

Reflective Learning in Catholic School Catechesis: An Integrative Review and Pedagogical Framework

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Abstract

Reflective learning is frequently recommended for religious education, yet its pedagogical use in Catholic school catechesis remains conceptually fragmented and supported by uneven evidence. This integrative review examined how reflective learning is conceptualised, which reflective practices are reported in Catholic and related religious-education contexts, what outcomes and enabling conditions are identified, and how the evidence can inform a catechetical framework. Searches and source verification were conducted through Google Scholar, GARUDA, ERIC, and DOAJ, with the direct evidence corpus restricted to peer-reviewed journal articles published from January 2021 to 19 August 2026; earlier works were used only for theoretical, methodological, or contextual framing. The final verified reference base comprised 56 scholarly sources: 52 peer-reviewed journal articles and four foundational books. Thirty-six recent journal articles formed the direct pedagogical-evidence corpus and were included in the thematic synthesis, while 16 journal articles provided methodological, foundational, or contextual background and were not coded as direct evidence. Four non-exclusive themes emerged: experience-based meaning-making, guided and dialogical reflection, faith-tradition integration, and enabling conditions and safeguards. The synthesis suggests that reflective catechesis is best understood not as unrestricted personal introspection but as a guided process moving from lived experience to critical reflection, communal dialogue, integration with Scripture, Catholic tradition, and doctrinal teaching, and responsive action. The review proposes a six-stage Reflective Catechesis Cycle (RCC) and six design principles for translating these thematic findings into pedagogical practice. Because intervention and longitudinal evidence remain limited, the framework is presented as an evidence-informed pedagogical model rather than as evidence of causal effectiveness.

Keywords: Reflective Learning; Catholic Religious Education; Catechesis; Integrative Review; Faith Formation; Reflective Pedagogy

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INTRODUCTION

Catholic religious education in school is simultaneously educational and formational. As a curricular field, it operates within educational standards and pedagogical responsibilities; as part of Catholic schooling, it also introduces learners to the Catholic tradition, moral discernment, and practices through which faith is interpreted and lived in everyday contexts. This dual character requires conceptual precision. In this article, Catholic religious education refers to the school-based

curricular process through which Catholic faith, values, and practices are taught; school catechesis refers more specifically to the confessional and formational dimension that supports the appropriation and living of faith; and faith formation denotes the broader development of religious identity, moral disposition, spiritual practice, and participation in the believing community. These terms overlap, but they are not interchangeable. Indonesian scholarship likewise shows that Catholic religious education is shaped by both national educational obligations and the Church's teaching responsibility, while implementation varies according to teacher availability, school context, pastoral support, and learner diversity (Habeahan, 2022; Jelahu et al., 2023; Sili, 2022). Accordingly, the present review focuses specifically on the catechetical and formational dimensions of Catholic school religious education rather than treating religious education, catechesis, and faith formation as equivalent processes.

Reflective learning offers a potentially useful bridge between curricular learning and formation because it treats experience as material for disciplined interpretation and meaning-making rather than as an end in itself. Dewey's reflective thought, Kolb's experiential cycle, Schön's reflective practice, and later critical-reflection traditions share an emphasis on examining experience, assumptions, and action, although they differ in purpose and unit of analysis (Dewey, 1993; Kolb, 2014; Schön, 1983). Across these traditions, experience becomes educationally significant when learners revisit it, examine its meaning, relate it to relevant knowledge and values, and consider implications for subsequent judgement or action. For the present review, reflective learning is therefore defined as a guided process in which learners revisit lived or learning experiences, examine them critically, connect them with relevant knowledge and values, and formulate a reasoned response or future action. This working definition is compatible with recent Indonesian work on reflective pedagogy, which identifies reflection as a structured component of learning rather than a spontaneous act (Setyawan, 2022), and with recent religious-education scholarship on reflexivity, dialogical reasoning, experiential pedagogy, and spiritual meaning-making (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2022; Heimbrock, 2022; Kvia & Aukland, 2025; Rodriguez, 2025). Importantly, contemporary research on reflexivity in religious education also indicates that reflection involves more than self-examination: it can include awareness of one's interpretive position, critical engagement with assumptions, and encounter with alternative perspectives.

The relevant literature, however, is distributed across several partially connected bodies of scholarship. A first body examines reflective pedagogy in general education and teacher development, where reflection is commonly associated with metacognition, professional judgement, and learning from experience (Setyawan, 2022; Suphasri & Chinokul, 2021). A second body investigates dialogical and argumentative learning in religious education, particularly how learners engage different viewpoints, take perspectives, and justify interpretations (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2022; Foley et al., 2022). Recent scholarship further emphasises that dialogue can support learner voice and engagement with diversity while remaining compatible with a clearly articulated religious tradition and catechetical curriculum (Larkins & Owen, 2025; Rymarz, 2024). A third body focuses on Catholic education and catechesis, including teacher formation, school pastoral ministry, digital catechesis, Catholic identity, character, and faith formation (Banjarnahor et al., 2024; Castillo & Barrameda, 2024; Habur, 2025; M. R. Marbun, 2025; McVey & Poyo, 2019;

Saputra, 2024). A fourth body addresses the conditions under which Catholic religious education operates in plural, culturally situated, and digitally mediated settings (Elelia, 2022; Jelahu et al., 2023; Payong, 2022; Wahyuningrum, 2022; Widiatna, 2022). Together, these bodies of literature establish the importance of experience, reflection, dialogue, tradition, and contextual sensitivity, but they do not yet provide a sufficiently integrated pedagogical account of how these elements should be connected within Catholic school catechesis.

The resulting research gap is therefore one of pedagogical integration rather than conceptual absence. Reflection is already well established within educational theory, and dialogue, experience, contextualisation, and faith formation are each represented within religious-education and Catholic-education scholarship. What remains comparatively fragmented is the pedagogical translation across these domains: relatively few studies specify a coherent sequence that connects lived experience, guided critical reflection, communal dialogue, engagement with Scripture and Catholic tradition, and a reasoned response or action in school catechesis. Moreover, because much of the available literature is conceptual, qualitative, descriptive, or context-specific, the strength of evidence for the effects of such an integrated sequence must be distinguished from the strength of its pedagogical rationale. Thus, the gap is not that reflection is unknown, but that reflective-learning theories and catechetical formation practices have not been sufficiently integrated into an explicit, auditable, and practice-oriented pedagogical framework.

This review addresses that fragmentation through four questions: (1) How is reflective learning conceptualised and operationalised across educational and religious-education research? (2) What reflective practices are reported in Catholic religious education, catechesis, and closely related religious-education settings? (3) What outcomes, enabling conditions, and safeguards are reported or proposed? and (4) How can the evidence be synthesised into a pedagogical framework for Catholic school catechesis? These questions move progressively from conceptual clarification and identification of pedagogical practices to the synthesis of their reported outcomes, conditions, and catechetical implications. The intended contribution is therefore concrete rather than merely affirmative: the study develops an evidence-informed Reflective Catechesis Cycle (RCC), accompanied by design principles that distinguish personal reflection from catechetical discernment anchored in Scripture, Catholic tradition, community, and action. Rather than assuming that reflective learning itself produces deeper faith, the RCC makes the proposed pedagogical sequence explicit and therefore provides a framework that can be implemented, examined, and empirically tested in future Catholic religious-education research.

METHOD

Review Design and Reporting Approach

This study used a structured integrative literature review. An integrative design was selected because the research questions required synthesis across empirical studies, conceptual analyses, review articles, and Catholic-education scholarship rather than estimation of a single intervention effect. This design is appropriate when heterogeneous forms of evidence must be brought together to generate an integrative understanding of a phenomenon while preserving distinctions among different types of scholarly contribution (Whittemore & Knafl, 2005). The reporting logic followed the transparency principles of contemporary review guidance, including explicit search

sources, eligibility criteria, source-corpus distinctions, data extraction fields, and a traceable account of corpus construction (Page et al., 2021; Snyder, 2019). The direct pedagogical-evidence corpus was limited to peer-reviewed journal articles published from January 2021 to 19 August 2026. Works published before 2021 were retained only for theoretical, methodological, or contextual framing and were not coded as direct pedagogical evidence.

