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Evaluation of Books on the Nature of Religious Education Science in Türkiye

Muhammet Mustafa Bayraktar ¹

Abstract

The science of religious education is defined as the search for a meaningful way for the scientific and pedagogical teaching of religion. In other words, the science of religious education is also defined as the process of individuals learning/teaching their religion. The science of religious education is related to both religion and education, but it is an independent branch of science. The Department of Religious Education was established in Türkiye in 1980. Since its establishment, some studies have been conducted in the department of religious education. Some of these studies are related to the nature of the science of religious education. In this context, the aim of our study is to evaluate the books that address the nature of the science of religious education in Türkiye. The books in question are important in terms of revealing the nature of the science of religious education, which is a young discipline. Because one of the most important tasks of a young branch of science is to reveal its own nature. In this context, the main question of our research is related to the science of religious education in Türkiye reaching the scientific foundations that will make it unique. In line with the said purpose, a content analysis of the books published in Türkiye on the nature of the science of religious education was conducted. In this way, the historical course of the scientification of religious education was tried to be determined. In addition, the tendency of books addressing the nature of religious education science was also tried to be determined. In our study, the qualitative research method was adopted. Accordingly, data were collected using the document analysis technique and analyzed using the content analysis technique.. A literature review was conducted regarding the nature of religious education science in Türkiye. In line with the method determined in the research, books addressing the nature of religious education science from the establishment of the Department of Religious Education in Türkiye to the present were determined. The books in question were read systematically.

Keywords: Religious Education, Department of Religious Education, Nature of Religious Education Science, History of Religious Education Science, Scientific Process of Religious Education.

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2025, 14 (2), 657-681 | Araştırma Makalesi

Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi Biliminin Mahiyetini Konu Alan Kitapların Değerlendirilmesi

Muhammet Mustafa Bayraktar¹

Öz

Din eğitimi bilimi, dinin bilimsel ve pedagojik öğretimi için anlamlı bir yol arayışı olarak tanımlanmaktadır. Başka bir ifadeyle din eğitimi bilimi, bireylerin dinlerini öğrenme/öğretme süreci olarak da tanımlanmaktadır. Din eğitimi bilimi hem din hem de eğitimle ilgili ancak müstakil bir bilim dalıdır. Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi Kürsüsü, 1980 yılında kurulmuştur. Kuruluşundan itibaren din eğitimi anabilim dalında bazı çalışmalar yapılmıştır. Bu çalışmalardan bir kısmı din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetiyle ilgilidir. Bu bağlamda çalışmamızın amacı Türkiye’de din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetini ele alan kitapların değerlendirilmesidir. Söz konusu kitaplar genç bir disiplin olan din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetini ortaya koyması bakımından önem taşımaktadır. Zira genç bir bilim dalının en önemli görevlerinden biri kendi mahiyetini ortaya koymasıdır. Bu çerçevede araştırmamızın temel sorusu, Türkiye’de din eğitimi biliminin, kendisini özgün kılacak bilimsel temellere ulaşmasıyla ilgilidir. Söz konusu amaç doğrultusunda, din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetine yönelik Türkiye’de yayınlanan kitapların içerik analizi yapılmıştır. Böylelikle din eğitiminin bilimselleşmesinin tarihi seyri belirlenmeye çalışılmıştır. Ayrıca din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetini ele alan kitapların eğilimleri de tespit edilmeye çalışılmıştır. Çalışmamızda nitel araştırma yöntemi benimsenmiş bu doğrultuda veriler döküman analizi tekniği ile toplanmış; içerik analizi tekniği ile değerlendirilmiştir. Türkiye’de din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetine ilişkin literatür taraması gerçekleştirilmiştir. Araştırmada belirlenen yöntem doğrultusunda, Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı’nın kuruluşundan günümüze kadar olan süreçte din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetini ele alan kitaplar tespit edilmiştir. Söz konusu kitaplar sistematik bir şekilde okunmuştur. Bu okumalar neticesinde din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetine ilişkin dört ana tema belirlenmiştir. Bu temalar tanım, amaç ve yöntem şeklinde kategorize edilmiştir. Belirlenen temalar çerçevesinde din eğitimi biliminin mahiyetini ele alan kitaplar yeniden okunmuş ve belirlenen kategorilere göre analiz edilmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Din Eğitimi, Din Eğitimi Anabilim Dalı, Din Eğitimi Biliminin Mahiyeti, Din Eğitimi Biliminin Tarihi, Din Eğitiminin Bilimselleşme Süreci

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Introduction

There are some concepts within the science of religious education that will help us make sense of it. While these concepts enrich the fields of study of the science of religious education, they also make it difficult to define the branch of science. In this respect, to say that the science of religious education is formed by the combination of the concepts of 'religion', 'education' and 'science' (Keyifli, 2013, 117) is, in a sense, to narrow down the science of religious education.

The process of the science of religious education emerging as an independent discipline in Türkiye is quite new in terms of the history of science (Aşıkoğlu, 1994, 85-86). Accordingly, it took time for an understanding to develop in Türkiye that religious education should be conducted based on scientific research. With the development of this understanding, the way was paved for the establishment of the department of religious education at Ankara University's Faculty of Theology for the first time. However, the science of religious education has not developed in our country. The reason for this is that the relationship between educational sciences and the science of religious education has not been easily established (Tosun, 2009, 293-303; Kızılabdullah, 2009, 305-314; Tosun, 2019, 109-128).

There are many other reasons that have affected the late establishment of religious education science in our country (Tosun, 2017, 37-43; Aydın, 2017, 196-289). These reasons have also delayed the study of the nature of religious education science (Akyürek, 2010, 117-135). In this sense, it can be said that doing studies on the nature of religious education science is a duty.

Essentially, the science of religious education has many duties. The first of these duties is to determine the definition, subject, duties, method, basic principles on which it is based, and the principles in its relationship with other fields. Therefore, the second duty of the science of religious education is to conduct studies on its own nature (Tosun, 2017, 72-75; Aydın, 2017, 290-292). After the establishment of the science of religious education as a discipline, many studies have been conducted in our country for this purpose. The increase in studies addressing the theoretical and conceptual framework of the science of religious education has made it necessary to conduct evaluation studies on these studies. Indeed, according to Kızılabdullah and Bayraktar, the inadequacy of research on the nature of the science of religious education causes the studies on the science of religious education to lack unity, integrity, and philosophy (Kızılabdullah, 2009, 306; Bayraktar, 2020, 436).

1. Subject and Problem

The fact that the science of religious education is quite new compared to the branches of science in theology faculties increases the discussions on the scientific efforts and nature of religious education. In this context, one of the duties of the science of religious education is to evaluate and develop the studies carried out towards the scientification of the field. In line with this purpose, our study aims to analyze the contents of the books that deal with the scientific nature of religious education. In this context, the problem of our research is what the content characteristics of the books related to the nature of the science of religious education are.

The sub-problems of the study can be listed as follows: How is the science of religious education defined in books that deal with the nature of the science of religious education

in Türkiye? How is the purpose of the science of religious education explained in books that deal with the nature of the science of religious education in Türkiye? How is the method of the science of religious education explained in books that deal with the nature of the science of religious education in Türkiye? What topics are covered in books that deal with the nature of the science of religious education in Türkiye?

