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**INTERDISCIPLINARY EDUCATIONAL REALITY OF BASIC  
EDUCATION: RELIGIOUS AND SECULAR COMPONENTS**

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***Abstract***

There were investigated problems of religious education in the former Soviet republics which now are independent states. Radically changes in the legislation on freedom of conscience and religious associations in these countries led to transformations of relationships between the state and religion in the sphere of education. So the content of the religious component in curriculum caused a heated discussion among educators and in society. The forms and methods of its implementation in modern school practice are not sufficiently developed with such rapid changes in training that led to an exacerbation of the relationship between parents and the school administration. The problem of combining religious and secular components was considering in an interdisciplinary perspective. Particular attention was paid to the interdisciplinary integration of training primarily in the post-Soviet space. The goal was to create of curriculum recommendations to different Russian regions in which one religion prevails. Virtually all countries have a religious component. There is practically no interdisciplinary connection in school programs. There is the basic Church in the post-Soviet space and, as a rule, this component is included in the basic education. Questioning students showed that parents are more religious than children. As a rule, the religious component has cultural, ethnic and moral aspects to a greater extent than the confessional one.

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## 1. Introduction

From time immemorial, religion and education go hand in hand with the evolution of human existence and the development of social institutions, among which is the basic school. The basic school is an obligatory state organization in which future citizens of the country are trained. Therefore, the contribution of basic education is very important for the cognitive, social and emotional development of the individual (Anderson, 2017). That is, the school implements interdisciplinary integration (Ribaupierre & Lecerf, 2017) of the development of all three of the intellects characteristic of man: cognitive, social, emotional. It is clear that religion has a great influence on all types of intelligence, but on some – more (Cavalcanti et al., 2007). In the information age, modern societies in different countries with different levels of socioeconomic and confessional development have made great strides in educational achievements, among them post-Soviet countries. So, Estonia has the highest result among schoolchildren in Europe in the international interdisciplinary study of PISA (OECD, 2018).

At the same time, analysis of trends in education and religion usually indicates negative relations, as in many countries of the world there is a decrease in religiosity and an increase in the quality of education. Nevertheless, in almost all countries religious education is present in the curricula of the main school (Grayson et al., 2014).

Another issue is that religious education more often has a cultural, ethnic and social context (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2007). The inclusion of a religious component in the curriculum allows students to compare different religions, traditions and customs, values and themselves with others, which of course leads to the following:

1. The emergence of civil identity is accelerating.
2. Confessional worldview is formed.
3. The traditions, customs and values of other ethnic groups are absorbed.
4. Different types of tolerant attitude towards people of different ages, nationalities and religions develop.

Thus, a positive connection between education and religion was noted thirty years ago (Iannaccone, 1998), when children born in new conditions and states came to school in the post-Soviet space. But other studies have shown that religion can be negatively associated with education (Iannaccone, 1992; Sander, 2002). The fact is that the educational level reflects individual personal characteristics that can themselves affect religiousness. .

## 2. Problem Statement

The religious component was included in the basic secular education in the post-Soviet states and the problem of combining these components is considering in an interdisciplinary perspective.

Therefore, in our study, a survey was conducted among students of universities of different profiles, in which the key is humanitarian, technical, social and artistic education from different regions of the Russian Federation. Such testing was conducted for the first time in 2004, when interest in religion was high and in 2016, at that time the next generation of schoolchildren were studying at the same universities (Naydenova, 2012).

And also the study examines the legislative changes that have occurred during this time in the field of education. Thus, an interdisciplinary comparative approach is used to analyze the influence of religiosity on the quality of education (Naydenova, 2012).

Because of the global risks associated with mass migration, interdisciplinary integration of cultures, ethnic groups and religions takes place, while the mentality and cultural code of the country is changing. All this leads to a variety of civil and religious mentality that ensure the growth of interest in religion in the life of modern society. Thus, the teaching of knowledge about religion, in general the role of religious education, in such conditions is an urgent task for changing curricula. It is believed that religious education plays an important role in the development of the individual by social and emotional type. It is only important to understand in what direction this development is going. Sometimes this leads to increased aggression and unwillingness to socialize in society.

