DROPOUTS RATES IN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN MUZARABANI DISTRICT SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN MASHONALAND CENTRAL PROVINCE OF ZIMBABWE

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Abstract

This present study's aim was to examine the causes of dropouts of secondary school pupils in Religious Education in Muzarabani District. A random sample of 75 teachers was used. The descriptive survey design was used. The questionnaire was the sole instrument used to gather data. The study revealed that lack of resources, culture conflicts, pupils' attitudes, methodological problems among other factors, contributed significantly towards high dropout rates in the subject. The study recommends that teachers should use the eclectic, multi-faith approaches when teaching Religious education. The study also recommends that the school and the home should play complementary roles in order to reduce cases of students dropping out of the subject.

Key words

Examination, causes, dropouts, Religious education, secondary schools, district

1. Introduction and Background

The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in Zimbabwe introduced Religious Education to instill the values of integrity, honesty, discipline and patriotism in pupils (Coltart, 2009). The subject is currently examinable at Ordinary Level and even in the current on-going curriculum review exercise by the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education it is still considered a relevant aspect of the curriculum (Museka, 2012). As Mondo (1991) posits, Religious Education as a lubricant, permeates into the traditional and modern socio-economic and political spheres of

life. And yet in spite of the significance of this subject in the lives of students, there is a paradox in that most Ordinary level pupils are dropping out of this subject (Museka, 2012). As Ndlovu (2004) states, some academically gifted pupils in the subject are willy-willy dropping the subject prematurely and are thus deprived of the chance to nurture their talents and build a strong professional foundation. Such talents no doubt could have benefited society and yet are laid to waste as such pupils may be disfigured, disoriented and displaced academically, professionally and most of all morally (Museka, 2012). It is therefore necessary to investigate the major drivers of dropping the subject by pupils so as to ensure that the existence of the subject in the school curriculum is sustainable.

Statement of the problem

The drop out rate of students doing Religious Education is a serious development which cannot be ignored or left unattended if the future of the subject is to be viable. There is need therefore to strategise in order to address the problem.

Purpose of the study

Religious Education in schools contributes not only to the personal reflection and development of young people, but also heightens respect for the beliefs of other people and help build a diverse but cohesive society. It is therefore important that all pupils yet the chance to learn this subject. The purpose of the study is therefore to examine the causes of dropouts in Religious Education in order to come up with suggestions to ameliorate the problem.

Objectives of the study

- To determine the extent to which shortage of resources causes cases of dropouts in Religious Education.

- To establish pupils' attitudes towards Religious Education.

- To examine the role played by culture in dropouts in the subject.

- To explore the teacher's role towards dropouts in Religious Education.

Research questions

To find answers to the main research question the study sought to find answers to the following research questions:

- How is the shortage of resources driving away pupils from Religious Education?

- What are pupils' attitudes towards Religious Education?

- How does culture affect dropout rates of pupils in Religious Education?

- What role do teachers play in increasing cases of dropouts by pupils in the Religious Education subject?

2. Review of Related Literature

The study reviewed literature in the area of dropouts in secondary schools.

Shortage of Religious Education resources

In Zimbabwe, teaching is affected by shortage of textbooks and inadequate financial support to procure instructional materials (Nyagura and Reece, 2000). Shoko (2011) states that before and during the colonial epoch, there were no textbooks and the official Religious Education syllabus for the secondary schools. The bible was the only available material resource (teacher's resource book) to teach the subject. Material resources to inform and guide teachers and learners were hardly available (Cox, 2005). Museka (2012) argues that the subject lacked scholarly criticism as it only focused on conversion and pastoral roles within the church. An attempt to revamp and localize the new Ordinary Level Religious Education was made after independence. However, as Jackson (2002) observes, the syllabus which was to be the contract between the teacher and teacher and examination board remains cosmetic to the examination and classroom interaction. As UNESCO (2011) states, the general shortage of resources of the subject is a severe problem in rural schools in Zimbabwe. To that effect as Nondo (1999) postulates, the subject dropouts are increasingly unavoidable in as far as the subject remains foreign, boring and dry while shrouded in obscurity with a lot of discrepancies and contradictions and it is seen as not educational, reflective interactive and purposeful to pupils.

Hernandez (2001) states that in teaching teachers find themselves in a dilemma in that while in the Religious Education syllabus the aim is for multi-faith pedagogy, the content to pursue the aims, is largely bible-centred. According to Fleming (2004) teaching about religion in the public schools requires that sound academic resources be made readily available to classroom teachers. These classrooms resources include charts, audio-visual aids, pictures and such relevant and motivating material to effectively teach and learn the subject (de Souza, 2003).

