THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES IN ENHANCING MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS' LEARNERS IN KENYA

Author: **Doreen Nyamosi**

Part- time Lecturer of Religious Studies

Department of Humanities and Social sciences, Egerton University

Email: dreencandy@gmail.com

Abstract

Moral development is a critical tool in enhancing the moral fabric and ethical citizenship in any given country. In Kenya, Religious studies as an academic subject has been for a long time been used as a tool of promoting moral reasoning among learners. This study focuses on the role of Religious in enhancing moral development and ethical growth of learners in secondary schools in Kenya. The study will employ qualitative study technique of study.

Introduction

Every country has a responsibility of developing moral reasoning competencies of its learners (You and Penny, 2011). Diman (2012) reiterates that development of learners with a strong moral component is salient because it equips the students with the ability to distinguish between good or bad and makes them acquire competencies on how to make correct

judgements.Additionally, Sober (2009) postulates that this type of moral training provided to learners has a great influence on the adults they become to their families, community and nation at large.

The greatest gift and working tool a nation can offer its youth is education. A healthy society is nurtured through the provision of quality education that is accessible and relevant (Kowino et al, 2012). Education therefore, is the cornerstone of all human societies. World governments recognize this and have factored education in their policies and budgetary allocation (Mwaka, et al, 2011). The teaching and learning of Religious Education (R.E) including Christian Religious Education (CRE) offered within the school curriculum are founded upon the need for value education. This is a form of education that stresses the acquisition of living values by learners. Religious Education inculcates universal and ethical values such as compassion, courage, honesty, tolerance and truthfulness. This helps in nurturing balanced individuals with the aim of creating a humane society. Values are what promote human beings to personhood. These values are inherent in all people and acting contrary to them negates one's personhood. Scholars have pointed out that there are three basic institutions that influence value education – the home, church/religious institution and the school.

In Kenya, the teaching and learning of Religious Education has come a long way. Initially, African communities taught values to their members informally by using religion even before the coming of the Europeans (Chesaro, 2012). With the coming of the colonists to Kenya, and the abolition of slave trade, Christianity was introduced in the missionary sponsored schools. In the colonial era, CRE featured as a dominant subject because missionaries used it as a tool to win converts, meaning that it enhanced conversion of the Africans into Christianity. They had a

preconceived idea that Africans could easily be converted to Christianity through schooling so they became interested in African education (Malusu and Otiende, 1994). Formal learning and Religious Education were taught hand in hand, and therefore CRE was treated as a core subject in school curriculum both at Primary and Secondary Levels (Kasomo, 2011). Schools then offered Christian Religious Education for confessional purposes and also for moral development. To strengthen the position of C.R.E in school curriculum, the Fraser Education Commission Report of 1909 (Government of Kenya, 1909) stated that any education system without Christian religious education being offered in its curriculum is mischievous and is bound to contribute to moral rot in the society.

The Beecher Education Commission report (1949) and the Binns Education Committee (1949) further urged the missionaries to offer CRE in the school curriculum as an attempt to satisfy mental, cultural, spiritual and moral values of the Kenyan society. During the time of attaining independence, it was noted that there was a strong force of CRE in enhancing moral growth of Kenyan citizens. The Ominde Education Commission report of 1964 (Republic of Kenya, 1964) took cognizance of the role of C.R.E in fostering moral growth of the citizens and also in promoting the realization of the broad aims education in the newly created nation. In the Kenyan school curriculum, the teaching of C.R.E was therefore entrenched to enable the students to acquire spiritual, social and moral insights in a rapidly changing society. The Kenyan Institute of Education (2003) is responsible for developing educational syllabus for both primary and secondary schools, believed that teaching C.R.E in schools was one of the several ways that could be used to increase unity and also in inculcating moral values amongst the Kenyan citizens.

The introduction of 8-4-4 system in 1985, which mandated is the applicability and self-reliance policy, rendered the subject elective. Furthermore, the religious plurality and freedom of worship, diversification and secularism in the country challenged the course content and its importance, in that the subject was no longer compulsory. Again the competition from other humanity courses, sciences and modernization divert the tendency of its significance in Kenya. This system placed a premium on science and technical subjects which could be directly or indirectly used for self-employment. Consequently, CRE has assumed a low status due to its limitation in the provision of opportunities for self- employment. (Chesaro, 2012).

