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## **Competences of an RE Teacher/Catechist in the Opinion of Schoolchildren**

### **Abstract**

An important issue addressed in the presented article is the competencies of the RE teacher/ catechist. Two main problems are posed, summarized in the following questions: What competencies should a teacher of religion/catechist have? What qualities,

according to secondary school pupils, should have an RE teacher?

An attempt to answer such questions was made on the basis of an analysis of the literature on the subject and the results of a nationwide quantitative and qualitative study of secondary school pupils in Poland.

The basic concepts of competence are discussed, groups of competencies relevant to the profession of religion teacher are characterized. Also presented are the results of research on the opinions of secondary school pupils regarding the person of a religion teacher/catechist.

### **Keywords**

competencies, teacher, educator, religion teacher, catechist, empirical research

The effective implementation of RE lessons at school – at different stages of education – depends upon many factors. These include the goals to be achieved, the content of education, teaching-learning methods, didactic means, forms of student activity, etc. The importance of the person of the RE teacher/catechist in this regard must also not be forgotten. Polish pastoral theologian M. Majewski stressed the importance of the RE teacher/catechist because the realization of the principles of religious education depends on him/her to a large extent. Religious education in schools in Poland has been regarded for a long time as catechesis, so the theory of religious education in schools (state and private) has been strongly dependent on catechetical theory. RE teachers tended to use the words catechesis and religious education interchangeably. The current situation of catechesis at school, draws most clearly the role of the catechist as a teacher, formally and officially similar to others, but at the same time quite different in his specific salvific, ecclesiastical mission. For a long time now, the list of requirements for the catechist or RE teacher has been very long and ambitious. Here, it is necessary to take into account both his substantive and methodical preparation, as well as his educational and personality predispositions. The catechetical and educational literature dealing with the issue of describing the qualities a good catechist-teacher should have, is very extensive.<sup>1</sup> Among

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<sup>1</sup> K. Misiaszek, A. Potocki, *Katecheta i katecheza w polskiej szkole*, Warszawa 1995, Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie; M. Snieżyński, *Efektywność kształcenia*, Kraków 1992, Wydział Katechezy Kurii Metropolitalnej w Krakowie; A. Janowski, *Uczeń w teatrze życia szkolnego*, Warszawa 1995, WSiP; K. Misiaszek, *Wyzwania współczesności dla formacji katechetów*, “Ateneum Kapłańskie” (1994) 513/514, pp. 203–214; A. Potocki, *Spoleczna formacja katechetów*, “Ateneum Kapłańskie” (1994) 513/514, pp. 232–241; J. Szpet, D. Jackowiak, *Lekcja religii szkolą*

the most frequently mentioned positive qualities that define a religion teacher/catechist are knowledge of the pupils, thorough knowledge, ability to pass on the knowledge possessed, pedagogical tact, creative attitude, good memory and eloquence. However, for the implementation of religious education at school in Poland, the most important thing is the teacher's attitude towards the truths of faith, bearing witness with his/her life, and the implementation of the salvific and ecclesiastical mission.

The reflection undertaken on the competence of the religion teacher/catechist, in the opinion of schoolchildren, aims to give reliable answers to two fundamental questions: 1) what competences should a teacher of religion/catechist possess?; 2) what qualities, according to the youth, should a teacher of religion have? An attempt to answer such questions will be possible thanks to the analysis of literature on the subject and the results of nationwide empirical research of school youth.<sup>2</sup>

## 1. Competences of a religion teacher/catechist

The rapidly changing conditions of life and faith in the modern world place particular demands on catechists. Their scope encompasses the entire personality of the catechist. They require comprehensive preparation and formation to meet the tasks and needs of contemporary catechesis. The present, like every epoch, gives rise to the necessity of a deeper reading and shaping of the identity of the catechist against the background of the requirements posed by the extraordinary mission of the preacher himself and the specific demands of the recipients of the Good News.<sup>3</sup>

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*wiary*, Poznań 1996, Płocki Instytut Wydawniczy; C. Sondej, *Osobowość katechety i jej wpływ na życie katechizowanych*, in: M. Śnieżyński (ed.), *Katecheta w szkole*, Kraków 1994, NWK, pp. 7–24; E. Osewska, *Kobieta katechetka*, in: J. Stala (ed.), *Dzisiejszy katecheta*, Kraków 2002, WAM, pp. 191–204; E. Osewska, *Rodzina i szkoła wobec współczesnych wyzwań wychowawczych*, Kraków 2020, UPJPII; A. Offmański, *Katecheta permanentnie kształtujący się*, in: J. Stala (ed.), *Dzisiejszy katecheta*, Kraków 2002, WAM, pp. 171–190; S. Kulpaczyński, *Retrospektywny obraz katechety*, "Seminare" (1997) 13, pp. 51–57.