2. Related Studies

When the literature on religious education is examined, it is understood that the nature or development process of religious education in Türkiye is addressed in different dimensions. For example, Aşıkoğlu (Aşıkoğlu, 1994, 85-92) focused on the emergence and development of religious education as an independent scientific discipline in Türkiye. He also provided information about the meetings that provided scientific contributions to religious education throughout the historical process.

Göçeri examined whether there is a difference between the concepts of religious education and religious education in his study (Göçeri, 2002, 49-79). Tosun, on the other hand, examined the establishment of the Department of Religious Education in Türkiye, its development, and the theoretical and practical contributions to its field as a scientific discipline in his study (Tosun, 2009, 293-303). In addition, the information sources, methodology, and terminology of religious education science were emphasized. In addition, the master's and doctoral studies in the field of religious education were categorized according to their subject areas. Thus, inferences were made regarding the study areas of religious education science.

In her study (Kızılabdullah, 2009, 305-314), She generally evaluated the studies conducted in the field of religious education from the establishment of theology faculties to 2009. He particularly examined the postgraduate and doctoral studies conducted in the field of religious education in theology faculties after 1980. In his study (Osmanoğlu, 2016, 157-205), Osmanoğlu made an assessment of the use of the concepts of 'religious education', 'religious instruction', and 'religious teaching' in the education literature of the Republican period. In this context, he examined the relevant concepts in the works of Ziya Gökalp, Osman Ergin, İsmail Hakkı Baltacıoğlu, Nurettin Topçu, A. Fuad Başgil, Erol Güngör, Osman Turhan and Semiha Ayverdi.

Gündüz's study (Gündüz, 2020, 155-181) focused on the definitions of the concept of religious education used in country. He made evaluations on how religious education can be understood. In this direction, the concepts of Islamic education, religious education and religious teaching, which are related to the concept of religious education, were discussed. According to the author, the three concepts here obscure the meaning of the concept of religious education and cause confusion in the field. In this direction, the author sought to answer the question of what religious education is. Bayraktar analyzed the definitions made for religious education in his study (Bayraktar, 2020, 433-456) and proposed a new definition. Bayraktar's study (Bayraktar, 2022, 23-30) examined the subjects of doctoral theses prepared in the field of religious education and made evaluations on the study areas of religious education science.

Although some studies in the literature have discussed the definitions and scope of the science of religious education, there is still a need for more systematic and integrative analyses that address its theoretical framework. For instance, Gümüş's work titled *A Critique of Religious Pedagogy and the Possibility of Religious Education as a Practical*

Metaphysics proposes redefining religious education through the lens of subjectivity and metaphysical inquiry, offering an ontological foundation beyond pedagogical limitations. Similarly, in *On the Subject, Purpose, and Method of Religious Education as a Practical Metaphysics*, Gümüş presents a theoretical construction that reconsiders the foundational categories of religious education by integrating Foucault's concept of subjectification and Platonic metaphysics. These contributions, although philosophically grounded, support the need for further comprehensive studies, such as the present research, that aim to analyze the science of religious education within a broader conceptual and disciplinary framework.

In light of these discussions, it becomes evident that while valuable theoretical contributions exist, a holistic and systematic examination of the science of religious education in terms of its definition, purpose, method, and areas of study remains limited. Accordingly, this study aims to fill this gap by conducting a content analysis of selected foundational works in the field. The methodological framework adopted for this purpose is presented below.

3. Method

In study, the qualitative research method was adopted; accordingly, data were collected using the document analysis technique and evaluated using the content analysis technique (Bilgin, 2014, 1-14; Miles & Huberman, 2016, 1). Before starting to collect data, 'categorical analysis' was conducted. Categorical analysis refers to first dividing the message into units and then grouping these units into categories according to certain criteria (Bilgin, 2014, 19). In order to classify the data meaningfully, a 'code list' was created. Thematic weight classification was applied to define the science of religious education, including its purpose, methodology, and subject of study. While creating the code list, attention was paid to ensure that the categories were homogeneous, holistic, distinctive, appropriate for the purpose, meaningful and objective. After this stage, the 'categorization' stage was passed, which allowed the message elements to be distinguished one by one, defined according to codes and themes and then distributed to certain groups. Thus, both a 'closed' and 'open' approach was adopted in terms of content analysis.

The reliability of content analysis techniques largely depends on the coding process. This is related to the reliability of the coders and the coding categories (Bilgin, 2014, 19). In order to ensure the reliability of the coder, the relevant texts were examined separately by two researchers who are experts in the field. The codes were then compared and re-evaluated. In order to ensure the reliability of the categories, care was taken to ensure that they were as clear and distinct as possible. This evaluation provided the opportunity to determine the codes at an adequate level and to review the coding accuracy.

In our research, books that address the nature of religious education in Türkiye were subjected to content analysis. For this purpose, a search was conducted in the 'ULAKBİM' Social Sciences Database, the Higher Education Institution National Thesis Center Database, the Islamic Research Center Theology Articles Database, and the Religious Education Science literature in November and December 2023. In this context, nine scientific books in Turkish written by religious education scholars on the nature of religious education were included in the research. The books analyzed in this article are independent scholarly works that directly examine the nature of the discipline of

religious education in Türkiye and contribute to the construction of its fundamental conceptual and epistemological framework. Particular attention has been given to selecting works that play a central role in defining religious education as an independent academic discipline, establishing its methodological foundations, and delineating its epistemological boundaries.

Works that do not explicitly focus on the nature of religious education as a discipline were excluded from the study. This includes resources that primarily function as textbooks or teaching materials without offering a conceptual or methodological discussion on the scientific foundations of the field. Edited volumes and multi-authored compilations were also omitted due to their instructional structure and lack of a coherent, author-driven theoretical perspective. While it is acknowledged that the selected works also serve as introductory literature to some extent, they were included on the basis that they explicitly aim to define, systematize, and critically reflect on the discipline of religious education through theoretical and methodological lenses. This distinction was essential to ensure that the study focuses on works that contribute to the disciplinary identity of religious education rather than solely offering practical or curriculum-oriented content.

Publication types other than books, such as articles, book chapters, and notifications, were excluded from the scope of the research since they would exceed the quantitative limits of this article. With the created ‘publication classification form’, the studies were examined and listed in terms of various features such as types, authors, publication names, publishing houses, publication places, publication years and publication languages, page numbers, and section titles. At this point, the consistency of the coding was re-checked to ensure validity and reliability. In addition, frequency analysis, one of the quantitative analysis techniques, was also conducted in the research and the findings were interpreted with descriptive analysis.

In our research, the ‘contingency analysis’ technique was used to examine the relationships between the elements in the messages. This analysis aims to determine not how many times something is seen, but what is seen together with what, and in what relationship structure various message elements are found together (Bilgin, 2014, 22).

4. Findings and Interpretation

Under this heading, factual information regarding the books discussed in the research and findings based on the obtained data are included.

