Factors Affecting Teaching and Learning of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in Ghanaian Junior High Schools: A Case Study of C. B. Mensah SDA Junior High School

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ABSTRACT

Religious and Moral Education (RME) has caught the attention and interest of Ghanaians from the past to our contemporary times. The subject seeks to enforce knowledge and values capable of making individuals responsible and resourceful members of society. In current times characterized by moral decadence, the need for religious and moral education has become a necessity. To realize the communal hope of making RME a lucrative and highly patronized course or subject in the education system in Ghana, it is necessary to look at the factors that affect the teaching and learning of RME in the country. This paper therefore sought to find out the significant factors that affect the teaching and learning of RME and the means to address such issues. A mixed approach was adopted in gathering the data from the C. B. Mensah Adventist Junior High School in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The study revealed that the RME curriculum is facing some difficulties in Ghana. These include scarcity of textbooks and shortage of professional teachers in the subject area. The study recommended that the government, and other stakeholders involved in or patronizing education, should collaborate in addressing the challenges and implement sustainable measures for enhancing the teaching and learning of RME in Ghana. The study is relevant for teachers and learners alike because it contributes to knowledge development by serving as secondary material for future research and policymaking. It also serves as insight for the government, parents, teachers, religious bodies, educationists, counselors and other stakeholders in the educational sector.

Keywords: Education, Religious and Moral Education, Religion, Morality, Teaching, Learning

INTRODUCTION

Religion has made many contributions to social development in the world. It serves as a tool for progress rather than an impediment to any national growth.¹ Religion is a source of moral values for human and national growth. Bansah argues that Africans are by nature religious, and their morality is utterly dependent on their religious

ethos and disposition, which translates to development. This implies that Africans’ orientation is deeply rooted in religion. According to Opoku et al, religion promotes all facets of human development, including education. In Ghana, formal education is a process that involves several years of schooling and participating in various curricular and extra-curricular activities. One of the fundamental building blocks for a nation’s intellectual advancement is the passing on of general information to enhance logical skills for generally preparing oneself or others for adult life.

Being a critical subject area in the Ghana Education Service (GES), Religious and Moral Education (RME) is a discipline in the school curriculum that allows students to analyze their beliefs and consider the challenges posed by these beliefs on their moral values. The subject assists students in developing and reflecting on their religious values and their capacity for moral decisions. Through developing consciousness and obligation of the value of each individual in a diverse society, RME produces learners with decent attitudes toward other people. This makes them capable of exhibiting religious tolerance in a pluralistic society. In effect, one of the courses taught in Ghana’s basic schools is RME, which is a subject that merges religious education and moral education into a single curriculum.

The focus of education in the 21st century is to develop the thinking prowess of individuals for national development. Nonetheless, various schools of thought centering on RME have emanated in society. Some of the views or thoughts support the operation and promotion of the subject RME. However, others portray the subject to be irrelevant especially now that the world is operating in a scientific and industrialized manner. To better understand and address these difficulties, the researchers aim to examine how RME is taught and studied in Ghana. It critically looks at the challenges of the teaching and learning of RME in Ghana using the C. B. Mensah SDA JHS as a focal point. This school is used as a case study since it is a school in which RME is taught from Basic 1 to 9. The school operates based on the Common Core Program which reveals standards for learning the subject and it aims to provide quality education for all learners. The findings from the study are presented subsequently.

LITERATURE REVIEW
Before the introduction of Western Education, the people of Africa in general and the Gold Coast (now Ghana) in particular had their own traditional form of Education. Though the beginning of human interest in the subject is unknown, Asare-Danso claims that the history of RME can be traced to the pre-colonial period (from 1820 to 1850), when the subject formed an integral part of Traditional African Education. Education, during this time, aimed at helping students to improve their mental, physical, moral, spiritual, emotional, and social dimensions. According to Opuni, informal education helped the indigenous people to be more moral.