### **3. Research Questions**

The constructed educational reality in the post-Soviet space was built anew after the 90s. Prior to that, in all countries there was one reality, made under a single pattern. Therefore, firstly, we need to consider the religious component in the main program of secular learning among the countries of the world. Since the process of education itself has changed radically in the 21st century, attention should be paid to the problem of interdisciplinary integration of such components. This is especially important for countries with multi-confessional administrative divisions, which leads to different regional curricula. Practically, this is typical for all countries of the post-Soviet space, especially for Russia.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to study the school curriculum in different countries about the including the religious component in the curriculum of secular compulsory school. And also for Russia it is important to find reasonable recommendations for balancing the integration of religious and secular components for regions in which the religious component does not belong to the basic one.

### **5. Research Methods**

#### **5.1. Comparative interdisciplinary analysis**

Virtually all countries conduct interdisciplinary comparative studies on religious education in secular public schools. Religious education in schools of other species was not the goal of our study. For example, in 2004, a comparative study of religious education was conducted in European schools. The results of this study formed the basis for the recommendations of the Council of Europe for countries on teaching religion in school (Kozyrev, 2005). The following countries participated in the experiment: France, Turkey and Azerbaijan acted as secular states, Italy and Spain as countries with a marked compromise between power and religious structures; in Germany and Georgia there is a gravitation towards a particular religion, in the UK, Denmark and Greece, religion has official status.

Until recently, France remained an example of a secular state, which prohibited the study of religious disciplines in public schools. In Turkey, the school curriculum necessarily includes the lessons of history and ethics of religion, an important emphasis is not on involving schoolchildren in certain religious beliefs, but in getting to know them about the role of different religions in the history, culture and everyday life of society. In Azerbaijan, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, a similar approach is practiced, however, not necessarily.

In Italy, the teaching of religious disciplines in the school is taught by secular teachers, but religious organizations participate in their selection. Here, in spite of the fact that it is predominantly a Catholic country, knowledge is also taught about other faiths. In Spain, for every schoolchild 16 age old, one-and-a-half hours of instruction in a religious subject is mandatory. Parents or the student himself are given the right to choose the form of education - confessional or secular. In the first case, the teacher is usually a clergyman, if the form of teaching is non-confessional - usually a teacher of history or literature.

In Germany, the study of religion in school is compulsory, its teachers teach, there is a choice between studying religion or ethics. In Georgia freedom of religion is proclaimed, in fact the main role belongs to the Georgian apostolic Orthodox autocephalous church. In spite of the obligatory study of the course of religion in school, students have the right to choose Orthodox theology or the history of religion.

Great Britain, Denmark and Greece are countries with compulsory study of religion at school, mostly official. Only in some courses and programs is an overview of other religions.

The ideal option for including a religious component in secular basic education at school was recognized as one in which:

1. Students learn a separate course in the history of religion;
2. Teachers of history include in the curriculum "Fundamentals of World Religions";
3. The lessons of the artistic cycle study the reflection of religious principles in music, painting, theater, dance, literature;
4. Philosophical and socio-civic aspects in the lessons of social studies;
5. Religious traditions and values in the development and formation of the world human civilization are studied in different lessons of the social cycle.

Today, when children who belong to different cultural and religious traditions study together in the classroom, the school must inculcate mutual recognition. Therefore, it is necessary to make maximum use of the possibility of co-education of schoolchildren of different nationalities and religions in a single space for a long time. Only so, the school will become a place where a friendly, constructive and intercultural dialogue reigns.

## **5.2. The post-Soviet space legislation**

In the states of the post-Soviet space, the issues of relations between state and religious structures are also at the center of public attention and require changes in legislation. The most debated topic in post-Soviet society is the question of introducing the subjects of the religious studies cycle into secular educational institutions (schools). So, in the study of Belyakova (2009), devoted to the study of the evolution of relations of power and religious Christian denominations in the former Soviet republics, notes the fundamental features that distinguish the solution of this issue (Belyakova, 2009).

The legislation of Ukraine and Belarus records the secular nature of education. The Estonian law "on churches and parishes" does not at all touch upon the issue of the interaction of denominations with educational institutions.