4.1. Factual Information

Factual information and research codes regarding the books included in the study are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Factual Information and Codes of Publications

No	Analysis Code	Author Name	Publication Name
1	A	H. Mahmut Çamdibi	Din Eğitime Giriş
2	B	Bayraktar Bayraklı	İslâm’da Eğitim Batı Eğitim Sistemleriyle Mukayeseli
3	C	Selahattin Parlador	Din Eğitimi Bilimine Giriş
4	D	Suat Cebeci	Din Eğitimi Bilimi ve Türkiye’de Din Eğitimi
5	E	Beyza Bilgin	Eğitim Bilimi ve Din Eğitimi
6	F	Cemal Tosun	Din Eğitimi Bilimine Giriş

7	G	Abbas Çelik	Din Eğitimi
8	H	M. Şevki Aydın	Din Eğitimi Bilimi
9	I	Nurullah Altaş	Din Eğitimi

Table 1 presents 9 books focusing on the nature of the discipline of religious education in Turkey, along with the names of the authors and titles of the works.

When the factual status of the publications is examined, it is seen that the Table presents some remarkable findings. When the authors are examined, it is understood that especially the first-generation academics have written books on the nature of the science of religious education. Because the science of religious education is a young discipline, it encountered two fundamental problems at the beginning of its establishment." The first is the interdisciplinary position of the science of religious education (Akyürek, 2010, 117-135; Okumuşlar & Genç, 2012, 53-79; Oruç & Yıldız, 2019, 235-246) and the second is whether the science of religious education has legitimacy (Tosun, 2009, 300). In this sense, the basic problem of the science of religious education since its establishment has been to reveal the nature of this branch of science. In this context, it can be said that the first generation of religious education scholars took it as their duty to write books that reveal the nature of the field.

Among the authors in Table 1 are important figures who shaped the science of religious education in Türkiye. The academic backgrounds of these authors and the themes they address in their works are indicators of efforts to establish the foundation of the science of religious education as a young discipline.

The titles of the books provide strong clues about how the authors define the discipline of religious education and the key issues they address. In this context, some of the selected works can be characterized as "general introductory studies." For instance, *Introduction to Religious Education* by H. Mahmut Çamdibi and *Introduction to the Science of Religious Education* by Selahattin Parladr are primarily designed to introduce the field to readers—particularly undergraduate students—by outlining its basic concepts and historical development. While the primary purpose of such introductory books is not to conduct an in-depth theoretical analysis, these works were included in the study because they attempt to conceptualize the discipline to a certain extent and present essential foundational discussions. However, it is acknowledged that their theoretical contributions remain relatively limited due to their instructional nature.

In contrast, some of the other works in Table 1 may be classified as "theoretical and comparative studies." For example, *Eğitimde İslam: Batı Eğitim Sistemleriyle Karşılaştırma* (*Education in Islam: Comparison with Western Educational Systems*) by Bayraktar Bayraklı analyzes both the Islamic and modern pedagogical foundations of the discipline from a comparative perspective. Additionally, some books exhibit distinct "scientific and pedagogical approaches." Works such as *Science of Religious Education and Religious Education in Türkiye* by Suat Cebeci (Cebeci, 1998, 25) and *Science of Education and Religious Education* by Beyza Bilgin (1998, 28) offer critical contributions to establishing a theoretical framework for the field and advancing scientific methodology within religious education.

Table 1 also indirectly reflects the themes on which the books focus on the nature of religious education. It is seen that the first generation of works generally focus on basic definitions, purposes and methods. This situation is compatible with the identity search of the discipline during its founding phase. While some works treat religious education only as a means of conveying religious knowledge, others also include the pedagogical

and social aspects of this branch of science. The works of Suat Cebeci (Cebeci, 1998, 28) and Cemal Tosun in particular emphasize methodological searches aimed at establishing religious education on scientific foundations. When the factual information in Table 1 is analyzed beyond its descriptive content, some critical patterns regarding the development of the discipline emerge. The fact that most of the authors belong to the first generation of scholars in the field suggests a strong foundational phase in which the discipline was shaped by pioneering academics. This initial phase was marked by efforts to legitimize religious education as an independent scientific discipline and to establish its basic conceptual framework. However, the concentration of authors from this specific generational cohort also highlights a potential limitation in terms of intellectual diversity and generational renewal within the field. The absence of second- or third-generation scholars in shaping the foundational literature signals a gap in the continuity of academic contributions, which might have led to the partial stagnation of theoretical discussions in recent years.

Another significant observation is that the book titles largely reflect the search for disciplinary identity and a tendency to frame religious education science either in an introductory or comparative manner. This duality points to a broader epistemological tension between traditional theological perspectives and modern pedagogical approaches. For instance, while works such as “Introduction to Religious Education” or “Islamic Education Compared with Western Systems” emphasize foundational and comparative frameworks, they also reflect differing ideological orientations. Some works present religious education predominantly as a religious or spiritual activity aligned with Islamic values, while others attempt to establish it as a scientific and pedagogical field by employing modern educational concepts and methodologies.

This divergence in the foundational texts mirrors the ongoing struggle of the discipline to balance its theological roots with academic and scientific rigor. The existence of these two paradigms—value-centered and pedagogy-centered—reveals the epistemological fragmentation of religious education science in Türkiye. While this fragmentation can be viewed as a sign of intellectual richness and multidimensionality, it also complicates the process of standardizing the discipline’s theoretical and methodological core. The fact that several authors emphasized pedagogical terminology while others leaned on theological narratives indicates that the discipline has yet to fully reconcile these two approaches. This unresolved tension has implications for the methodological consistency, curricular design, and academic legitimacy of religious education science in Türkiye today. Additionally, it calls for a more integrative approach in future studies to bridge the divide between the theological and scientific domains of the discipline. The distribution of publications addressing the nature of religious education by year is presented in the table below.

Table 2: Distribution of Publications by Year

No	Years	F	%
1	1989	2	20
2	1996	2	20
3	1998	1	12
4	2001	1	12
5	2013	1	12
6	2017	1	12
7	2022	1	12
Total		9	100

When looking at Table 2, the distribution of publications by year is seen. Here, it is striking that the subject was included in independent studies long after the establishment of religious education science as a department. This shows that independent studies on the nature of the science of religious education as an academic discipline could not be conducted in a timely manner." It is seen that the books in question are listed according to the years 1989, 1996, 1998, 2001, 2013, 2017 and 2022. Can the decreases in publications seen towards the present day be interpreted as the subject reaching a certain saturation? When the studies addressing the problems of the science of religious education in Türkiye (Cebeci, 2002, 99-144; Köylü, 2018, 15-48) are taken into consideration, it is understood that it is unfortunately difficult to say this.

This period can be considered as a time when the science of religious education was searching for an identity. However, this identity formation raises a deeper question: Did the science of religious education emerge out of an intrinsic scientific necessity, or was it primarily a disciplinary reflection of its institutionalization within the university system? If the latter is true, then the scientific legitimacy of the field might be seen as deriving more from administrative structures than from epistemological foundations. This tension highlights the importance of critically examining whether the institutional recognition of the discipline was accompanied by a parallel theoretical development. Academicians made efforts to position the discipline as an independent branch of science. One publication was made in 1998 and 2001. These years represent a period when the science of religious education was recognized as a discipline and academic production evolved in different directions. Interdisciplinary approaches and methodological diversity came to the fore in the works of this period. In particular, the relationship between the science of religious education and fields such as pedagogy, psychology and sociology was addressed in more depth. There was one publication in 2013, 2017 and 2022. This period gives the impression that the science of religious education has reached a saturation point in the literature. However, the decrease in publications does not indicate that the literature is exhausted, but that research in the field is focused on certain themes. Despite the thematic maturation of the discipline, the fundamental problems of religious education science (such as definition, method and field unity) have not been solved.