Pupils' attitudes towards Religious Education

In describing attitudes of pupils towards Religious Education, de Souza (2003) states that, pupils perceive Bible knowledge in Africa as the powerful force in moulding and replicating in context

and content the domineering western culture, civilization, commerce and Christianity. Groenewegen (1990) says pupils view Religious Education as being confessional, dogmatic and bible-centred and it gives no room to the African pupils to critically reflect and analyse it using African lens. Museka (2012) postulates that dropouts in Religious Education are at an increase because the current syllabus being taught in Zimbabwe secondary schools is a mockery to the cultural diversity of society and its constitution. Crawford and Rossiter (1986) say that the syllabus is cancerous to African pupils in pluralistic milieu and the fallacy of missionary education resists the test of time as it influenced and shaped the content and characters of the subject according to the denominational doctrines.

On the other hand, Groenewegen (1990) argues that pupils view Religious Education as a yoke of precursors, persecutors and belief in a foreign God if the western culture. As Nyagrowa (1997) posits, the negative attitudes towards Religious Education have managed to outline the test of time and are still prevalent covertly through the subject curriculum, hence dropouts from the subject seem to increase as pupils seek to free themselves from the bondage of western Christianity and slavery. Bezzina (1997) argues that Religious Education as a subject is facing a lot of drop outs for pupils discard it as a boring dry and irrelevant subject because they perceive it as upholding chains of outdated dogmatism and sectarian prejudices. McCaul (2008) says students believe that Religious Education blinkers and restricts growth, development and improvement of African culture, wisdom and knowledge. To African pupils, the subject seemed to be decaying because the acids of modernity have eaten deeply into the fabric of Religious Education as the religious past on which pupils were living has fallen into pieces (Museka, 2012).

According to Cox (2005) pupils emotions, feelings, interests and attitudes play an important role in enhancing or dropping the subject. If pupils decide to be passive, uncooperative and disinterested in Religious Education lessons, knowledge acquisition is inhibited. The attitudes of pupils determine the way in which they perceive the value of the subject and the rate at which pupils dropout or perform in the subject (Bezzina, 1997).

Role played by culture in drop outs

The teaching and learning of Religious Studies has undergone numerous changes, phases and modifications to bridge the gap between the students' home culture and school Religious Education culture (McCaul, 2008). As Museka (2012) argues, these changes failed to exercise the curriculum of the subject from its colonial jinx, texture and hangovers. The changes were and are still cosmetic, confessional and neo-confessional (Jackson, 2004). The subject is by and large Eurocentric and Christ centric as it is presented as a western idea grounded within western systems of thought. It is used to marginalize, disorient, disfigure and displace African learners

and as a result, learners may resort to drop it as they see its incompatibility to their cultural knowledge and wisdom (Ndlovu, 2004).

3. Research Methodology

The study used the quantitative methodology and made use of a survey research design. According to Anderson (2011) the descriptive survey method looks with intense accuracy at the phenomenon and then describes precisely what the researcher sees. The questionnaire was the only instrument used for collecting data. As Bell (2013) observes, the questionnaire increases reliability as an instrument of gathering data because of its greater impersonality. The population comprised all secondary school teachers teaching Religious Education. A sample of 75 randomly selected respondents was used. All the respondents were given the questionnaires by the researchers at their schools. The researchers also personally collected the questionnaires to increase on the rate of return of the questionnaires.

Data presentation and analysis

The study set out to examine the causes of dropouts in Religious Education in Zimbabwean secondary schools.

Table 1: Composition of sample by sex

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	33	44
Female	42	56
Totals	**75**	**100**

As table 1 above reveals, 56% of the respondents were female and 44% were male. This is generally a good representation of respondents as the variance is very marginal between the two sexes.

Table 2: Composition of sample by professional qualifications

Professional qualification	Frequency	Percentage
Certificate in Education	2	3
Diploma in Education	37	49
Bachelor of Arts	34	45
Bachelor in Religious Studies	2	3

Totals	75	100

Table 2 shows that all the respondents (100%) were in possession of a professional profession. However, only 3% of the respondents were in possession of a Bachelor in Religious Studies. The rest had other professional qualifications and yet they were teaching the subject.

Table 3: Teacher's responses on causes of drop outs in Religious Education

Category of responses	Agree	Disagree	Total
	%	%	%
Teacher factors	75	25	100
Shortage of resources	83	17	100
Cultural factors	92	8	100
Attitudes of pupils	72	28	100
Parental non-involvement	65	35	100
Disciplinary problems	80	20	100

Information on Table 3 above shows that all of teacher factors (75%), shortage of resources (83%), cultural factors (92%), attitudes of pupils (72%), parental non-involvement (65%) as well as disciplinary problems were causes of dropouts in Religious Education.