<sup>2</sup> Scientific work subsidized from the state budget under the program of the Ministry of Education and Science called "Science for Society" project number Nds/537097/2022/2022 grant amount 780 538 PLN, total project value 780 538 PLN.

<sup>3</sup> H. Słotwińska, *Aktualny i idealny obraz katechety*, "Katecheta" (1998) 9, p. 69.

Bearing in mind the wide range and multidirectional nature of the demands placed on religion teachers, the following will indicate the most important competences they should possess.

The term competence, used in pedagogical sciences, has its Latin root *competentia*, which means responsibility, conformity, and *competere*, i.e., to agree, to suit, to compete (with someone).<sup>4</sup> According to the Contemporary Dictionary of the Polish Language, competence is “the ability and readiness to perform; a learned skill to do things well, developed abilities necessary to cope with problems.”<sup>5</sup> Such a definition of competence is not always sufficient, especially in relation to teachers, including religious teachers-catechists. E. Goźlińska and F. Szlosek define competence as “professional preparation, range of knowledge, skills and responsibility to perform specific tasks (...)”<sup>6</sup>

According to H. Kwiatkowska – it is “the subject’s ability and readiness to perform tasks at an expected level.”<sup>7</sup> This expected level indicates certain characteristics of a competent person, which include: possessing specific knowledge, professionalism, expertise, being a specialist in a given field. W. Okoń points out that teacher competence is expressed in the ability to self-realisation, as well as the ability to undertake in specific areas of pedagogical activity.<sup>8</sup> On the other hand, S. Dylak defines teacher competence as “a set of knowledge and skills, dispositions, as well as attitudes and values necessary for the effective implementation of the imposed tasks.”<sup>9</sup> W. and J. Strykowski and J. Pielachowski identify competences with teachers’ qualifications and their skills necessary to perform the teaching profession.<sup>10</sup> In the context of the

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<sup>4</sup> A. Mączkowska, *Kompetencje*, in: T. Pilch (ed.), *Encyklopedia pedagogiczna XXI wieku* T. 2, Warszawa 2003, Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak”, p. 693.

<sup>5</sup> B. Dunaj (ed.), *Słownik współczesny języka polskiego*, T. 1, Warszawa 1998, Reader’s Digest Przegląd, p. 455.

<sup>6</sup> E. Goźlińska, F. Szlosek, *Podręczny słownik nauczyciela kształcenia zawodowego*, Radom 1997, Instytut Technologii Eksploatacji, p. 52.

<sup>7</sup> H. Kwiatkowska, *Pedeutologia*, Warszawa 2008, Wydawnictwa Akademickie i Profesjonalne, p. 35.

<sup>8</sup> W. Okoń, *Nowy słownik pedagogiczny*, Warszawa 2007, Wydawnictwo Akademickie “Żak”, pp. 186–187.

<sup>9</sup> S. Dylak, *Wizualizacja w kształceniu nauczycieli*, Poznań 1995, Wydawnictwo Naukowe UAM, p. 37.

<sup>10</sup> W. Strykowski, J. Strykowska, J. Pielachowski, *Kompetencje nauczyciela szkoły współczesnej*, Poznań 2003, Wyd. eMPi2, p. 22.

topic of this study, M. Czerepaniak-Walczak's definition is worth highlighting. According to the author, the notion of competence includes specific properties of a person, expressed in demonstrating – at the level set by social standards – the ability to behave adequately, being aware of the need and consequences of such behaviour, and accepting responsibility for it.<sup>11</sup>

There are many classifications of teacher competences. W. Strykowski divides them into three basic groups: content-related – concerning the content of the taught subject; didactic and methodological – concerning the teacher's workshop; educational – concerning various ways of influencing students.<sup>12</sup>

From the definitional approaches to the concept of competence quoted above, it can be seen that they are multiple. A religion teacher/catechist can acquire the above competences through professional training, self-education and self-improvement, during ongoing formation and acquisition of professional experience in pedagogical practice. Continuing education and the striving for self-improvement, the workshop of work, leads to the broadening of one's own competences.

As already noted above, there are many divisions and classifications of teaching competences. Due to the specific nature of the profession of religion teacher, it is worth noting the following:

- Substantive competence;
- Didactic-methodical competence;
- Implementing competence;
- Moral competence;
- Psychological/personal competence;
- Communicative competence;
- Social competence.