Table 2 shows that the scientific production process of the science of religious education has an intermittent structure. The reasons for this situation can be summarized as follows: Since the science of religious education is an interdisciplinary field located between educational sciences and theology, it faces both epistemological and methodological uncertainties. The academic development of religious education science has been slowed down due to lack of institutional support and the small number of academics specialized in this field.

The table shows that studies on religious education have decreased in recent years. This trend reveals several fundamental issues. Although the literature frequently addresses core themes such as the definition, purpose, and method of the discipline, the epistemological boundaries and conceptual coherence of the field remain ambiguous. The development of religious education science should not be confined to theoretical inquiry alone; it must also be supported by applied and comparative studies. However, in a context where basic concepts and disciplinary definitions are still under debate, applied research may face significant methodological and interpretive challenges—particularly in ensuring conceptual clarity, research validity, and consistency in the use of

terminology. Therefore, strengthening the theoretical infrastructure of the discipline is a necessary prerequisite for conducting meaningful field research.

In this regard, thematic expansion, international engagement, and the development of interdisciplinary perspectives are essential. For instance, examining how religious education can address current social issues—such as value erosion, generational alienation, and ethical indifference—would not only enhance the relevance of the field but also help position it as a socially responsive discipline. Such inquiries can contribute to methodological diversification by encouraging research that is both contextually grounded and theoretically informed. Moreover, ensuring methodological unity and fostering dialogue with international literature are indispensable steps toward consolidating the academic identity of religious education science in Türkiye.*

When the data presented in Table 2 is examined beyond its descriptive framework, certain critical trends become apparent regarding the temporal development of religious education science in Türkiye. The distribution of publications over time reveals that a significant concentration of works emerged during the late 1980s and 1990s, which coincides with the early decades following the formal establishment of the Department of Religious Education. This surge in publications can be interpreted as a foundational response to the urgent need for legitimizing and structuring the discipline within the academic and theological landscape of Türkiye. The early publications focus on constructing the identity and justifying the existence of religious education as an independent field of inquiry, reflecting the formative concerns of first-generation scholars.

However, the sharp decline in the number of publications in the subsequent decades suggests a noticeable interruption in the systematic production of foundational literature. The intermittent nature of these publications points to a structural issue within the field: despite its early momentum, religious education science appears to have encountered stagnation or a shift of focus away from addressing its own disciplinary identity. While this could be partially attributed to an impression of "conceptual saturation," closer analysis suggests that the decline might stem from unresolved epistemological debates and the absence of an interdisciplinary consensus regarding the discipline's theoretical and methodological frameworks.

Furthermore, the relatively low output in the 2010s and 2020s underscores a broader issue regarding generational transitions in scholarship. It seems that subsequent generations of scholars have increasingly focused on specialized or applied research areas, potentially overlooking the need for critical meta-analyses or theoretical reconstructions of the field's foundations. This situation is also symptomatic of an academic culture in which the reproduction of foundational literature has not been prioritized or institutionally encouraged. Consequently, the discipline risks losing coherence and missing the opportunity to integrate evolving educational paradigms and global academic discussions into its framework.

The non-linear pattern of publication suggests that religious education science in Türkiye has yet to establish a sustained tradition of systematically re-examining its disciplinary boundaries and methodologies across successive generations. This irregularity in scholarly production highlights the necessity for renewed academic attention to the discipline's conceptual and methodological self-definition, especially in light of global

trends that increasingly emphasize interdisciplinary and applied research in the social sciences.

4.2. Evaluation of Books

The data obtained under this heading are presented in a tabular form. First of all, information regarding the definition of religious education science is evaluated.

Table 3: Definition of Religious Education Science

Theme Books	Definition
A	-
B	Islamic education is to draw the path that a person should follow in his life theoretically, apply it to life, and show how to act.
C	It is a branch of science that examines the scientific principles of religious education.
D	Religious education is a discipline that seeks answers to the questions of "who should we teach what to, how and why?" and tries to develop goals, principles, methods and theories on this subject (...) Islamic education is the solid foundation on which the Muslim personality is formed, who is devoted to the principles of religion and who is capable of presenting the true religion to the service of all humanity, always and everywhere, in order to lead humanity from deviation to guidance and from darkness to light.
E	It is a field of study that identifies, evaluates and educates about problems related to human existence.
F	It is a scientific discipline that attempts to describe, explain and control the process of an individual's attempts to bring about a desired change in their religious behavior through their own experiences, using scientific methods in the past, present and future.
G	It is a branch of science that seeks answers to questions such as where, by whom, for whom, on what subjects, and how religious education activities will be conducted.
H	It is a discipline that studies the reality of religious education. It is a discipline that tries to identify, explain, and produce information on controlling and managing the process of intentionally creating desired behavioral changes in an individual regarding religion through their own experiences with a scientific approach.
I	It is a scientific discipline that tries to describe, explain and manage the past, present and future of religious education using scientific methods.

Table 3 lists the definitions of religious education in books on the nature of religious education in Türkiye. Each book provides important information about the definition, content and function of this branch of science. These definitions reveal the differences in the epistemological foundations and methodological approaches of religious education. When Table 3 is examined, it is seen that there are remarkable situations regarding the definition of religious education. It is understood that especially in the first books written after the establishment of the department (B, C, D, E, G), religious education activities are expressed as the definition of religious education. In this context, it is understood that there is a general uncertainty and disagreement in the definitions. As we approach the present day, it is understood that the definitions made in the books (F, H, I) are adapted to Ertürk's definition of education (Ertürk, 1979). It can be thought that these definitions were made with the concern that religious education science would be accepted as an independent discipline in the historical context.

In the definitions in the books dealing with the nature of the science of religious education, it is seen that religious education activities are described, their aims are stated, their methods are explained and research topics are pointed out. On the other hand, it is understood that in the definitions made, the concepts of Islamic education, Islamic education, religious education or religious teaching are sometimes used interchangeably. It is possible to see this in the first studies conducted in the field (B, C, E).

In the definitions in the books dealing with the nature of the science of religious education, it has been determined that there are two approaches to religious education activities. One is the definitions that attribute value to religious education activities (B, D, E, G) and the other is the definitions that only describe the reality of religious education without attaching value to it (C, F, H, I). When looked at from another perspective, it is seen that the definition of the science of religious education is explained with the concepts of Islamic education or Islamic education according to the transfer-centered and traditionalist approaches in our country (B, D). It is also understood that a connection with the sacred is established in these definitions.

