



CHALLENGES OF ASSESSING CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN KENYAN SCHOOLS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Pauline Wanjiru Githaiga

P.O BOX 536-20115, EGERTON UNIVERSITY, KENYA, Paulinegithaiga20@yahoo.com

ABSTRACT

This paper highlights the challenges of the implementation of the Christian religious education in Kenyan schools in the 21st century. Christian religious education is one of the earliest subjects in Kenya's school curriculum. The aims of Christian religious education are to enable students acquire knowledge and other dispositions which help them fit well in society. In spite of this, the teaching of the subject is still faced with challenges in its implementation. These include inadequate facilities, global social changes and students' attitude among others. The paper posits that in view of the importance attached to the subject in the school curriculum, there is need to address these challenges so as to achieve the positive goals. The paper concludes by making useful suggestions on the way forward.

Legal Position of the Teaching of Christian Religious Education in Kenya

The teaching of Christian Religious education in Kenya is dated back to the first half of the nineteenth-century when the Christian missionaries established the first school (Itolondo, 2013). In Kenya, the formal CRE started with the coming of the missionaries with the purpose to evangelise to the people. With the dawn of independence, the first independence education commission, known as then Kenya Education Commission of 1964 chaired by Ominde (RoK, 1964), was charged with the responsibility of looking into the education system among other issues. The commission recommended that CRE should continue being taught as it offered moral education to the youth. However, it should be treated as an academic subject and an ecumenical syllabus be applied during instruction. CRE was to be taught using a common syllabus in all Kenyan schools and not according to the various religious groups as it was earlier done. The recommendation was only effected in 1968 when the Education Act became a law.

In 1976, the National committee on Educational Objectives and Policies chaired by Gachathi was constituted (RoK, 1976). The commission became more critical of Religious Education as a means of teaching ethics. The committee argued that Christianity, in particular, was rejected from a social and political view because it was seen as a pacifying tool for the colonial master (Groenewegen, 1993). It recommended the introduction of a common subject on moral education for all students irrespective of their religious affiliation with the argument that RE had not accomplished the objective of inculcating national moral consciousness (RoK, 1976). According to Burgman (1990), Catholic bishops in Kenya were, initially, happy to see how much the Gachathi-led committee stressed on the importance of social ethics and inclusion of another

subject to this effect. In 1986, Social Education and Ethics was included in the curriculum. The Koech Commission's Report (RoK 1999) strongly agreed with the Gachathi report and recommended that CRE and SEE continue being taught because they would contribute to the inculcation of religious, social and ethical values to the youth. According to the report, the programmes would be aimed at equipping the youth with necessary tools for dealing with the anti-social activities such as drug abuse and addiction, irresponsible sexual behaviour and indulgence in various cults with anti-social activities and behaviour such as devil worship. The teaching of CRE curriculum in Kenya has been justified on educational grounds as contributing to the fulfilment of national educational goals (KIE, 2002).

Importance of Teaching of Christian Religious Education

The objectives of teaching religious education can be summed up as religions, moral, social, civics, academic, spiritual and personal (Onovughe & Mordi, 2017)

Religious/Spiritual

The roots of Christian Religious Education in Kenyan Schools can be traced back to 1884 at the inception of the British rule in Kenya that led to an increase of Christian missionaries who started schools as a means of converting Africans to Christianity.

Till today, there has remained a close interlink between religion and education. RE besides being an examinable subject of the curriculum vitae is still viewed as a vehicle to instilling the right values in the lives of the young scholars. The Kenyan constitution importantly upholds the development of values, and religious education as one of the channels through which the requisite values are inculcated in learners.

Moral

As per the revised curriculum of 2002, the learners who interact with the CRE content besides being examined for what has been covered are also expected to use the acquired social, spiritual and moral insights to think critically and make appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society.

The 2017 basic education curriculum framework by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) outlines that, from the early years of primary education, children need to participate in activities that integrate religion and moral values. Teachers should help children to appreciate people of different religious backgrounds and to differentiate right and wrong at an early age so they can grow up as upright members of the society.

It is therefore important to emphasize religious education in schools in order to instill acceptable religious and moral values in young children.

Social

Besides, the religious and spiritual expected gains from CRE, the students are further expected to acquire the basic principle of Christian living and develop a sense of self respect and respect for other. They are further expected to contribute positively to the transformation of self and the society as a whole.

The 2017 KICD further stipulates that, the aim of moral and religious activities at pre-school level is to develop awareness and appreciation of the generosity, love and care of God in all He has created, and to enable children to acquire the qualities of sharing, respect, kindness and getting along with others. This in an overall perspective aids in nurturing positive attitude towards peaceful core-existence within the society which in turn promotes social wellbeing.

Civic

All citizen of a country have a civil responsibility to the country and learners are not excluded from this. Vices like negative ethnicity, corruption, selfishness can be bombarded through Christian Education. Positive attributes like honestly, faithfulness, love, peace, forgiveness among others drawn from the Religious studies would remain a positive point of reference among the young learners.