The first three groups of competence refer mainly to practical solutions during the organization and implementation of religion lessons at school by the teacher/catechist, the others to the person of the religion teacher himself. As J. Stala emphasises, "The formation of religion teachers and catechists should take

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<sup>11</sup> M. Czerepaniak-Walczak, *Między dostosowaniem a zmianą. Elementy emancypacyjnej teorii edukacji*, Szczecin 1995, Wydawnictwo Naukowe US, pp. 135–137.

<sup>12</sup> W. Strykowski, J. Strykowska, J. Pielachowski, *Kompetencje nauczyciela szkoły współczesnej*, p. 23.

into account and harmoniously combine the basic elements: to be, to know, to be able.”<sup>13</sup>

Substantive competence refers to the teacher’s possession of knowledge in the field of religious instruction. What is important here is a broad knowledge of the content covered in religion lessons. It is the religion teacher’s multifaceted and in-depth orientation to the topics which he or she takes up during lessons.<sup>14</sup>

Didactic-methodical competence refers to the implementation of the educational process. They include both methodological preparation for teaching (setting goals, selection of methods, forms, didactic means, etc.) and permanent improvement of the didactic and educational workshop.<sup>15</sup> As J. Stala<sup>16</sup> emphasises, “The contemporary religion teacher and catechist should be characterised by a creative attitude to methods and didactic means, as postulated by contemporary didactics, because he or she cannot limit himself or herself to teaching religion lessons only by the administration method.”

Implementation competence is related to the ability to apply didactic and pedagogical knowledge in educational practice.<sup>17</sup> It concerns the ability to develop didactic plans, scenarios for religious education lessons, to formulate operational goals and educational requirements, to design and construct tools for assessing pupils’ knowledge, to evaluate lessons, and to use diagnostic tools to effectively achieve the set goals of religious education adapted to pupils’ abilities and to support their integral development.<sup>18</sup>

In addition to *praxis*-related competences, personal competences are very important in the work of RE teacher. They are related to the personality traits of the religion teacher and his or her own identity. They also determine to what extent he or she has a psychological predisposition for the teaching profession and displays the essential creative abilities necessary for this profession.

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<sup>13</sup> J. Stala, *Umiejętność działania nauczyciela religii i katechety. Kierunki formacji kształtowania umiejętności pedagogiczno-katechetycznych*, “Rocznik Teologii Katolickiej” (2011), Tom X, p. 162.

<sup>14</sup> J. Szpet, *Kompetentny katecheta*, in: *Katecheza – Rodzina, Parafia i Szkoła*, 2003, pp. 9–14.

<sup>15</sup> J. Szpet, *Kompetentny katecheta*, in: *Katecheza – Rodzina, Parafia i Szkoła*, 2003, pp. 11–12.

<sup>16</sup> J. Stala, *Umiejętność działania nauczyciela religii i katechety*, pp. 161–170.

<sup>17</sup> R. Kwaśnica, *Ku pytaniom o psychopedagogiczne kształcenie nauczycieli*, in: Z. Kwieciński, L. Witkowski (eds.), *Ku pedagogii pogranicza*, Toruń 1990, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Uniwersytetu Mikołaja Kopernika, p. 296.

<sup>18</sup> E. Alberich, *Katecheza dzisiaj. Podręcznik katechetyki fundamentalnej*, Warszawa 2003, Wydawnictwo Salezjańskie, p. 302.

Moral competence is considered to be the most important among them. This is expressed in an in-depth reflection of a moral nature, the ability to accurately assess each behaviour, knowledge and implementation of ethical duties towards pupils, their parents, the school, the community of the Church, which sends the religious teacher with the mission of teaching and educating in the faith.<sup>19</sup> Respect for the dignity of the pupil and the other actors involved in the educational process, as well as their subjective treatment, is also important here.