Teachers involved in traditional education were mostly parents and elders in the community. Their main focus was to see to it that children and young adults remained upright, honest, sociable, brave, humble, truthful, and well-behaved. According to Gyekye, reciting stories, proverbs, myths, and riddles functioned as an endless supply of instruction regarding the consequences of individuals’ actions, both good and bad. Canham and Ozigi observed that this form of instruction was dictatorial since it did not encourage effective interaction because the information flow was constantly directed from the teacher (parents) to the student (children).

Asare-Danso notes that it is on record that RME is one of the earliest subjects that was taught in the castle schools. During the early part of the missionary activities in the Gold Coast, the subject was used as a tool for evangelization both in castle schools and mission schools. It became a pillar of the curriculum while the school also served as the church. Currently, RME is an essential component of the pre-tertiary school curriculum in Ghana. The aims of teaching and learning of the subject are that it seeks to develop in learners

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awareness of their Creator and the purpose of their very existence; enable learners to develop tolerance and understanding of other people’s faiths and cultures; help learners to draw the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours; help learners to acquire the socio-cultural values inherent in the three major religions in Ghana (Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion); develop in learners the spirit of teamwork, collaboration and togetherness in nation-building as well as develop in learners the ability to respond to religious beliefs and practices in an informed, rational and responsible way. Thus, RME has been one of the primary disciplines of formal education in Ghana from the time of the colonial era to the present.

Many scholars from Ghana, Africa and the world at large emphasize the importance of RME in the development of pupils and even society. According to Asare-Danso, RME teachers ensure that learners learn about moral values through their instructional delivery of the subject. In the opinion of Rossiter, RME actively promotes the principles of justice, truth, and environmental preservation. The subject places premium on the importance of individuals valuing one another and themselves, their families and communities, as well as celebrating diversity in society by appreciating human stewardship towards the environment. To this end, Mumuni claims that the purpose of RME entails disseminating religious concepts, ideals, and practices so that individuals can make decisions that will promote peaceful coexistence.

According to Campbell, a procedure for educating children about the various expressions of religion that they encounter in society is provided by RME. Ofosu observed that there are multiple religious factors contending for people's allegiance in a pluralistic society. For this reason, RME leverages the level of conflict, freedom of choice, and an awareness of the coexistence of individuals in the society. Indeed, all three major religions in Ghana namely Christianity, Islam and the Indigenous African Religion, as noted by Mumuni, encourage religious tolerance among practitioners and adherence to the country's numerous religious groups. It is in light of this that McMillan claims that learners cannot properly engage with the world as adults unless they are aware of the significant roles that religion plays in human societies and cultures.

Inspite of the major contributions of RME towards the sustenance of society, some studies have revealed the challenges being faced as a result of the teaching and learning of RME in schools. Asare-Danso claims that the lack of technological knowledge, pedagogical knowledge and content knowledge of most RME teachers in Ghana negatively influence the teaching of the subject. He noted that the inability of most RME teachers to incorporate various instructional resources, knowledge and content in teaching RME stumped students' understanding of RME concepts. On his part, Mumuni laments that teaching and learning of religion and morality in Ghana face numerous difficulties.

Chu and Park studied preschool teachers to evaluate their abilities to teach religious and moral lessons. The study found that the majority of teachers lacked the expertise required to teach the topic effectively. Moon also looked into the value of religious and moral instruction in the age of digital technology. He concluded that the curriculum was attacked for being overly grade-oriented and for failing to instruct learners about moral matters of urgent importance and its applicability in the digital era, which dissolves the conventional limits of human life.

Another difficulty RME teachers face, according to Hoge, is a textbook deficit. Hoge came to the conclusion that because the Ministry of Education practices the centralized curriculum system in which there is an emphasis on the common use of RME textbooks in all schools, students are taught the same moral messages or lessons. This is believed to affect the evaluation of pre-service teachers’ perspectives on the moral education.

14 Mumuni Thomson, “Teachers and Students’ Perception of and Attitude towards the Religious and Moral Education Programme in Selected Senior Secondary Schools in the Upper East Region of Ghana” (University of Cape Coast, 2006).
18 R.C. James H McMillan and Sally Schumacher, Research in Education: Evidence-Based Inquiry (Pearson, 2010).
20 Thomson, “Teachers and Students’ Perception of and Attitude towards the Religious and Moral Education Programme in Selected Senior Secondary Schools in the Upper East Region of Ghana.”
program in Korea. Diversity of demands and circumstances are not considered carefully when disseminating moral messages.

