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CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS STUDIES CURRICULUM IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL : ITS IMPLICATION FOR SPIRITUAL AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract

Education is regarded as an instrument for effecting social, economic, political and intellectual development of the individual curriculum remains a tool for the achievement of this purpose. Christian Religious Studies (CRS) curriculum is included in the school not only as a school teaching subject but as a means of fostering the religious, spiritual and moral development of the students. This paper therefore examined the objectives of CRS curriculum in the school curriculum and the teaching of CRS in Nigerian senior secondary schools. It argues that the teaching of CRS is to develop the cognitive skills, learning to think and develop emotional maturity through cultivation of high sense of morality, a sense of self identity and to relate with others harmoniously. The paper also look at the significance of teaching CRS in order to bring about spiritual and moral development of the students so that they can be worthy both in character and learning and at the end be good ambassadors to their families and the nation at large.

Keywords: Curriculum. Christian Religious Studies, Objectives

Introduction

Religion is an essential factor in any human society because the history of man is inextricably linked with religion. It helps in controlling human social behaviours and providing answers to questions that goes beyond human understanding and uncertainties of life. Religion remains the source of spiritual, moral and desirable patterns of the society. It helps to promote both spiritual and moral values. Religious education can be described as those processes designed to induct each generation into the attitudes, beliefs and the practices of religion or faith in order to promote the religion and at the same time provide for the individual unifying centre for his life.

Ibenwa (2014), remarked that religious education helped in character moulding of the students and make our young ones imbibe such virtues like love for one another, truth, obedience and respect for elders, parents and people in authority. It is an effective instrument to control our youth's moral behaviours, now and in the future (Oladipo 2006). However, this has not been able to be achieved considering the increased level of crime, immorality and indiscipline that pervade the country. The case of a twenty one year old undergraduate of the Redeemer University who killed his father readily comes to focus on the issue of crime and indiscipline among youths (Daily Sun, July 4, 2014)

Kwasau (2013) noted that Christian Religious Studies (CRS) fulfils the aims of education, which focuses on the development of the individual mentally, spiritually, physically and socially. In his own contribution, Omali (2001) observed that Christian Religious Studies in Nigerian schools, whether primary or secondary is a study of an aspect of the whole education system which aims at teaching religious and moral instruction using the curriculum that is "Bible-based, Christ-centered and related to life experience".

Abioye and Adekunle (1991) were of the opinion that every subject has its unique value and importance in the school curriculum. The uniqueness of Christian Religious Studies emerges from its dual function: it is a single subject which aims at the simultaneous development of the pupils' intellectual ability as well as moral development. Though it has been observed that some students who choose CRS as a subject are morally bankrupt. It also emphasizes the affective domain of education taxonomy which many seem to be silent about it especially in the course of evaluation; some give it less emphasis while some even neglect it completely.

Teaching of Christian Religious Studies in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The National Policy on Education (FRN 2013) recognizes the importance of preparing Nigerian primary school pupils and students at the secondary school level to be able to think critically, analytically and independently about moral issues, to become independent moral agents. The National Policy on Education section 3 subsection 15(2), (v) stressed further that the need for the inculcation of moral and spiritual values in interpersonal and human relations. Thus, Christian Religious Studies emphasizes the development of moral education in their adherents which enables them to be useful to themselves and the society.

Christian Religious Studies is pertinent in the secondary school curriculum and is relevant to the Nigerian youth due to the moral values that

are embedded in it. It can rightly be stated that no subject instills discipline and virtues into the youths like religious education. Oladipo (2006) asserted that religious education is an effective instrument to control youths' moral behavior now and in the future. In the same vein, Collins (2008) noted that it is an integrative view of human life which provides the basic foundation for the community and believers' ethics and values. Religious values in Christian Religious Studies (CRS) did not only focus on the mental and social development of an individual but also concern with spiritual and moral upbringing.

Christian Religious Studies aims at nurturing students in all ramifications of life to make them responsible, active and productive citizens. Taiwo (1980) and Nnadozie (1995) observed that the curriculum of schools had provision for the production of moral skill in school leavers and aims at producing persons who will be fit or equipped for religious and social responsibilities.

The National curriculum for Senior Secondary Schools (NERDC, 2012) specified the following objectives:

- a. To provide more opportunity for the Nigerian youth to learn more about God and thereby develop their faith in God;
- b. To enable youth to accept Christ as their Saviour and Redeemer;
- c. To enable the youth to recognize Jesus as the founder and sustainer of the Christian Church;
- d. To enable the youth to accept the guidance of the *Holy Spirit in their daily lives and activities*;
- e. To help the youth to understand the basic teachings of Christ and to apply these to their daily lives and work;
- f. To help develop in the youth Christian attitudes and moral values, such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice, fair play, spirit of forgiveness, obedience, orderly behaviour or discipline, hard work and devotion to duty, selfless service to God and humanity;
- g. To prepare the youth for higher education, self reliance, critical thinking and for selfless service within community;
- h. To instill in the youth the spirit of tolerance, reconciliation, peaceful co-existence and non violence; and
- I. To develop and foster in the youth the spirit of respect for all people and human life.

