

The Importance of the Cultural and Religious Components in Higher Education

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During the study, the analytical and bibliographic method was applied to study the scientific literature on cultural and religious education and a questionnaire survey to practically investigate individual aspects of the cultural and religious component in higher education. As a result of the study, we have been studied the opinions of scholars concerning individual problematic issues and the significance of the cultural and religious component in higher education; the viewpoints of students and professionals, performing scientific and pedagogical activities in the sphere of religious studies, on the influence and role of spiritual culture on the level of cultural and aesthetic development of students.

Keywords: religious component of higher education, cultural and religious sphere, religious studies, spiritual development, religious education

INTRODUCTION

The cultural revival is responsible for the revival of historical folk traditions, including the leading place of religion as a spiritual phenomenon.

The diversity of viewpoints regarding religious values, the intensification of confessional claims about identity, and violations of the sensitive issues of freedom of conscience and religion, take place today in all democratic societies whose members can think and actively participate in public life (Davies, 2019).

Mastering theoretically scientific and practical knowledge of religious studies is a prerequisite for developing the specialist's cultural and educational level of any profile and specialty. Lack of necessary knowledge in this field can be the reason for wrong decisions or the neutral position of specialists in discussions on the topic of religions and the church. Therefore, religious studies in higher education institutions are essential in increasing a person's spiritual culture. Furthermore, knowledge of the history of spiritual cultures, especially religions, opens the door to a proper understanding and comprehension of the depth of the civilizational heritage of humanity.

The theoretical section of this study presents scholars' viewpoints regarding the approaches to religious education and upbringing and the goals of the religious dimension in intercultural education. In addition, the methodological aspect of including the religious component in the educational process is revealed, and the nature of the problems of different countries in religious education is outlined (Elton-Chalcraft & Cammack, 2019).

The practical section of the study contains an assessment of the viewpoints of students and teachers of higher education regarding the type of influence and importance of spiritual culture for the personal development of students, respondents' assessment of the importance of studying certain subjects in the field of religious studies in higher education institutions.

The study results established the respondents' viewpoints regarding the priority of studying subjects related to the sphere of religious studies in higher education institutions, the essence of significance for the participants of the survey of cultural and religious education in higher education institutions. In addition, they highlighted predominant ideological directions of studying religion in higher education institutions.

LITERATURE REVIEW

As K. Niemi notes, contemporary European societies have undergone significant secularization, weakening the sociopolitical significance of world religious communities. As a result, religious denominations no longer determine the political order of society, but references to religious truths can still be found in various forms in many social groups. In other words, while major religious traditions are no longer a force encompassing all aspects of political and social life, no sphere of society is independent of the religious sphere. Therefore, religion can be spoken of as a component of society's culture (Niemi, 2018).

This view is confirmed by J. Metcalfe and D. Moulin-Stozek, who note that today there is little doubt that secularization is an irreversible feature of our societies, but it should be recognized that it has not erased all remnants of the peoples' religious experience worldwide. Such traces and connections can be found in various forms. Today the symbols and values associated with great religious traditions are still part of the collective memory (Metcalfe & Moulin-Stozek, 2020).

According to P. Weller, T. Hooley, and N. Moore, the question of the religious perspective's importance in education can be summarized as follows: religious education should convey an understanding of the phenomena of faith and atheism and cultivate the ability to reflect on different worldviews in pluralistic societies. It concerns the interests of all educational applicants, covering issues related to general cognitive activities and exploring the student's right to be prepared for life as a citizen with a full role in a democratic society. Such education should develop personal autonomy and critical thinking, tolerance, openness to diversity, and a sense of belonging to the community as a whole (Weller, Hooley & Moore, 2017).

According to O. Melnychuk, cultural and religious education should develop a sense of trust and unite citizens despite their moral and religious differences and related ideological differences (Melnychuk, 2020).

At the same time, according to K. Kiley and S. Vaisey, the above approach to religious education can cause resistance from some applicants for education and teachers. For example, independence and critical engagement may offend the sensibilities of believers who disapprove of such approaches and teachers who

find it difficult to consider other people's beliefs because they consider them a private matter (Kiley, & Vaisey, 2020).

Many scholars have considered in their research how intercultural education can use religious studies to promote understanding, learning to coexist, inclusion, and participation while respecting the nature of deep beliefs that define individual values and identities.

According to E. Alexeeva, there are three main goals of the religious dimension in intercultural education. They relate to tolerance, mutual respect, and citizenship principles and underlie many different educational approaches to learning (Alexeeva, 2019).

