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Enhancing religious education through emotional and spiritual intelligence

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In the context of the changes and challenges of the 21st century, the main focus of education, especially religious education, is to prepare students to live purposeful and meaningful lives with well-developed analytic, emotional and spiritual abilities to assist them in achieving a life perspective that allows them to face the larger world with greater self-confidence and self-awareness. Therefore, the main objectives of the study are: to bring forward the concepts of religious education, emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence; to discuss the importance of emotional and spiritual literacy in children's education; and to discuss the main strategies to enhance the educational process through emotional and spiritual intelligence. This article is a conceptual framework based on a theoretical review. The author reviews literature from books, scientific journals and research reports to develop relevant concepts.

Contribution: This study provides information about two important intelligence in Christian Orthodox religious education. Recognising emotional and spiritual intelligence has allowed teachers to engage with students and help them perform at their best. Emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence promote self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, which help students perform management tasks in their future occupations but also help them to improve relationships with parents, colleagues and God.

Keywords: religious education; emotional intelligence; spiritual intelligence, self-confidence; self-awareness; emotional and spiritual abilities.

Introduction

Changes in the 21st century present significant challenges, particularly in education. The social media phenomenon has succeeded in altering social structures and interactions. Nowadays, social media, friends communities have captured the younger generation's attention, feelings, thoughts and desires. As a result, educators struggle to assist students in responding, understanding differences and preparing for future uncertainties.

In the realm of education and the 21st century, technological, social, economic, psychological and rapid cultural changes pose significant challenges. Today's generations of children, also known as digital natives, children and young people have grown up using computers, mobile phones and other tools of the digital age such as video games, the Internet, social networking and instant messaging. Their daily interaction with modern media shapes their expectations and preferences and influences how they perceive and process information, with obvious educational implications. These changes lead to modifications in the goals, content, educational practices and trends of teacher education. As a result, education systems worldwide are searching for the most effective methods of preparing today's students for the increasingly complicated life and work demands of the 21st century.

In this contxt, education is critical in preparing people to keep abreast with societal changes by shaping them to anticipate these changes. In today's world, education aims to prepare students to live purposeful and meaningful lives with well-developed analytic, emotional and spiritual abilities. Furthermore, assisting them in achieving a balanced life perspective allows them to face the larger world with greater self-confidence and self-awareness (Kumar & Tankha 2021:187–201).

Education is an essential attempt to transform individuals. Education, in general, and religious education, in particular, materialise the latent human nature in individuals, preparing them as

individuals, who believe in God Almighty, to maintain the degrees of human perfection and to support human rights.

Christian teachings, in general, Orthodox Christian teachings, to which we will refer in the current study, in particular, are transformative and dynamic in today's global world.

Transformation in Christianity must begin with an awareness of God's saving grace. With the help of the Holy Spirit, man undergoes a change (transformation), namely a change of mind and deeds towards Christ's perfection (Rm 12:2). Through the Orthodox religious education, students can feel the presence of the Holy Spirit not only in the Church but also in schools, allowing them to overcome the spiritual and moral degradation that exists in today's globalised world. Students gain and master theological knowledge through Christian religious education and the ability to develop strong character and moral and spiritual traits that will fortify their conscience (Evimalinda & Dewi 2018:45–52).

The main question raised by this study is how to improve the quality of Orthodox religious education in Romania by recognising and developing the emotional intelligence (EQ) and spiritual intelligence (SQ) of both teachers and students.

The research aims to highlight some of the benefits of endorsing this perspective by emphasising the possibility and the necessity of enhancing religious education by using emotional and SQ in the educational process.

The main objectives of the study are:
- to bring forward the concepts of religious education, EQ and SQ
- to discuss the importance of emotional and spiritual literacy in children's education
- to discuss the main strategies to enhance the educational process through EQ and SQ.

Firstly, we will define these terms and contextualise them in the study context.

