviewee 13.

Female, 46 years old. Worked in religious education for 15 years. Master's degree. Subjects taught: physics, mathematics and Islam. Has worked in the public sector as a teacher in a secondary school. Laywoman. Teacher of Islam. Religion: Muslim. Teaching: in a big city. One main religion/denomination, but others are also significantly represented (60-80% main religion/denomination, 20-40% other religions/denominations).

Students' background in the last 5 years. The composition of pupils has been mainly multi-ethnic and mainly multi-religious/multi-denominational. Pupils have been mainly in groups, mainly children and young people under 25 years of age. Predominantly pupils with religious affiliations, to a lesser extent also non-religious pupils with a relatively poor background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. Children and young people have clear expectations about the beginning of education. *"Pupils have quite high expectations regarding the teaching of Islam, due to the fact that in everyday life children and young people experience Islamophobia and have questions about everyday applications and how to adapt religious thinking to living in Finnish society. A receptive attitude."*

She has found self-learning to be important. (Q29).



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Interviewee 14.

Male, 58 years old. Worked in religious education for 30 years. Master's degree. Theology. Teaching experience in the public sector in a church organisation and in the private sector in a primary school. Member of the clergy. Diocesan Secretary. Christian: Lutheran. Teaching: in a large city. Predominantly mono-ethnic / mono-ethnic (more than 80% of residents belong to the same ethnic group). Mainly single religion/denomination (over 90%).

Pupils in the last 5 years. Pupil composition has been predominantly mono-ethnic with pupils predominantly of one religion/denomination, but some pupils from other religious/denominational groups. Pupils have mainly been in groups/groups, mainly adults over 25 years of age. Mainly pupils, most with religious affiliations and with a really good background knowledge of religion.

Students' attitudes and expectations. The majority of pupils have a positive, accepting attitude.

They perceived the training of guidance counsellors as important. (Q29).

Summary of the interviewees and their students' backgrounds

14 informants participated in the interviews, 9 of whom were male and the rest female. Their average age was 53 years, the youngest 43 years and the oldest 63 years. They had a strong teaching background, having taught for an average of 25 years, with a maximum of 40 years. They also had a high educational background. Eleven of the respondents had a master's degree and three had a PhD. They had studied Orthodox or Lutheran theology, Orthodox or general history, physics, mathematics, Islamic religion, religious studies, philosophy, psychology, social sciences and pedagogy. However, not all respondents had the pedagogical studies required to qualify as a teacher. Of the respondents, 12 were Christian (Orthodox, Lutheran, Catholic, Methodist). Other religions included one Jew and one Muslim. Five respondents were members of the clergy and the rest were lay people.

They mainly taught in larger cities in different parts of Finland. Only one taught in a small town or sparsely populated rural area. The areas were mainly monoethnic and where the majority said that other religions were influenced in addition to the main religion/denomination.

They had taught in a variety of settings, but mainly in the public sector in primary or secondary school (5), in a church-related organisation (6) or at university (3). Some had also taught in the private sector in primary or secondary schools.

The experience of education in primary and upper secondary schools

In Finland, religion is a compulsory subject in comprehensive and upper secondary schools. Pupils have a positive attitude and a good knowledge and understanding of religion in the world. On the other hand, the subject is seen as part of school subjects and is subject to prejudice. The teacher must have a personal relationship with religion. There are questions about how to put the content into



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practice and adapt it to everyday life, and it is not perceived as natural. The majority of pupils have religious affiliations, with a smaller number of non-religious pupils who have a fairly good background knowledge of religion. In one case even a very good background knowledge. In two cases, quite poor background knowledge of religion.

Experience of teaching at university

The majority have a positive attitude towards religion. Seeing the importance of religion as both a personal and a social issue (theology students). On the other hand, there is also a range from neutral to negative (not theology students).

Most of them have had religious affiliations and have a fairly/very good background knowledge of religion (theology students). Also, there are students with religious affiliations, and to a lesser extent non-religious student, with a fairly poor background knowledge of religion (non-theology students).