Information Sources and Search Strategy

Searches were conducted through Google Scholar and GARUDA to maximise coverage of Indonesian scholarship, and through ERIC and DOAJ to identify international and open-access educational literature. Search terms were organised around four concept groups: reflective learning, religious education, Catholic schooling/catechesis, and faith/spiritual formation. English and Indonesian strings were combined using Boolean operators and adapted to each search interface. The search strategy was intentionally bilingual because the review sought to integrate Indonesian Catholic-education scholarship with the broader international religious-education literature. Searches were last verified on 19 August 2026. The information sources, search window, search strings, eligible study types, evidence focus, and principal inclusion and exclusion criteria are summarised in Table 1.

Eligibility Criteria and Corpus Definition

Eligibility was determined according to publication type, publication period, language, scholarly verifiability, pedagogical relevance, and relationship to the review questions. Direct pedagogical-evidence sources were required to be peer-reviewed journal articles published between January 2021 and 19 August 2026, available in Indonesian or English, supported by verifiable publication metadata, and directly relevant to at least one review question. Relevant settings included Catholic schools, Catholic religious education, catechesis, faith formation, and closely related religious-education contexts when the pedagogical process was sufficiently relevant to inform the review questions. Empirical, review, conceptual/theoretical, development, and documented pastoral-reflective studies were eligible when their methods or scholarly arguments were transparent and traceable.

Sources were excluded from the direct-evidence corpus when they lacked a relevant reflective, experiential, or dialogical pedagogical construct; had no meaningful religious- or Catholic-education relevance; provided incomplete or unverifiable scholarly metadata; or consisted of sermons, devotionals, theses, conference-only records, news items, or unreviewed web content. Earlier and otherwise relevant scholarly publications could be retained as theoretical, methodological, foundational, or contextual background, but they were not coded as direct evidence. This distinction between analytic evidence and supporting literature is also specified in Table 1.

Table 1. Search Strategy and Eligibility Criteria

Component	Specification	Inclusion	Exclusion
Databases / search interfaces	Google Scholar; GARUDA; ERIC; DOAJ	Peer-reviewed journal records retrievable through the named sources	Non-scholarly websites could be used to locate records but not as evidence sources

Component	Specification	Inclusion	Exclusion
Search window	January 2021-19 August 2026	Journal articles in Indonesian or English eligible for the direct pedagogical-evidence corpus	Pre-2021 works excluded from the direct-evidence corpus; relevant works retained only for theoretical, methodological, or contextual framing
English search strings	("reflective learning" OR "reflective pedagogy" OR "reflective practice" OR "experiential learning") AND ("religious education" OR catechesis OR catechetical); ("Catholic religious education" OR "Catholic school" OR catechesis) AND (reflection OR reflective OR experiential OR dialogical)	Direct relevance to reflective/experiential/dialogical pedagogy and religious/Catholic education	No relevant pedagogical construct or no religious/Catholic education relevance
Indonesian search strings	("pembelajaran reflektif" OR "pedagogi reflektif" OR "pembelajaran berbasis pengalaman") AND ("Pendidikan Agama Katolik" OR katekese OR "sekolah Katolik"); (refleksi OR dialogis OR pengalaman) AND (katekese OR PAK)	Catholic-school, parish catechesis, teacher education, or adjacent religious-education context with pedagogically relevant evidence for at least one review question	Sermons, devotionals, theses, conference-only records, news, and unreviewed web content
Study types	Empirical, review, conceptual/theoretical, development, or documented pastoral-reflective studies	Transparent method or traceable scholarly argument	Incomplete metadata or claims not traceable to a scholarly basis
Evidence focus	Definitions, practices, outcomes/propositions, conditions, safeguards, and formational implications	At least one review question directly addressed	Only general theology/religion with no pedagogical relevance
Corpus role	Direct pedagogical evidence distinguished from methodological, foundational, or contextual background	Direct-evidence sources met the publication-window, peer-review, metadata-verification, and pedagogical-relevance criteria	Sources used only for theoretical, methodological, foundational, or contextual

Component	Specification	Inclusion	Exclusion
			purposes were not coded in the thematic synthesis

Screening, Verification, and Corpus Construction

Searches, source verification, and subsequent manuscript strengthening produced a final scholarly reference base of 56 sources: 52 peer-reviewed journal articles and four foundational books. The books were used only for theoretical framing. The prespecified analytic corpus remained unchanged at 36 peer-reviewed journal articles published within the January 2021-19 August 2026 evidence window that met the direct pedagogical-evidence criteria: verifiable metadata and direct pedagogical relevance to at least one review question. These 36 articles were coded in the thematic synthesis. The remaining 16 journal articles were retained or added only for methodological, foundational, or contextual framing and were not coded as direct evidence.

This two-tier corpus structure separates sources used to generate the thematic findings from sources used to define concepts, support methodological choices, or contextualise interpretation. In doing so, it prevents the complete reference list from being conflated with the analytic evidence base. Source metadata were verified against journal landing pages and, where available, DOI records. The structure of the final verified reference base and the analytic corpus is shown in Figure 1.

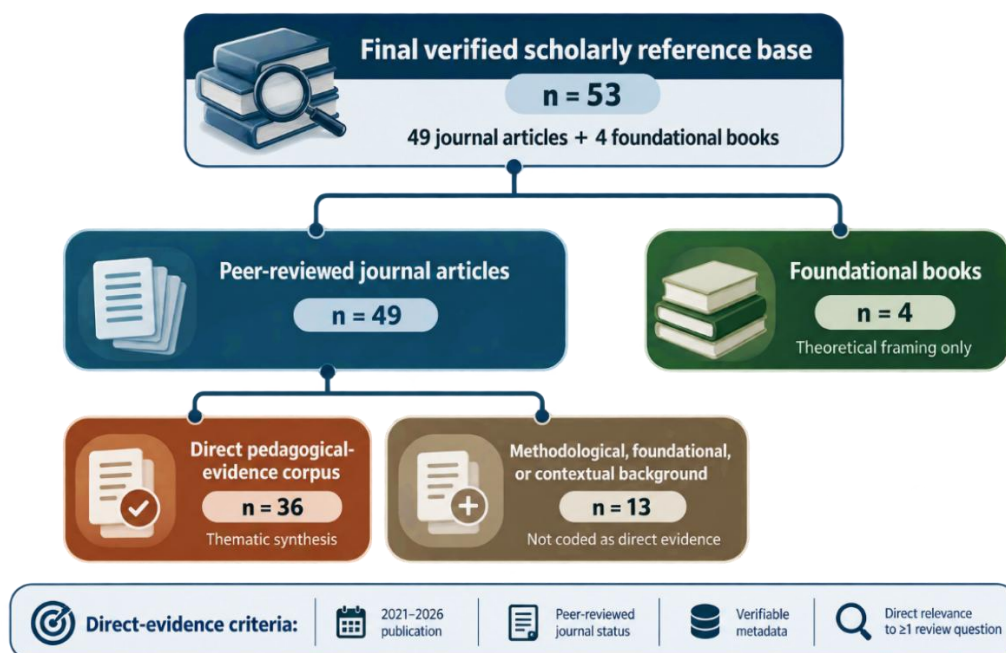


Figure 1. Structure of the verified reference base and analytic corpus for the integrative review.

Data Extraction and Relevance Appraisal

A structured extraction matrix was used to record author/year, country or context, educational setting, study type, pedagogical focus, reflective or dialogical practice, relevant findings, and implications for catechesis. These fields were selected to permit comparison across heterogeneous studies while retaining information directly relevant to the four review questions.