Another group is communication competences. Broadly speaking, these consist of the ability to dialogue with others. Their possession is evidenced not only by the ability to use language effectively and to adapt it to the pupils' perceptive capacities, but also, the ability to empathize, to listen actively and constructively, to understand and determine meaning and to express one's own opinions in a non-directive way.<sup>20</sup> Skills concerning both verbal and non-verbal communication, the culture of the religion teacher's language and respect for the rights of others, all important in this respect. In this way, the religion teacher "becomes a direct mediator who facilitates communication between persons and the mystery of God and between persons in the community."<sup>21</sup> He should be a man of definite principles and broad horizons. To have authority, having on the one hand the mission of a master, and on the other hand a friendly praise over the protégé.<sup>22</sup>

A manifestation of social competence is the proper understanding by the teacher of religion/catechist of the relations occurring between his/her own person and the attitude adopted during educational interactions, as well as the relations existing between the teaching and upbringing style preferred by the person of the teacher and the processes taking place in the school classroom.<sup>23</sup>

Summing up the above, it should be emphasized once again that a religion teacher/catechist should possess multifaceted competences. These refer both to the ability to implement the process of religious education, personal qualities and also to social competences.

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<sup>19</sup> *Dyrektorium Ogólne o Katechizacji* 156.

<sup>20</sup> A. Skreczko, *Współpraca z rodzicami a umiejętności komunikacji katechety*, in: *Katecheza – Rodzina, Parafia, Szkoła 2*, 2004, pp. 69–79.

<sup>21</sup> *Dyrektorium Ogólne o Katechizacji* 156.

<sup>22</sup> J. Stala, *Umiejętność działania nauczyciela religii i katechety*, p. 164.

<sup>23</sup> W. Strykowski, J. Strykowska, J. Pielachowski, *Kompetencje nauczyciela szkoły współczesnej*, p. 25–28.

## 2. Methodological elements of the conducted research

In order to elicit the opinions of secondary school students on the person of a religion teacher, selected results of the nationwide research under the project “Religious education of Polish youth – current state, opportunities and challenges” were analysed.

Both quantitative and qualitative research was conducted in December 2022 and January 2023. The empirical research covered secondary school students of general and technical secondary schools with a particular focus on first and fourth grades (final year of secondary school – in Polish *maturalny*).

Both qualitative and quantitative research took place in two stages. In the first stage, a pilot study was conducted, the main aim of which was to validate the research tools used in this research. The quantitative research used the diagnostic survey method, the survey technique, and the survey questionnaire was the research tool. The primary research was carried out throughout Poland, equally in all sixteen voivodships. The quantitative study involved 1,672 secondary school students; in accordance with the research assumptions, a minimum of 100 people were surveyed in each province in Poland.

The qualitative research, on the other hand, used the in-depth interview method; the research tool was an interview scenario. The interviews were conducted in four extreme dioceses (north – Gdansk diocese, south – Krakow diocese, east – Lublin diocese, west – Wroclaw diocese). The qualitative study involved 120 secondary school students, 30 from each diocese listed. As in the quantitative study, the adolescents surveyed attended the first and last years of secondary school. 63 females and 57 males took part in the survey, making up 53% and 47% of all respondents respectively. In contrast, the aspect of the ratio of the class which the young people attended ranked equally at 50% – half of the students were first graders and half were fourth graders.



### 3. Teacher/catechist competences in the light of research findings

#### a. Analysis of quantitative research results

Like the catechist-teacher, the catechist-educator should also possess certain qualities and be characterized by certain personality traits.<sup>24</sup> Among a number of qualities and those resulting from the catechist's function as an educator, the following should be included: love, empathy, respect, educative contact, openness, attentive listening, joy and cheerfulness. In the nationwide research on religious education of Polish youth, the survey questions included those on positive and negative qualities of a religion teacher.

The chart below shows the catalogue of positive qualities with which respondents used to describe their religion teachers. It is gratifying that as many as 1548 students positively evaluated their RE teachers/catechists (N=1548).

As the most important positive qualities of a religion teacher, the secondary school pupils mentioned, above all, the fact that he/she is kind (58.6%), engaged in class (28.1%) and friendly (25.2%). Other important positive characteristics were: open-mindedness 17.0%, understanding 13.1%, possessing a lot of knowledge 11.3%. Slightly lower percentages were received for qualities such as: helpful 9.8%, calm 4.4%, 'laid-back' 3.7%.