Scientists P. Hatemi, C. Crabtree, and K. Smith consider the methodological aspect of the problem of including a religious component in the educational process. First, we are talking about the spectrum of so-called moral-spiritual disciplines, which seems rather long and unwieldy. They cover Christian ethics, the basics of Christian morality, the study of spiritual principles, the basics of Orthodox culture, the basics of Muslim culture, and many others. This list is not exhaustive; it can be supplemented with possible courses in history, dogmatics, religious cults, and the moral foundations of famous religious movements. Even the directions mentioned above, especially in today's ideological diversity, can be disorienting for professionals, not to mention potential audience-education applicants (Hatemi, Crabtree & Smith, 2019).

Cultural and religious education is a significant area for the state's development and the individual religious organizations' emergence. It shapes the worldview of future citizens and the professionalism of active members of religious organizations.

The knowledge, experience, and worldview established in higher education institutions will influence society's social and political processes in the future.

There is now a general trend toward the secularization of education in most countries. However, this is not connected to the religion's exclusion from the educational space but the redistribution of responsibility for educational processes. Under present-day conditions, the state is addressing the general issues of secular and religious education and the place and role of religious organizations in this sphere. Nevertheless, the nature of different countries' problems in religious education is not uniform. In some countries, the possibility of state funding of religious schools is discussed, while in others, the possibility and advisability of teaching religion-related subjects in public educational institutions are questioned. Each state addresses these issues per its educational and religious policies and general ideological guidelines. At the same time, religious education is separated from the general education system in countries with strong religious traditions and well-established legal norms.

A somewhat different classification of religious education, based on the formation of religious associations of the state and society, is proposed by V. Kryshmarel. She identifies:

- religious education;
- religious and cultural education as a form of transferring knowledge about religion (Kryshmarel, 2017).

Considering the legal aspect of this issue, scholars identify the following approaches to the implementation of religious education in higher education in Western Europe:

- teaching about God: an approach in which priests of different denominations teach the law of God in public educational institutions. Students can choose alternative ethical education if they wish;
- "General History of Religions" as a compulsory subject. At the same time, the church has the right to identify private educational institutions with public institutions that teach the confessional law of God.

Meanwhile, this classification does not apply to countries where religious education is wholly excluded from general education. Therefore, from a legal point of view, the classification of M. Bročić and A. Miles may be more appropriate. They highlight:

- countries where religious education is offered in both public and private institutions;
- countries where religious education is present only in private institutions;
- countries where religious education is prohibited in both public and private education (Bročić & Miles, 2021).

AIMS

This study aims to determine the higher education applicants' and teachers' opinions on the influence and role of spiritual culture on the students' level of cultural and aesthetic development, the applicants' interest in studying certain subjects related to the study of the religious sphere, as well as their role in the formation of the professional and personal formation of future specialists. Also, the survey aims to determine the participants' viewpoints on the educational process regarding the worldview direction of teaching the subjects related to cultural and religious upbringing and the essence of cultural and religious upbringing in higher educational institutions.