Orthodox religious education

Orthodox religious education is a path towards the formation of accurate and comprehensive representations of national and universal culture, the stimulation of intercultural dialogue from the perspective of freedom and equality among peers, education in the spirit of respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms and the cultivation of dignity, tolerance and sensitivity.

Orthodox religious education brings an important contribution to the formation of the individual and his involvement in active and social life. Hence, religious education is primarily informative, providing pupils with specific theological, dogmatic, liturgical, historical and philosophical knowledge of religions. However, it also has a pronounced formative character, internalising and translating religious norms into facts of life. The internalisation of religious and spiritual values will manifest itself through a series of behaviours of the child towards themself, towards others, and towards divinity (Dumitrescu 2019).

As a result, Orthodox religious education is defined as a dimension of education that actively develops the human being's intrinsic and characteristic religiosity through teaching principles and the application of specific means and procedures (Opriș 2010).

The Orthodox Christian religious education, as a paideic practice, has as its primary focus the formation and perfection of the moral-Christian profile, the summation at the human level of virtues inspired by divine exemplarity, a deification of man to the point of lowering this attribute to the human dimension and condition.

Relationships between different scientific fields must be formed to meet Orthodox religious education's goals. Christian religious education implies that change and progress are both possible and desirable, and it, like all other education, involves some grasp of the human development process (Boiliu et al. 2021).

To support our stance, we must examine the relationship between Orthodox religious education and psychology by appreciating the similarities and understanding the differences.

Education in the 21st century, as it is now understood and performed, is significantly reliant on psychology and its numerous ideas, research findings and practices because psychology has embraced studies of the subconscious and human behaviour in the learning process as a scientific field (Pazmino 2012). In addition, because education is so directly linked to individuals and the teaching-learning process, educators can learn much from psychological research findings.

By approaching with openness and carefully evaluating some main psychological concepts, Orthodox Christian educators can gain valuable tools that can help improve the quality of students' lives (Callaway & Strawn 2020:3–17).

Emotional intelligence

In recent years, our understanding of intelligence has expanded beyond linguistic and logical ability to encompass personal and social competences, which were formerly regarded as to have nothing to do with intelligence (Gardner 1999, 2000). In addition, multiple intelligence ideas have led psychologists to speak about emotional, creative, social, practical, existential and SQ (Bar-On 2000; Emmons 1999; Gardner 1999, 2000; Goleman 2001; Mayer & Salovey 1993; Sternberg 1997, 2005).

Since Goleman (1998) and Hedlund and Sternberg (2000) revealed that standard IQ, a measure of cognitive

intelligence abilities, only accounts for roughly 20% – 30% of professional performance, the notion of EQ has gained popularity.

Emotional intelligence is defined by Goleman (1995, 1998, 2001) as a range of qualities that draw on an individual's emotional assets and contribute more to life success than standard IQ. The ability to detect and control one's own emotions, as well as the emotions of others, has been termed EQ.

Goleman (1995) defines EQ as having five major domains: self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills.

On the other hand, Mayer and Salovey (1993:433–442) provide a cognitive model of EQ. The emotions elicited by a specific event are determined by how the situation is interpreted. Mayer and Salovey (1993:433–442) define EQ as the ability to recognise, appraise, monitor and employ one's and other's emotions or sentiments. His emotions define the quality of a person's relationship with his surroundings. Emotionally stable individuals are less aggressive and hostile to others and have positive interpersonal connections (Dash & Patnaik 2015:10–16).

Because they can comprehend the wants and desires of others, emotionally intelligent people are better at negotiating and dispute resolution. At the same time, EQ is linked to a lower risk of depression and higher subjective happiness and life satisfaction (Saklofske, Austin & Minski 2003:707–721). Taylor (2001) discovered that people with low EQ self-medicated by smoking, drinking and eating fatty meals.

In the school context, we find similar situations where students learn to socialise, solve conflicts and problems and face temptations and curiosities of their age. Therefore, Orthodox religious education is greatly concerned about children's EQ.