Today, Nigeria is bedeviled with moral decadence evident in greed, materialism, immorality, terrorism, kidnapping, corruption and other criminalities. This moral decadence is felt in almost all aspects of private and

public life, and even in the religious institution. Hence Ilori (2002) stressed that the curriculum content of Christian Religious Studies should be properly designed so that, there will be improvement in such areas where there is general decline in discipline and morality. It is assumed that teaching and learning of CRS will enable the learners to imbibe the fear of God in their hearts and have faith in the religion they profess without coercion or indoctrination. More importantly, CRS curriculum is supposed to bring about an effective positive change in the learner in order to contribute positively to the development of individual and mankind.

Religion is to be seen as major nourishment for the soul as well as a spiritual frame-work or guide in personal and interpersonal enterprises. Thus, Christian Religious Studies is presented in action, to understand in-depth and with greater clarity the basis and implication of the Christian faith to moral and appropriate values and attitudes indispensable for healthy and spiritual daily living (Akintola, NERC). Kwasau (2013) asserted that CRS fulfills the aims of education. According to him, education focuses on the development of the individual mentally, spiritually, physically and socially and that CRS as a subject caters for the spiritual, social and moral aspect of man, hence, it is taught in schools. Christian Religious Studies which is a "part of Christian Education that aims to educate human beings to look beyond here and now, to live for God as strangers and sojourners' in this present age placing their trust in Jesus Christ in looking for a new heaven and earth in which righteousness and trust dwell" (OlaREWaju, 2008).

The key to success of any educational programme lies in the attainment of the objective as stated in the curriculum. There has been lots of hue and cry as regards indiscipline, immorality and social malady among the youths of today. And the question has been, what is the outcome of the training which these students went through during their Christian Religious Studies lessons or when they were in school. In the history of the teaching of Christian Religious Studies in Nigeria, there is deliberate and conscious attempt to inculcate spiritual and moral values into children through the teaching of CRS so that ethical and code of conduct can be achieved in the life of the students. The major aims of inclusion of CRS in the education curriculum is to raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, appreciate dignity of labour and those moral values specified in the broad national aims as good citizens. While at the secondary school level the subject is meant to prepare learners for useful living through inculcation of Christian attitudes and values, and to prepare learners for higher education (Akubue, 1992)

To these effect, CRS is designed to achieve many goals in the lives of the pupils ranging from teaching the pupils about God to the teaching of moral values which is geared towards shaping human behavior. These values were embedded in the stories and events recorded in the bible (drawn from biblical characters and events). Notwithstanding the lofty aims of CRS, studies by Ali and Akubue (1988) showed that learners moral attitude have not improved greatly especially at this era. Meanwhile an appraisal of CRS curriculum contents revealed that the subject has the potentials required to build ones moral character.

Right from inception of education in Nigeria, CRS has been one of the core subjects in both primary and junior secondary schools. However, there have been questions on the efficacy of CRS programme in instilling discipline and moulding character of the student. Judging from the state of moral behavior of school students, it seems that the subject is not achieving its major goals, which is developing in learners the ability to attain intellectual and moral perfection, as well as discipline them both mentally and morally so as to face their daily and future challenges as good citizens. (Akubue, 1992). Subsequently, there has been rapid growth of social ills among students across the country (Njoku, 2012). The above observation seems to suggest that CRS is taught in schools without much impact on the lives of the learners. This means the subject is being taught without achieving its set objectives. Ucha (2004) pointed out the importance of societal values of the teaching of CRS by revealing that the society and parents view of the subject affects the students' choice and interest; and advocate for positive view of the subject so that its desired goals in the life of the learner would be achieved especially now that the society is at the cross road of moral decadence. This implies that the teachers, parents and society at large need to be positive concerning the teaching and learning of CRS. If the subject must achieved its major goals in learning.

The teaching of religion is not supposed to end in the classroom or passing of examination and the award of certificates. It is to bring out all round development of the individual (Leonard, 2014). The major aims of inclusion of CRS in the education curriculum is to raise generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, appreciate dignity of labour and those moral values specified in the broad national aims as good citizens. At the secondary school level the subject is meant to prepare learners for useful living through inculcation of Christian attitudes and values, and to prepare learners for higher education (Kosoko-Oyedeko and Adeyinka, T. 2010).