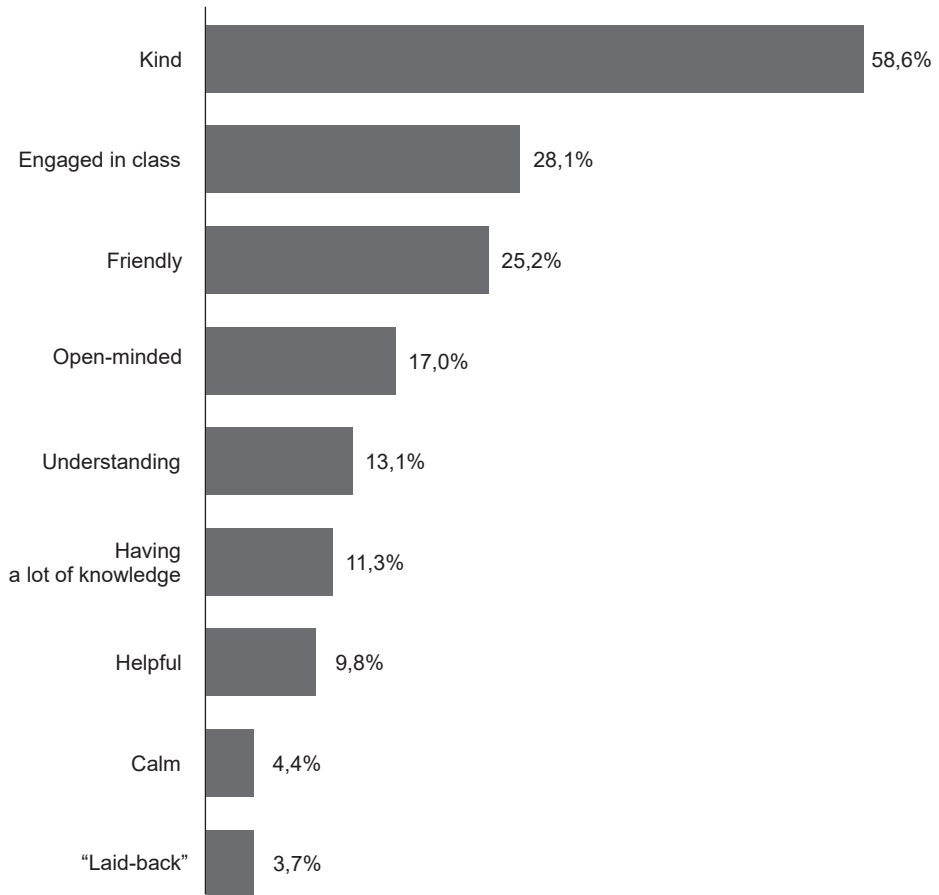
It should be noted that among the positive qualities of a religion teacher, respondents most often indicated his/her character and personality traits. Substantive competences were not so important for them, although a large group of respondents stressed their importance.

The catechist and the catechized are subjects between whom there is mutual contact and interaction. Catechesis is precisely what happens between them in purely human terms. The way in which it happens depends upon both parties. The catechized is the active party. The catechist, therefore, cannot introduce him/her to the world of Gospel values without his/her free will. At the same time, however, it is the catechist who inspires the contact, directs it and sets the

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<sup>24</sup> S. Dziekoński, *Podmiotowy charakter wychowawczego działania katechety*, in: J. Stala (ed.), *Dzisiejszy katecheta*, Kraków 2002, Wydawnictwo WAM, pp. 89–109; R. Pomianowski, *Ważność tożsamości katechety w interakcji katechetycznej*, in: M. Majewski (ed.), *Formacja katechetów*, Kraków 1990, Poligrafia Salezjańska, p. 40; J. Bagrowicz, *Formacja katechetów w świetle dokumentów Kościoła*, "Ateneum Kapłańskie" (1994), 513/514, pp. 215–226; C. M. Sondej, *Osobowość katechety w opinii uczniów*, in: M. Śnieżyński (ed.), *Pedagogika w katechezie*, Kraków 1998, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, pp. 21–48.

**Chart 1.** Positive characteristics of a religion teacher



Source: own study based on the results of the audit survey, November 2022 – January 2023, N=1548

tone, which can be very different.<sup>25</sup> In this respect what is important is to have communicative and social competence. “The catechist is essentially a mediator. He/she facilitates communication between the people and the mystery of God, between subjects amongst themselves, as well as with the community.” (General Directory For Catechesis #156)

At present, a very worrying and increasingly common phenomenon in catechesis is aggression directed towards the catechist. Lack of pedagogical talent and experience, as well as coercing behaviour desired by the catechist, most often foster disrespectful, ignorant and even aggressive attitudes among the catechized.<sup>26</sup>

Such catechetical interaction creates more harm than benefit in the long run. It can distance the catechized person from an encounter with God, rather than bringing him closer to Him. There is no doubt that the commonly perceived violence and intolerance in society has its origins also in violent behaviour towards children and adolescents.<sup>27</sup> Hence, it is important that the catechist, when confronted by youth aggression or contestation of the Church’s teachings, does not react too violently or hastily judge these attitudes. “An attitude that judges everything in advance, without a desire to understand the young, would be unedifying. The catechist is called to be on the journey together with the catechized, to seek together with them and to experience with them the joy of discovering the truth. He is in solidarity with their anxieties and often anxious rebellion, but not to push them towards doubt, but to be a guide towards hope.”<sup>28</sup>