Because the corpus combined empirical and conceptual publications, no single formal risk-of-bias instrument could be applied consistently across all source types. Instead, each source was appraised using four relevance and credibility criteria: peer-reviewed publication status, transparent study or argument basis, direct relevance to at least one review question, and conclusions that could be traced to presented data or scholarly reasoning. This procedure functioned as a relevance-and-credibility appraisal rather than as a uniform methodological quality or risk-of-bias assessment. Sources that failed basic relevance or metadata checks were excluded.

The review used a single-reviewer screening and extraction process. To reduce inconsistency, decisions were logged in the extraction matrix, and source metadata were rechecked against journal landing pages and DOI records. The same eligibility and extraction criteria were applied across the corpus to maintain consistency in source classification. The limitation associated with single-reviewer screening and extraction is acknowledged in the Discussion.

Thematic Synthesis

The synthesis followed a thematic procedure informed by the principles of reflexive thematic analysis described by Braun and Clarke (2006, 2021). The process involved familiarisation with each included source; initial coding of pedagogical processes, practices, outcomes, conditions, and implications; grouping related codes into candidate themes; reviewing candidate themes against the extracted evidence; defining and naming the themes; and integrating their meaning across educational and catechetical contexts.

Coding units included descriptions of learning sequences, learner activities, reported outcomes, teacher roles, and stated conditions or risks. For example, codes such as 'experience as starting point', 'daily reflection', and 'narrative encounter' were grouped under experience-based meaning-making; 'peer discussion', 'perspective-taking', and 'guided dialogue' contributed to guided and dialogical reflection. Codes concerning engagement with Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrine, moral values, and ecclesial community contributed to faith-tradition integration, while codes concerning facilitation, safety, competence, plural contexts, learner participation, and digital mediation informed the conditions-and-safeguards theme.

Themes were treated as non-exclusive because a single study could support more than one pedagogical dimension. Consequently, the number of studies associated with each theme represents the distribution of thematic support across the analytic corpus and should not be interpreted as an effect size, a measure of methodological quality, or a set of mutually exclusive study categories.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Evidence Profile of the Included Literature

The direct pedagogical-evidence corpus comprised 36 studies, of which 26 were situated in Indonesia or published within Indonesian Catholic-education contexts and 10 represented international religious-education scholarship. The corpus was methodologically heterogeneous, including qualitative case studies, descriptive and perception studies, development research, practice-based pastoral reflection, conceptual and literature-based studies, systematic or scoping reviews, and empirical research on dialogue and argumentation. Table 2 summarises the context, design,

pedagogical focus, and evidence relevant to reflective catechesis for each included study.

Across the corpus, qualitative, descriptive, conceptual, and review-based studies were more common than controlled classroom interventions or longitudinal investigations. Studies addressed diverse educational settings, including Catholic schools, public-school Catholic learners, parish catechesis, catechist and teacher education, Catholic higher education, interreligious learning, and digitally mediated catechesis. This diversity provided evidence across several dimensions of reflective pedagogy but also indicated that the available literature differed substantially in study design, educational level, and formational focus.

The Indonesian studies contributed evidence particularly on Catholic religious education, pastoral accompaniment, teacher readiness, learner participation, character formation, digital catechesis, and faith formation (Habeahan, 2022; H. J. Marbun, 2026; M. R. Marbun, 2025; Saputra, 2022, 2023, 2024, 2025; Sili, 2022; Widiatna, 2022). International studies contributed evidence on interreligious learning, perspective-taking, argumentation, experiential religious education, reflexivity, learner voice, and spiritual pedagogy (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2022; Foley et al., 2022, 2023; Guilfoyle et al., 2021, 2023; Heimbrock, 2022; Kvia & Aukland, 2025; Rodriguez, 2025; Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022). These studies formed the empirical and conceptual basis for the thematic synthesis reported in Table 2.

Table 2. Characteristics of Studies in the Direct Pedagogical-Evidence Corpus

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
Setyawan (2022)	Indonesia; multiple educational levels	Systematic review	Reflective pedagogy	Reflection was consistently treated as a structured movement from experience to meaning-making; implementation depended on facilitation and context.
Martinus & Amadi (2021)	Indonesia; senior high school	Qualitative	Catholic religious education and student behaviour	Catholic religious education was linked to behavioural and value formation when teachers enacted relational and exemplary roles.
Habeahan (2022)	Indonesia; public-school	Descriptive/documentary study	Quality and access to	Implementation quality

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
	Catholic students		Catholic religious education	depended on teacher availability, institutional support, and alignment between educational rights and faith formation.
Budiono et al. (2022)	Indonesia; parish youth catechesis	Community-based study	Participatory catechesis	Participatory catechesis was reported to support enthusiasm and active involvement when experience and community interaction were foregrounded.
Elelia (2022)	Indonesia; Catholic school in a Buddhist-majority context	Qualitative/descriptive	Catholic religious education in a plural setting	Religious education required contextual sensitivity and dialogical practice to maintain Catholic identity while respecting religious diversity.
Sili (2022)	Indonesia; Catholic religion teachers	Descriptive study	Teacher professionalism and readiness	Teacher readiness and professional competence emerged as conditions for learner-centred and contextual Catholic religious education.

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
Saputra (2022)	Indonesia; Catholic and public junior high schools	Comparative/ descriptive	School pastoral practice	Pastoral-school practice was associated with Christian community formation when learning was connected with relational accompaniment and lived school experience.
Widiatna (2022)	Indonesia; Catholic youth	Literature-based analysis	Faith transmission in digital culture	Faith formation was framed as accompaniment, listening, active participation, and hybrid/digital engagement rather than one-way transmission.
Siswantara et al. (2023)	Indonesia; students in religious diversity	Perception study	Religious character and diversity	Students' religious character was connected with lived encounters and the ability to interpret faith amid diversity.
Wea & Tage (2023)	Indonesia; elementary school	Descriptive study	Character formation through Catholic religious education	Catholic religious education was positioned as a formation process that links teaching, practice, and everyday character.
Mones et al. (2023)	Indonesia; Catholic religious education	Conceptual study	Progressivism and religious education	Learner experience, active inquiry, and contextualisati

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
				on were proposed as important complements to content transmission.
Saputra (2023)	Indonesia; Catholic schools	Conceptual/pastoral analysis	School pastoral ministry and Christian community	School pastoral ministry was presented as a bridge between curriculum, community, and formation, supporting reflective and relational learning.
Andita & Wijaya (2023)	Indonesia; YOUCAT study group	Qualitative study	Small-group catechesis	Small-group catechesis supported questioning, dialogue, and personal appropriation of faith content.
Tinenti (2023)	Indonesia; catechist education	Empirical study	Retreat and catechist spirituality	Structured spiritual experiences and reflection supported catechist spirituality and formational learning.
Jelahu et al. (2023)	Indonesia; national Catholic religious education	Qualitative document study	State-Church framework for Catholic religious education	Catholic religious education in schools operates within both national educational standards and the Church's teaching authority, making

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
				doctrinal and civic alignment essential.
Anggraini & Permana (2024)	Indonesia; Grade V Catholic school	R&D / ADDIE	Game-based Catholic religious education	Interactive media was associated with positive learner responses and greater involvement, illustrating the value of active participation beyond lecture-centred teaching.
Saputra (2024)	Indonesia; Catholic religious education	Literature review	Digital transformation	Digital tools can broaden participation and access, but meaningful Catholic education still requires guidance, values, and reflective use of technology.
Lay et al. (2024)	Indonesia; Catholic elementary education	Educational analysis	Cognitive learning and Catholic religious education	The study highlighted active construction of understanding and the need to adapt pedagogy to learner development rather than rely on memorisation.
Banjarnahor et al. (2024)	Indonesia; digital catechesis	Conceptual/literature study	Catechist role in digital catechesis	Digital catechesis requires catechists to combine technological competence

