

Challenges and Opportunities in the Implementation of Catechism Program in a Vicariate

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Abstract; In the Diocese of Iba, Zambales, a concerning trend has emerged in religious education: catechists, who play a pivotal role in imparting Catholic teachings, appear to be outnumbered by other spiritual teachers within the public school system. This study aims to assess the status of the catechism program among parishes in a vicariate as a basis for strategic actions. We are employing mixed method research design. This study reveals the need for effective management, adequate funding, and long-term impact assessment within parish catechetical programs to deepen participants' spiritual connection. Challenges such as insufficient compensation and training require urgent attention to improve program effectiveness and spiritual growth. It is recommended addressing challenges like insufficient compensation and inadequate training is crucial to improving parish catechetical programs and fostering spiritual growth. Sustainability can be achieved by conducting research on socio-demographic trends, training interventions, and innovative funding strategies. Collaborations among stakeholders, such as the Diocese of Iba, Columban College, parish sponsors, and benefactors, should focus on nurturing future catechists through youth career guidance and expanding student catechist initiatives in DEIFI schools. Re-engaging former catechists to serve part-time can also ease the workload of current catechists. Exploring technology, community partnerships, and real-world financial strategies will further enhance program effectiveness and ensure long-term viability.

Keywords: Catholic Education, Catechetical Program, Mixed Method Design, Olongapo City, Philippines.

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the Diocese of Iba, Zambales, a concerning trend has emerged in religious education: catechists, who play a pivotal role in imparting Catholic teachings, appear to be outnumbered by other religious teachers within the public school system. Particularly striking is that Born Again religious teachers outnumber catechists and are seemingly more active in disseminating the Word of God within these educational institutions. For decades, the idea that our spiritual community is endowed with many talents has been one of the most widely held beliefs. The vast legacy of Catholic social teaching and our unwavering commitment to Catholic education and catechesis in all their forms are two of the most important. We must unite these two strengths in the new millennium to better spread our social teaching throughout all stages of Catholic education and spiritual formation (United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2023). Growing our understanding and devotion to God gives us shining examples of his saving grace. There is

a "call inside a call" that compels the catechist to help each student develop a deeper devotion to Jesus. No matter how valuable our lessons may be, the lessons we learn, and our lives are of much greater significance (Mladinich, 2022). Those serving as catechists keep God's memory alive, personally and communally (Libreria et al., 2022)

Without lay catechists' unwavering faith and selfless work over many centuries, the Church in Asia would not be a vibrant presence among the continent's approximately four billion people (Kroeger, 2022). Sabah and Sarawak, located in northern Borneo, are home to roughly 30 percent of the country's Christian population and where most Christians live (Gomes, 2022). The Directory advocates for a kerygmatic catechesis, which aims to introduce people to Jesus so that the Gospel follows them everywhere they go. This focus on the individual is important to understand the connection between the proclamation and kerygmatic exegesis, which lies at the heart of the first proclamation (Sultana, 2022). It will be a perfect time to reflect on our growth as Christians and resolve

to do better as catechists, religious educators, and evangelists. When Jesus said this, He gave the Church the authority to carry on His mission. "Full power has been shown to me both in heaven and on earth; go and make disciples of all nations. Baptize them in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Teach them to carry out everything I have commanded you. Moreover, I know I will be with you until the end of time. (Mt. 28:18-20)". This great commission has been given to God's chosen women and men to announce the Good News. Today's youth are in a severe economic, cultural, and moral crisis. Almost 500 years after Christianity arrived in the Philippines, the Catholic Church still faces obstacles in evangelism and catechism of Filipinos (Varsitarian,2022). The Filipino faith has stood the test of time and has come to be known and acknowledged worldwide (Quimson,2022).

The findings of the study can inform decision-making by Church leaders, such as allocating resources and developing policies related to catechism education. conducting a study on the status of catechism programs among parishes in a vicariate is important to ensure that the Catholic Church's mission to teach and spread the faith is effectively carried out. It provides a basis for strategic actions that can enhance the quality of catechism education and ensure that it remains relevant and accessible to all community members. Overall, conducting a study on the status of catechism programs among parishes in a vicariate is important to ensure that the Catholic Church's mission to teach and spread the faith is effectively carried out. It provides a basis for strategic actions that can enhance the quality of catechism education and ensure that it remains relevant and accessible to all community members.