Discussion

The information from this study revealed that the respondents were fairly balanced in terms of gender or sex representation. The results therefore fairly reflect the views of both male and female teachers on this subject as they interact with boys and girls in the schools. It has been established that boys and girls experience schooling differently and are treated differently by teachers depending on whether they are girls or boys (Cox, 2005). Research has shown that the interactions between teachers and boys and between teachers and girls vary in frequency, duration and content (Museka, 2012). Further, mode of socialization lead girls and boys to develop different attitudes to certain academic disciplines and it is hypothesized that negative attitudes will influence whether students will feel able to engage with certain tasks and the subsequent quality of their engagement (Shoko, 2011).

The study revealed that teachers were a crucial factor influencing dropout rates of pupils in Religious Education. Variability, complexity and uncertainty in the workplace reduce teachers' commitment, effort and satisfaction. As Jackson (2004) emphasizes, conditions associated with these qualities of the workplace include the number of periods taught, the number of different preparations required, the proportion of a teacher's classes that he/she feels competent to teach, the total number of students in classes and the average achievement levels of students in class. Teacher attitudes towards a subject may motivate or demotivate pupils to continue or discontinue doing it. The qualifications of teachers in the study were clearly not relevant to the subject and thus were likely to frustrate the teachers' efforts in the subject.

Cultural factors were also highlighted as one aspect that drove pupils away from the subject. Teachers probably felt that the subject content was still bigoted and biased (Ndlovu, 2009). Teachers view culture conflicts as creating an educational vacuum and paralysis to the affected pupils and dropouts would be unavoidable. Thus according to McCaul (2008), students believe that Religious Education blinkers and restricts growth, development and improvement of African culture wisdom and knowledge.

Pupils' attitudes were also seen as another factor that exacerbated dropout in Religious Education. Negative attitudes on the subject exhibited by pupils are likely to cause boredom and a lack of desire to continue doing the subject and this is likely to drive away the pupils from the subject. This corroborates findings the Groenewegen (1990) who argues that pupils view Religious Education as a yoke of precursors, persecutors and belief in a foreign God of the western world. These negative attitudes are likely to demotivate pupils from pursuing the subject.

There is also evidence that parents are not involving themselves in the development of a positive image of the subject to their children. Teachers felt that non involvement by parents in motivating their children to do the subject encouraged drop-outs. For example, parents were not prioritizing Religious Education when they were paying examination fees for their children at Ordinary Level. This gave the subject a low opinion status among students. As Fleming (2004) states, where parents think that a subject does not have a good career path for their children, this is likely to cause the children to stop doing the subject.

Evidence also reveals that teachers did not have adequate resources for effectively teaching Religious Education. The only major source available to teach the subject was the Bible. As UNESCO (2011) observes, the general shortage of resources for the subject is a severe problem in most schools. Religious Education requires resources like relevant textbooks bibles, charts, pictures, videos and other audio-visual aids so that pupils have a fee of the practical realities of the subject. There is also need to have many resource persons with relevant expertise coming in to help or complement the teachers' efforts (Cox, 2005).

Conclusions

In view of the above findings, the researchers would like to make some conclusions:

- Teachers teaching Religious Education were not in possession of relevant qualifications and were most likely to use inappropriate methodologies to teach the subject.

- Schools lack resources for teacher to effectively teach Religious Education, and as a result, teachers used the bible as the only source.

- Cultural factors were driving pupils away from the subject in as far as the subject content was viewed as bigoted and biased against traditional beliefs.

- Pupils had negative attitudes towards the subject largely due to lack of motivation from parents and due to cultural influences.

- Parents were not motivating their children to do Religious Education as a school subject particularly at Ordinary Level where it was not a priority for registration for the public examinations.

Recommendations

In light of the findings of the study the researchers would like to make some recommendations:

- Teachers are encouraged to use the eclectic, cooperative multi-faith Religious Education approaches and e-generative and pedagogy demonstrations in resource deficient environments.

- The school and home should play complementary roles in efforts to ameliorate the problems of drop-outs in Religious Education through consultations.

- The Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education should organize staff development sessions for Religious Education teachers where latest developments in the subject will be conveyed to the teachers.

- The Curriculum Development Unit should modify the Religious Education syllabus and adopt and adapt it to new global multi-faith Religious Education syllabus content and perspectives.

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