

## RELIGION AS A KEY DETERMINANT OF STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD THEIR STUDIES

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[https://doi.org/10.34017/1313-9703-2025-1\(25\)-2\(26\)-130-133](https://doi.org/10.34017/1313-9703-2025-1(25)-2(26)-130-133)

“Social institutions guide our behavior as we develop as members of society. People are socialized into a society that reinforces conformist behavior. Political parties, unions, professional associations, churches influence our thoughts and actions, and we are mostly influenced by the groups that immediately surround us: our families, friends, peers, classmates, colleagues, etc. These social influences operate simultaneously and shape our beliefs, values, attitudes, and actions” (Capiková, 2015, pp. 60-61).

However, it seems that in addition to (1) a supportive family environment (Jagannathan, Donnelly, Mclanahan, Camasso, Yang, 2023; McFarland, Mclanahan, Goosby, Reichman, 2017), (2) a functionally connected school and family environment (e.g., in relation to setting appropriate sleep duration and sleep quality for adolescents – “adolescents in the HBSC (Health Behavior in School-Age Children) international study reported that better time management, less homework, engagement in physical activity, a parent-set bedtime, and less time spent online in the evening would help them go to bed earlier) – this requires a focus on reducing pressure at school, building supportive social networks; strengthening adolescents’ self-regulatory skills; and the growing involvement of parents in setting sleep and daily routines for their adolescents” (Kosticova, Veselska, Sokolova, Dobiasova, 2024, p. 1973), there is another (important) phenomenon that also significantly affects children's success in school and later in working life, namely (3) religiosity.

This is also confirmed by the findings of various foreign empirical research or review studies. For example, Shishu Zang (2012) analyzed representative data from the American General Social Survey to examine the relationship between religiosity and education. It was shown that religiosity has a strong positive effect on motivation, school performance, employment success and other aspects of social life. Lehrer E. J., using representative data from the Nation Survey of Families and Households, demonstrated that religiosity is associated with a higher level of education (Lehrer, 2004). The same conclusion was reached by a research team led by Michael J. McFarland, who also analyzed data from the General Social Survey (McFarland, Mclanahan, Goosby, Reichman, 2017). In addition to church membership, a higher level of education among Americans was also correlated with the frequency of church attendance, prayer and reading The Holy Bible. Similarly, Patrick F. Fagan found in his analyses that religious values and religiosity (measured by the importance of religion in life and indicators of religious practice) are in a close positive relationship with school

attendance, academic achievement (e.g. in reading and mathematics), and also with the level of education attained (Fagan, 2010).

According to a review by I. Horwitz, which analyzed 42 relevant studies published in 1990-present and 95% were based exclusively on quantitative survey data. „There were three major findings. First, research has advanced from correlational studies to methodologically rigorous designs suggesting religion can play a causal role in academic success. Second, research reveals a religiosity-religious tradition paradox: Adolescents with stronger religiosity earn better grades, are less truant in secondary school, and complete more years of higher education” (Horwitz, 2021).

Thus, religiosity appears to be a significant indicator differentiating students' relationship to their studies. This was also one of the reasons why religiosity, as a complex multidimensional phenomenon, was also investigated within the framework of a representative quantitative sociological research, the object of which was students of the 3rd and 4th grades of secondary schools in Slovakia. The sample consisted of 1,968 respondents and was representative according to the following characteristics: sex, type of school and region. Field collection of primary empirical data was carried out using the technique of distributed and collected questionnaires, which was carried out by scientific and pedagogical workers of the Department of Sociology (Matulník J. et al., 2014). The relationship of young people to their studies was investigated in order to determine whether there are differences in the relationship of students to their school according to their religious affiliation, type of school and the connection with indicators of religiosity (dimension of religious practice, dimension of religious knowledge, dimension of religious experience and dimension of religious orthodoxy – dimensions defined by C. Y. Glock and W. W. Piwowsky (Matulník J. et al., 2014; Piwowski, 1996)). Since this is the only representative research on this topic among high school youth in Slovakia, the authors consider it important to draw attention to the findings resulting from this research.

When analyzing the respondents' relationship to their studies, the following indicators were monitored: whether high school students have a favorite subject among the subjects taught; if so, whether they study it outside of school obligations; how much time they usually spend daily preparing for classes; how important it is for them to have excellent grades in school; what grades they had on their end-of-year certificate; and what their plans are after graduation (Kollár, Kollárová, 2014).