A few studies have shown the topic of catechism and catechist programs, most notably in the Philippines. Also, only a few studies have concentrated on the catechism and catechist programs holistically; however, there needs to be more studies about it. Based on a literature review, there is no consistent recognition of catechism status in parishes during the pandemic. Moreover, it is reported based on the interviews with some school heads in Olongapo and Zambales that the one who teaches religious instruction in public schools is the born-again Christians, and we know that 80% of the population in public schools are catholic. One strategy for overcoming these obstacles is to assess the quality of the catechism program among parishes in a vicariate. In the Diocese of Iba, St. Joseph Vicariate, specific data on the catechism program is absent. This thesis will contribute to religious, Christian education, and catechetical programs. Additionally, it will be a basis for giving some recommendations for improving the catechetical program in the Diocese of Iba.

II. FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

This study is primarily anchored to the Catechism of the Catholic Church. The catechism is a systematic presentation of the core moral and religious teachings of the Catholic Church (Sjoberg,2023). It is the outcome of considerable teamwork; it was created over six years of rigorous work with complete transparency and zeal. Current barriers to effective

catechesis include the fact that parish resources frequently do not allow for thorough catechist formation and that catechetical resources in Spanish lack critical cultural factors. The secular world's influence, the strain on families, and the reality that many parents, teachers, and catechists came from a poorly catechized age, he says, are all significant hurdles to catechists' capacity to bring others to a genuine experience with Christ through catechesis (Marlin,2021). In 1986, the Synod Fathers charged a committee of twelve Cardinals and Bishops, led by Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, with writing a draft of the catechism they had asked for. In addition to the commission's theologians and catechists, they were helped in their efforts by a seven-member editorial committee of diocesan bishops. The commission, responsible for issuing orders and monitoring progress, meticulously followed all the steps in editing the nine successive drafts. The editorial board took on the task of producing the text, revising it as asked by the commission, and considering the input of many theologians, exegetes, catechists, and bishops from around the world. A more robust document was produced by comparing the several perspectives represented in the committee, ensuring integrity through careful editing. All the Catholic Bishops, their respective Episcopal Conferences or Synods, and theological and catechetical institutes provided important feedback on the project. Most of the Episcopate was generally supportive of it. The entire Episcopate of the Catholic Church worked together on this Catechism. They graciously accepted my request to take on joint responsibility for an endeavor vital to the Church's existence. This comment fills me with immense happiness because it exemplifies what I can only describe as a symphony of faith. This Catechism's completion exemplifies the Church's Catholicity and the Episcopate's collegiality (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 2022). The Catechism is a widely used compilation or summary of Catholic teachings on faith, morals, and dogma intended for use by catechists. A Catechism was a religious text popular in the late Middle Ages. Teaching the fundamentals of the Christian faith to adults and teenagers was vital during the Reformation. In modern parlance, a catechism is a book on the faith written by the head of a church. Catechesis has numerous distinguishing features, including its ability to be universal, national, or local. Catechesis is a question-and-answer book that teaches the basics of a religion (Chalimah,2020)

Most Filipinos adhere to the Catholic faith. Since most of the population identifies as Catholic, citizens are held to the standards of that religion. Specifically, schools are the traditional environment where Catholic doctrine is disseminated to the general populace (Abaerion,2021). In light of the current state of Philippine Catholic tradition, it is clear that Christianity was brought to an "institutionalized" on Philippine territory. This necessitates a reexamination of the Catholic Church in the Philippines to propose reforms, particularly to Catholic Religious Education in Philippine Catholic Universities (Roy & Rosario, 2017). However, Catholic schools' ability to maintain their distinctive character and fulfill their mission has been eroded by the moral decline wrought by secularism and globalization (Bual & Madrigal, 2019). The rising plural condition in the educational system is still largely "un-discussed" or integrated into many schools,