Another extreme that is increasingly common in schools is an overly liberal attitude towards the pupil. This is also often the case in catechesis, according to a misconception of freedom. This position, which refers to unfettered freedom and freedom of choice on the part of the individual, assumes that the child should not be disturbed, should be given full space to choose, and that the child will develop properly on its own (pedagogical naturalism, anti-pedagogy). “There are positive elements in this approach, such as great respect for the human person and the renunciation of violence, but it does not take into account that

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<sup>25</sup> R. Pomianowski, *Katecheta – terapeuta duchowy*, in: M. Majewski (ed.), *Postawy katechetów*, Kraków 1996, Poligrafia Salezjańska, p. 65.

<sup>26</sup> H. Slotwińska, *Agresja i przemoc wśród młodzieży*, in: S. Kulpaczyński (ed.), *Katechizacja młodzieży*, ed. S. Kulpaczyński, Lublin 2003, pp. 307–333.

<sup>27</sup> R. Pomianowski, *Katecheta – terapeuta duchowy*, pp. 65.

<sup>28</sup> J. Bagrowicz, *Katecheta – chrześcijański wychowawca*, in: M. Majewski (ed.), *Postawy katechetów*, Kraków 1996, Poligrafia Salezjańska, pp. 57.

everything noble in human, including human's attitudes towards God, are not innate qualities, but acquired with the significant contribution of others. The developing individual must first come to know them. This cognition takes place with the help of other people, especially educators, who introduce their pupils to the world of general human values, and catechists to the world of religious and moral values.<sup>29</sup> There are certainly many reasons for this liberal approach. However, the ones most often cited by teachers themselves include a lack of faith on their part in the effectiveness of their educational impact, or too low a salary for their work, which does not motivate them to make such a great effort. This leaves us with the belief that one day these educators themselves will realize just how far they have missed their calling and responsibility to be a role model to their pupils through personal presentation and professional conduct.

For the sake of full objectivity, let us also look at the negative qualities that catechized students perceive in their RE teachers (N=252). The most common characteristics cited by the students are that he/she is: contemptuous (21.4%), has difficulty in conducting the lesson smoothly (18.4%) and brings up content during the lesson that is inappropriate from the students' point of view (18.4%), imposes his/her opinion (16.5%). In addition, for 12.1% of the pupils the catechist is 'closed', whereas for 10.7%, he is easily angered. Respondents also believe that the religion teacher: does not respect their opinion 9.2%, is too demanding 8.7% and not tolerant 6.8%.

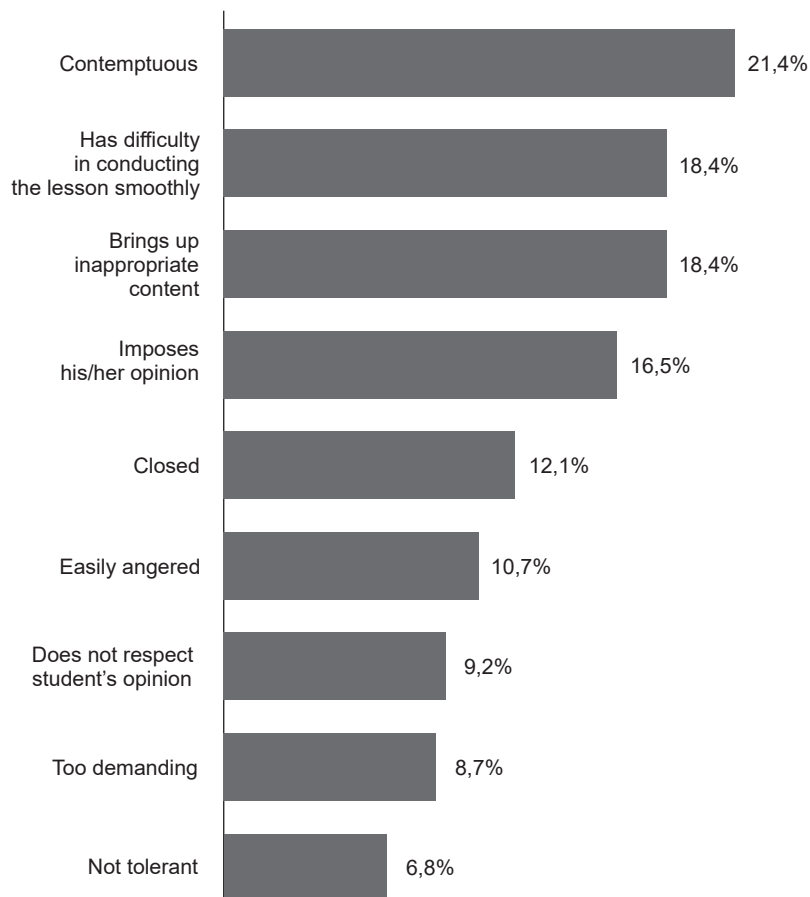
Considering the number of N=1548 positive opinions and N=252 negative opinions, this proportion clearly indicates that by far, the overwhelming number of catechized young people have a positive perception of their religion teacher. Nevertheless, this does not change the fact that emerging negative behaviour of catechists should be eliminated immediately. And while opinions such as, he or she tackles on inappropriate content or imposes his or her own opinion, may have no substantive justification, the other negative characteristics require permanent formation and supervision by school and Church authorities.