The major goals of secondary school education in Kenya are to provide the students with opportunities to: acquire necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes for the development of the self and the nation, promote love for and loyalty to the nation , promote harmonious co-existence among the peoples of Kenya, develop mentally, socially, morally, physically and spiritually, enhance understanding and respect for own and other people's cultures and their place in contemporary society, enhance understanding and appreciation of interrelationships among nations, promote positive environmental and health practices, build a firm foundation for further education and training, develop ability for enquiry, critical thinking and rational judgment, develop into a responsible and socially well adjusted person, promote acceptance and respect for all persons, enhance enjoyment in learning, identify individual talents and develop them, build a foundation for technological and industrial development, develop into a self-disciplined individual who appreciates work and manages time properly. (Chesaro,2012). Through CRE, Objectives of Secondary School Education are met in that it inculcates moral beliefs that makes individual grow spiritually, and promote the view of equality before the eyes of God. These

individual hence develops virtues of love, unity and harmony. At international levels, CRE contributes to views of people as one race (KIE, 2005).

In particular, the objectives of teaching CRE are: to gain insights into the unfolding of God"s self-revelation to mankind through their personal experience. The African Religious Heritage, the biblical relation as a whole and specifically in Jesus Christ and the Christian Community; use the acquired social, spiritual and moral insights to think critically and making appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society; appreciate and respect other people's cultural and Christian beliefs and practices; acquire

basic principles of Christian living and develop a sense of self-respect and respect for others; promote international consciousness through the understanding of universal brotherhood and sisterhood; contribute positively to the transformation of self and the society as a whole and acquire knowledge of their studies in various career fields (KIE, 2005). The content of CRE entails African Religious Heritage topics, which lead to appreciation of other people's culture and beliefs. The acquired social, spiritual and moral insight helps students to think critically and make up appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society.

MORALITY AND INDICATORS OF MORAL DEVELOPMENT

According to Straughan (2000), moral reasoning is a conscious effort to make informed and responsible judgments about matters of moral importance. The word moral comes from a Latin root, *mos or moris* and means standards, principles and habits of behavior that are applicable to the distinction between what is right and wrong (Kowiniet al., 2012). Morals

are therefore regarded as desirable and held with high esteem by the society. They are codes or customs that define how individuals should live together. Morals are principles or standards of good behavior. Morals such as industriousness, courage, self-control, honesty, responsibility and respect for others are moral virtues developed for one's personal interest Self control honesty, respect, patriotism, peaceful resolutions of conflicts. (Turgeon, 2011). Kalsoom, Behlol, Kanyani and Kaini (2012) define moral reasoning as the conscious effort to make informed and responsible judgments about matters of moral importance. Mensch (2009) provides a more detailed definition as the specific aspects of moral development that focuses on the cognitive ability of the individual to understand morality in the context of the situation. According to You and Penny (2011) moral reasoning is a process of determining right and wrong in a given situation.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CURRICULUM AND STUDENTS' MORAL REASONING

In Kenya, moral education is provided to secondary school students to equip them with moral reasoning skills to foster good morals (KIE, 2002). Major changes in the school curriculum in 2002 left CRE with almost the exclusive responsibility of promoting moral development among the youth which was effected following a recommendation by the Wangai commission on causes of indiscipline in secondary schools in Kenya (GoK, 2001). The Basic Education Curriculum Framework in Kenya (GoK, 2016), also emphasis that moral and ethical values through Christian Religious Education be taught in a more detailed way both in junior and senior secondary school. Through this, learners will be provided with opportunities to practice their faith by applying Biblical principles to daily living, such as love for God, self and others. Consequently, the

knowledge, skills and attitudes gained here will help the learner to cope with the challenges of life.