The definitions in Table 3 indicate that there is a lack of full consensus regarding the nature of the science of religious education, with varying emphases placed on theological, pedagogical, and interdisciplinary dimensions. Most definitions state that the science of religious education is related to the religious development of individuals. Definitions that emphasize scientific methods and pedagogical principles are noteworthy. While some definitions adopt a more theological perspective, others have a pedagogical or scientific perspective. It is seen that the concepts of Islamic education, religious education and religious teaching are sometimes used interchangeably. The theoretical framework of the discipline has not been fully clarified. There is an epistemological and methodological ambiguity in the definitions. It is possible to make the most ideal definition by looking at the definitions in Table 3 as follows: "The science of religious education is an interdisciplinary branch of science that enables individuals and societies to understand, develop and apply their religious knowledge, values and attitudes through individual experiences and pedagogical processes; and that develops theories, methods and principles to describe, explain and manage these processes with scientific methods."

The data presented in Table 3 not only reflects how various scholars have defined the science of religious education but also uncovers significant conceptual divergences that shape the epistemological structure of the discipline. A closer examination reveals two dominant paradigms: a theological-value-oriented approach and a pedagogical-scientific approach. Definitions adhering to the former tend to frame religious education science as an extension of Islamic education, often emphasizing religious, moral, and spiritual aims aligned with Islamic theology. For example, several works equate religious education science with Islamic education itself or embed it within a framework of fostering religiosity, piety, and moral behavior. This theological framing suggests that the science of religious education is perceived not merely as an academic field but also as a tool for reinforcing religious identity and values.

On the other hand, definitions aligned with the pedagogical-scientific paradigm depict religious education science as a discipline that focuses on developing theoretical models, empirical studies, and educational methodologies. These definitions emphasize scientific methods, behavioral change processes, and educational practices grounded in broader pedagogical theories. The presence of these two divergent definitional trends reveals an epistemological duality at the core of religious education science in Türkiye: one that oscillates between its theological heritage and the requirements of modern scientific inquiry.

The implications of this divergence are profound. The lack of a unified definition complicates the development of a common research language and hinders the formation of a coherent curriculum in higher education institutions. While the theological approach

reinforces the discipline's normative and faith-based dimensions, it may limit its integration with international academic standards and interdisciplinary collaborations. Conversely, the pedagogical-scientific approach aligns more closely with contemporary social science methodologies but risks being perceived as disconnected from the theological essence that many scholars deem indispensable for the field.

The coexistence of these paradigms demonstrates that the science of religious education in Türkiye is still in a state of conceptual negotiation, struggling to reconcile its religious identity with academic expectations. This fragmentation suggests that the discipline has not yet fully achieved the epistemological and methodological cohesion necessary to position itself firmly within either the social sciences or theological studies. Therefore, future scholarship must address this definitional ambiguity and aim to synthesize these approaches, potentially through an interdisciplinary framework that respects the theological roots of the field while adopting pedagogical rigor and scientific methodologies. So how is the purpose of the science of religious education expressed in the books in question, as emphasized in the definitions?

Table 4: The Purpose of Religious Education Science

Theme Books	Purpose
A	-
B	Islam prepares people to be servants worthy of Allah. His education also aims at this. Therefore, Islamic education means preparation and training. It is to keep a person on the right path from birth to death and to enable him to walk on that path without being influenced by anyone.
C	One of the duties of the Science of Religious Education is to identify the educational material found scattered in many branches of science in Islamic literature, and to evaluate this material by organizing it in terms of the plan, curriculum and results of today's pedagogy.
D	<p>The science of religious education combines the information from religion with the data from the science of education and conducts studies that will contribute to the development of people as individuals in accordance with the will of Allah. It investigates and examines the theoretical and practical problems related to religious understanding and life that they may encounter throughout their lives, and tries to produce solutions and develop theories for the future. It is to help children to be raised in accordance with the Divine Will and to help people develop behaviors in accordance with the Divine Will within the integrity of life.</p> <p>The aims of Islamic education:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Revealing the hidden powers in man 2. Meeting daily needs 3. Raising good people 4. Keeping people on the right track 5. Leading from darkness to light 6. Eliminating imitation 7. Combining words and actions 8. Universal morality.
E	To call for the meaning of life. To call for the person to think about himself. To call for the idea of God. To systematize religions, sects and interpretations and make them suitable for teaching. To determine the principles and methods of religious education. To use other sciences and techniques. To work on religious education activities in schools. To ensure the integrity of theory and practice in religious education. To cooperate between sciences.
F	<p>To study the nature of the Science of Religious Education.</p> <p>To establish the foundation of widespread and formal religious education.</p> <p>To establish a theoretical basis for the entire process starting from program development in religious education.</p> <p>To think about the elements of the process of religious education.</p> <p>To determine the process that religious education has gone through from its beginning to the present day.</p> <p>To investigate the subjects and contents in order to reach the goals determined by the Department of Religious Education.</p> <p>To investigate the possibilities and problems of widespread religious education.</p>
G	Its individual purpose: To teach the principles and principles of a religion to a person, to make

	them feel it within themselves and to act accordingly and to make them a religious person. Its social purpose: 1. To help the individual socialize. 2. To protect religion from all kinds of superstitions. 3. To train the personnel needed to perform religious services.
H	<p>To guide those who carry out religious education/teaching activities in making religion available for teaching at all levels.</p> <p>The aim is to clearly introduce the process of religious education activities with all its dimensions through scientific research, to access laws on this subject, to present systematic and consistent interpretations by making analyses, and to guide religious educators in the management/control of this process by developing scientific theses and theoretical frameworks. To establish its own existence as a scientific discipline.</p> <p>To establish the language and terminology of Religious Education Science.</p> <p>Producing information and theories regarding religious education activities.</p> <p>To establish the basis of religious education.</p> <p>To establish the status of religious education in public schools.</p> <p>To determine new trends in religious education.</p> <p>Developing models of religious education.</p> <p>Developing religious education programs.</p> <p>To train religious education teachers.</p>
I	<p>The Science of Religious Education is closely interested in religion itself, its principles and teachings. In addition to the theoretical knowledge of religion, it deals with its education and training, the past and present situations of the practices and experiences related to these, and the relationship between religious belief and education. The Science of Religious Education also interprets current sciences and technical developments from a religious perspective and makes suggestions regarding application. The Science of Religious Education develops examples for those who will take religious education and teaching as a profession, on how revelations can be effectively taught from a social perspective. Another task is to mediate the integration of theory and practice, that is, professional practices. The aim of religious education is to enable students to develop an understanding of the essence of religion as a method of explaining individual experiences. The purpose of religious education is to provide students with a foundation that will enable them to think about religion and develop understanding.</p>

When the books that deal with the nature of religious education are examined in terms of the purpose of religious education, remarkable results are reached. It is understood that the explanations in the books are made around terms such as purpose, aim, task and goal. It is seen that the explanations differ in terms of approach as much as the terminology difference regarding the purpose of religious education science.

It is possible to say that the difference regarding the purpose of religious education science in the works stems from the differences in approaches to religious education science. It can be stated that these are value-based/theological and description-based/pedagogical approaches.