More than 2/3 of Catholics and 3/5 of not affiliated with any church listed their favorite subject. Young Catholics have more favorite subjects, tend to spend more time preparing for classes each day (more Catholics than not affiliated with any church read specialized books and magazines on the subject and follow educational programs with such a focus; more not affiliated with any church students than Catholics search for specialized information on the Internet), consider it more important to have good grades in school, and also have better overall scores on final school reports than non-Catholics.

Young Catholics typically spent more time preparing for lessons per day than respondents who did not belong to any church – the differences in responses were statistically significant. A sign test was used to analyze how church membership contributed to the heterogeneity in the distribution of the observed variables. The sign test showed that among Catholics, there were few who prepared for lessons for less than 45 minutes per day and many more who prepared for lessons for 2 hours or more per day, while among non-church members, there were many more who prepared for lessons for less than 45 minutes per day.

Regarding preparation for teaching, significant differences were found in the subgroup of Catholics, with women devoting more time to preparation for teaching than men, the most students from the Bratislava region, and by school type, the most students from grammar schools with 4-year-long study programs. Among young Catholics, the time spent on preparation for teaching at school was very closely associated with indicators of religiosity: students who usually devoted more time daily to preparation for teaching considered religion to be more important in their lives, prayed more often (and prayed more often alone), went to confession more often, and were more strongly

convinced that they would go to church when they were 25, if it were up to them, had higher values of the religious experience index as well as the religious orthodoxy index.

Statistically significant differences in the responses of young Catholics and young non-churched people were also demonstrated in relation to the extent to which they consider excellent grades in school to be important. The sign test showed that among Catholics there are very few who do not consider studying for excellent grades to be important, while there are many more who consider it important. The opposite is true for respondents who do not belong to the church. In the subgroup of Catholics, significant differences were found by sex, as well as by type of school - more women than men considered it more important to have excellent grades in school, and women and students of grammar schools with 4- and 8-year-long study programs had the most positive relationship with school.

Another indicator that more significantly distinguishes Catholics from non-believers is the grades that respondents had at the end-of-year certificate. Young Catholics had significantly better (excellent) grades than non-believers (the differences are statistically significant – even the analysis of the sign test showed that Catholics had a higher proportion of those who excelled and a lower proportion of those who were successful, while for non-believers it was the opposite). In the subgroup of Catholics, significant differences were identified by sex, region and type of school – women, students in the Prešovský region and students of grammar schools with 4-year-long study programs grammar had excellent grades at the end-of-year certificate.

It is undoubtedly worth noting (as with the previous two indicators) that the indicator grades at the end-of-year certificate was also closely related to indicators of religiosity. Young Catholics who had excellent grades at the end-of-year certificate considered religion more important to their lives, prayed more often (even alone), went to church more often if it depended on them, were more strongly convinced that they would go to church when they were 25, went to confession and Lord's Supper (Eucharist) more often, and also achieved higher values in the index of religious knowledge, the index of religious experience, and the index of religious orthodoxy.

An analysis of the students' plans immediately after graduating from secondary school revealed other important findings: students belonging to the Catholic Church planned mainly to study at a university in Slovakia in daily form of study, while those who did not belong to the Church wanted to get a job. In the subgroup of Catholics, significant differences were shown by sex and type of school: men preferred to get a job, while women planned to study in daily form of study at a university in Slovakia. Depending on the type of school, young students studying at secondary vocational schools with final examination (successfully completed) wanted to get a job, and students of grammar schools with 4- and 8-year-long study programs preferred to daily form of study.

Currently, the only representative research conducted among secondary school youth in Slovakia and examining individual dimensions of religiosity has shown (among others) that religiosity fundamentally differentiated the relationship of secondary school students to their studies. Young Catholics reported more favorite subjects, usually spent more time preparing for classes every day, it was more important for them to have excellent grades in school, and they also had a better overall assessment on them at the end-of-year certificate than students who are not affiliated with the church. In the subset of Catholics, women and students of grammar schools with 4- year-long study programs had the most positive relationship to their studies. No less important is the finding that young Catholics with a more positive relationship to school also achieved higher values of indicators of religious practice, religious experience, and religious orthodoxy. However, it is highly desirable to conduct further representative research and verify whether the findings correspond to current sociological knowledge, according to which declared religiosity and religious practice are positively correlated with school attendance, overall academic achievement, and educational level (not only at the level of secondary school students, but also, for example, in the context of medical students).

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