The CRE curriculum stipulates that students who interact with CRE content should acquire social; spiritual and moral insights to think critically; and make appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society, appreciate and respect their own; and other peoples' culture, promote international consciousness through the understanding of universal brotherhood and sisterhood; and contribute positively to the transformation of self and society as a whole. However, majority of secondary school students are teenagers and are at the stage of learning by experimenting and trying to seek freedom. This makes most of the students become victims of moral decadency. Some common immoral behavior in secondary schools include; alcohol and drug abuse, bullying, cheating in examination, stealing, raping, among others. Kenya National Examination council [KNEC] (2014) reported that cheating and other examination irregularities during the Kenya Certificate of Secondary Education (KCSE) increased significantly from 2,927 cases in 2011 to 5,101 in 2016. The KNEC report states that in 2016, there were numerous reported cases of examination cheating which led to the arrest of twenty university students and three principals in 2015.Ndarwa (2007), noted that there is little or no emphasis on moral education enhanced through CRE in most of the schools despite the moral role CRE as a subject is expected to play.

The CRE curriculum is expected to expose learners to critical thinking which is essential for moral reasoning. However, despite exposure to the curriculum, many secondary school graduates are still unable make responsible moral choices (Kowino, Agak and Kochung,

2012). Mwalulu (2007) noted that it is the school leavers who are normally used by politicians to cause mayhem in the society. Oyaro (2009) adds that Kenyan reform institutions are full of the students who should belong to secondary schools rather than penitentiary. Many problems in schools are therefore attributed to students' bad behavior, negative attitudes and lack of moral (Ming'yue, 2013). The Wangai led commission of 2001 report on causes of indiscipline in schools in Kenya observed that problems plaguing schools were mainly due to lack of the teaching of moral reasoning skills. Sahu (2013) attributes lack of moral reasoning skills to poor instructional methods used in the teaching of moral education. Achola and Pillai (2001) observed that most students concentrate on CRE not because of moral benefits associated with it but to boost their overall performance in KCSE examination. Itolondo (2011) noted that ineffectiveness of moral education was due de-motivated teachers who felt that they are not given recognition by the government. The teachers accused the government of undermining implementation of the CRE curriculum and where responsible for the escalation of moral decadence in the country because it places more emphasis on and science subjects.

CRE is a compulsory subject in Christian Religious inclined public secondary schools in Kenya in the first two years and an elective in the third and fourth years (Kenya National Examination Council [KNEC], 2016). This means that all in Christian Religious inclined secondary school students have been exposed to some moral education. Despite this, the moral reasoning level of most students is relatively low which is reflected in the unbecoming behaviour observed in schools and society. The low moral reasoning level maybe due to inappropriate CRE curriculum, inadequate instructional materials and lack of qualified and

experienced teachers (Sahu, 2013; Kowino, Agak & Kochung, 2012; Rao,2008). Teaching methods may also be a possible cause as they affect learning outcomes. Felder, & Brent (2005),) asserts that use of appropriate teaching methods assist learners develop their ability analyze issues and situations besides gathering knowledge and skills. Akaranga and Simiyu (2016) demonstrated that moral education is influenced by the instructional methods used in the classrooms.

Moral and intercultural dilemmas are often inextricably entwined with one another during the teaching of moral reasoning (Cush, Man & Young, 2009). Cultures and ethics involve multidimensional frameworks of values, beliefs, epistemological orientations, and expectations (Vangronsvelt & Manchal, 2009). According to Corm et.al, (2012), intercultural moral reasoning skills help students to live and work with others who come from very different cultural backgrounds. Moral reasoning enables one to adjust behavior as he/ she moves in and out of cultures in order to meet the implicit and explicit expectations of each culture's framework. Due to increasing cultural diversity within many countries, people are constantly called upon to make personal decisions on ethical issues that have the potential to harm or help others whether directly or indirectly. For example, the life-and-death encounters are typically considered to be moral dilemmas such as euthanasia and abortion among others (KIE, 2002; Endicott, Bock & Narvaez, 2003). Therefore, given the sensitivity of discussions in today's classrooms, teachers should be willing to invest time to train their students in discussion techniques and to encourage them to participate whenever needed so as to develop moral reasoning skills.

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