Overconfidence or authoritarianism on the part of the educator can be a detriment to establishing a bond and understanding. The catechist has an advantage over the pupil: he/she has theological knowledge, he can disregard the pupil's simple and naive questions, and by the same token, refer to the pupil with contempt and disregard. In such instances, there may be a desire to demonstrate his superiority, a temptation to ridicule the more unconcerned student. Such

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<sup>29</sup> R. Pomianowski, *Katecheta – terapeuta duchowy*, pp. 65.

**Chart 2.** Negative characteristics of a religion teacher



Source: own study based on the results of the audit survey, November 2022 – January 2023, N=252

an educator who speaks from the position of the sole holder of the truth, who must always and everywhere be right, will not be able to have an educational and effective impact. If he/she is not characterized by humility towards the truth, as well as humility towards the educator, he can easily spurn and discourage students.<sup>30</sup>

Marian Śnieżyński believes that, among other things, such elements as the emotional involvement of the catechist and the creation of an atmosphere of co-partnership in the classroom, can facilitate educational contact and thus contribute to its more effective impact.<sup>31</sup> According to this author, the catechist's emotional involvement in what he does is very important. The teacher's attitude to his subject and to the children often determines the pupils' attitude to learning. The more personal effort the catechist puts into the very course of catechesis, the more he/she lives what he is doing, the more easily he/she will encourage the pupils to work together. Also, creating an atmosphere of co-partnership in the classroom is good for the development of mutual relations. Neither an overly strict nor an overly liberal teacher will be a person who mobilizes his/her students to work.

Autocracy in teaching and in education creates a psychological barrier. The teacher is perceived as one who: instructs, delegates, requires, commands, prohibits, punishes. This type of behaviour on the part of the catechist/RE teacher can cause such reflexes in pupils as lying, aggression, rebellion or apathy. On the other hand, a liberal attitude, an attitude of ill-understood kindness and excessive submissiveness toward students, induces in them the conviction that both the catechist and the catechesis do not deserve to be taken seriously.

As the aforementioned M. Śnieżyński further states, "the most desirable style of work will be a democratic approach, which will manifest itself, among other things, in a dialogue between the teacher and the students, in giving instructions or orders, but after consulting the class. Partnership means co-determination, clarification of different positions and opinions, allowing students to voice their rationale and opinions. Partnership born in the course of democratic leadership is respect for students, it is noticing and understanding their problems, it is the teacher's contacts with students transferred also to breaks, as well

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<sup>30</sup> J. Bagrowicz, *Katecheta – chrześcijański wychowawca*, in: M. Majewski (ed.), *Postawy katechetów*, Kraków 1996, Poligrafia Salezjańska, pp. 59.

<sup>31</sup> M. Śnieżyński, *Nauczanie wychowujące*, Kraków 1995, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Papieskiej Akademii Teologicznej, pp. 97–98.

as extracurricular activities.”<sup>32</sup> Following some psychologists and educators, we can offer a number of typical personality traits that a teacher should have. In addition to those discussed above, he mentions a sense of responsibility and duty, the need for permanent improvement, love, courage, a sense of humour, vividness of imagination, the ability to express feelings, a tendency to social action, artistic abilities.

The presented list of qualities of an RE teacher/catechist is certainly not exhaustive. However, it allows us to see that the personality traits of a catechist, combined with substantive knowledge and appropriate psychological and pedagogical preparation, are an essential factor in religious education.