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
				with accompaniment, discernment, and fidelity to faith content.
Lan (2024)	Indonesia; formal Catholic education	Literature study	Catholic social teaching in formal education	Faith education was framed as formation toward responsible social action, connecting teaching with lived social realities.
M. R. Marbun (2025)	Indonesia; Catholic higher education students	Descriptive qualitative	Daily reflection and character formation	Habitual daily reflection was associated with moral awareness, honesty, discipline, empathy, and responsibility.
Lay (2025)	Indonesia; Catholic religious education	Literature review	Think-Pair-Share	A structured think-dialogue-share sequence was proposed to support critical engagement, peer discussion, and participation in Catholic religious education.
Habur (2025)	Indonesia; Diocese of Ruteng-Flores	Qualitative/digital catechesis study	Interactive pedagogy in digital catechesis	Interactive digital pedagogy supported dialogue and faith reflection, while connectivity and facilitator

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
				competence remained important constraints.
Saputra (2025)	Indonesia; Generation Z	Literature/conceptual study	Catholic religious education in the digital era	Generation Z requires participatory, contextual, and digitally literate pedagogy that preserves the formative aims of Catholic religious education.
H. J. Marbun (2026)	Indonesia; parish-based education for public-school students	Practice-based pastoral reflection	Pastoral Priority Principle	Pastoral discernment should prioritise the learning conditions most conducive to faith growth when curriculum demands and learner needs cannot be fully addressed at once.
Tjang et al. (2026)	Indonesia; Catholic faith education	Descriptive-reflective theological study	Narrative and transformative faith pedagogy	Narrative reflection can connect Scripture, personal experience, conversion, and action in a formational learning process.
Foley et al. (2022)	Australia; Catholic primary school	Case study	Interreligious learning	Leadership, pedagogy, identity, and relationships jointly shaped dialogical learning in a

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
				Catholic school context.
Foley et al. (2023)	Australia; Catholic primary school students	Case study	Student engagement in interreligious learning	Student engagement was associated with participation in a community of learners, discussion of perspectives, and relational learning.
Fancourt & Guilfoyle (2022)	England; secondary schools	Multi-school empirical study	Perspective-taking across science and religious education	Religious-education argumentation was associated with explicit perspective-taking and disciplined reasoning across viewpoints.
Guilfoyle et al. (2021)	England; teachers	Qualitative study	Argumentation in science and religious education	Teachers identified the need for structured discussion and epistemic clarity when learners reason about religious claims.
Guilfoyle et al. (2023)	United Kingdom; secondary students	Empirical study	Student argumentation	Students' reasoning varied across disciplinary contexts, highlighting the value of explicit scaffolding for reflective and dialogical inquiry.
Hacıeminoğlu & Yıldız (2022)	Türkiye; teacher education	Empirical study	Interdisciplinary	Structured argumentation enabled

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
			argumentation	preservice teachers to examine assumptions and justify positions in religious and philosophical questions.
Heimbrock (2022)	European religious education	Conceptual study	Experiential pedagogy in digital times	Religious learning was interpreted as embodied and experiential meaning-making that cannot be reduced to information transfer.
Stones & Fraser-Pearce (2022)	England; religious education teacher preparation	Conceptual analysis	Bildung and epistemic justice	Reflective professional formation requires attention to learner voice, knowledge, and justice in religious-education classrooms.
Kvia & Aukland (2025)	International religious education literature	Scoping review	Reflexivity in religious education	Reflexivity in religious education includes self-positioning, critical examination of assumptions, and awareness of interpretive contexts.
Rodriguez (2025)	Children's religious/spiritual education	Conceptual/pedagogical study	Spiritual pedagogy	Spiritual growth is supported by pedagogies that create space for meaning, reflection, relationships,

Study	Context	Design	Focus	Evidence
				and response rather than content acquisition alone.

Thematic Distribution of the Evidence

The thematic synthesis generated four interrelated and non-exclusive themes: (1) experience-based meaning-making, (2) guided and dialogical reflection, (3) faith-tradition integration, and (4) conditions and safeguards. Table 3 presents the working definition, number of supporting studies, illustrative evidence, and catechetical relevance of each theme, while Figure 2 provides a visual representation of their relationship within the evidence base.

Experience-based meaning-making was identified in 11 studies, guided and dialogical reflection in 22 studies, faith-tradition integration in 23 studies, and conditions and safeguards in 25 studies. Because coding was non-exclusive, individual studies could contribute evidence to more than one theme. Consequently, the frequencies represent the distribution of thematic support across the 36-study corpus rather than effect sizes, methodological-quality scores, or mutually exclusive study categories.

Figure 2 visually represents these four themes as an interconnected evidence architecture. The first three themes describe recurring pedagogical processes, whereas conditions and safeguards emerged as cross-cutting implementation factors that shaped how reflective and catechetical practices were enacted.

Table 3. Thematic Evidence Map of Reflective Catechesis

Theme	Working definition	Studies supporting theme (n)	Illustrative evidence	Catechetical relevance
Experience-based meaning-making	Learners examine lived, learning, narrative, pastoral, or moral experience as material for interpretation	11	Daily reflection; pastoral experience; narrative conversion; experiential pedagogy	Provides the starting point for connecting life and faith
Guided and dialogical reflection	Reflection is scaffolded through questions, peer dialogue, argumentation, accompaniment, or community exchange	22	Small-group catechesis; Think-Pair-Share; perspective-taking; interactive digital catechesis	Prevents reflection from remaining isolated opinion and supports communal discernment
Faith-tradition integration	Experience is interpreted in relation to Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrine, moral	23	Faith formation; school pastoral ministry; Catholic identity; Catholic social teaching	Distinguishes catechetical reflection from generic self-reflection

Theme	Working definition	Studies supporting theme (n)	Illustrative evidence	Catechetical relevance
Conditions and safeguards	values, or ecclesial community Reflective pedagogy is shaped by facilitation, safety, competence, doctrinal clarity, plural-context sensitivity, access, and ethical participation	25	Teacher readiness; digital constraints; plural contexts; pastoral priority; learner voice	Defines the conditions under which reflective catechesis can be responsibly implemented

Note. Theme coding was non-exclusive; therefore, study frequencies indicate the distribution of thematic support across the corpus rather than effect size, study quality, or mutually exclusive classification.