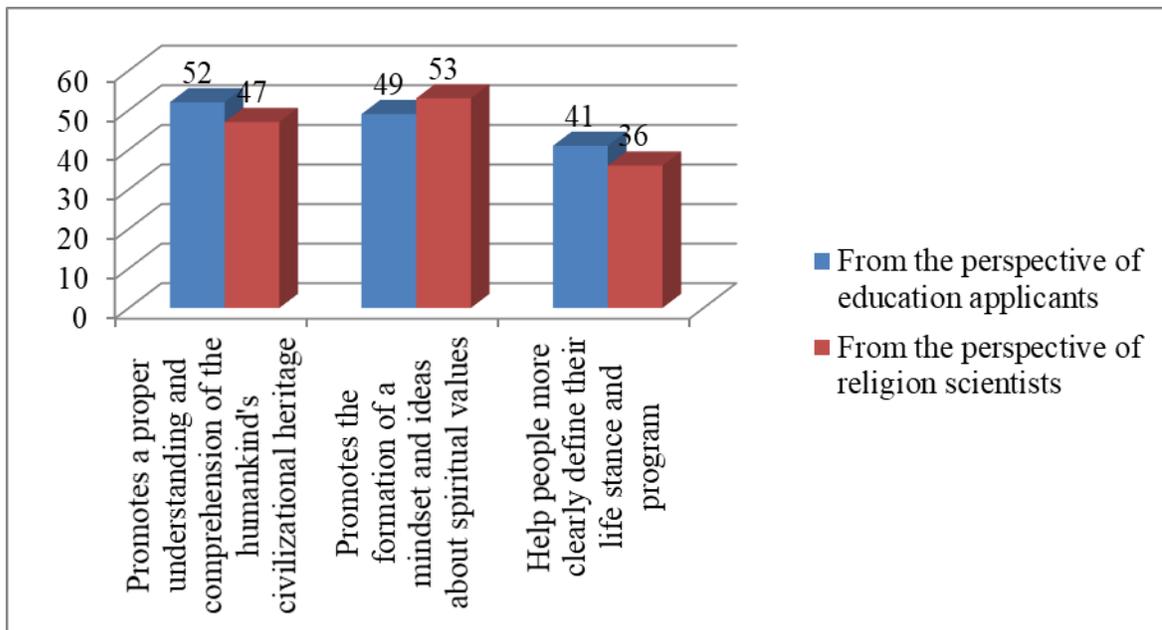
MATERIALS AND METHODS

A practical study of modern trends and the importance of the cultural and religious component in higher education was conducted by surveying 73 students and 46 teachers, carrying out scientific and teaching activities in the field of religious studies in 17 educational institutions in Cherkasy, Khmelnytskyi, Lviv and Ternopil regions of Ukraine. The survey was conducted through an online questionnaire survey using the LimeSurvey service.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the study, the HEI students and teachers' views on the type of influence and importance of spiritual culture for the personal development of students were studied (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1
SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SPIRITUAL CULTURES' HISTORY FOR THE INTELLECTUAL AND SPIRITUAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION APPLICANT, %



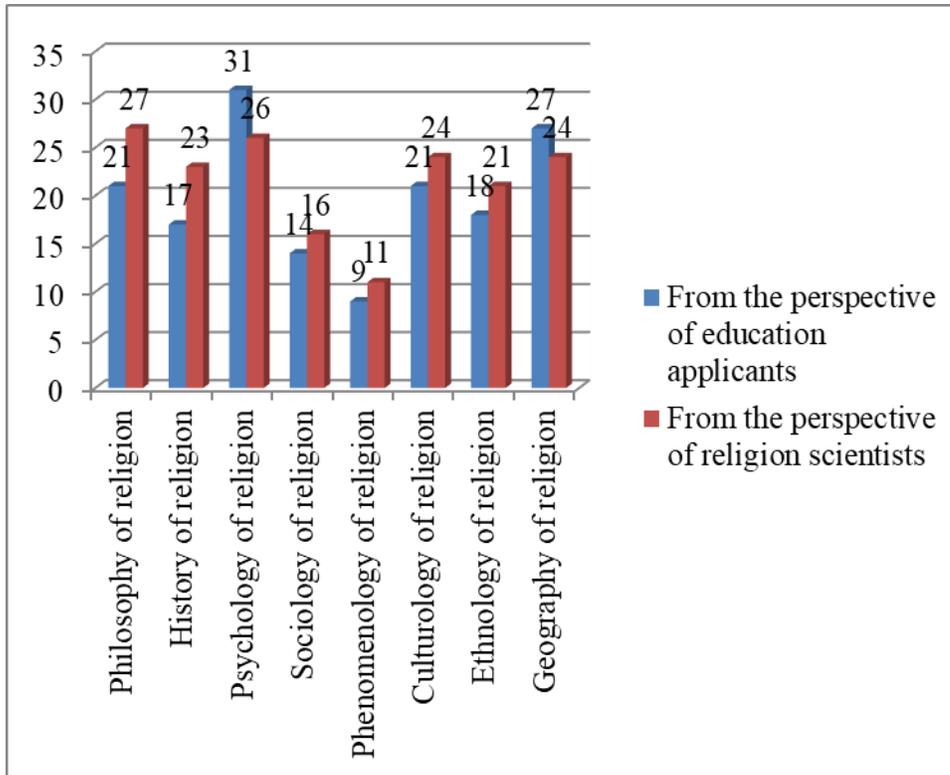
Source: built by the authors.

As we can see from Figure 1, both in terms of university students and teachers, cultural and religious education is quite essential for students in terms of forming worldviews and ideas about spiritual values, as

well as for the proper understanding and comprehension of the civilizational heritage of humanity by applicants for education.

Educational institutions today offer a reasonably wide range of courses in religious studies. The study found out the degree of students' interest in studying certain subjects, as well as their role, from the respondents' point of view, in forming professional and personal formation of future specialists (Figure 2).