In Estonia, the law does not specifically regulate the issue of education. The country has decided to teach "ecumenical religious studies", which is in the process of debating.

To date, the legislation of the post-Soviet states regulates the activities of religious associations. The general characteristics of the legislation in the field of education in these countries consist of:

1. Declaration in the legislation of international norms on freedom of conscience;
2. The serious influence of Soviet practice of administrative interference;
3. Procedure for registration of religious associations;
4. An active desire to use the resource of religions in the cultural, moral, social and educational spheres.

The trends in the legislation on religious associations in the above countries are largely determined by the vision and assessment of the role of religion in society. In any case, it is obvious that the state has a strong presence in the regulation of the religious sphere. Thus, in a number of countries special bodies for interaction with religious structures (Ukraine, Belarus) or were recreated (Latvia) have been preserved.

### **5.3. The Belarusian Experiment (Karaseva & Shkuro, 2015).**

From 2011 to 2014 In Belarus, in order to study the attitude of the Belarusian public to the possible inclusion in the school curriculum of the course on religion, the Center for Religious Studies (CRI) of the Faculty of Philosophy and Social Sciences of the Belarusian State University (FSU BSU) initiated a comprehensive study using quantitative and qualitative methods of sociology. Questionnaires of senior pupils and parents of schoolchildren (2011), as well as focused interviews and a questionnaire survey of teachers and school administrators (2012-2014) in Minsk were conducted.

The task of the second stage of the study in 2013 was the holding of three focused interviews with the teachers of Minsk schools (two groups - subject teachers, one group - heads of general education institutions) and a questionnaire survey for Minsk city teachers (500 people).

All respondents demonstrated some degree of awareness about existing religions and confessions. But the researchers noted that this awareness is superficial, accidental, not corresponding to the actual confessional situation in Belarus.

A minority of senior pupils and parents surveyed named Orthodox Christianity and Catholicism among the most important for the country, which are traditional, significant and numerous denominations for the country, represented in many ways in its social and cultural life (one of the main holidays of Orthodoxy and Catholicism - Christmas - twice, according to different styles of chronology, included in the state calendar).

Surprisingly, scientists, a similar situation developed among educators when, when answering the question about religions known to them, they named first those confessions that are now actively represented in the media, in works of mass culture, and then traditional for Belarus.

The introduction of the religious studies course to school students and parents find only in the elective form. So the Minsk teachers say about elective form in schools.

The content of the course, in the opinion of the majority of high school students, parents and teachers, should be based on the idea of acquaintance with the history of various religions. For schoolchildren, an entertaining and informative component of the course is important.

Parents and teachers are more focused on studying in the school course content aspects – the history, the essence of different religions, their impact on people's way of life – factual and confessional diversity.

## **6. Findings**

The results obtained in the framework of the methodology described above are also presented in three perspectives: A) Belarus recommendations to the implementation of religious education; B) regional context of religious school education in specific regions of Russia, in which non-Orthodox religion predominates; C) the study of relations among university students about including the religion to the curriculum (see below).

### **6.1. Belarus recommendations**

So, the conducted research made it possible for experts to talk about the necessity and expediency of conducting a permanent monitoring of religious education issues on a national scale. An analysis of the results obtained made it possible to formulate a number of proposals and recommendations for the Ministry of Education of the Republic on the prospects, the optimal format and conditions for the possible inclusion of a course on religion / religions in the school curriculum, the essence of which was as follows:

- the educational status of the subject can be determined only by the voluntariness of its study, the well thought-out system of non-price training incentives, we build by observance of the principle of secularity;
- for any form of teaching - optional or as an obligatory subject, its concept should be to develop specialists of different profiles: teachers, psychologists, historians, sociologists, religious scholars, philosophers, theologians and be accepted at the state level;
- the content of the course should have a secular (ie, religious, but not religious, ie, non-doctrinal) character and reveal in the ideologically neutral context the content, history and socio-cultural role of one or several religions of significance to the country or the world, the influence religions on the life of their representatives, facts from religious history;
- the subject preferably (though not necessarily) should include information about different religions;
- methodical support of the course should include textbooks, methodological recommendations for teachers and educational materials (printed, electronic, video) for students;
- the course should be taught by specially trained teachers who have completed retraining courses in religious studies (and / or theology as a secular specialty) for several months with a separation from work.