which is at the heart of the dilemma in Philippine religious education. A proposal for a debate platform in religious education receives little attention. In contexts outside of schools, dialogue is typically associated with interfaith efforts (Baring, 2022). To better compete with other Asian countries, the Philippines has revamped its education system, increasing the length of basic education from 10 to 13 years. This has made the job market at home and abroad more challenging for recent graduates in the Philippines (Future Learn, 2021). To promote and protect the well-being of the affected faculty and other employees in the higher education sector, it is necessary to consider five predisposing factors: eligibility, staffing guidelines, course streamlining, workforce surplus management, and alternative programs (Acosta & Acosta, 2016). There is a connection between the Church's evangelistic work and Catholic schools. However, Catholic schools are threatened in their mission and daily operations by the erosion of morals, the loss of dedicated teachers, and falling student populations (Bual & Banusing, 2021).

In recent years, the Church has become increasingly focused on outreach and evangelization, resulting in a greater demand for catechists than ever before; the role of catechists in the Philippines is largely under-researched. In the past, research has focused on the Catholic Church in the Philippines rather than examining catechists' specific roles. However, recent research has begun to focus on the role of catechists in the Philippines and the challenges they face. This has strained the pool of catechists, who may need more resources, training, and recognition to fulfill their roles effectively. In addition, the cultural and religious diversity of the Philippines presents unique challenges for catechists, who may need help adapting to their students' different beliefs and practices. Finally, the pandemic has posed additional challenges for catechists, who must now grapple with the implications of remote learning and teaching in a digital environment.

III. METHODOLOGY

The study aimed to assess the status of the catechism program among parishes in a vicariate as a basis for strategic actions. It was delimited to survey and analyze the respondents' profiles regarding age, status, length of service as a catechist, highest educational attainment, and the number of relevant trainings for the last three years. The implementation of the Catechetical Programs in their Parish and the complexities encountered by the catechists in the performance of catechetical programs in their parish were described. A mixed method research design was utilized. The study was conducted in a vicariate, utilizing a stratified random sampling method to ensure representativeness. Participants included catechists responsible for teaching the Catholic faith, selected from different parishes within the vicariate, aiming for diversity in experience, training, and teaching styles. Survey data was collected via a Google form questionnaire adapted from Reblora (2016). Ethical considerations were paramount, ensuring informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, voluntary participation, respect for participants, and minimizing harm. An ethical review by

an ethics committee or institutional review board was conducted. Data collection methods included surveys, interviews, and focus groups. Permission from the Vicar forane was secured, and parish priests were notified. The survey questionnaire was personally sent to respondents via Google form. The data collection timeline involved delivery of the survey questionnaire in April, follow-up in the fourth week, retrieval in the first week of May, and tabulation and analysis in the second week of February 2024. Statistical tools such as mean, frequency, percentage, rank, and weighted mean were employed, and the significant relationship between respondents' descriptions in the catechetical program and their profiles was evaluated using Microsoft Excel for analysis.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

➤ *Implementation of the Catechetical Programs in their Parish*

These findings highlight the effectiveness of regular evaluation and proper utilization of teaching materials among catechists while signaling challenges related to funding hindrances for catechists' duties and inadequate budget allocation for essential resources like uniforms. The goal of any good catechetical program is to help its participants grow closer to God, learn more about the faith, and actively practice their faith in their daily lives. Training people in this way is crucial if we want to raise a generation that is knowledgeable about the faith and motivated to live by its principles (Krezalek & Miller, 2018). To spread the Catholic faith, build stronger communities, and encourage more people to take part in the sacramental life of the Church, catechetical programs are crucial. The Church's continued growth depends on the dioceses and parishes investing time and resources into creating and implementing effective catechetical programs (Villar, 2021). Steffey and Lauer (2019) found that youth catechetical programs significantly shaped their religious identities and faith because they allowed youth to learn more about God and the Church. In order to effectively transmit the Catholic faith, dioceses and parishes must invest in catechetical programs and address these challenges. The importance of well-designed, culturally sensitive, and ably-led catechetical programs in nurturing and sustaining individual and community faith is emphasized, as is the need to ensure that such programs are staffed by competent and committed leaders (Clark & Johnson, 2017). De Guia (2018) looked at how well catechetical programs in the Philippines met the spiritual and religious needs of young people. She found that these programs could be more effective if they took a more interactive and participatory approach and adapted to the local culture.