In the works that explain the purpose of religious education science in terms of value (B, D, E, G), it is understood that the purpose of Islam is explained as the purpose of religious education science. For example, it is seen that the purpose of religious education science in the works in question is explained as preparing people to be servants worthy of Allah (B), keeping people on the right path (direction) and making people servants in accordance with Allah's will (D), inviting people to think about the idea of Allah (E) and ensuring that the person becomes a religious person (G). This situation shows that the purpose of religious education is sometimes confused with the purpose of religious education in books. Because it is understood that approaches that explain the purpose of religious education science based on values mostly try to create religiosity.

In works that explain the purpose of religious education science based on description (C, F, H, I), it is seen that the purpose in question is explained as determining and organizing educational materials within the framework of pedagogical planning and curriculum design. In the same vein, other studies (F, H, I) state that the purpose of religious education science is to conduct studies on the nature of religious education science.

Table 4 includes the approaches presented by books on the nature of religious education science in Türkiye regarding the purpose of religious education science. The table lists the different emphases of each book regarding the purpose of religious education science. This information is very important for understanding the epistemological, methodological and pedagogical orientations of discipline.

Table 4 shows that there is no consensus on the purpose of religious education science. In light of this divergence, it is important to propose a purpose definition that is both comprehensive and methodologically grounded. One such definition could be articulated as follows: “Religious education science is an interdisciplinary academic field that aims to guide individuals in understanding, interpreting, and developing their religious knowledge, values, and behaviors through scientific methods; and to produce theoretical and practical suggestions by analyzing these processes within individual and social contexts.” This definition seeks to integrate both pedagogical and theological dimensions of the field, and to establish a framework that supports both research and practice in religious education.

The findings presented in Table 4 demonstrate that the purpose of religious education science has been articulated through two distinct and sometimes conflicting paradigms: a value-centered (theological) approach and a descriptive (pedagogical-scientific) approach. In works reflecting the value-centered perspective, the purpose of religious education science is predominantly equated with the overarching goals of Islamic education itself, such as guiding individuals to become servants worthy of Allah, ensuring adherence to religious principles, and cultivating religiosity. This alignment with religious doctrines suggests that religious education science is often framed as an extension of the spiritual and moral objectives of Islam, rather than as an autonomous field of scientific inquiry. Such an approach tends to blur the lines between theology and education, merging normative religious goals with the academic study of religious education.

In contrast, works adopting a descriptive and pedagogical-scientific approach focus on more academically grounded objectives, such as developing a theoretical framework for religious education, identifying and systematizing educational content, and designing scientifically valid teaching methods and models. These definitions emphasize research, theory-building, and the systematic development of educational practices, distancing the discipline from its purely theological underpinnings.

This duality in the articulation of purpose reflects a deeper epistemological tension within the field. The theological approach prioritizes the moral-spiritual formation of individuals, potentially limiting the discipline’s capacity to engage in critical, interdisciplinary research that is standard in the broader social sciences. Meanwhile, the pedagogical-scientific perspective encourages the institutionalization of religious education science as a branch of applied educational sciences, promoting empirical research and methodological rigor but risking alienation from its foundational religious context.

The coexistence of these paradigms raises questions about the discipline’s identity and direction. Does religious education science primarily serve the internal religious community, aiming to sustain faith-based values and practices? Or is it positioned as an academic field contributing to the study and improvement of religious teaching practices

in a secular educational context? The data reveals that the field has not yet fully resolved this dilemma. This lack of consensus on purpose limits the formation of a unified research agenda and makes it difficult to design curricula that balance theological content with pedagogical methodology. Ultimately, the variation in how purpose is defined suggests that religious education science in Türkiye remains in an ongoing process of negotiating its dual identity. Addressing this ambiguity is critical for establishing both national and international academic credibility and for enhancing the discipline's capacity to contribute to contemporary educational and social challenges. So, what kind of conclusions are reached regarding the method of religious education science in studies on the nature of religious education science?

Table 5: Method of Religious Education Science

Theme Books	Method
A	-
B	Islamic education methods are suitable for human personality as a whole. In other words, methods are imposed according to human structure, the measure is the human structure. As a method, it does not deal with unnecessary and superficial things. It puts the principles of its method according to the centers that manage human behavior. When the centers that manage human behavior are taken into consideration, it is possible to divide Islamic education methods into three: Method of educating the mind Method of educating the heart Method of educating the soul
C	-
D	Revelation-Centered Approach Child-Centered Approach Traditional Approach
E	The results of all experimental research are open to discussion.
F	The science of religious education needs to develop a methodology, a scientific research tool that allows for multi-faceted research. This tool should include empirical understanding as well as the spiritual scientific method. Spiritual scientific methods group (Method of understanding, historical method, dialectical method and phenomenological method) Empirical methods group (Survey, interview, statistics, etc.)
G	It benefits from all social sciences and uses the methods of historical science and experimental research.
H	He uses the research methods of all human sciences in general and theology and educational sciences in particular, adapting them to his own field.
I	The scientification of religious education methods refers to the process of obtaining information on the methods used and newly produced in religious education and teaching from history to the present day, at what levels, to achieve what kind of goals, in the teaching of which subjects, with what kind of techniques and materials, and how they can be used, using scientific research methods and techniques. Another meaning of the scientification of religious education methods is to pave the way for the development of special teaching methods required by religious education activities. Today, this field has taken its place in scientific literature as a sub-branch of religious education science. ...Religious education is applied in different areas, to different target groups, and with different qualities. For this reason, religious education in different categories should be carried out with special methods for each. Which method will be used in which field of religious education, and how which methods will be applied in each of the vocational courses taught in vocational religious education should be determined through scientific studies to be conducted using experimental methods.

One of the conditions of being a science is to have its own scientific methods. Does religious education, which is a young branch of science, have its own scientific methods? In other words, what are the methods used in the research of religious education science? Is it possible for a branch of science whose fields of study encompass the past, present and future to use a single method or group of methods?

It is understood that one of the most frequently discussed points in books dealing with the nature of religious education science is the method of religious education science. Here, it seems possible to talk about two approaches. One is the value-oriented/theological/spiritual approach and the other is the pedagogy-based/ descriptive/scientific approach.

It is understood that religious education or Islamic education methods are used instead of the method of religious education science in books explaining the method of religious education science with a value-oriented/theological/spiritual approach (B, D). In this direction, the method of educating the mind, heart and soul (B) and also the revelation, child and traditional-centered approach (D) are emphasized for the method of religious education science.

In books explaining the method of religious education science with a pedagogical/descriptive/scientific approach (F, G, H, I), it is seen that the method of religious education science is expressed as spiritual scientific and empirical method (F), methods of social sciences (G) and methods of Theology and Education sciences (H).

In books about the nature of religious education science, it is understood that there is no unity in the method of religious education science. One of the reasons that reveals the problem of method is that religious education science is a relatively new branch of science. Another reason is that the fields of study of religious education science cover all time periods. On the other hand, is it possible to talk about each science having its own methods? Could it be that the issue that needs to be emphasized here is the necessity of using scientific research methods in order to be a science? Is it necessary for religious education science to develop a methodology that allows for multi-faceted research methods as an interdisciplinary field of study?

Table 5 details the approaches offered by books on religious education science in Türkiye regarding the method of this branch of science. The table shows the variety of methods and the differences in the methodological framework of religious education science.