The main function of the course should be teaching – raising the level of education. Educational results (formation of moral values) can be indirect, as a result of exposure to images and examples from religious history, since direct educational influence is achieved when the course is vividly

expressed in a doctrinal nature that ensures profound personal involvement in the religion of both educators and students, which is not the task of the school and education, but is achieved in the family, in the community, in Sunday schools.

## **6.2. Regional context**

Considering the issue of religious education and upbringing in the regions of the Russian Federation, it should be noted that there, along with general education disciplines, also studies the course "The Basics of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics". But the question of teaching modules is not less acute. According to the Institute of Ethnological Research named after Kuzyaev in 2012-2016. Parents prefer to choose non-religious modules, even in poly-confessional regions, such as the Republics of Tatarstan and Bashkortostan. For several reasons, in some cases it is a shortage of administrative resources to ensure the teaching of several modules at the same time, as well as decisions taken at the level of regional authorities.

So in the Republic of Tatarstan, it was decided to teach two non-confessional modules of the course (Antonov, 2015), but at the same time combining the theoretical study of the modules "The Basics of Secular Ethics" and "The Basics of Religious Cultures of the Peoples of Russia" with the practice of visiting cultural, historical and religious sites.

Presumably, several factors influence the choice of religious modules, on the example of the Republic of Bashkortostan: the religious, ethnic and educational environment (Nadyrsin, 2016). In the Republic of Bashkortostan only two of the confessional modules are taught: "The basis of Orthodox culture" and "Fundamentals of Islamic culture". The percentage in the choice of this or that module of the course is verified depending on the compact residence of the ethnic population of the region or on the work of local clergy actively taking part in the social life of their community, as well as the educational environment of the particular institution and its internal policy. This is both shortage of specialists in specialists and insufficient financing of the educational process.

An active position in the spiritual and moral education and religious education of the younger generation is now held by the clergy, centrally carrying out activities jointly with the state authorities and self-government of the republic, since 2015 representatives of religious communities were allowed to participate in parent meetings and provide information support to parents and teachers, when there is a need. Likewise, those responsible from the Orthodox and Muslim religious organizations were appointed, for their interaction with the administration of the education system.

A new stage in the development of religious education in Russia took shape in a constructive dialogue between the government bodies of the Russian Federation and religious organizations (in this case, the Central Spiritual Directorate of Muslims of Russia and the Spiritual Administration of Muslims of the Russian Federation), marked by the adoption of the "Concept for the Preparation of Specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam" November 2015. As part of the preparation of this document, the Government of the Russian Federation decree No. 815-r of May 14, 2014 "On the approval of the plan of measures to ensure the training of specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam", which allows legalize educational programs implemented by religious educational organizations, and so to create on the basis of secular higher

educational institutions, units providing professional training of specialists in the field of history and culture of Islam. The interaction of secular education and the institutions of Islamic education with the aim of creating a common "system of training specialists with in-depth knowledge of the history and culture of Islam is aimed at training qualified personnel for Muslim religious organizations and associations, Islamic educational organizations, as well as secular educational organizations of higher education, research institutions, public authorities of the Russian Federation on the basis of both secular and spiritual educational organization"(Concept, 2015).

### **6.3. Russian students about religion in the teaching.**

In Russia, the course "Foundations of Religious Cultures and Secular Ethics" was introduced as mandatory in the 4th grades of schools from 2012 after a large-scale state experiment. The main tasks are educational and educational. The aim of the subject is to acquaint younger school children with the basics of religious cultures and secular ethics, the formation of primary ideas about material and spiritual culture, the creation in the child of the image of Russia's culture as a whole, which consists of the cultures of all peoples and nationalities, nations and nationalities living in Russia.

It is assumed that as a result of primary acquaintance with the basics of secular and traditional religious cultures for Russia, the children will have an interest and a need to continue their study in the future through the development of similar subjects or elective courses. Important is also the formation of communicative, ethical, social, civic competence and sociocultural identity in schoolchildren in their national-state, ethnic, religious, gender and other aspects.