➤ *Complexities in the Implementation of the Catechetical Program*

The data collected from various sources sheds light on the multifaceted challenges encountered in the implementation of the Catechetical Program within the Vicariate of St. Joseph, situated in the Diocese of Iba. Through thematic analysis, several key themes emerged, reflecting the complexities involved in executing the program effectively.

Table 1 Complexities in the Implementation of the Catechetical Program

Category	Sub-Category	Codes
Supportive Environment	Family Support	Unsupportive family
	Teaching-Learning Environment	Not conducive teaching-learning environment
	Resources Availability	Unavailability and accessibility of teaching aids, Lack of Resources
	Transportation	Inconvenient to no means of transportation
Compensation and Training	Compensation	Insufficient compensation
	Training and Opportunities for Growth	Insufficient training/OGF
Time Constraints	Time Allocation	Limited Time in teaching
External Support and Collaboration	Parish Support	Unsupportive parish priest
	Transportation	Inconvenient to no means of transportation

A worldwide shortage of funding is a significant obstacle to expanding catechetical programs. This can lead to a decline in the quality of catechesis and the availability of catechists, teaching resources, and physical space. A lack of funding can result in a lack of resources and staff burnout, as found in a study by Groome and Moran (2018), which impacts many catechetical programs. Also tricky is adjusting to new cultural settings. More and more people are living in different parts of the world, so it's important that catechetical programs are flexible enough to meet their needs. This calls for an attitude of adaptability and curiosity about alternative methods. In order to be effective, Fisher and Groome (2018) point out that catechetical programs must be flexible enough to adjust to the various cultural settings in which they are implemented. Challenges posed by the internet and other forms of modern technology can also have an effect on catechetical programs, especially those aimed at attracting and retaining young people. A lack of resources and training opportunities for catechists, a lack of engagement and participation from those being catechized, and a lack of integration of catechesis and other aspects of Church life are all discussed by Pineda (2018) as challenges of catechesis in the Philippine setting. Addressing these issues, he argues, will require a fresh commitment to the training and encouragement of catechists and a deeper dive into the spiritual lives of individual believers and their communities. A lack of interest and engagement with matters of faith is one of the obstacles that Mancini (2017) identifies when discussing the difficulties of catechesis in secularized societies.

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study highlights the importance of socio-demographic factors in community development and suggests further research into longitudinal trends and training effectiveness for targeted interventions. The parish catechetical programs emphasize the need for effective management, adequate funding, and long-term impact assessment to deepen participants' spiritual connection. The challenges facing catechetical programs, including insufficient compensation, and training, require urgent attention to improve program effectiveness and spiritual growth. Further research into Demographic factors and training methods will contribute to developing more effective strategies for promoting active engagement in catechetical initiatives. This study holds practical implications for various sectors, including education, public organizations, and

religious institutions. By understanding the role of socio-demographic factors in community development, stakeholders can implement targeted interventions to enhance program effectiveness. The present study cannot be considered conclusive because the research is based on a specific context and may need to be fully generalizable to other settings. Secondly, the data collection methods may introduce biases or limitations in interpreting results.

RECOMMENDATION

Addressing weaknesses such as insufficient compensation and training in parish catechetical programs is crucial for enhancing program effectiveness and fostering spiritual growth. Recommended topics for further study include exploring longitudinal trends in socio-demographic factors and investigating the effectiveness of diverse training interventions. Additionally, examining innovative funding approaches and assessing their long-term sustainability is vital for program continuity and impact. One strong take-home message underscores the importance of addressing compensation, training, and funding challenges to optimize catechetical program effectiveness. Open questions for future research include exploring the interaction of socio-demographic factors with other variables, leveraging technology, and community partnerships. Conducting empirical research on training methods and financial strategies in real-world contexts and longitudinal studies will provide valuable insights. Moreover, reopening the catechetical center in the Diocese of Iba, specifically in Columban College, with support from parish sponsors and benefactors, and capitalizing on youth career guidance to nurture a new generation of catechists are recommended steps to ensure program sustainability and community development.

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