Experience of education in church organisations

Attitudes are positive and receptive, even highly motivated. Most of them have had religious affiliations and have a good/very good background knowledge of religion.

PART II – Teaching in practice

3. Topics, contents and objectives to be taught and participation in teaching (questions 20-26)

Teaching in primary and upper secondary schools

In High Schools in spring 2021 the topics were *Religion as a phenomenon and the Religions of the Middle East (Judaism, Christianity and Islam)*. In primary school, foreign religions or world religions. In the Jewish school, the emphasis in secondary school is on the life cycle of Judaism with its festivals and customs. The diversity of Islam for the Muslims.

The teaching contents are based on the existing primary or secondary school curricula and are part of the compulsory religious education in the school. The teacher may apply the content locally. The aim is to provide a general religious education and knowledge of one's own religion, other religions and religious diversity as a building block for a student's religious identity. In Judaism, the emphasis is on strengthening the student's identity. (Q21, Q22, Q23, Q25)

"The general aim of religious education is general religious education, the second is to build up one's own religious identity, which is in no way imposed but is given material. The student can build it himself. The third is to provide the materials for interacting with those who think differently and learning respectful dialogue. " (I4)



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School education cannot be confessional, but the values of each religion, broadly expressed, underlie it. They reflect the way in which each religion emphasises and interprets them (Orthodox, Lutheran, Catholic, Jewish and Islamic). Valuing diversity of belief. A religious studies perspective is also introduced. The school curriculum itself is not advertised anywhere, but upper secondary schools can advertise themselves on social media. (Q24, Q25, Q26).

"We do a bit of advertising for those who come to our high school. We advertise the whole school to them. Not these courses, because these are compulsory. If you want to become a high school graduate, you have to take them. We have a website and in January, before the applications, we have an event called "introduction night". This year, of course, we had made videos, so it was a bit of an anomaly. But they usually come to see the school premises. We advertise in this way and the subjects also advertise how good and interesting each subject is." (I4)

Teaching at university

Practical theology content, such as Orthodox worship, practical and pastoral dimensions of theology. Priesthood in the Church. These, however, have a research dimension:

"What are the perceptions within the Orthodox Church and what is the nature and theological basis of worship? The theological traditions and principles and the practical dimension. How does it reflect the theological background and principles?" (II)

On the other hand, the content of the teaching also includes the practical teaching of Orthodox worship and services. For the teacher students there is Pedagogical foundations of the Evangelical Lutheran religion. Multicultural education and religion, ethics and multiculturalism are also part of the university curriculum.

The teaching contents are part of the university's theology or class teacher training programme, where the teacher has some autonomy over the content. The aim is to provide knowledge and skills for the liturgical life of the Orthodox Church through both research and practice. From a school perspective, the aim is that the student should be able to apply methods of teaching religion or belief appropriate to the level of education and the age of the children (Q21, Q22, Q23).

Orthodox theological education is based on a Christian worldview, which is rooted in the tradition of the Orthodox Church. In the training of classroom teachers, an anthropological ecumenical philosophy aimed at a broad understanding of religions and beliefs. Undergraduate teaching is compulsory for students. At the university, teaching is provided through online platforms for university students. (Q24, Q25, Q26).

Teaching in church organisations



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The content of the teaching may include information on topical issues (teaching materials, organisation of school education or curriculum issues). In a Catholic Church organisation, the teaching of one's own religion. Courses to familiarise people with Orthodoxy. Confirmation education. Cooperation between schools and parishes, religious events in schools. Working life skills and the application of information technology to the educational and teaching work of the Church.

"Well, in a way, the work is focused more so that those educators and teachers trainers could get means and that is to keep up-to-date of the [educational] situation and then about new methods that they may be that someone else will train to organize so them in these tasks they platforms for those places either online or physically." (I14)

Training is voluntary training for teachers, clergy or other parish workers, for example in the form of diocesan days. In these, the content of the course or teaching is determined by demand and current needs. Some may be qualifying, compulsory diploma training, such as ordination and pastoral training. Those with content predetermined by the diocese. Training is also provided in the form of in-service training, where a theme may be chosen each year. The teacher can also decide on the content of the course. (Q21, Q22).