FIGURE 2
RESPONDENTS' ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPORTANCE OF STUDYING INDIVIDUAL
SUBJECTS IN RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS, %

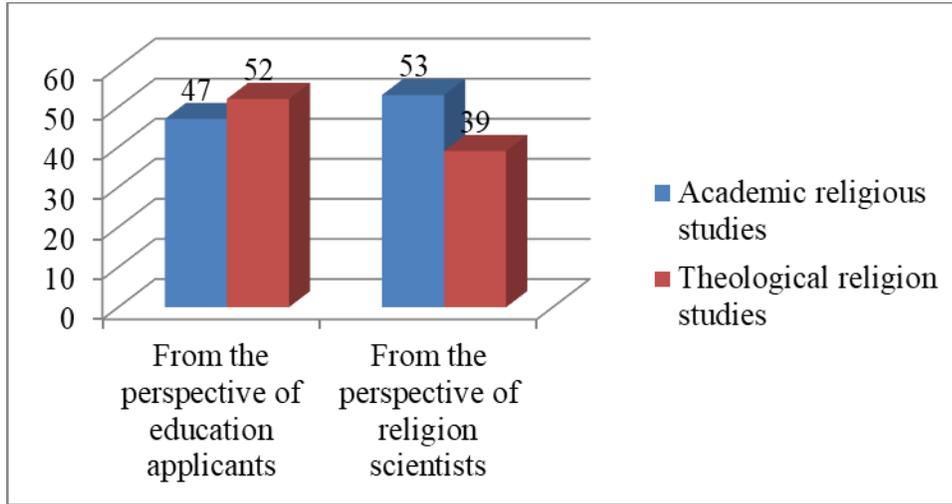


Source: built by the authors.

Figure 2 shows that higher-education teachers assessed philosophy of religion, history of religion, cultural studies, and ethnology of religion. Education applicants, on the other hand, assessed religious psychology and geography.

The vital role of religious studies in higher education in practical research is the formation of the educational process participants' viewpoints regarding the worldview direction of teaching the subjects related to cultural and religious education (Figure 3).

FIGURE 3
PREDOMINANT AREAS OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN HIGHER EDUCATION
INSTITUTIONS, %

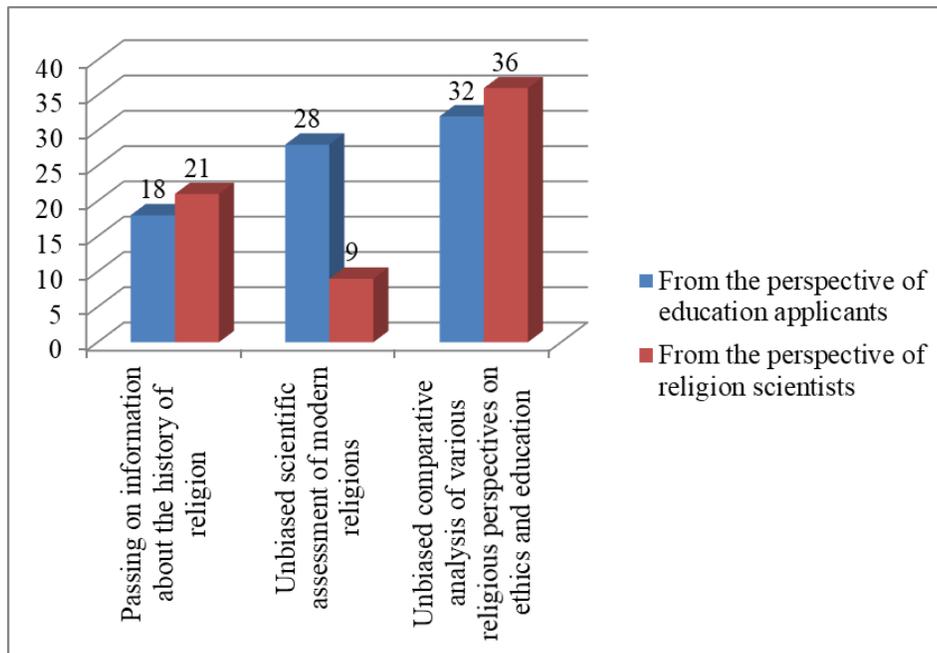


Source: built by the authors.

As Figure 3 shows, from the teachers’ perspective, theological religion studies are the most important, while the scientists in this field consider teaching more significant from an academic viewpoint.

The importance of cultural and religious education in higher education institutions is vital in teaching this type of subject (Figure 4).