Table 5 shows that religious education science demonstrates a variety of methodological approaches; however, it has not yet developed a distinct methodological framework unique to its own disciplinary identity. While qualitative and quantitative methods borrowed from other disciplines—such as surveys, statistical analysis, and experimental research—are frequently employed, the field also incorporates interpretive and philosophical approaches such as hermeneutics and phenomenology. It is important to critically question whether the discipline possesses methods that are uniquely its own, or whether it functions by adapting methods from theology, pedagogy, and social sciences. This methodological dependence raises an essential issue: can a scientific discipline achieve epistemological maturity without generating or clearly defining its own methodologies? In this regard, a comprehensive methodological definition might be as follows: “Religious education science is a discipline that employs both empirical methods (e.g., surveys, statistics, experiments) and interpretive-philosophical approaches (e.g., hermeneutics, phenomenology) to understand, explain, and enhance individuals’ religious knowledge and behavior. These processes are studied through an interdisciplinary lens that draws on pedagogical, sociological, and theological frameworks.

The findings in Table 5 highlight the methodological ambiguity that characterizes the science of religious education in Türkiye. Similar to the definitional and purposive divergences identified in earlier tables, there is a marked bifurcation between value-oriented/theological approaches and pedagogy-based/scientific approaches when it comes to methodology. In the former, methodologies are predominantly derived from religious doctrines, where spiritual and value-laden frameworks such as the education of the mind, heart, and soul (B), or revelation-centered and traditionalist methods (D), are prioritized. These approaches conceptualize methodology not as a set of empirical or research-based tools, but as a spiritually meaningful process embedded within religious practice. This theological orientation reinforces the view of religious education science as an extension of Islamic moral and spiritual development rather than an autonomous research discipline.

Conversely, works adopting a scientific approach (F, G, H, I) emphasize empirical methods, social science research techniques, and interdisciplinary models. These studies highlight the importance of using both spiritual-scientific methods (such as phenomenology, hermeneutics, and historical analysis) and empirical techniques (such as surveys, interviews, and statistical analyses). This dual-method approach suggests a move toward aligning religious education science with contemporary research standards in educational and social sciences. However, the integration of these methods across the literature appears inconsistent and fragmented.

This methodological divergence has significant implications for the discipline's scientific legitimacy and operational scope. The theological approaches risk isolating religious education science from broader academic dialogues, limiting its potential for interdisciplinary engagement and its capacity to address modern educational challenges. On the other hand, while the scientific approaches align the discipline with contemporary research paradigms, they may be perceived as insufficiently grounded in the theological values that many stakeholders in Türkiye expect from the field.

The tension between these paradigms indicates that religious education science has yet to establish a standardized methodological core that is both academically rigorous and contextually relevant to its religious foundations. Additionally, the discipline faces the challenge of developing methods that can adequately address the unique intersection between religious instruction, educational theory, and social sciences. Without resolving this tension, the field risks perpetuating a fragmented identity, limiting its ability to produce research that is both empirically valid and theologically meaningful.

Ultimately, the findings suggest that the science of religious education must pursue a methodological synthesis that acknowledges its interdisciplinary nature. It needs to develop research models that integrate theological insights with empirically grounded educational practices to navigate both academic expectations and the religious-cultural context of Türkiye. This synthesis will be crucial for advancing the discipline toward a more coherent and globally competitive academic framework.

Table 6: Contingency Table

Themes Books	Definition	Purpose	Method	Section	(-) N / %	(+) N / %
A	-	-	-	+	3 / %75	1 / %25
B	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
C	+	+	-	+	1 / %25	1 / %25
D	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
E	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
F	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
G	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
H	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
I	+	+	+	+	0	4 / %100
(-) N / %						
(+) N / %						

Table 6 addresses the contingent factors that affect and shape various aspects of the discipline in works on religious education in Türkiye. This table provides very important data for understanding the dynamic structure of religious education, its evolution in a historical context, and its scientific foundations. The probabilities of co-occurrence, i.e. the real contingency values, determined at the level of definition, purpose, method, and section headings in books that address the nature of religious education are shown on the matrix in Table 6. According to the table in question, it is understood that the definition of religious education science is made in all but one of the books addressing the nature of religious education science. Again, it is understood that the purpose of religious education science is explained in all but one of the books addressing the nature of religious education science. Again, it is understood that the methods of religious education science are explained in all but two books addressing the nature of religious education science. It is understood that all of the books have sections related to the fields of study of religious education science.

Table 6 systematically presents the rates at which the basic elements of the nature of religious education science, namely definition, purpose, method and chapter titles, are addressed in books. The table allows us to analyze the comprehensiveness and consistency of the academic literature of religious education science by evaluating the possibility of these themes to be seen together (contingency). According to the table, all but one of the books define religious education science. This shows that the basic conceptual framework of the discipline is generally accepted and emphasized. However, works lacking definitions (e.g. Book A) create a weakness in the process of constructing the identity of the discipline. It has been stated in the previous tables that there are epistemological uncertainties among the definitions, and that some definitions are theologically focused while others are pedagogically focused.

The purpose of the science of religious education is explained in all but one of the books. This shows that the functional dimension of the discipline is widely discussed. However, the differences between the value-based (theological) and pedagogical (scientific) approaches among the purposes reveal that the discipline cannot reach a consensus within the framework of a common purpose. While this diversity shows the multidimensional structure of the discipline, it also implies a conceptual disorganization. The methods of the science of religious education are discussed in all but two of the books.

This ratio reveals that discussions of methodology generally have an important place in the discipline, but methodological uncertainties still exist.

The data in Table 6 offers a systematic view of how core components—definition, purpose, method, and section topics—are addressed in books focusing on the nature of religious education science. Beyond the descriptive overview, this table reveals important insights into the structural patterns and epistemological tendencies within the field. One of the most striking findings is the inconsistency in the comprehensive treatment of all four dimensions across the analyzed works. While most books provide definitions, articulate purposes, and touch on methodological issues, a minority neglects one or more of these elements, resulting in an uneven disciplinary foundation.

The near-universal inclusion of the "definition" and "purpose" categories in most works suggests that scholars agree on the necessity of framing religious education science conceptually and functionally. However, the variation in how these categories are addressed—whether through theological or pedagogical lenses, as shown in previous tables—indicates that this consensus is superficial. It reflects a discipline where agreement on "what must be discussed" exists, but "how it should be discussed" remains unresolved. This situation illustrates an epistemological fragmentation in the foundational literature.

The methodology category, which is absent or underdeveloped in a notable portion of the works, highlights a critical gap in the discipline's scholarly maturity. The lack of sustained methodological discussions in certain texts points to a broader problem: the difficulty of balancing theological commitments with the expectations of modern scientific inquiry. This methodological inconsistency not only hinders the discipline's scientific standardization but also weakens its potential to contribute effectively to the broader educational sciences.

Moreover, the fact that all works include discussions related to the "fields of study" category—such as areas of application or institutional relevance—suggests a pragmatic orientation in the literature. However, this practical focus, in the absence of clear methodological frameworks in some texts, risks reducing the discipline to a loosely defined applied field, lacking the robust theoretical and methodological underpinnings required for long-term academic development.