Park did a comparison study on the functions of the community and the school in a child's moral development. The survey results showed that the intense competition in both classrooms and schools redirected students' attention away from moral growth in favor of solely academic learning. He continued by saying that rather than encouraging learners to develop moral values, teachers and parents also pushed them to achieve better results.

**METHODOLOGY**

A mixed approach was adopted in gathering the data. This involved collecting and analyzing both numerical and non-numerical data consisting of the opinions and experiences of respondents on the importance and challenges of teaching RME in C. B. Mensah SDA JHS. The data accessed by the researchers during the research was from both primary and secondary sources. Published books, articles and other significant literature were used as secondary sources of information on the subject matter. The data was computed using descriptive statistics to work out the frequencies and percentages of respondents.

C. B. Mensah JHS is one of the educational institutions in the Antoa community. The school was established on the 26th of November 2000 and was commissioned by Pastor Peter Osei Mensah who was the then President of the Ghana Union Conference and assisted by Pastor Israel Nana-Tuffour. Antoa is located in the Kwabre East Municipal in the Ashanti Region of Ghana. The student population of the school at the time of the survey was 292 with 165 being females and 127 being males and also the staff strength of the school was 18. The Seventh-Day Adventist Church manages the Primary School while the government of Ghana controls the Junior High School. The age range of the participants at the time data was collected was 12 – 18 years.

Questionnaires and interviews were the main instruments used for gathering primary data. These types of instruments were chosen based on the fact that they are designed for self-administration and also possible to cover a larger number with these instruments. Again, questionnaires and interviews allow detailed information to be received from respondents.

Purposive sampling was used in the research to identify the variables influencing RME teaching and learning in basic schools. A sample is a discrete survey study whose features are assessed about the population as a whole. 100 people made up the entire sample. All 100 questionnaires were personally distributed by the researchers to the sampled students in grades BS 7 to BS 9, and they were all returned. This was done to guarantee that the study would include students from all grades in the JHS. To gather qualitative data, 5 participants representing the teaching staff, including the headteacher, were interviewed during the study. Out of this number were 3 male teachers and 2 female teachers. This implies that there was a fair representation of gender among the sampled teachers whose age bracket was between 23 and 40 years.

**PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS**

To ensure comprehensive research into the topic, questionnaires were administered in the C.B. Mensah SDA JHS in the Kwabre East Municipal in Ghana to seek the views of students and teachers in the school. The demographic features of the students revealed that male students were 57 representing 57% and 43 respondents were females representing 43%. This indicates that though the males have the largest representation, ideas from both genders were fairly represented through their responses. The age range of students was between ages 12 and 18. The study also revealed that 33 students representing 33% were in BS 7, 30 students representing 30% were in BS 8, and lastly, 37 students in BS 9 constituting 37%. This suggests that ideas were taken from all grades giving a fair representation of the students in the study. With regards to religion, 99 represented the two major religions i.e., Christianity and Islam. The other respondent representing 1% failed to declare his religious affiliation. Out of the 99 represented, 81 representing 81% of the respondents were Christians and 18 representing 18% were Muslims. This also suggests that, though Muslim participants were in the minority, ideas were represented by both religions. The question that guided the data collection is discussed subsequently.

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Obstacles to the Teaching and Learning of the RME Curriculum

What are the challenges of the teaching and learning of RME in Ghana?

Table 1: Challenges of the teaching and learning of RME in Ghana

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Position</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>(a) Inadequate RME subject teachers</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(b) The subject does not stimulate the interest of learners (boring)</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>7th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(c) Wider content of the RME subject</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>3rd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(d) General negative attitude towards the discipline</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>6th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(e) Science-related subjects are seen as more important than RME in terms of national development</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>2nd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(f) Lack or Inadequate teaching and learning materials</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(g) Poor teaching styles of teachers</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The opinions on the inadequacy of RME teachers were also examined as shown in Table 1 above. It came out that, 65% of sampled respondents in (a) were of the view that the inadequate number of RME teachers in the country hinders effective and practical teaching of the subject. This was confirmed by most respondents from all the levels in the school. When asked (b) whether RME encouraged students' interest, 17% responded that the subject was dull and that in contrast to scientific disciplines, no new skills were gained. This implies that the remaining respondents are of the counter view that the subject was practical in life and good for national development. From the findings in question (c), 75% of participants responded that RME is wide in content and that teachers were under pressure to complete the syllabus. The remaining respondents affirmed that the subject is not wide in content.