Among the general EQ, goals are learning and identifying the cognitive, attitudinal and psychological phenomena that underlie emotional experience with oneself and others; enhancing one's positive and harmonious relationship with one's emotions through awareness, comprehension, legitimacy, normalisation and basic management; and sensitising in the stimulation of well-being and valuable and satisfying life experiences (De la Serna 2018:70).

Greene (2019) shifts the focus from the fixed perspective of EQ – the one that looks at how it can be taught or measured – to a more flexible perspective that looks at how the school environment may or may not facilitate social-emotional education. He claims that the link between social-emotional learning (SEL) and moral-religious education is an effective and valuable pedagogical strategy for motivating students to internalise what they have learnt.

Spiritual intelligence

If EQ is the domain of human psychology, SQ is the higher dimension of human existence that embodies the relationship with God. Spiritual intelligence is commonly defined as 'compassion, wisdom, and peace' (Wigglesworth 2006:3). However, if these qualities are limited to human psychology and morality (which can be, to some extent, non-religious), they do not attain their full potential.

Spiritual intelligence refers to a collection of skills that rely on spiritual resources (Emmons 1999, 2000a, 2000b), comparable to EQ, which refers to a set of capabilities that rely on emotional assets and knowledge (Mayer, Salovey & Caruso 2004:433–442). Emotional intelligence is not synonymous with emotionality, and SQ is not synonymous with spirituality. Spiritual intelligence emphasises abilities that use spiritual themes to forecast functioning and adaptation and develop meaningful outcomes (Emmons 1999, 2000a, 2000b).

Spiritual intelligence can be considered a controversial subject from religious and scientific perspectives. From a religious standpoint, SQ is not rigidly related to any religion or belief system; it is beyond them. On the other hand, it values the core concepts of virtuous behaviour (compassion, altruism and kindness), which are at the 'heart' of all religions and belief systems. Spiritual intelligence enables us to raise our consciousness sufficiently to recognise and adjust our spiritual assumptions to the changing circumstances of our lives. It also helps to connect us to all humanity from the perspective of a holistic worldview, based on the central idea that each of us is interconnected, interdependent and interrelated to one another as a part of the whole 'bigger picture' (Ker-Dincer 2007:1–22).

Spiritual intelligence manages to combine the concepts of spirituality and intelligence into a new construct (Amram 2007), but not simply by integrating one's intelligence and spirituality (Hosseini et al. 2010:179–188). According to Robert Emmons, SQ refers to the abilities that draw on such spiritual themes to predict functioning and adaptation and produce valuable products or outcomes. In contrast, spirituality refers to the search for and experience of sacred elements, which means higher consciousness and transcendence (Emmons 2000b:57–64).

Zohar and Marshall (2000) identified 12 underlying principles of SQ:

1. Self-Awareness: understanding what I believe in and value and what drives me deeply.
2. Spontaneity: living in and responding to the present moment.
3. Being visionary and value-driven: this means acting on principles and deeply held beliefs and living accordingly.
4. Holism: recognising larger patterns, relationships and connections, as well as a sense of belonging.
5. Compassion: the ability to 'feel with' and have deep empathy.
6. Diversity celebration: valuing others for their differences rather than despite them.

7. Field independence: standing up to the crowd and sticking to one's convictions.
8. Humility: a sense of one's true place in the world, as a player in a larger drama.
9. Predilection to ask fundamental 'Why?' questions: the desire to comprehend and understand concepts.
10. Reframe ability: the ability to step back from a situation or problem and see the bigger picture or broader context.
11. Making the best of adversity: learning and growing from failures, setbacks and pain.
12. A sense of vocation: A strong desire to serve and give back.

These principles can help students cope with any challenges during their school years. By nurturing students' SQ through Orthodox religious education, we will have students who become aware of who they are, what they believe and value; who will be able to have healthy relationships and authentic connections with others; who will learn to respect others, even if they are different; who will learn to have the courage to stand up for their point of view and position in a group; who will have the willingness to ask questions and understand concepts; who will be able to appreciate the broader contexts of issues, and most importantly, will understand that every less pleasant experience (failure, frustration and pain) is a learning opportunity. These attributes wil enable students to overcome, be wiser, more capable, and be better equipped.