The course is built strictly in the context of the culturological approach, has the character of a developing, enlightening one. Traditional for Russia religions (Orthodoxy, Islam, Judaism and Buddhism) are studied as part of the Russian and world cultural traditions. Religious culture is the tradition of worshipping God. It includes religious texts (sacred books, prayers, laws), religious rites (rituals, sacraments, rules of behavior and prohibitions), religious art (architecture, music, painting). Ethical and religious teachings have always been at the center of culture: they reflected a person's desire for self-improvement, towards the spiritually and aesthetically meaningful organization of the surrounding world and human society, served as reference points in spiritual search and in artistic creation.

In the tasks of education in the course of studying the subject, the formation of a Russian identity, respectful attitude towards people with different ideological positions, tolerance, patriotism, and civic-mindedness is most important. The subject is a means of forming in schoolchildren a multicultural competence - the integrative quality of the child's personality (the system of multicultural knowledge, interests, needs, motives, values, qualities, experience, social norms and rules of behavior) necessary for life in contemporary society, manifested in a benevolent attitude towards any culture and its carriers. Therefore, it is important that as a result of studying this subject, students have an understanding that each spiritual culture has the right to exist, its own context and its development logic, none of them can be better or worse than another, because each has significance for the development of mankind value content (Shaposhnikova, 2012).



The above conclusions are compared with the results of author's research on religious preferences among schoolchildren, parents and university students of different specializations. The study was conducted in two stages, that is, it was longitudinal. In addition to questioning and interviewing students and students, they were offered a multiplex test for measuring functional literacy, multi-subject competencies, academic writing skills, social and emotional personality characteristics, etc. That is, the measurement tool was interdisciplinary in its essence (Naydenova, 2012). The short questionnaire was answered by students of classes IV-VI in one of the schools without a selective admission in Moscow, in which children from different nationalities, from different confessions, from families with different social and cultural status study. The school is territorially located in a remote area from the center in an administrative, mostly industrial district. In total, 191 people participated in the study, which is approximately 99% of the general population of this school. In addition, students from different regions of the Russian Federation participated in the multiplex.

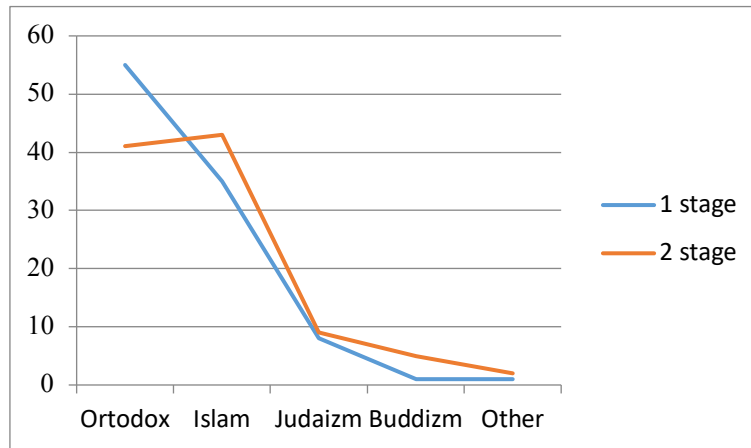
Students were asked to answer for their parents about their preferences about teaching a subject of religious direction in school. The following preferences were suggested: a) world religions; b) orthodoxy; c) islam; d) judaism; e) buddhism; f) secular ethics. Children could choose only two answers for each preference: 1) choice of parents; 2) parents will never choose.

In addition, students could express their opinion to the proposed subject: they also had two answers to each preference: 1) I do not know what to choose; 2) My choice.

The results of such a multiplex study show that psychologists, medical employees, teachers, managers, statisticians, mathematicians, religious workers, sociologists, philologists, linguists, etc. participated in the development of a single instrument. To enable such a team of scientists from different sciences to work for one goal, it is necessary all interested in the result. In any case, such results could not be obtained in monodisciplinary study. About three years left to create a real interdisciplinary team. Therefore, it is noted that the collective of one educational organization (school, university) could not design a reliable and valid interdisciplinary toolkit. External people from other organizations must be in the team.