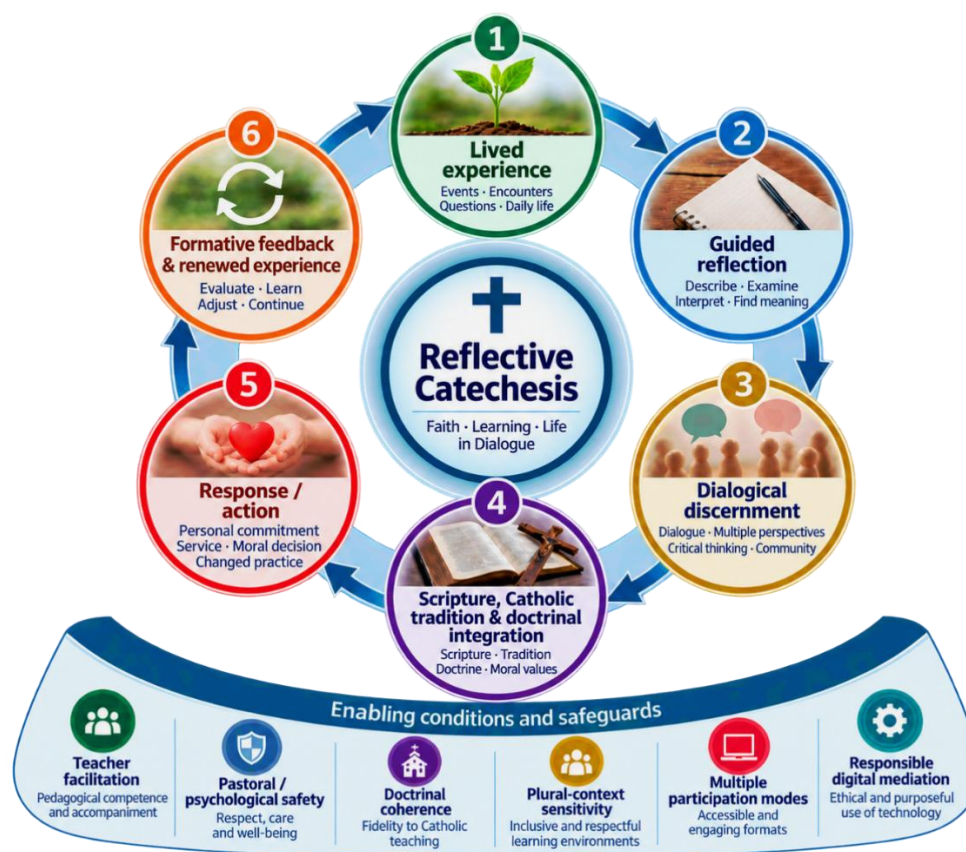


Figure 2. Thematic architecture emerging from the 36-study direct pedagogical-evidence corpus.

Experience-Based Meaning-Making

The first theme concerned the use of lived, learning, narrative, pastoral, or moral experience as material for interpretation. Across 11 studies, experience was not treated simply as an activity completed by learners but as a starting point for subsequent reflection and meaning-making.

Studies of reflective pedagogy identified experience as a recurring starting point for structured reflection (Setyawan, 2022). In Catholic contexts, participatory catechesis foregrounded learners' experiences and community interaction (Budiono et

al., 2022), while daily reflection was associated with moral awareness and character-related dispositions among Catholic higher-education students (M. R. Marbun, 2025). Narrative-reflective approaches similarly connected personal or faith-related experience with subsequent interpretation and response (Tjang et al., 2026).

Related evidence appeared in pastoral and experiential educational settings. School pastoral studies emphasised attention to lived school experience and relational accompaniment (Saputra, 2022, 2023), while religious-education scholarship described learning as embodied and experiential rather than reducible to information transfer (Heimbrock, 2022). Across these studies, the recurring empirical and conceptual pattern was that concrete experience provided material that could subsequently be examined, interpreted, and connected with broader religious or moral meaning.

Guided and Dialogical Reflection

The second theme, supported by 22 studies, concerned reflection that was structured through questions, peer exchange, perspective-taking, argumentation, accompaniment, or community dialogue. Guided interaction appeared in both Indonesian Catholic-education studies and international religious-education research.

Small-group catechesis supported questioning, dialogue, and personal engagement with faith content (Andita & Wijaya, 2023). Think-Pair-Share was proposed as a structured sequence for individual thought, peer interaction, and wider classroom participation (Lay, 2025), while interactive digital catechesis incorporated dialogue and reflective participation within technologically mediated settings (Habur, 2025). Learner-centred and interactive media likewise illustrated forms of participation beyond lecture-dominant instruction (Anggraini & Permana, 2024).

International studies provided further evidence of structured dialogical processes. Perspective-taking was used to support reasoning across religious and disciplinary viewpoints (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2022), while studies of argumentation identified explicit scaffolding, structured discussion, and epistemic clarity as recurrent requirements for student reasoning (Guilfoyle et al., 2021, 2023). Interdisciplinary argumentation likewise provided opportunities for participants to examine assumptions and justify positions (Hacıeminoğlu & Yıldız, 2022).

Catholic-school studies of interreligious learning showed that dialogue occurred within networks of pedagogy, identity, leadership, and relationships (Foley et al., 2022), and that student engagement was associated with participation in a community of learners and interaction across perspectives (Foley et al., 2023). Across this theme, reflection was most commonly represented as a socially and pedagogically scaffolded process rather than as isolated individual introspection.

Faith-Tradition Integration

The third theme, identified in 23 studies, concerned the relationship between learner experience and Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrine, moral values, ecclesial community, or socially oriented expressions of faith.

Catholic religious education was consistently represented as having both educational and formational dimensions. Studies addressing its institutional context showed that Catholic education operates within national educational expectations as well as the Church's teaching responsibilities (Jelahu et al., 2023). School pastoral literature connected curriculum, Christian community, accompaniment, and formation (Saputra, 2022, 2023), while research on the transmission of faith

emphasised listening, participation, accompaniment, and contextual engagement rather than one-way communication (Widiatna, 2022).

Other studies linked Catholic educational content with particular dimensions of formation. Catholic social teaching was connected with responsible social action (Lan, 2024), while character-related studies associated Catholic religious education with behavioural, moral, or relational formation (Martinus & Amadi, 2021; Siswantara et al., 2023; Wea & Tage, 2023). Narrative-reflective faith pedagogy explicitly connected Scripture, personal experience, conversion, and action (Tjang et al., 2026).

Digital catechesis studies likewise indicated that technological mediation did not replace the need for faith-content guidance, accompaniment, and discernment (Banjarnahor et al., 2024; Saputra, 2024, 2025). Across these studies, engagement with lived experience was repeatedly situated in relation to Catholic belief, moral interpretation, ecclesial identity, or formational purpose rather than being treated as self-contained personal reflection.

Conditions and Safeguards

The fourth and most widely distributed theme, identified in 25 studies, concerned the conditions under which reflective and catechetical pedagogy could be implemented. These included teacher competence, pastoral sensitivity, doctrinal clarity, institutional support, learner voice, plural-context awareness, accessibility, and responsible digital mediation.

Teacher readiness and professional competence were recurrent conditions in Indonesian Catholic religious education (Sili, 2022), while access and implementation quality were associated with teacher availability, institutional support, and the relationship between educational provision and faith formation (Habeahan, 2022). In plural educational contexts, Catholic religious education required sensitivity to religious diversity while maintaining its particular educational identity (Elelia, 2022).

Digital studies identified additional implementation conditions. Catechists required technological competence alongside accompaniment and fidelity to faith content (Banjarnahor et al., 2024), while interactive digital catechesis remained affected by facilitator competence and connectivity constraints (Habur, 2025). Research on Catholic education for younger digitally oriented learners similarly emphasised participatory and context-sensitive approaches while retaining formative aims (Saputra, 2025).

Pastoral and educational studies also emphasised responsiveness to learner conditions. The Pastoral Priority Principle foregrounded discernment regarding curriculum demands and learners' faith-formation needs (H. J. Marbun, 2026), while broader religious-education scholarship highlighted learner voice, epistemic considerations, and justice within classroom practice (Stones & Fraser-Pearce, 2022). Taken together, these findings show that reflective pedagogy was not presented independently of implementation context; its enactment was repeatedly associated with the competence of facilitators, characteristics of learners, institutional conditions, and the ethical or theological boundaries of participation.

Cross-Theme Patterning

Although the four themes were analytically distinguishable, they frequently overlapped within individual studies. Studies focused on participatory catechesis, for example, could contribute simultaneously to experience-based meaning-making and guided dialogue, while work on digital catechesis contributed evidence to dialogical

reflection, faith-tradition integration, and implementation conditions. Similarly, studies of pastoral ministry often connected learners' lived circumstances, relational accompaniment, ecclesial formation, and contextual constraints.

The thematic pattern therefore did not indicate four independent pedagogical approaches. Instead, the evidence showed recurring combinations of experience, structured reflection, dialogue, tradition-related interpretation, and contextual conditions. Table 3 summarises these relationships quantitatively and conceptually, while Figure 2 presents their overall architecture without implying that the themes are sequential or mutually exclusive.