According to Covey (2004:53), SQ is the central and most profound of all intelligence because it serves as a source of guidance for others. In his perspective, there are five components of SQ:

1. The ability to transcend physical and material boundaries.
2. The ability to enter altered states of consciousness.
3. The ability to elevate the everyday experience.
4. The ability to solve problems using spiritual resources.
5. The ability to be moral.

Spiritual intelligence and EQ are related, but some basic EQ skills are required even to begin the spiritual growth process. A foundation of emotional self-awareness and empathy is essential. As spiritual development progresses, EQ skills will be strengthened, reinforcing and aiding the development of SQ skills (Peerzadah, Mufti & Nazir 2018:309–318).

The spiritual is generally defined in terms of moral principles and behaviour. Rest (1994), for example, introduced four components that establish the foundation for moral behaviour:

1. Moral sensitivity, which is the awareness that a particular situation or behaviour has a moral value.
2. Moral reasoning, which refers to the process of deciding which course of action is more justifiable.
3. Moral motivation, which relates to the significance attributed to moral values in comparison to other values.
4. Moral character, which implies psychological strength that determines the ability to demonstrate moral behaviour in the face of interfering influences.

Because spirituality refers to the value systems of the persons involved, when SQ is active in a person's life, it may encourage that person to fulfil these four components. Moral sensitivity is a part of a broader spiritual sensitivity, the ability to distinguish between the spiritual and the secular, as well as between self-centredness and God-centredness (Ronel 2008:100–119). Furthermore, the corresponding moral reasoning demonstrates the ability to morally assess a circumstance outside of the viewer's personal, social or ideological perspective (Fernhout & Boyd 1985:287–307). As a result, while SQ is not the same as moral intelligence, it serves as a foundation for morality and moral actions.

Research methods and design

This article is a conceptual framework based on a theoretical review. It is intended to be the first step in subsequent research that will verify the applicability and validity of the hypotheses in the concrete context of the Romanian school. The author reviews literature from books, scientific journals and research reports to develop relevant concepts. This approach was the most appropriate way to address the research objectives and underline the importance of the research issue.

Transformative Christian religious education teachers

There is a contrast between the transmission and transformation conceptions of education, as some researchers refer to them (see, e.g. Wardekker & Miedema 2001a, 2001b). This distinction is founded on an essential epistemological debate about the nature of knowledge and, by extension, the ideal of education. In a transmission conception of education, knowledge is considered an objective stock of teachable elements ready to be transferred to the learner. In contrast, a transformation vision of education emphasises appropriation and hence the knowledge change (Vermeer 2009).

Transmission and transformation are complementary. Both processes are at least connected in education, particularly in religious education. Davie (2000:82–97) states that religious illiteracy is pervasive among European students. Before people can relate religious-cultural elements to their lives, the majority must first be introduced to the central themes, stories, traditions, symbols and similarly to European culture and major religious traditions. Maintaining religious memory is an essential educational responsibility of Orthodox religious education instructors as bearers of particular religious traditions (Vermeer 2009:201–211).

An Orthodox Christian religious education teacher must be competent and efficient with high expectations; he or she must play various roles and be spiritual, as displayed in his or her attitude and actions. Spirituality is one of the most significant attributes he or she must possess because education entails coping with the issues of diversity of values, beliefs and spirituality. Therefore, an Orthodox religious education teacher's awareness of spirituality is crucial since his or her instruction strives to increase pupils' awareness of spirituality. Furthermore, he or she should be spiritually strong, striving to be a role-model in his or her teaching capacity (Delipiter 2021:39–47).

Christian spirituality, according to Eliade (1986), is a Christian lifestyle that involves praying and cultivating a relationship with Christ. It signifies that Christian spirituality emerges from the human, Christlike relationship, and is then exhibited in the daily lives of Christians who follow Christ. Christian spirituality involves achieving a meaningful and authentic Christian life, which requires bringing together essential Christian principles and the whole living experience based on and within the context of the Christian religion (McGrath 1999).

