Re-imagining senior secondary religious education: evaluating the religion, meaning, and life curriculum

Ahmad Suhaimi, Devi Pramitha, Abdul Wahid Wathoni & Lolla Pitaloka

Published online: 03 Sep 2025.

Submit your article to this journal ↗

View related articles ↗

View Crossmark data ↗

BOOK REVIEW

Re-imagining senior secondary religious education: evaluating the religion, meaning, and life curriculum, by William Sultmann, Janeen Lamb, Peter Ivers, and Mark Craig, Singapore, Springer Nature Singapore Pte Ltd, 2023, 246 pp., EUR 49.99 (Hardback), EUR 42.79 (eBook), ISBN: 978-981-19-9179-0 (Hardback); ISBN: 978-981-19-9180-6 (eBook), DOI: 10.1007/978-981-19-9180-6.

This book critically examines the innovative Religion, Meaning, and Life (RML) curriculum implemented in Catholic secondary schools in the Archdiocese of Brisbane, Australia. Written by academics and education practitioners, it explores how RML addresses religious diversity among students, integrates modern pedagogical approaches, and ensures curriculum relevance in an increasingly pluralistic society. The primary objective of the book is to provide a data-driven analysis of student, teacher, and parent satisfaction with RML, while offering a theoretical model for developing senior religious education programmes. The book's context is particularly significant in global discussions on transforming religious education, particularly in Catholic schools grappling with the challenges of secularisation and growing diversity. This review assesses the strengths and limitations of each chapter.

Chapter 1: Research Overview. The first chapter introduces the RML curriculum as a response to religious pluralism and community demand for an inclusive approach to religious education. Drawing on a longitudinal study conducted from 2019 to 2021, the authors highlight high levels of satisfaction among students, teachers, and parents. Key findings underscore the positive impact of dialogue, technology, and service learning in enhancing student engagement. However, the use of regression analysis to identify satisfaction predictors – such as topics on Catholic Social Teaching – may prove overly technical for some readers.

Chapter 2: Research Context. In this chapter, the authors position the RML curriculum within the historical framework of Catholic religious education in Australia, highlighting the shift from a catechetical approach to the reconceptualist model, which emphasises religious literacy and interfaith dialogue. This chapter also discusses challenges such as secularisation and the need to integrate Christian values with contemporary issues such as social justice.

Chapter 3: Commonality of Trends in Religious Education. The authors provide a critical analysis of the overarching trends shaping religious education across various international contexts, with a particular focus on Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Through a comprehensive exploration of contemporary educational paradigms, the authors effectively highlight both the challenges and opportunities they present. They show how pedagogical approaches, such as experiential learning and service-based learning, enhance student engagement and promote a deeper understanding of religious diversity. These findings align with contemporary literature that supports an educational framework capable of adapting to social change and fostering intercultural understanding (Barnes 2022).

Chapter 4: Gathering Community Perceptions. Here, readers will find a meticulous analysis of community responses to the Religion, Meaning, and Life curriculum, utilising both qualitative and quantitative research methods. The authors take care to involve students, teachers, and parents. This comprehensive approach not only generates a rich dataset but also fosters a sense of community ownership, reflecting current educational research that highlights the importance of stakeholder engagement in curriculum development (Vreuls et al. 2022). A particularly compelling finding is the high value students place on topics that promote ethical dialogue and interfaith understanding, underscoring the

growing need for educational programmes to address moral and normative questions in pluralistic societies. While the quantitative data are clearly and effectively presented, the chapter would benefit from a more detailed analysis of the qualitative feedback, which would enrich the readers' understanding of the community's sentiments.

Chapter 5: Reporting Community Perceptions. A quantitative data analysis of surveys of 318 students, 38 teachers, and 65 parents reveals that students find ethics and interfaith dialogue to be the most meaningful topics. Teachers, on the other hand, highlight the importance of content training and collaboration. Data visualisation through charts (e.g. Figures 5.1–5.17) reinforces these findings, but some statistical tables (e.g. Tables 5.1–5.17) may be difficult to interpret without more detailed explanations.

Chapter 6: What Matters Most: Interpretation of the Data. This chapter elaborates on the RML educational experience, presenting it as a theoretical model that synthesises four key propositions: formative, relational, educational, and interdependent. This model characterises the curriculum as a dynamic process that prioritises student agency, topic relevance, and community engagement. However, the discussion regarding research limitations – such as the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on data collection – is only briefly addressed.