Njoku and Njoku (2015) observed that there is little or no emphasis on CRS in most schools despite the moral role of the subject. This is an indication that the teachers are not committed to their duties; understand the pedagogical and theological aims of the subject

Christian Religious Studies for Spiritual and Moral Development

In the examination of how the CRS curriculum is committed to the inculcation of moral and spiritual development among students it is vital to refer to the objectives of CRS curriculum especially item (f) which states that: to help develop in the youth Christian attitudes and moral values, such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice, fair play, spirit of forgiveness, obedience, orderly behaviour or discipline, hard work and devotion to duty, selfless service to God and humanity. The curriculum content of CRS has the ability to inculcate spiritual and moral values by helping students become better members of the society. The teaching of CRS is significant in the development of attitudes and social skills. Teachers at this level must teach the students' virtues and attitudes that foster tolerance, create respect for cultural, ethnic and religious diversity as well as human rights and religious tolerance. Uche (2012) opined that Christian religious education can help Christian students to interact and to live in peace with people of other religious faiths. It can also encourage dialogue, friendship, good leadership traits, Christian principles of democracy and governance.

The Nigerian secondary school system is falling in its duty towards inculcation of expected moral values in Nigerian students. Mkpa (1999) observed that, part of the reason why morality appears to be at its lowest ebb in the Nigerian society is the lack of focus on sound values in our schools. This is why our political, religious and even religious life are bedevil with different forms of immorality and social cohesion is disintegrating in the society. The place of religion in the inculcation of good character has been acknowledged by many authors (Aderibigbe, & Johnson, -Bashua, 2001, Adeoye, 2005, Oyekanmi, 2011). According to Adeyinka (1991) the stories selected from Bible passages would enable students to know their relationship to God and men and in particular, how to behave well in community in which they live and learn.

Imaekhai (2010) therefore submitted that religious values are the core values which shape our lives and living. They determine our attitude to things, particularly when we wield or hold position of power, influence, authority in a family or nation. National Policy on Education section 8 stated clearly that no educational system may rise above the quality of its teachers. This therefore

shows that the teachers should live an exemplary life so that their students can emulate them. The teacher should demonstrate those moral virtues he/she wishes his/her students to imbibe. He should also punish erring and reward good virtues demonstrated by students. It is by these measures that the Nigerian senior secondary schools can teach moral values in the right direction (Ohwovorione, (2013).

As a result of this when the Christian Religious knowledge curriculum was implemented: the general assumption was that the subject would help in instilling in youths the required and desired knowledge, values behaviours, attitudes and skills that would ensure their effective adaptation in our ever changing multi faith and multi –ethnic society such as Nigeria. It was expected to contain not only the content of the Bible but also moral lessons or instructions for the youth (Adewale in Gotan, 2005). It is believed that teaching and learning the bible would help the Nigerian youths to prepare for useful living within the society and that the Christian religious teacher could help the youths to improve their morals and attitudes to God, to their fellow men, to work and to the nation generally (Gaiya in Gotan, 2005). Teachers of CRS should have passion for the job and be properly equipped with current trend in teaching through seminars in order to keep up with what is obtainable in their field.

The inclusion of extra biblical topics into the content of CRS curriculum also gave credence to the fact that issues and events that would promote the spiritual and moral development can be of immersed benefit to the student. Topics such as the role of the church in the Nigerian society, Christian living in the community and Peaceful coexistence were in the curriculum (Omoike, 2010, Orebanjo, 1992). When such topics such as these are treated the students will learn and believe in the multi religious and multi ethnic diversity of the Nigerian nation.

Falako (2013) posited that the place of religion in the inculcation of good character is acknowledged as moral instruction is integrated with religious education lessons. This is manifested in Christian Religious Studies textbooks where there is the inclusion of moral instruction for character training and even at the Senior School Certificate Examination questions are asked bothering on the moral lesson learnt from a particular event or biblical text. According to Adeyinka (1991), the moral lessons are drawn from the stories or from the selected Bible passage or passages. They are meant to be thoroughly discussed with the students, more so when we seek to link the Bible teaching with life in the present day society.

Falako (2013) further said that this affords the teachers the golden opportunity to applying the word of God to the social, economic and, political segments of the learners life. Bible stories should no longer be studied for their own sake, but should be in consonance with the spiritual and moral development of the society. (Ajayi in Quarcoopome et. al. 2010). This at the end will make the teaching and learning of CRS all encompassing.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Christian Religious Education can be seen as an essential subject for equipping the students to be able to judge what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, just and unjust and good or bad in social relations. It inculcates in the students the appreciation of the values of honesty, integrity, altruism, accountability, hard work, justice, equity, patience and discipline. In order to accomplished the above it is recommended that teachers should adopt life approach method and learner centre method in instructing the students on spiritual and moral issues in schools. Also, bible stories should not be studied for passing examination alone but should be used to promote the spiritual and moral development of the students in the society.

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