The evidence base also differed in the types of claims it could support. Only a limited proportion of the included studies examined specific classroom interventions, and longitudinal assessment of faith-formation outcomes was uncommon. Much of the corpus consisted of qualitative, descriptive, conceptual, pastoral, developmental, or review-based scholarship. Accordingly, the Results establish recurrent pedagogical patterns and conditions across the literature but do not independently establish comparative or causal effectiveness.

Discussion

Reflective Learning as a Process of Catechetical Discernment

The synthesis indicates that reflective learning is more defensibly understood as a pedagogical process rather than a discrete classroom technique. As shown by the evidence characteristics in Table 2 and the thematic patterning in Table 3, reflective practices occurred across different settings and methods, yet repeatedly involved movement from experience toward interpretation, dialogue, faith-related meaning, and response. This pattern suggests that the pedagogical value of reflection lies not simply in asking learners to revisit experience, but in structuring how experience is examined, interpreted, and related to subsequent judgement or action.

The first movement is experiential: an event, learning episode, moral issue, narrative, social encounter, or personal response becomes the object of attention. The second is interpretive: learners are guided to name what occurred, identify assumptions or values, and consider alternative understandings. The third is relational and dialogical: meanings are examined through interaction with peers, teachers, community perspectives, or relevant disciplinary knowledge. The fourth is catechetically integrative, bringing emerging interpretations into dialogue with Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrine, and moral teaching. The fifth is responsive, inviting learners to formulate a judgement, commitment, action, or changed way of seeing. Recent Indonesian evidence on daily reflection and narrative faith pedagogy illustrates movement from experience toward moral and spiritual interpretation (M. R. Marbun, 2025; Tjang et al., 2026), while broader religious-education research highlights the importance of perspective-taking and reflexivity in examining assumptions and interpretive positions (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2022; Kvia & Aukland, 2025).

This interpretation also clarifies how the reflective traditions introduced earlier in the manuscript relate to catechesis. Deweyan reflection and experiential learning explain why experience must be examined rather than merely accumulated; Schön's reflective practice emphasises attention to action and learning through practice; and critical or reflexive approaches extend reflection toward the examination of assumptions, positionality, and alternative perspectives (Dewey, 1993; Kolb, 2014;

Schön, 1983). None of these perspectives, however, fully defines catechetical reflection on its own. A purely individual or metacognitive account may remain psychologically inward, whereas Catholic catechesis is relational, ecclesial, and tradition-bearing. Conversely, doctrinal instruction without opportunities for reflective appropriation may remain externally received rather than meaningfully interpreted by learners. The central pedagogical challenge is therefore to hold critical reflection and confessional coherence together rather than to position them as competing aims. Earlier work on teacher moral reflection likewise illustrates how concrete ethical dilemmas can be examined through explicit interpretive frameworks that connect practical judgement with moral reasoning (Husu & Tirri, 2003).

Guided and Dialogical Reflection as a Pedagogical Core

The prominence of guided and dialogical reflection in Table 3 (n = 22) indicates that reflection across the reviewed literature was rarely conceived as entirely private or unstructured. Indonesian studies describe small-group catechesis, Think-Pair-Share, interactive digital catechesis, and learner-centred media as ways of moving learners from passive reception toward questioning, interaction, and participation (Andita & Wijaya, 2023; Anggraini & Permana, 2024; Habur, 2025; Lay, 2025). International religious-education studies similarly show that perspective-taking and argumentation depend on structured prompts, explicit norms, and attention to how claims and perspectives are reasoned about (Fancourt & Guilfoyle, 2022; Guilfoyle et al., 2021, 2023). Dialogue-oriented professional learning in Catholic schools further emphasises the importance of relational and community conditions for reflective development (Madden, 2020).

These findings support an important distinction between dialogue as participation and dialogue as discernment. Participation alone does not guarantee reflective depth. Learners may exchange opinions without examining assumptions, providing reasons, or relating their interpretations to relevant knowledge and faith resources. Guided reflection therefore requires teachers to structure dialogue through questions that move from description toward interpretation, comparison, justification, and response.

This interpretation is consistent with recent scholarship on dialogue in Catholic religious education. Larkins and Owen (2025) argue that dialogical teaching can operate within a catechetical curriculum rather than requiring the abandonment of explicit religious content, while Rymarz (2024) frames dialogue as particularly important in Catholic-school settings marked by contemporary religious and cultural plurality. For reflective catechesis, this means that dialogue need not imply doctrinal indeterminacy; instead, it can provide a pedagogical space in which learners encounter different perspectives while also engaging the particular resources of the Catholic tradition.

The review therefore does not support the broad claim that dialogical methods necessarily produce stronger faith outcomes. Rather, the evidence supports a more limited pedagogical proposition: reflective engagement is more plausibly facilitated when participation is intentionally scaffolded, alternative perspectives can be heard, and learners are provided with interpretive resources for evaluating their responses.

Integrating Lived Experience with Scripture, Tradition, and Doctrine

The faith-tradition integration theme was supported across 23 studies (Table 3) and provides the clearest distinction between generic reflective learning and reflective

catechesis. Catholic catechesis is concerned not only with what learners think or feel about an experience but also with how that experience is interpreted in relation to the Gospel, Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrinal and moral teaching, and the life of the believing community.

Recent Indonesian literature provides different components of this relationship. Participatory catechesis foregrounds active involvement (Budiono et al., 2022); digital and youth-oriented studies emphasise accompaniment, contextual communication, and the formative use of technology (Banjarnahor et al., 2024; Saputra, 2025; Widiatna, 2022); daily reflection connects personal review with moral awareness (M. R. Marbun, 2025); and pastoral-priority work highlights discernment of learner needs within faith formation (H. J. Marbun, 2026). Taken together, these studies indicate that learner experience functions as a starting point for catechetical interpretation rather than as its sole criterion of meaning.

Groome's shared-praxis tradition provides an important theological-pedagogical precedent for this movement by placing present action and experience in dialogue with the Christian Story and Vision before inviting a lived response (Groome, 1991). The present synthesis does not reproduce shared praxis as a model; rather, it identifies contemporary evidence that supports a related pedagogical logic in which lived experience, dialogue, tradition-bearing knowledge, and response are intentionally connected.

This distinction is particularly important because reflective pedagogy can otherwise drift toward unbounded subjectivity, where personal experience becomes self-validating. Catholic school catechesis remains accountable to Scripture, Catholic tradition, and the Church's teaching function while simultaneously operating within educational standards and socially diverse learning environments (Jelahu et al., 2023). Learners' experiences should therefore be taken seriously without being treated as self-authenticating doctrine.

At the same time, doctrinal anchoring should not be reduced to one-way transmission that terminates reflection. The challenge is to create an interpretive relationship in which learners can question, reason, encounter the tradition, and reconsider their understanding. In plural settings, this requires dialogical openness alongside clarity about the Catholic character of the educational process (Elelia, 2022; Foley et al., 2022). The resulting position is neither unrestricted relativism nor authoritarian transmission, but guided catechetical discernment. Work on spiritual pedagogy likewise illustrates how educators' epistemological orientations and reflective practice can shape the space created for spiritual meaning-making (Rouse, 2024).

Conditions and Safeguards for Responsible Reflective Catechesis

The most widely distributed theme in the evidence map was conditions and safeguards (n = 25; Table 3). This finding is significant because it indicates that reflective catechesis cannot be understood solely through the sequence of learner activities. Its responsible implementation also depends on who facilitates reflection, how participation is structured, what kinds of disclosure are expected, what theological resources are available, and the institutional and social context in which learning occurs.

Teacher competence is central. Teachers and catechists must be able to facilitate questioning and dialogue while also providing appropriate theological and

pedagogical guidance. Indonesian research identifies teacher readiness, professional competence, and pastoral accompaniment as important conditions for Catholic religious education (Habeahan, 2022; Sili, 2022). Related Catholic-education scholarship likewise highlights the formation of teacher values and the need to prepare educators for both educational and evangelising responsibilities (Castillo & Barrameda, 2024; McVey & Poyo, 2019). Digital catechesis adds another layer: technological access or interactivity does not itself create reflective depth. Facilitators require technological competence together with discernment, accompaniment, and fidelity to faith content (Banjarnahor et al., 2024; Habur, 2025; Saputra, 2024).