It was indicated in question (d) that, 21% of students had negative attitudes toward the discipline, and the remaining respondents were identified as having a positive attitude towards the subject. When students were asked about the relevance of RME as a discipline to national development as compared to the Science-related subjects as shown in (e), 78% of the students responded in affirmation and the rest opposed that question.

From the table indicating the challenges of learning and teaching RME, it can be observed that 91% of the respondents as shown in (f) were of the view that lack of relevant teaching and learning resources is one of the major variables affecting the teaching and learning of RME. The rest asserted that this was not the case because some of the resources, in particular textbooks, are provided to students by their parents and guardians. On the issue of teachers' capability to teach the subject under question (g), 25% of students indicated that some teachers do not have the requisite techniques or skills to guide students in learning the subject RME. Nonetheless, many others indicated that there are available teachers who have the requisite skills and techniques in teaching RME, but the students are not serious enough to learn.

DISCUSSION

According to Alice Sambu, one of the problems with Religious and Moral Education (RME) as a field of study in elementary schools is that the discipline has insufficient or no teaching and learning resources.27 It was realized from the responses of the majority of the participants in the school that only 9% of parents or guardians supported their wards with materials that helped them in learning the subject. When the headteacher of the school was interviewed on the issue, he attributed the challenge of the subject to the low commitment of the government and other stakeholders in providing students with material resources that could enrich their knowledge and development of good moral values expected in the communities as compared to other subjects like the Sciences.28 According to Juliana Ekuban in a similar study, the challenges that students face in studying RME may be due to poor teaching styles and learning strategies, lack of students' interest in the subject and the unavailability of teaching and learning resources like syllabus, textbooks, classrooms and stable learning environment.29 The inadequacy or unavailability of teaching and learning materials was noted by Ekuban as a

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28 Interview with Gabriel Ofosu, The Headmaster of C.B. Mensah Basic School, Antoa, 01/09/2022
major factor or challenge in the quest for giving quality education to the people of Ghana.\textsuperscript{30} The researchers further asked the headteacher about the school materials used in teaching and learning RME, and he indicated that most teachers use the scriptures such as the Bible and the Qur'an in teaching. He indicated that only a fraction of the students come to class with textbooks on RME.\textsuperscript{31}

The headteacher also posited that the unavailability of professional RME teachers is mostly a problem associated with remote communities.\textsuperscript{32} The responses confirmed the findings of Ekuban’s study where the school which was used as the case study had only one RME teacher and he was not even professionally trained in the subject. The views of the headmaster further confirm Ekuban’s study which established that the major problem of learning RME in basic school is the lack of professionally trained RME teachers.\textsuperscript{33}

According to Jebungei, RME is too broad to be covered in the allotted time.\textsuperscript{34} The study revealed the same trend at C. B. Mensah JHS and identified that teachers are under pressure to cover all or most of the topics for examinations. They, therefore, cover only examinable topics. This finding is similar to the findings gathered by Ekuban where the only RME teacher in the school under review was of the view that the pressure of covering all the topics in the Ghana Education Service syllabus poses a challenge to him and learners since much of the attention is given to the intellectual part of the subject instead of the desirable attitudes expected by communities in Ghana. This is a worrying trend and Ekuban posits that the bias for science-related subjects against the moral values in the Ghanaian educational sector is one of the major challenges religious education is facing currently in Ghana.\textsuperscript{35} The Chaplain of the school during the interview shared similar views as he underscored that modernization and technological advancement have given much premium to science-related subjects rather than inculcating moral values such as faithfulness, loyalty, hard work, chastity and love. He further argued that these values are supposed to serve as a supplement to the skills needed for every vocation.\textsuperscript{36} In support of this assertion, Opuni-Frimpong has posited that education without morals produces intellectual criminals, in that, Ghanaian education should not only focus on producing individuals with the right skills to occupy positions but should also focus on their moral values like hard work, affection for people, justice and love.\textsuperscript{37}