".../ I decide myself when we make the programme for the following year what to take. Once it is decided, then we make a programme for that course and go according to that programme. Of course, you can deviate, what's to stop you. If questions arise in the middle of a course about something that is not included in the programme, but in which the student is interested, the matter will be raised." (I10)

The objectives are to inform teachers of Orthodox religion about administrative or other changes in teaching. To develop issues related to the growth of the spiritual life of the students and, on the professional side, to deepen the pastoral professional skills of priests. A Christian worldview is the basis.

"An understanding of the basics of Christianity and a knowledge based personal decision whether to engage in a life as Christianity understands it or to go in a different direction in life." (I12)

In ecclesial contexts, the approach is based on each church's own religious starting point (Orthodox, Lutheran or Catholic). Enrolment in training is voluntary, except for the pastoral qualification for the priesthood. Information about the course is provided on the website of the ecclesiastical organisation and through targeted e-mails. In addition, the organiser also uses various social media applications and some personal contacts. (Q23, Q24, Q25, Q26).

"Actually, kind of central platform is the church staff training calendar, which is on the web. 10 years ago, ceased to exist in print. It is common to the Church and there you can find training and events by diocese or by field of work, and then the diocese has its own website. Of course, in addition to this there are emails targeted at specific groups.



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Well, yes, e-mail communications also to the education department, the education department, the regional administrative office and elsewhere as well." (I14)

PART III - In service training needs

5. About what would you like to get more training or information (questions 28, 30)

The need for further training depended to some extent on the respondent's background organisation. Two themes emerged among primary and secondary school teachers. There was a desire for training in the use of e-learning environments and the pedagogical challenges they bring. In addition, two teachers' responses highlighted training in media and literacy (the Curriculum for Basic Education (2019) now includes a new course on "Religion and Media" in upper secondary schools).

At university level, more training in pedagogy and in the more diverse and widespread use of digitalisation in pedagogy would be welcome. The development of a broader knowledge of the content to be taught is also seen as important.

In church organisations, training was also mentioned in order to develop the pedagogical and technical use of the online environment.

Of the individual in-service training contents, respondents considered the following to be the most important in order of importance: other area, teaching methods, pedagogy, teamwork methods, theology, social awareness, psychology.

The other contents showed a wide variety of subject content. These included animal rights, internet and media, democratic society, the relationship between the Catholic Church and society, environmental protection, community service, religious disputes (slaughter, circumcision), individual and communal aspects of religiosity, dialogue, faith awareness, structural discrimination, gender and sexual diversity.

6. The most important training courses in religious education to date (question 29).

Not all of the training courses that respondents considered important were directly related to the delivery of religious education. Among those teaching in primary and secondary schools, the following were perceived as important: small training courses (I4, I11), information and communication technology (I5), interpretation of images (I9), self-study (I13).

The following training courses were perceived as important so far by those working in universities: doctoral/doctoral training (I1), teacher training (I3) and master's/university pedagogy (I6).

Among those working in church organisations, The following were considered important: e-learning (I2), higher education (I7), doctoral/doctoral studies (I9), education (I10), Greek language course (I12), training of supervisors (I14).



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7. Views on current social issues raised in teaching (question 31,32).

The most important topic discussed in teaching was human rights. The next most important topics were refugees and immigration, beginning/end of life, social crises, Christian/religious dialogue, climate rights, sexual minorities. The least important topic was races and peoples. Further information could be provided, e.g. in the form of a booklet or other material, in addition to physical training. Information packs with links and websites could also be one form of provision.