Academic

Since colonialism in Kenya, education and religion remained inseparable till the time of independence when the first independence education commission known as the “Kenya Education Commission of 1964”. While taking note of the divisive nature of RE, particularly Christian education, the chairperson of the commission, Ominde (1964), recommended that RE should be taught as an academic subject that has a body of knowledge. The recommendations were effected in 1968 when the Education Act became a law.

Personal

Drawing from the Christian values as the primary point of reference, it would be expected therefore, learners acquire a positive approach to life issues which in turn promotes personal growth. This more is seen in good decision making, being able to different good from bad and on the overall, the learners acquire good character and behavior for personal growth.

The fruits of CRE are therefore more long term than short term. The young learners on a long term basis are expected to grow up into responsible adults within the society.

Challenges of Teaching of Christian Religious Education

The impact and effectiveness of teaching Christian religious education in the early learning institutions remain unfelt considering the wave of unrest that continue to rock the Kenyan schools. Cases of students burning schools, drug addiction and sexual immorality and many other vices continue to be reported among learners.

What then could be the challenges facing the dispensation of this noble course?

Student Attitude

Noted by Professor Eshiwani (1992) on the quality of secondary education in Kenya is the fact the challenge associated with teaching subjects like CRE, is that the learners perceive it as having minimal contribution to the job market. This is compounded by the fact that the subject is not a pre-requisite for entry to highly ranked professional courses like medicine, engineering, law, computer science etc.

This is even made worse by a proposal by the Ministry of Higher Education indicating that the government would in the future only sponsor university courses that are directly relevant to the attainment of the vision 2030 economic development.

Though extremely important as indicated in the objectives, learners perceive the subject negatively posing a challenge to the teaching of the subject in schools.

Teacher's bias

CRE teaching content and lessons are majorly drawn from the bible and Christian teachings. Depending on the interpretation and the perspective the teacher takes, the same will be imposed on the student.

Objectives are life long

As indicated earlier, the 2017 basic education curriculum framework by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) outlines that, from the early years of primary education, children need to participate in activities that integrate religion and moral values. This in turn helps them to appreciate people of different religious backgrounds and to differentiate right and wrong at an early age so they can grow up as upright members of the society. Hence to say the importance of CRE may not be very vivid in the minds of the young learners, though when looked at from the bigger picture, the benefits of life long.

Suggestions on the Way Forward

From the above observations, it is understood that Christian Religious Education is not only a subject to learn, but also a way of life. According to Onovughe, and Mordi (2017). A look at Christian religious examination shows that these objectives are not achieved. This is why pupils will be non-chalet. The goal of teaching CRK as a subject in our schools is to develop the morals of the individuals and the society as a whole. In other words, the aim of teaching CRK in Nigerian schools is to develop the pupil's character and moral training which will enable them to have sound attitude. In Nigerian society, many parents and educationists have aired their views on the respect for moral decadence of their Children. This has made some parents to doubt the credibility of CRK in the Primary school's curriculum as an agent of moral-upbringing. It is in the light of this, that the author attempts to find what could have been the problems of implementing the curriculum.

Unrest and negative vices continue to rock the Kenyan school, this runs from students burning schools, drug addiction, sexual immorality among many other challenges that face young learners. It is therefore important that CRE be made compulsory. This would be present an opportunity for the teachers through the lessons to instill the right values from a tender age.

Abbreviations

CRE-Christian Religious Education

KICD- the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development

REFERENCES

- Burgman, H. (1990). The way the Catholic Church started in Western Kenya. Nairobi: Mission Books Service.
- Chemutai, F. (2008). The Students Attitude Towards CRE and its Influence on Performance in School in Eldoret Municipality, Uasin Gishu District, Kenya Unpublished M.Phil Thesis Moi University, Eldoret.
- Eshiwani, G.S.(1992).The Quality of Secondary Education in Kenya.Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- Itolondo, W.A. (2013).The Role and Status of Christian Religious Education in the School Curriculum in Kenya. Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies. 3(5), 721-729.

- Kutto Naomi Jebungei (2013). Overcoming the Challenges Facing Secondary Schools Teachers in Using Christian Religious Education to Convey Values to Students in Eldoret Municipality, Kenya. *International Journal of Humanities and Social Science*.
- Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (2017). *Basic Education Curriculum Framework* Republic of Kenya (2012). *A policy framework for education and training: Reforming education and training in Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Printers.
- Republic of Kenya (2001). *Task force on student discipline and unrest in secondary schools*. Nairobi: Government Printers.
- Totally Integrated Quality Education and Training (TIQET). *Report of the commission of enquiry in education system in Kenya*. Nairobi: Government Press (1999).
- The National Commission on Educational Objectives and Policies. Nairobi: Government Printers (1976).
- The Kenya Education Commission. Nairobi: Government Printers (1964).
- The National Curriculum policy (2013) the Ministry of Education, Science and Technology.
- Wilfrida Arnodah Itolondo (2012) *The Role and Status of Christian Religious Education in the School Curriculum in Kenya*. *Journal of Emerging Trends in Educational Research and Policy Studies (JETERAPS)* 3(5): 721-729 © Scholarlink Research Institute Journals, 2012.