In this study, the number of primary data of their questionnaires, tests, interviews and monitoring protocols is very extensive: more than 300 in questionnaires, more than 100 in tests, more than 30 in interviews, more than 20 in protocols. Descriptive statistics is calculated for the primary data. After their analysis, the second-level constructs for the secondary analysis are calculated. We can say that these constructs become scientific facts of the multiplex.

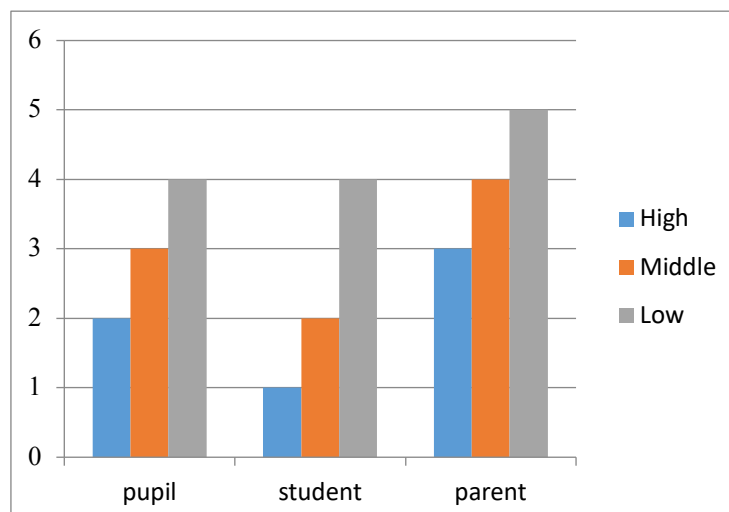
As example the results for these constructs are shown in Figures 1 and 2.



**Figure 01.** Interest to religion (I want more to know about it)

The first diagram shows the results of a longitudinal multiplex on the topic of this article. The construct of interest in religion was calculated from primary data, that is pupils and students had an interest in learning about a particular religion more than they teach. So, the students at the first stage were interspersed with a large list of religions and included even atheism in religion. They could write in the paragraph "Others" what they are interested in. Thus, among others, there was an increased interest in the Hare Krishnas, Protestants, etc. At the second stage, interest in Buddhism and atheism increased. And the students wanted to know about different branches of different religions: Orthodox and Adventists, Catholics and Anglicans, Shiites and Sunnis, etc. That is, the introduction of the course led to a more detailed acquaintance with religions, but on the whole, interest began to fall. There was an increased interest only in Islam and Buddhism (see fig.1).

The second diagram shows the dependence of the level of religiosity on the level of the quality of education in its multiplex understanding. All levels are calculated on a 1000-point scale for convenience of comparisons. So, the quality of education was considered high, if the result by different criteria in a proportional sum is above 600 points, low – below 400 points, and the average level is 400-600 points. Religiosity was divided into 5 statistically distinguishable groups: 1 – almost absent; 2 – very low, 3 – low, 4 – medium, 5 – above average.



**Figure 02.** Correlation between quality of education and religiosity

So, it follows from the diagrams that the higher the level of education, the lower the religiosity. And also, the more religion in the media, the lower the interest in it.

## 7. Conclusion

Religion and education are not only historically related, although practically the entire cultural background of each nation has grown out of religion. But in general, interest in religion in the world is falling, the stern of some regions.

The legislation of the post-Soviet countries is changing radically in general and especially in the sphere of education. Moreover, the religious component penetrates into secular institutions.

The limitations of the article do not allow us to describe these changes in more detail in different countries, including the post-Soviet ones. These materials will form the basis of other articles.

Studies on the correlation between education and religion should continue in an interdisciplinary comparative manner.

If in the world interest in religion falls, in Russia it grows among more age groups of the population with a lower quality of education.

University students have become less religious in their worldview and in observing traditional norms of everyday life.

The introduction of a special subject in school practice turns schoolchildren away from religion, because according to the Russian proverb you could not force yourself to be loved.

This is a matter for further research at a complex interdisciplinary level, while research is conducted separately by religious scholars, separately by educators, singly by sociologists, and so on. But we must solve this problem jointly and it is dangerous to postpone its decision for later. Terrorism, extremism and aggression are growing in all societies. Will religion help solve this issue, is it not known? It depends on what religion?

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