Particularly among primary and secondary school teachers, current knowledge of the topics mentioned in the list was perceived as sufficient (Q32). For example, informants stated the following:

"This is the same again, I feel that I can cope with these and have sufficient knowledge, but additional training is good, because no one is ready in these areas. I would put a second one in there. I do go to some training courses every now and then, if I have time and what's on offer./.../ (I4)

"I don't [need], I could go and train people." (I13)

"I can't immediately think of anything that would be relevant." (I5)

On the other hand, further training was requested from other sources (university, church organisation) on the following topics:

"/.../ human rights in connection with refugee and immigration issues /.../ (I1)

/.../ I am constantly involved in the dialogue on religion and immigration and refugees. It's an interesting question /.../ (I2)

/.../ human rights and nature conservation /.../ (I10)

/.../ understanding the thinking and experiences of a child or young person /.../ (I12)

8. Adequacy of teaching tools and materials and use of methods (questions 33,34,35)

The general impression is that two sectors are satisfied with the adequacy of tools and materials.

Primary and upper secondary education

With regard to school education, a common feature of the informants' responses was that there is a lack of sufficient learning materials among people of minority religions. In other respects, those in school were satisfied with the facilities and materials.

"No, especially in their own religion. Teaching materials are the worst pitfall. A commercial publisher has no interest in publishing teaching material and in foreign languages two problems, language and sorted in a different country. For example, talk



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about miles and temperature in America, and you're out of your topic. Translating into the local language and culture, those are the problems." (I11)

"There is currently no material that corresponds to the curriculum." (I5)

There was some wariness among teachers about the use of modern learning applications. Classroom, Thinglink, Socrative, Kahoot and Quizlet were mentioned as examples of cloud-based applications. They do not necessarily facilitate learning, but at least they increase interest in teaching. Videos give a living face, for example when learning about different religions. Films provide opportunities for deeper and broader content analysis. Distance learning enables international cooperation. (Q34) Regarding applications, it was noted:

"I don't know if all modern methods are very innovative. To some extent, I have started to use this kind of methods to teach terminology and concepts. Learning and testing them with this kind of multiple-choice battery that these students can practice. Some of them have such game-like dimensions that they can be played and are fun. Quizlet has those. I don't really think that gamification solves the issues of our subject in any particular way, because the fact that you just want to beat a friend and identify a concept is not really the core." (I4)

/.../ "but traditional frontal teaching has quite a lot of good points. Otherwise we wouldn't be practicing it. It's not necessarily boring. (I13)

In general, it has been recommended to colleagues to use applications that have already been supported by surprise, and that they themselves have experience of. On the one hand, there was a questioning of what is meant by innovative digital solutions, on the other hand it was a good example. (Q35)

"What does innovative mean? " (I11)

/.../ I've experimented those with primary school children. Made the pupils do tasks /.../ the pupils go to the mall and look for religious symbols and they describe them. To wake up to how religion is seen in everyday life. It was exciting to see the insights of someone who has been to a frozen food shop and seen a halal sign on a meat packet. /.../ (I13)

University

At university level, the situation was perceived as good, although the digital accessibility of learning materials could be improved, and the choice of language could be increased. Informants stated the following:

"Yes, in terms of adequacy of tools, that more is available in terms of what you master. /.../



The functionality and availability of small tools is constantly evolving, to keep up with it /.../ " (I1).

/.../ In Finnish there is only superficial material. In any case, the sector is international, you have to be able to operate at least in English. (I6)

The innovative and modern methods mentioned included co-teaching, flipped teaching and the use of videos. The latter was seen as a useful way of gaining a deeper understanding of the subject and learning. (Q34). The Mentimeter application and the game-based parts of Moodle have been recommended to a colleague. (Q35)

Church organisation

Church organisations were also satisfied with the situation in terms of tools and materials, with some reservations. However, the importance of traditional materials was also highlighted. Informant 7 stated:

/.../ books should certainly not be abandoned. Because the disadvantages of increasing screen time are clear from the research evidence in terms of strain and physiological characteristics, concentration problems, etc. The books user-friendliness in a situation where digital media are not available or accessible. The problem with digital is that young people are doing something else and not just young people. (I7)