#### b. Analysis of the results of the qualitative research

Within the framework of the project “Religious Education of Polish youth – current state, opportunities and challenges”, young people participating in the qualitative research also had the opportunity to comment on the person of a religious education teacher-catechist. The interview scenario included questions that dealt with ways of implementing religious education in Poland.

Among the categories of statements concerning positive opinions about RE lessons in schools, we can distinguish those that refer to the person of the RE teacher. As the survey results indicate, the person and personality of the teacher plays an important role in the evaluation of religious lessons at school.

The data obtained during the interview shows that the passion of the religion teacher, his/her attitude of openness, lack of coercion directed at students, mainly influences the positive evaluation of RE lessons at school. This fact was emphasized by 51 out of 120 respondents, accounting for 42.5% of respondents from four dioceses, the highest number emanating from the Diocese of Lublin, although the number of statements between dioceses does not differ significantly from one another. Selected authentic statements from respondents read as follows: “For example, yesterday we had a lesson on Islam. There, the catechist talked about how Islam came into existence, how it all came into existence. Well, and all in all, he taught us a little there about the religion, what the holy books are. But at the same time, he talked about the differences between the Church, between our faith and the faith in Islam.” (IDI, M., DIEC. KRAK. LO, KL. I);

<sup>32</sup> M. Śnieżyński, *Nauczanie wychowujące*, pp. 98.

“I mean yes from my point of view, it’s nice when the teacher tells with such passion, it’s impossible in all. It’s a pity yes, but if the teacher just sort of loves to teach and knows how to pass on that knowledge, then you listen to it better right away.” (IDI,K, DIEC. LUB. LO, CL. I); “I rate religion lessons very well with me. As I said I’ve been learning new things and expressing my opinion, we talk, we just talk among ourselves, as well as with the priest about all the things that are going on in the world. There is no such topic that we don’t talk about.” (IDI, K, DIOC. KRAK. CL. I).

Among the statements made by the respondents, there were also some that contained negative opinions with respect to religious lessons at school. Some of the categories of statements were about the religion teacher catechist.

A negative evaluation of religion lessons can also be determined by the attitude of the religion teacher/catechist, such as: lack of openness to the views of students (N=24), low personal culture of the religion teacher (N=24) and low level of his commitment (N=19). While the opinion regarding openness to pupils’ views may seem debatable (all can be heard, not all should be agreed with), the teacher’s low personal culture and low degree of involvement in the lesson process should be of concern to both religion teachers and those responsible for their preparation for the profession of faith, as well as their spiritual formation.

Responses in the ‘other’ category, included the teacher imposing views, judging students by their attendance at Mass, lack of tolerance on the part of the teacher, too much material covered in catechesis, students arguing with the teacher, boring lessons. Some authentic sample statements from students are: “He says something for 10 minutes, for example, about Saint Maximilian Kolbe, well, and then says we have time to ourselves. Well, and we do what we want. There some people sit on their phones, some people talk.” (IDI, M. DIEC. KRAK. LO, CL. I); “We had remote religions, but we also had another priest at that time, who completely didn’t come to these lessons, treated them very lightly, practically didn’t attach any importance to them.” (IDI, M. DIEC. KRAK. LO, KL IV); “He didn’t tell stories in an interesting way, and more than once it was clear that he chose controversial topics on purpose in order to make someone disagree with him, but not to invite discussion, but just to baffle someone that way.” (IDI, K. DIOC. GDAŃ. TECH. CL. IV).



## 4. Summary

The analysis of the literature on the subject, as well as the results of quantitative and qualitative studies on the religious education of young people in Poland, clearly indicate the role played by the RE teacher/catechist in the process of teaching religion, upbringing in the faith and in formative activities directed towards his charges. Important in this regard is his/her wide range of competencies that allow him to effectively carry out the mission to which he has been called. Although many researchers emphasize the importance of the praxeological competencies of RE teachers, the analysis of the literature and the results of the studies conducted in Poland, indicate that the social competencies and personality traits of the RE teacher are also of great importance. In view of the above, it is necessary to re-examine all the findings on the permanent formation of RE teachers/catechists. After all, in addition to the strictly substantive and methodical preparation, should there not be an increased emphasis on the formation of his/her religious-moral attitudes, social-communicative competence and the development of pedagogical creativity? As a continuation of the search for RE teacher/catechist competences, a critical revision of the relationship between catechesis and religious education at school in Poland may be needed.

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