Christian spirituality is a way of life that generates compassion, happiness, serenity, wealth, tolerance, goodness, humility and self-control. A Christian religious education teacher serves as a translator of the Christian faith, a mentor to students and an apostle concerned for each student's embrace of Jesus Christ (Delipiter 2021:39–47).

Teacher effectiveness, EQ and SQ have assumed enormous importance in the realm of education throughout the world over the last few decades. In light of pressing issues such as excessive stress, depression, corruption, suicide and communalism, only mentally, emotionally, spiritually and culturally transformative teachers will guide students to good mental health and well-being and ultimately assist them in achieving their goals. In addition, spiritual and EQ assist humans in understanding their life's purpose and place in the universe (Dwivedi 2020:102–114).

Emotional intelligence is a tool for improving student learning and assisting teachers in advancing their professional careers. Teachers should be aware of their emotions and feelings to help them solve problems. People with higher levels of EQ benefit from a sense of creativity, develop believable thinking, manage their nervousness and establish high-quality relationships with others. Emotional intelligence triggers an individual to meet his physical, mental, spiritual and emotional needs and communicate effectively with others (Singh 2006:133–143). Emotionally intelligent teachers are the most effective at managing their students' emotions. In today's classrooms, students must learn to recognise and accept differences in emotional expressions and organisational structures among themselves (Dwivedi 2020:102–114).

In today's world of innovation, the ability to be spiritually intelligent is also essential for teachers. According to Emmons (2000a, 2000b), SQ includes the ability to use spiritual resources to resolve conflicts and other issues. Teachers are expected to use best practices and approaches to meet the demanding requirements of their profession. Teaching involves conveying subject matter and instilling moral, ethical, spiritual and social values. Spiritual intelligence fosters self-efficacy, which helps them manage their task performance in their respective professions, but it also helps them improve their relationships with colleagues, parents and others. As a result, SQ is critical for teachers to train efficient, effective and productive citizens for the nation (Dwivedi 2020:102–114).

Christian religious education is essentially an education that seeks to form a complete Christian person, develop all of the students' physical and spiritual potentials and strengthen relationships with God and others. As a result, Christian education must hone intellectual appreciation and awareness to touch all aspects of students' lives so that the ultimate goal of Christian education is realised, namely, to bring about transformation, enabling students to become more like Christ by guiding and directing them to follow Jesus and providing Bible knowledge and application so that it can be translated into everyday life (Evimalinda & Dewi 2018:45–52).

Teachers must have spiritual abilities from their relationship with God. For example, the understanding of Gods' 'power' to restore damaged relationships, namely the ability of educators to relate things that come from God, as a part of human life in order to communicate and interact effectively with students and society with spirit/soul, mind and conscience.

The teacher's role in teaching is to prepare and send information to students, while students' roles are to receive, store and act on information (transfer of knowledge). On the other hand, teachers as instructors facilitate students' active participation in constructing meaning through active learning, developing knowledge, skills, critical thinking, high-level skills and communication in transformative education (Evimalinda & Dewi 2018:45–52).

The purpose of religious education is to live a meaningful and beautiful life. As a result, religious education is defined as 'spiritual', requiring an exegetical method that looks beyond the surface, which can hide serious inadequacies at the level of personal growth (Coroiu 2021:262–268).

Nurturing emotional intelligence and spiritual intelligence in the class

This study refers to all grades in which Orthodox Religion is taught as a compulsory or optional subject, from primary grade to high school. The earlier we nurture children's SQ, the better the long-term results will be. This will be done gradually, according to each age group and the children's capacity for understanding.

Thus, the importance of education and educators in training today's students for a meaningful life and making them satisfied and fulfilled personally and professionally cannot be understated. Students should have critical thinking skills (Cognitive Intelligence), emotional skills and stability (EQ), and the capacity to generate inner coherence and create a socially significant life purpose (SQ) to reach the stated aim (Kumar & Tankha 2021:187–201).