Augmented reality (AR) has been used. This augmented reality is used, for example, to make an iconic person speak. Among the various recent cloud computing applications on the web, Zoom, Teams, Meet, Prezi, Genial, Moodle and YouTube were mentioned. Informant 10 described it as follows:

"Just this videoing and streaming to YouTube. So, it's someone else who's streaming, not me of course. I've been involved in it myself. I've made videos with my own technology and of course emails and everything but it's just a daily routine. The virtual learning environment is now, it's not even very strong yet, but it will be." (I10)

The use of tools and applications has been found to be motivating:

"An animated character asking and answering questions can be a tool for some students to motivate or facilitate the learning process. All the tools can be used when there are so many different types of learners." (I2)

For others, 'mobile phone apps' have been recommended, i.e. apps that can be accessed on a mobile phone by name or anonymously, but for the most part the different apps are familiar to all. If you are not familiar with a tool or application, it is not recommended (I12). (Q35)

No group of respondents wanted any more specific or detailed information about applications and their use.



9. Collecting feedback (question 36)

Primary school and upper secondary school

Part of the school curriculum is the collection of feedback on teaching. Feedback has been collected (high school) using a Google forms form with open and closed questions. Feedback is collected during exams and lessons, especially in small groups, direct feedback is obtained by observing students during lessons. Feedback can also be collected in three stages. Here is an example:

"I ask for feedback in a written form asking first what the expectations are, in the middle asking how the expectations have been met and if there is anything that should be done differently and finally how they themselves assess whether the course has given anything and what could be improved." (I13)

University

At the University, feedback is automatically collected on an electronic platform after the end of the course. However, a certain number of students must be enrolled before feedback is collected. In that case, the course provider collects the feedback independently. The feedback includes both an assessment of the student's own learning and feedback on the delivery of the course. The students' feedback is responded to. In small groups, there may also be oral feedback.

Church organisation

Written feedback either by email or paper form. Oral feedback in small groups. Group feedback has also been used in the form of feedback sessions. In e-learning sessions via online form or chat. Informant 12 reported the following in relation to confessional school:

"There are two levels. The first is the subject to be taught, the second is to find out how it went and the third is to evaluate the whole thing at the end of the confessional. It has usually been an anonymous process, with people amorously giving their views and feedback. It has been felt more effective to give feedback in a group, with the possibility of individual feedback." (I12)

10. Other issues raised (question 37)

Respondents wondered how they had been selected as interviewees for the study (I1,I2), but after the interview said that in fact they had been the right target group. As regards school education, the question was raised as to its model. Is religious education *"imposed by religious communities, an extension of them in school, i.e. is it general education or identity building?"*, as informant 4 reflected. On the other hand, the importance of religious education and its nature as a subject on an equal footing with others in terms of holistic living and understanding and acceptance of other people was also raised.

"Religion is a terribly important subject that should not be pushed into a paaria class because people have their own agenda as to whether God exists or not. It is irrelevant



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to the teaching of religion whether there is a God, or not /.../ I would emphasise, again, cooperation and understanding between faiths. This study does not ask that, for all minority religions the idea of a common doctrine is anathema. If you don't know your mother tongue, it's difficult to learn foreign languages because you can't compare."/.../ (I11)

The various challenges of religious education, especially for minority religions, were also discussed. These relate to the heterogeneity of the student population in terms of language, culture and different levels of pupil ability. The following aspects were raised by informants:

/.../ "I have noticed that when there are immigrant backgrounds in every group, the Orthodox religion might be the only familiar thing. Orthodox religion classes may be expected. The child may say, 'I know something about this, being a foreign language and all that. Finnish school customs may be alien, own religion lessons can be a self-esteem boosting moment. " (I5)

/.../"Or if, as happened to my friend, there were pupils in the same Islamic education group in grades 1-9. There were 35 pupils. How do you implement good teaching there? (I13)

From the point of view of the minority religion, the lack of the right to be taxed, the lack of an own matriculation examination, the problems of organising own teaching and the lack of teaching materials, the lack of own training of religious teachers were also mentioned. The development of distance education from the point of view of minority religions was seen as a "Trojan horse", as it could lead to the disappearance of traditional classroom teaching.