Pastoral and psychological safety also deserve explicit attention. Reflective activities can invite discussion of personal beliefs, relationships, moral struggles, or spiritual experiences. Therefore, participation should not depend on coerced disclosure. Learners should have appropriate choices regarding how they contribute, and teachers should distinguish educational reflection from therapeutic or confessional disclosure. This safeguard follows from the review's broader evidence concerning learner voice, accompaniment, relational pedagogy, and sensitivity to diverse educational circumstances rather than from any assumption that greater personal disclosure produces deeper reflection.

Plural-context sensitivity represents a further condition. Catholic schools may include learners with different degrees of Catholic identification, other religious affiliations, or no religious affiliation. Studies in plural Catholic-school and interreligious settings indicate the importance of maintaining respectful dialogue while retaining clarity concerning educational identity (Elelia, 2022; Foley et al., 2022). Contextual Catholic-education scholarship also shows the value of engaging local culture and learner circumstances rather than assuming a culturally uniform learning environment (Payong, 2022). Rymarz (2024) and Larkins and Owen (2025) further support the view that Catholic particularity and dialogical pedagogy need not be treated as mutually exclusive.

Digital and media design constitute a related safeguard. Learning media can support participation when they are developmentally appropriate and integrated with pedagogical purposes rather than used as ends in themselves (Wahyuningrum, 2022). These conditions are therefore best understood as cross-cutting safeguards rather than an additional stage of reflection. This interpretation corresponds to the thematic architecture presented in Figure 2, where conditions and safeguards surround and support the principal pedagogical dimensions rather than appearing as an independent learning activity.

From the Thematic Synthesis to the Reflective Catechesis Cycle

The major integrative contribution of this review is to translate the four themes reported in Table 3 and visualised in Figure 2 into an explicit pedagogical sequence. The relationship is not one-to-one: the themes represent patterns in the evidence, whereas the Reflective Catechesis Cycle (RCC) represents an evidence-informed pedagogical interpretation of those patterns.

Specifically, experience-based meaning-making informs the opening movement of lived experience; guided and dialogical reflection informs the reflection and discernment stages; faith-tradition integration is operationalised through explicit engagement with Scripture, Catholic tradition, and doctrinal teaching; and conditions and safeguards operate across the entire cycle rather than becoming a seventh stage.

Figure 3 presents this synthesis as the Reflective Catechesis Cycle (RCC). The model begins with lived experience, moves through guided reflection and dialogical discernment, brings emerging meanings into explicit conversation with Scripture, Catholic tradition, and doctrinal teaching, and then invites learners to formulate a response or action. Formative feedback returns the learner to renewed experience, making the model iterative rather than strictly linear.

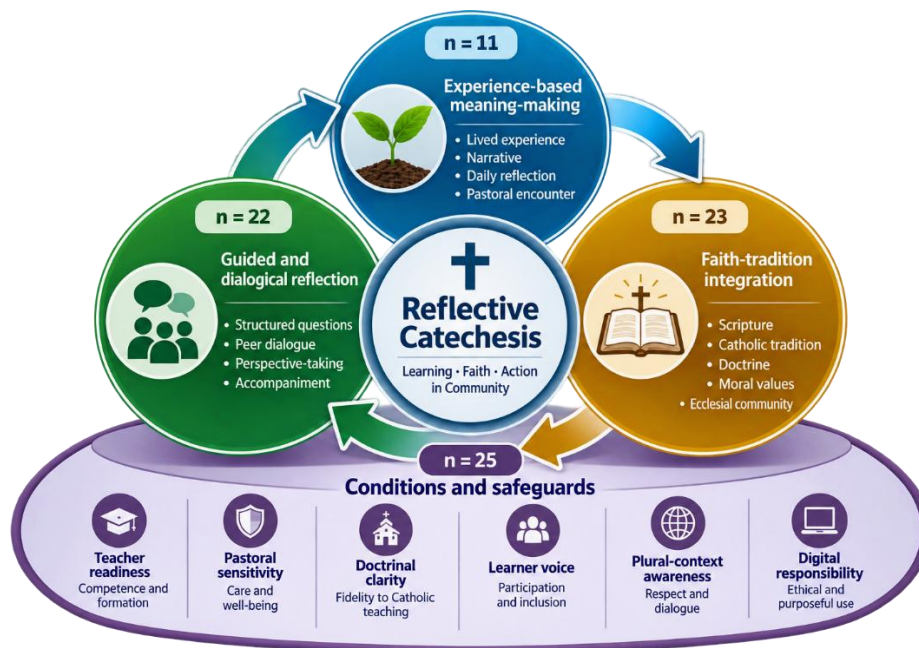


Figure 3. Reflective Catechesis Cycle (RCC) derived from the integrative synthesis.

The RCC should be interpreted as an evidence-informed logic model rather than a validated intervention. This distinction is critical. As shown by the heterogeneous evidence profile in Table 2, relatively few included studies directly tested complete reflective-learning sequences in Catholic-school classrooms, and longitudinal assessment of formation outcomes was limited. The cycle therefore makes the review's pedagogical proposition visible, implementable, and testable, but it does not establish causal effectiveness.

The RCC also makes explicit what distinguishes catechetical reflection from generic self-reflection. Experience initiates the process but does not determine its final meaning; dialogue expands interpretation but does not replace tradition-bearing knowledge; Scripture and Catholic tradition provide interpretive resources without eliminating learner agency; and response/action prevents reflection from remaining purely cognitive. Formative feedback then allows experience, interpretation, and action to be reconsidered in subsequent learning.

Design Principles and Classroom Applications

Six design principles follow from the synthesis. First, reflective catechesis should begin with a concrete experience, narrative, moral case, learning event, or social reality that learners can meaningfully examine rather than relying on abstract exposition alone.

Second, reflection should be structured with prompts that move beyond affective recall. Questions can progress from what happened, to what meanings or tensions emerged, what assumptions or values are involved, and what reasons support a particular interpretation. This emphasis is consistent with broader

integrative-review evidence showing that facilitated and dialogical strategies can support more substantive reflection than unguided written activity alone (McLeod et al., 2015).

Third, individual reflection should be connected with dialogical discernment. Paired, small-group, or whole-class exchange can allow assumptions to be examined, reasons articulated, and alternative perspectives encountered.

Fourth, interpretation should be explicitly brought into dialogue with Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrinal coherence, moral teaching, and the ecclesial community. This is the principal design feature distinguishing reflective catechesis from generic reflective pedagogy.

Fifth, reflection should move toward a response. Depending on the learning objective, this may involve a revised understanding, judgement, decision, prayer, practice, service action, or moral commitment that can subsequently be revisited.

Sixth, the entire process should operate within safeguards that protect learner agency and educational integrity: multiple modes of participation, avoidance of coerced personal disclosure, sensitivity to plural classroom dynamics, responsible digital mediation, and teachers who possess sufficient pedagogical and theological competence.

These principles can be translated into concrete but provisional classroom strategies. Guided reflective journaling may use four linked prompts: what happened; what meaning, question, or tension emerged; how the experience can be considered in relation to Scripture or Catholic teaching; and what response follows. A case-based moral discernment activity can ask learners to identify competing values, examine possible consequences, consult relevant Catholic moral or social teaching, and justify a reasoned response. Think-Pair-Share can be adapted so that peer discussion is followed by engagement with a scriptural, theological, or doctrinal resource rather than ending with peer opinion alone. Narrative catechesis may use biblical or saint narratives as interpretive resources for examining experience, while digital catechesis may combine asynchronous reflection with synchronous guided dialogue.