St. John's School in Denver is a practical example of integrating EQ and SQ in education; its mission is to actively educate kids and families in SEL with God's Word as the

foundation. The programme Whole-Hearted Learning/SEL proved that students who get social-emotional interventions early and throughout their academic pursuits have significant and quantifiable long-term benefits. The five elements of SEL promoted through the programme are as follows: self-awareness – recognising thoughts and feelings (and being able to lift these feelings in prayer to God), and how their feelings relate to behaviour; self-management – assists children in lifting their emotions to God, controlling their emotions, thoughts and behaviours through the power of the Holy Spirit; social awareness – assists children in understanding and relating to the feelings of others, as well as learning what behaviours are acceptable or God-pleasing and unacceptable or God-pleasing in various situations; relationship skills – which include communication, cooperation and conflict-resolution abilities, in light of God's word responsible for decision-making abilities, which assist children in finding positive, godly solutions to problems and making healthy, safe choices with integrity (St. John's School, Early Learning Center & K-8).

Education must be multidimensional, combining social, emotional and academic development (SEAD) activities that train individuals to face competitive cognitive challenges by attaining grades with the help of modern syllabi and technology based on SEL abilities. Social, emotional and academic development refers to integrating five SEL skills into the academic system to create more balanced and learner-centred educational environments (Aspen Institute 2019). Social, emotional and academic development practices are designed to enhance SEL skills through constant processes in which all students develop and use culturally relevant information, abilities and behaviours. The expected results are strong personalities, managing emotional states, achieving personal and social goals, feeling empathy, establishing and maintaining healthy relationships, and making accountable and compassionate decisions (Kumar & Tankha 2021:187–201).

As a result, education must include both EQ and SQ skills. Social Emotional and Academic Development practices can help one to improve their emotional and spiritual quotients. Students will develop their personalities holistically through a SEL-based curriculum. Individuals raised in this manner will be able to think holistically and compassionately. As a result, they can break through the barriers of individual and small personal goals (Kumar & Tankha 2021:187–201).

Conclusion

A fundamental prerequisite in nurturing spiritual and EQ in the classroom is for the religious education teachers to grow their own emotional and SQ, to be an authentic role model, selfless, patient, moral and resilient, teaching children unconditional love, openness, tolerance, integrity, faith and wisdom.

By organising the curriculum flexibly, through extra-curricular activities, through learner-centred methods –

which make the learner a partner in the educational process – and by stimulating the creativity and inspiration of pupils, these can become more self-aware and confident in their strengths and relate healthily to those around them.

By helping children realise the importance of physical, emotional, mental and spiritual health, we can have functional, mentally and emotionally stable adults who can cope with any of life's challenges.

Teachers should understand their emotions and feelings to help students solve their problems. People with high EQ benefit from creativity, developing trustworthy thinking, managing tensions and building high-quality relationships with others. Emotional intelligence gives rise to individuals to meet their physical, mental, spiritual and emotional needs and communicate effectively with others (Singh 2006:133–143). Teachers with high EQ are most effective in managing students' emotions.

Teachers should use best practices and methods to meet the rigours of their profession. Teaching involves the transfer of subject matter and the instilling of moral, ethical, spiritual and social values.

Emotional and spiritual intelligence promote self-efficacy, self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills, which help students perform management tasks in their future occupations and also help them to improve relationships with colleagues, parents and others. Therefore, spiritual wisdom is essential for teachers to develop effective, efficient and productive citizens of the nation, increasing emotional and spiritual literacy among the students and broadening their mental horizons in a way that transcends all material self and narrows into a broad spectrum of global self and altruism.

These aspects are not intended to be exhaustive coverage of the relationship between religious education, EQ and SQ. However, they hopefully provide a useful starting point for professors who may not fully understand these concepts as they relate to the classroom.

Acknowledgements

Funding information

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial or not-for-profit sectors.

Data availability

Data sharing is not applicable to this article as no new data were created or analysed in this study.

Disclaimer

The views and opinions expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of any affiliated agency of the author.

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