As regards carrying out of education in schools, it was noted that it should have a "relaxed and safe atmosphere" (I9).

In the Church's adult education, where people voluntarily enroll in courses, the emotional and experiential aspects should be considered in addition to the knowledge side.

"The knowledge side is also important, but above all, when you come to my course, you experience something there that you cannot experience at home. You can read books at home. If you come to a church environment, it's a change for you, at least for a weekend, and that's one of the reasons why you come, because it's an extraordinary place. It's experiential." (I10)

11. Summary of the study

The interviewees in the study were all highly educated, i.e. they all had a university degree; Master's or Doctorate. Only some of them also had a pedagogical education. They also had a strong professional background, having been in teaching for an average of a quarter of a century. The



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respondents' religious background reflects well the situation in Finland. The majority of respondents belonged to the Lutheran Church, with some respondents from other Christian churches and other religions.

In terms of teaching and training, they work, mainly in the public sector, in three different educational organisations: 1) comprehensive or upper secondary schools, 2) universities or 3) church-related organisations. This breakdown was also used in the reporting when analysing the interview responses

The respondent's background organisation had a major influence on the attitude towards religion, the students' relationship with religion and their attitude towards the teaching. Despite the fact that religion is a compulsory subject at school, respondents' experiences of students' attitudes were positive. The level of knowledge of the students varied. Teaching at the school is based on national curricula. At university, teaching is also based on predetermined curricula for specific disciplines. Attitudes were mixed and knowledge levels varied. Students in different church organisations were receptive and motivated to voluntary education, even with good background knowledge.

As before, the use of teaching methods depended on the target group. In addition to the various forms of traditional face-to-face teaching, e-learning and the digitalisation of teaching are increasingly being introduced in school education, to which there were also reservations. In the area of school education, the lack of availability of learning materials among minority religions in particular was strongly felt by representatives of minority religions. In particular, up-to-date textbooks in line with the curriculum are not yet available. Universities and church organisations have started to introduce student-activated, interactive methods as an alternative to lectures. Collecting feedback is an essential part of teaching and its development. In primary schools, secondary schools and universities, it is a compulsory part of the curriculum after it has been delivered. In church organisations, too, feedback on teaching is systematically collected. The ways of collecting feedback vary from electronic applications to verbal feedback.

In terms of the need for content in continuing education, the different contents of the respondents were perceived as really important, and it was not possible to identify one or a few common contents. Instead, the options given were perceived in order of importance as follows: teaching methods, pedagogy, teamwork methods, theology, social awareness and psychology. In terms of the respondent's background organisation, in all three groups, the theme of training emerged, in slightly different words, as the development of e-learning skills and related pedagogical solutions.

Human rights were perceived as the most important issue to be addressed in education. The next most important topics were refugees and immigration, the beginning/end of life, social crises, Christian/religious dialogue, climate rights and sexual minorities. The least important topic was races and peoples. Further information could be provided, e.g. in the form of a booklet or other material, in addition to physical training. Information packs with links and websites could also be one form of provision.



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Especially among primary and secondary school teachers, the current knowledge of the topics on the list was considered sufficient, i.e. there was no need for further training. From other sources (university, church organisation), a few topics were mentioned, such as immigration, human rights or issues related to the encounter between children and young people.

On other issues, some respondents wondered why they were involved in the study, but after the interview had felt that they were suitable for the research team. Some were concerned about the role of religious education as a school subject and minority religions in particular were concerned about the various pedagogical and educational policy challenges in school education. One of these was the introduction of distance education.

Quoting the respondent, a general observation can be made:

"Teaching and education should consider the recognition and acknowledgement of religious diversity. Knowledge of religion and culture is part of human identity and a principle of security. Knowledge of religion and culture is a safe way to meet others. Knowledge prevents local as well as global conflicts and conflict situations." (I14)



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