FIGURE 4
ESSENTIAL MEANING OF CULTURAL AND RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN HIGHER
EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS FOR THE RESPONDENTS,%



Source: built by the authors.

As we can see from Figure 4, according to students and scholars, an objective comparative review of different religious views on ethics and education is the most important cultural and religious component in the educational process. Education applicants also appreciate an objective scholarly assessment of contemporary religions. For scholars, conveying information about the history of religion to education applicants is highly important.

Thus, the analysis of the scientific literature on the research topic showed that the modern growth of interest in the cultural and religious component of the educational process in higher education institutions is explained by the following circumstances:

- the dynamic state of modern civilization, where culture and religious sphere draw attention as an inexhaustible source of social innovation;
- the acceleration of the cultural change dynamics and cultural values are changing so rapidly that people do not have time to understand and appreciate the innovations, which causes confusion and uncertainty (Ridwan & Diantimala, 2021), (Rodriguez, Hook & Farrell et al., 2019).

Besides culturology, many other sciences study the cultural-religious sphere: philosophy and religious studies, archaeology, ethnography and anthropology, history and sociology, and sciences that study various forms of consciousness - art, morality, law, and others. Each of these disciplines creates a specific idea of religions as the subject of its study (Shutaleva, Tomyuk, Dyachkova & Novgorodtseva, 2019).

A study of the scientific works shows an increasing influence of the religious factor in different countries (Hook, Farrell & Johnson, 2017).

According to P. Kahn and L. Misiaszek, in some foreign countries, human spirituality is formed by religious means. Some regions or their educational systems practice spiritual education in so-called Sabbath or Sunday religious schools (Kahn & Misiaszek, 2019). While this method generally offers a more or less sustainable spiritual education and moral responsibility for the individual, this approach cannot be considered universal. Moreover, here is why:

- first, human spirituality is not limited in any way to the religious component because it is a broader type of education, including popular morality (wisdom), aesthetic values, atheistic beliefs, scientific knowledge, etc.;
- second, in religious spirituality, the individual remains in the background, which should be recognized as the main subject of its spirituality (and life in general);
- third, religious spirituality is primarily based on irrational knowledge, whereas spirituality, in general, is based on the discourse of scientific and non-scientific, rational, and irrational knowledge.

As M. Chankseliani, I. Qoraboyev, and D. Gimranova, religious studies as an educational area is divided into academic and theological. What they have in common is that they use logical considerations and evidence. At the same time, they may have different currents and schools; unlike academic (secular) theology, religious studies is part of the theological complex, developing to a certain extent based on the regularities of this specific type of spirituality. Theological religion cannot be identified with theology, although its difference is not absolute. First, they unite the recognition of God's existence, the supernatural world, within a specific confessional distinction (Chankseliani, Qoraboyev & Gimranova, 2021).

There are many classifications of religious education. M. Guest, A. Scott-Baumann, S. Cheruvallil-Contractor & T. Baghal argue that there are at least three types of religious education to be distinguished:

- informing about the religions types;
- religious studies;
- moral education.

By "informing," they are referring to teaching certain religious studies to students who are members of a particular religious organization.

In public schools, such instruction is usually performed by ministers of a particular denomination. Religious studies should be understood as the transmission of the history of religion or an objective scholarly assessment of contemporary religions. As for ethics education, according to the scholar, it is an objective comparative overview of different views of ethics and character education, and although such

courses are not religious, they are also part of the policies and goals of religious education in educational institutions (Shutaleva, Dyachkova, Tomyuk, Ivanova & Smolina, 2019).

Religious education is inherently secular by nature, as it is not guided by religious associations and does not involve voluntary choice, as it aims to disseminate general culture and knowledge of historical and religious culture (Guest, Scott-Baumann, Cheruvallil-Contractor & Baghal, 2020).

CONCLUSIONS

Consequently, based on the given classifications and forms of religious education, we can say that almost all countries can be divided into three groups:

- 1) Countries where religious education is organized and controlled by the state
- 2) Countries where the confessional form of religious education is legislated
- 3) In countries where religion is separated from public education but respects the right of citizens to religious education

World experience shows that despite intellectual preferences and political crises, teaching about religion is integral to secondary education. A multi-confessional and multi-ethnic society cannot be an obstacle in this, influencing the form rather than the content of modern religious pedagogy.

Correctly formed worldviews and ideas about spiritual values help people define their life program more clearly, and nations take their proper place in the civilized world. After all, the main task of higher education in the XXI century is to ensure the spiritual development of society and understanding of the meaning and essence of their lives in the natural, social and cultural environment.

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