The contingency analysis ultimately demonstrates that while there is a shared awareness of key themes, the simultaneous occurrence of definition, purpose, method, and section headings in a single, integrated framework is relatively rare. This uneven distribution indicates a lack of cohesion across foundational texts, which affects the discipline's ability to present itself as a unified academic field. The pattern uncovered by the contingency analysis also implies that religious education science in Türkiye may still be navigating its early developmental stages, where disciplinary identity, methodological clarity, and epistemological coherence have yet to be fully established.

This diagnosis points to the necessity of more integrative research efforts that address these elements in tandem. Without such efforts, the discipline risks remaining fragmented and vulnerable to criticism regarding its scientific legitimacy and relevance in contemporary educational discourse.

Conclusion And Recommendations

This study aimed to evaluate the books that address the nature of the science of religious education in Türkiye and to reveal the conceptual, methodological, and epistemological patterns embedded within them. While the descriptive content analysis provided essential information regarding the definitions, purposes, methods, and focus areas found across the selected works, a deeper examination has highlighted several structural and interpretive patterns that require further reflection.

The findings reveal a persistent duality within the discipline, with two dominant paradigms shaping the foundational literature: a value-centered/theological approach and a descriptive/pedagogical-scientific approach. This dichotomy is evident in how the definitions of religious education science oscillate between theological formulations—emphasizing faith-based goals and moral-spiritual objectives—and scientifically oriented frameworks that foreground educational principles and empirical methodologies. While this diversity reflects the interdisciplinary nature of the field, it also reveals a lack of consensus on how the discipline should position itself within academic discourse.

Similarly, the divergence in how the purpose of religious education science is articulated indicates that the field has yet to fully resolve its epistemological tension. Some works align the purpose with the doctrinal goals of Islam, while others frame it within a modern pedagogical paradigm, aiming to systematize educational practices through scientific inquiry. This inconsistency has prevented the formation of a unified research agenda and has fragmented the discipline's intellectual development.

The analysis of methodological approaches further underscores this fragmentation. While some works prioritize traditional, theology-based methods rooted in religious doctrine, others advocate for empirical and interdisciplinary techniques drawn from the social sciences. However, even among works that emphasize scientific methods, there is no common methodological framework that could serve as a standard for future research. This divergence limits the capacity of religious education science to engage with global academic debates and integrate into broader educational sciences.

The contingency analysis strengthens these findings by illustrating how inconsistently the four key dimensions—definition, purpose, method, and scope—are addressed together within individual texts. This lack of comprehensive integration reflects a disciplinary immaturity, suggesting that religious education science in Türkiye is still undergoing a formative phase where foundational elements remain under negotiation.

In light of these findings, several recommendations emerge. First, there is a pressing need for scholars in the field to develop a shared epistemological and methodological framework that bridges the gap between theological and scientific approaches. An interdisciplinary synthesis that respects the religious foundations of the field while embracing contemporary educational research standards would greatly benefit the discipline's academic legitimacy.

Second, future research should prioritize studies that address the observed fragmentation by focusing on integrative analyses. Comparative and meta-analytical studies examining the evolution of the field across different generations of scholars could offer valuable insights into how the discipline can achieve greater cohesion.

Finally, there is a need for applied research that demonstrates how religious education science can respond to contemporary educational and societal challenges, both in Türkiye and in broader global contexts. By focusing on how the field can contribute to resolving modern issues—such as identity crises, social cohesion, and values education—religious education science can enhance its relevance and reinforce its position as a dynamic academic discipline.

The results of our research, which aims to evaluate books on the nature of religious education, can be listed as follows:

1. It is understood that the writing of independent books on the nature of this discipline was delayed immediately after the establishment of the department of religious education. The books written until recently after the establishment of religious education can be considered as a natural result of the identity search of a newly established branch of science. These works prepared by the first generation of religious education scholars reflect the effort to establish the basic concepts of religious education and to ensure its legitimacy as discipline.
2. The interdisciplinary structure of religious education and the debates on whether it is accepted as an independent branch of science constitute one of the main focal points of books. In this context, the works attempt to prove its legitimacy as an independent branch of science by discussing the epistemological foundations of religious education.
3. The publication years of the books allow us to follow the evolutionary development of religious education. The works, which started in 1989 and were published in different years, reflect how the discipline has developed in a historical context. However, although the decreasing trend in publications over the years gives the impression of saturation in the field, it is difficult to explain this decrease when the gaps in the existing literature are taken into account. This situation reveals that religious education science needs to be constantly re-evaluated from a scientific perspective.
4. It is also understood that there is a general ambiguity and disagreement in the definition of the science of religious education in books that deal with the nature of the science of religious education. In addition, it is understood that while definitions with a value-oriented / theological approach were made in books written after the establishment of the department of religious education, descriptive-oriented / pedagogical approaches have been adopted towards the present day. In works explaining the purpose of the science of religious education based on values, it is understood that the purpose of the religion of Islam is explained as the purpose of the science of religious education. Similarly, it is seen that the purpose of the science of religious education and the purpose of religious education is sometimes confused in books dealing with the nature of the science of religious education.

The main problem of the article was to examine whether the theoretical and practical dimensions of the science of religious education were addressed clearly and consistently enough in the literature. The results obtained from the seven tables in the analyzed books revealed the following findings regarding this problem:

Although the definition of the science of religious education largely attempts to reveal the identity of the discipline, it was seen that a common epistemological and

methodological framework was missing in the definitions. There are differences between theological, pedagogical and scientific approaches among the definitions.

Although the approaches regarding the purposes reveal the multidimensional structure of the discipline, the theological and scientific balance of these dimensions has not been achieved. In particular, it has been observed that the purposes are more value-based in some works and that scientific methods and practices are not sufficiently emphasized.

Although the discussions on methods generally point to an interdisciplinary perspective, it is noteworthy that there are serious deficiencies regarding the methods in some works. In addition, it has been concluded that the science of religious education needs to develop an original methodology. Although the fields of study of the science of religious education cover a wide range, there is a lack of consistency in the classification of these fields and the determination of their focal points. The contingency table has provided important data in understanding the relationship of discipline with social, historical and cultural contexts. However, it has become clear that the contingency factors need to be addressed in a more systematic framework.

In this direction, a balance should be established between the definition, purpose and methods of the science of religious education and the epistemological foundations of the discipline should be strengthened within this framework. The methodological and theoretical structure of religious education should be enriched by establishing stronger connections with fields such as educational sciences, sociology, psychology and theology. Religious education should focus on applied research as well as theoretical discussions, and the discipline should be an area that produces solutions to social problems. The historical, social and global contexts of the discipline should be analyzed more deeply through contingency factors. The science of religious education continues to develop as a distinct discipline within the social sciences. Although achieving full standardization may not be entirely feasible in theological disciplines, the science of religious education needs to attain a more systematic structure in terms of its definition, objectives, methods, and fields of study. In this context, greater academic discussion on the methodological aspects of the field is required. For the field to evolve as an independent scientific discipline, a more coherent epistemological and methodological framework must be established.

Peer-Review	Double anonymized - Two External
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