These examples should not be interpreted as intervention components already shown to be effective. They are design applications derived from the synthesis and require empirical evaluation in authentic Catholic religious-education settings.

Implications for Catholic Religious Education and Future Evaluation

The findings have implications for lesson design, teacher formation, and empirical research. For lesson design, the RCC provides a structure for connecting experience, reflection, dialogue, tradition, and response without treating any single component as sufficient. For teacher formation, the framework highlights that reflective catechesis requires both pedagogical facilitation and theological competence. Teachers must be able to invite learner voice and critical engagement while also selecting and interpreting appropriate scriptural, doctrinal, and moral resources.

The framework also clarifies that engagement and faith formation should not be treated as interchangeable outcomes. A learner may participate actively without necessarily demonstrating stronger moral discernment, religious understanding, faith appropriation, or changed action. Likewise, digital participation should not automatically be interpreted as reflective depth. Future evaluation of the RCC should therefore distinguish among outcomes such as classroom engagement, reflective

reasoning, religious understanding, moral discernment, faith-related identity, and responsive action.

This distinction is especially important because the evidence base represented in Table 2 is stronger for conceptual relationships, learner participation, and contextual description than for longitudinal or comparative claims about faith-formation outcomes. Future studies should therefore test individual stages of the RCC as well as the complete cycle, clarify which outcomes each stage is intended to support, and examine how implementation varies across age groups, school contexts, plural classrooms, and digital or hybrid settings.

Limitations of the Review

Several limitations should be considered when interpreting the synthesis and the proposed RCC. First, the corpus was deliberately weighted toward literature published from 2021 to August 2026 and toward Indonesian Catholic-education sources. This strengthens contextual relevance for Indonesian Catholic education but may underrepresent older scholarship and research published in languages other than Indonesian and English.

Second, the databases and search interfaces used may have introduced retrieval bias, particularly for theological or religious-education journals with limited indexing. The review therefore reflects the scholarly literature retrievable through the specified search strategy rather than an exhaustive representation of all catechetical scholarship.

Third, the included studies were heterogeneous in design, educational setting, population, and evidential purpose. Only a limited subset examined direct classroom interventions or longitudinal faith-formation outcomes. Consequently, the synthesis supports the conceptual and pedagogical plausibility of the RCC more strongly than claims about comparative or causal effectiveness.

Fourth, screening and extraction were conducted through a single-reviewer process, although decisions were logged and source metadata were rechecked against journal landing pages and DOI records. This procedure improved consistency but does not provide the independent verification obtainable through duplicate screening and extraction.

Finally, several included studies addressed adjacent contexts, including interreligious religious education, teacher education, parish catechesis, and higher education. They were included because they illuminate reflective, dialogical, or formational processes relevant to the review questions. However, transfer of these findings to Catholic school catechesis should be empirically examined rather than assumed.

CONCLUSIONS

This integrative review shows that the most defensible contribution of reflective learning to Catholic school catechesis is not a general claim that 'reflection improves faith', but the articulation of a structured pedagogical logic through which experience, reflection, dialogue, faith tradition, and response can be intentionally connected. Across the 36 included studies, reflective and related pedagogies repeatedly connected experience with interpretation, dialogue, tradition-bearing knowledge, and response, while also identifying teacher competence, pastoral sensitivity, doctrinal clarity, plural-context awareness, learner participation, and digital mediation as important conditions. The synthesis generated four non-exclusive themes: experience-based meaning-making, guided and dialogical reflection, faith-tradition integration,

and conditions and safeguards. Together, these themes indicate that reflective catechesis is most coherently understood as guided, dialogical, tradition-informed, and responsive rather than as unrestricted personal introspection. At the same time, the literature remains strongest in conceptual, qualitative, descriptive, and context-specific support and less developed in comparative intervention research and longitudinal assessment of formational outcomes.

The review's main contribution is the evidence-informed Reflective Catechesis Cycle (RCC): lived experience -> guided reflection -> dialogical discernment -> integration with Scripture, Catholic tradition, and doctrine -> response/action -> formative feedback and renewed experience. The cycle translates the thematic synthesis into an explicit and testable pedagogical sequence while recognising that enabling conditions and safeguards operate across all stages. This framework preserves learner experience without making it the sole authority for meaning, and it preserves Catholic identity without reducing catechesis to one-way doctrinal transmission. It therefore positions reflective catechesis as a process of ecclesially informed discernment in which learners are invited to interpret experience critically, encounter other perspectives, engage the resources of the Catholic faith tradition, and formulate a reasoned response.

Because the available evidence does not establish the causal effectiveness of the complete cycle, the RCC should be understood as a pedagogical framework for design, implementation, and empirical evaluation rather than as a validated intervention. Within this boundary, it offers a concrete basis for lesson design, teacher formation, and future research on reflective catechesis in Catholic schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Future research should empirically examine and progressively refine the RCC in authentic Catholic religious-education settings, using designs capable of distinguishing classroom engagement from more complex educational and formational outcomes. A first priority is implementation-focused research that examines whether the six stages can be enacted coherently across different learner groups and educational contexts. Design-based research could be used to develop and refine reflective catechesis modules through iterative cycles of implementation and evaluation. Quasi-experimental studies could compare structured RCC-informed reflective learning with appropriate comparison conditions, including more lecture-dominant forms of instruction, while qualitative classroom case studies could combine observation, teacher interviews, learner dialogue, and student reflection artefacts to examine how the process operates in practice.

Longitudinal research is particularly important because outcomes such as moral discernment, faith appropriation, religious identity, and responsive action may develop over longer periods and should not be inferred from immediate participation or satisfaction. Future studies should therefore distinguish among outcomes such as learner engagement, reflective reasoning, religious understanding, moral discernment, faith-related identity, and action rather than combining them under broad claims of 'deeper faith'.

Research should also examine implementation across different school levels, Catholic learners in public-school settings, culturally and religiously plural classrooms, and digital or hybrid catechetical environments. Comparative work

across these settings could clarify which components of the RCC are broadly transferable and which require contextual adaptation.

Particular attention should be given to teacher and catechist preparation, including the pedagogical ability to facilitate reflective questioning and dialogue and the theological competence required to engage Scripture, Catholic tradition, doctrine, and moral teaching appropriately. Ethical implementation should also remain central. Reflective catechesis should protect learner agency, avoid coerced disclosure of personal or spiritual experiences, provide multiple modes of participation, respect religious and cultural diversity, and use digital technologies purposefully and responsibly.

Finally, future studies should distinguish empirically measurable educational outcomes from normative theological aims. This distinction will allow subsequent research to evaluate what reflective catechesis demonstrably contributes to learning while remaining appropriately cautious about claims concerning personal faith or spiritual transformation. Such research would provide the evidence needed to determine whether, for whom, under what conditions, and through which mechanisms the RCC can contribute to Catholic school catechesis.

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Informed Consent

Not Applicable.

Ethical Approval

Not Applicable.

Data Availability

No new primary data were generated in this study. The evidence supporting the findings of this integrative review was derived from publicly available scholarly publications cited in the article. The extracted information used for study characterization and thematic synthesis is summarized within the tables and figures presented in the manuscript.

Author Contributions Statement

Name of Author	C	M	So	Va	Fo	I	R	D	O	E	Vi	Su	P	Fu
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Martina R. Marbun	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓			✓				
Perdo Binji	✓				✓					✓				
Fitra Zebua	✓	✓		✓	✓			✓	✓	✓				
Bety Novriani Zebua	✓				✓					✓				
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C : Conceptualization	I : Investigation	Vi : Visualization
M : Methodology	R : Resources	Su : Supervision
So : Software	D : Data Curation	P : Project administration
Va : Validation	O : Writing - Original Draft	Fu : Funding acquisition
Fo : Formal analysis	E : Writing - Review & Editing	

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