Chapter 7: Practice Implications. This chapter offers practical recommendations for RML curriculum implementation, focusing on three key areas. First, the authors advocate for enhanced collaboration among schools, universities, and religious communities to develop adaptive learning resources. Examples include the cross-institutional collaboration model, which integrates curriculum development programmes and action research-based teacher training (Sholeh and Muzakki 2023) and initiatives such as the Bible Quiz Competition in North Jakarta, which fosters interschool synergy through spiritually-based educational competitions (Pandie et al. 2024). Second, the chapter emphasises the need for teacher training modules on interfaith dialogue and the use of educational technology. Third, the authors stress the importance of data-driven evaluation systems, including AI-driven analytics, to monitor curriculum impact. Unfortunately, the chapter does not adequately address the ethical challenges of using AI in religious contexts, such as the risk of AI systems exacerbating interreligious conflicts through biased recommendations (Ahmed, Sumi, and Aziz 2025; Tsuria and Tsuria 2024)

Overall, *Re-imagining Senior Secondary Religious Education* makes a significant contribution to the ongoing discussions on modernising religious education. With a foundation in empirical research and strong pedagogical insights, this book offers practical guidance for educators seeking to adopt a more dynamic, student-centred approach to religious education.

This book is a recommended resource for academics, curriculum developers, and educators involved in religious education. It not only provides a strong foundation for reconsidering pedagogical approaches in faith-based schools but also offers valuable insights on the intersection of religion, education, and contemporary social change.

Acknowledgments

Funding

Notes on contributors

Ahmad Suhaimi is a doctoral student in Islamic Studies at the Graduate School of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta.

Devi Pramitha is a lecturer at the Faculty of Tarbiyah and Teacher Training, Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang.

Abdul Wahid Wathoni is a master student in Islamic Studies at the Graduate School of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta.

Lolla Pitaloka is a master student in Islamic Studies at the Graduate School of Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta.

References

Ahmed, S., A. A. Sumi, and N. A. Aziz. 2025. "Exploring Multi-Religious Perspective of Artificial Intelligence." *Theology and Science* 23 (1): 104–128. doi:10.1080/14746700.2024.2436783.

Barnes, L. P. 2022. "The Commission on Religious Education, Worldviews and the Future of Religious Education." *British Journal of Educational Studies* 70 (1): 87–102. doi:10.1080/00071005.2021.1871590.

Pandie, R. D. Y., R. A. M. Sianturi, R. N. Waruwu, and L. Christian. 2024. "Program Cerdas Cermat Alkitab Sebagai Upaya Meningkatkan Pengetahuan, Persahabatan Dan Prestasi Tingkat SMA/SMK Se-Jakarta Utara." *Devotion: Jurnal Pengabdian Kepada Masyarakat* 2 (1): 19–29. doi:10.62282/devotion.v2i1.19-29.

Sholeh, M. I., and H. Muzakki. 2023. "Peran Manajemen Pendidikan Islam Dalam Menanggulangi Ekstremisme Dan Radikalisme." *EDUSIANA Jurnal Manajemen Dan Pendidikan Islam* 10 (2): 73–102. doi:10.47077/edusiana.v10i2.435.

Tsuria, R., and Y. Tsuria. 2024. "Artificial Intelligence's Understanding of Religion: Investigating the Moralistic Approaches Presented by Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools." *Religions* 15 (3): 375. doi:10.3390/rel15030375.

Vreuls, J., M. Koeslag-Kreunen, M. van der Klink, L. Nieuwenhuis, and H. Boshuizen. 2022. "Responsive Curriculum Development for Professional Education: Different Teams, Different Tales." *The Curriculum Journal* 33 (4): 636–659. doi:10.1002/curj.155.

Ahmad Suhaimi
Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta

✉ hemi.latanza@gmail.com   http://orcid.org/0000-0001-8337-3598

Devi Pramitha
Maulana Malik Ibrahim State Islamic University, Malang
http://orcid.org/0000-0001-7979-6133

Abdul Wahid Wathoni and Lolla Pitaloka
Syarif Hidayatullah State Islamic University, Jakarta
http://orcid.org/0009-0004-2564-722X
http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5851-9361