On the question of students’ interest in the subject RME, Jebungei posits that the media or the internet has influenced learners’ acquisition of values. She indicated that most students tend to focus on watching nude videos and listening to immoral issues or stories on the internet and other media platforms, other than videos or stories that carry religious and moral values and information.\textsuperscript{38} The teaching staff members in the school during the interview expressed the view that this phenomenon shifts the attention of students to secularization instead of the moral and religious values needed to live a good life in the school and society. They explained that when most students experience this kind of life, their interest in RME declines and as a result behave negatively towards the discipline by being absent from class when it is time for RME lessons, sleeping while class is ongoing and staying unconcerned in class. A member of the teaching staff during the interview also posited that the negative comments from some teachers in the school about the subject discourage students from learning the subject and acquiring the moral values needed for life.

The majority of the respondents revealed that the lack of relevant teaching and or poor teaching styles of the teachers as one of the major variables affecting the teaching and learning of RME. This view is supported by some scholars who have noted that most RME teachers in the pre-tertiary institutions in Ghana have low knowledge when it comes to teaching methodologies. She further explained that most teachers are not familiar with RME teaching techniques required to guide students in adopting the right values the school and society want them to acquire. This is a result of the fact that RME is presumed by many people to be a subject that can be taught by all persons who have received a formal education, even if it is outside the subject of RME. As such,
workshops, seminars and other training sessions are not regularly organized for teachers to equip themselves with the requisite knowledge and skills needed to teach RME effectively.

Discussion Summary
The study set out to analyse the Obstacles to the teaching and learning of the RME Curriculum. Various issues came up during the fieldwork which included the inadequacy of teachers, lack of interest, the wide scope of the subject, lack of teaching and learning materials, the poor teaching style of the teachers and the general bias towards science-related courses to the detriment of RME. However, as stated by various scholars there is a need for the educational system to focus on not only producing individuals with the right skills to occupy positions but also on building their moral values which would in the long run build the moral fibre of society.

RECOMMENDATIONS
Based on the research findings, the researchers would like to make the following suggestions and recommendations to ensure that RME becomes an impactful subject in Ghana’s education system. It is, therefore, recommended that:

• R.M.E. Textbooks must adequately be provided in basic schools. Also, regular workshops should be organized to enhance the teaching and learning of the subject.
• Professionally trained RME teachers should be assigned to teach the subject to avoid poor outcomes in the subject area.
• The teaching of RME should not only focus on teaching religion based on the history, beliefs and practices of religious traditions. However, it should involve a holistic approach aimed at teaching religion and morality from all aspects of human life and existence.
• In teaching RME, there should be adequate stakeholder engagement so that learners will get an in-depth knowledge and experiences that will condition their religious, moral and socio-cultural lives.
• Students or learners should be orientated to have adequate knowledge of the reason why Religion should be studied academically. This will ensure and promote interest in the study of Religion by learners and parents.
• There should be conscientious efforts by government, religious authorities and other stakeholders to change the attitude of some Christians and Muslims towards African Traditional Religion which prevents people from studying the Indigenous African Religion.
• The education system in Ghana should desist from decoupling RME from other subject areas such as Geography, Economics and Social Studies. Thus, RME should be treated as an academic discipline that is linked with other humanistic disciplines such as Geography, Economics and Social Studies.
• The teaching and learning of RME should be holistic but not targeted more at the affective domain.

CONCLUSION
This paper sought to find out the significant factors that affect the teaching and learning of RME and the means to address such issues. The findings revealed that the Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum is facing some difficulties in Ghana which have been mentioned and discussed. Various recommendations have also been provided and if adhered to would ensure that RME becomes an impactful subject in Ghana’s education system. Thus students who are churned out would be holistically developed to run the affairs of the nation efficiently and effectively.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
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