Pedagogy of Christian Religious Education in Nigerian Schools

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Abstract
Confronted by increased uproar, the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) rescinded its decision that removed Christian Religious Studies as a stand-alone subject and made it a sub-theme in Civic Education, unlike the Islamic/Arabic/French subjects in Nigeria's Basic Education Curriculum (BEC). This paper criticizes against this controversial change. It appreciates the reversal to the old curriculum which allowed Islamic Religious Knowledge and Christian Religious Knowledge to be taught as individual stand-alone subjects, with the common-good focus on moral responsibility, peaceful co-existence and national development. The needful at this moment is a suitable and viable pedagogy for imparting religious knowledge in the classroom setting. In this light, this paper makes a case for Christian Religious Knowledge by recommending shared praxis and community practice pedagogical approaches. It argues that, these methods will serve as good guides for interactive construction of moral knowledge in the students' class room and social settings.
Keywords: Religious Education, Christianity, Pedagogy, Praxis, Practice, Nigerian Schools

1. Introduction

When Nigeria launched the Universal Basic Education (UBE) program in September, 1998 ten years after, "in 2008 the Federal Government of Nigeria, through the Nigerian Educational Research and Development Council (NERDC) developed and introduced the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum (BEC) in schools by realigning all extant Primary and Junior Secondary School Curricula to meet the key targets of the UBE program" (Igbokwe, 2015, p.31). To further address new academic innovations and make the curriculum much more relevant and practical the 9-year BEC was revised in 2012 with its implementation to commence in September, 2014. In the course of the implementation in stages, the new curriculum raised dust over the place of religion, particularly, the Christians accusing NERDC of a grand design to Islamize the country with the new curriculum.

The fear of the Islamization of Nigeria via school curriculum is widespread. There has been much ado in Nigerian media and warnings from the Christian Association of Nigeria (CAN) that Christian Religious Studies has been deliberately eliminated from the new curriculum. CAN president, Dr. Samson Ayokunle argues that "whereas CRK [Christian Religious Knowledge], according to the new curriculum, would no longer exist as a subject in schools but rather as themes in civic education, **Islamic/Arabic Studies/French subjects on the other hand, have been introduced in the new curriculum"** (Zaimov, 2017). This claim led the Incorporated Trustees of Kingdom Human Rights Foundation International to sue Vice President Yemi Osibanjo (who was acting president at the time of the announcement), the Minister of Education, Adamu Adamu, and the Federal Ministry of Education alleging a sinister plan to cause inter-religious crisis in the country (Nnochiri, 2017). The federal government denies the allegations saying that it wants to reduce students' workload and keep their studies in line with international standards.

Given the above scenario, critics are questioning the relevancy of religious education in public schools in a secular state like Nigeria. Some argue that religion is dividing rather healing the wounds of discord in the country: that the two major religions of Islam and Christianity have evolved creeds that exploit the ignorance and fear of the weak and vulnerable, instead of upholding the truth that would liberate the masses. This paper argues that the relevancy of religion to the creation of values in Nigeria has already been studied (Eluu, 2016), and that the controversial curriculum has also been reverted to the old style, leaving both Islamic and Christian religions to be taught as legitimate subjects that will entrench nationalistic values. This paper, however, states that their curricula should be restructured to be more practical in orientation. Effective religious pedagogic approaches emerge as pragmatic and contextual responses to students' diverse capabilities in a classroom, with the purpose of making religious literacy learning accessible and relevant to their lives (Lytra, Gregory & Ilankuberan, 2016). This paper focusing on CRK explores ways of making Christian religious education much more practical to Nigerian students. The paper reviews the state of Christian religious studies in Nigeria, considers approaches to Christian religious education, and then prioritizes learners' experiences with the aim of adapting them to Christian religious education in Nigerian schools. As a way of forming students in Christian practical knowledge, moral responsibility, and social skills; this paper proposes a curriculum design, and how to assess and evaluate students for optimal attainment of learning outcomes.

2. Christian Religious Studies in Nigeria

This section looks at five different tables that detail the recent curriculum review that has generated a lot of tension between Christians and federal education administrators in Nigeria. The curriculum provides frameworks for instruction and assessment of students. The tables below represent the revised 2012 curriculum; depict the class and content levels expectations as well as the related ideas, concepts, skills, and procedures that form the foundation for understanding and learning specific subjects. This is the curriculum that is to prepare students for the West African Senior Secondary Certificate Examination (WASSCE). Specifically, the curriculum provides a focus for teaching, learning, and assessing students in the final year of secondary education, thus preparing the students with contents useful for future learning in higher institutions and beyond. The grand focus is that at the end of the day, the students are rigorously made to understand Nigeria's history and effectively participate in the civic life as responsible citizens (Ilechukwu & Ugwuozor, 2014).

To clearly understand the 2012 controversial WASSCE curriculum, it is important to gloss over the non-controversial 2008 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum in the table and compare with four 2012 revised tables displayed below.

Table 1. The 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum as structured in 2008

Lower Basic education Curriculum	Middle Basic Education Curriculum	Upper Basic Education Curriculum
PRIMARY 1-3	PRIMARY 4-6	JSS1-3
Core Compulsory Subjects 1. English Studies 2. One Major Nigeria Language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) 3. Mathematics 4. Basic Science and Technology 5. Social studies 6. Civic Education 7. Cultural and Creative Arts (CCA) 8. Christian Religious Studies/ Islamic Studies 9. Physical and Health Education(PHE) 10. Computer Studies/ICT	**Core Compulsory Subjects** 1. English Language 2. One Major Nigeria Language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) 3. Mathematics 4. Basic Science 5. Social Studies 6. Civic Education 7. Cultural & Creative Arts 8. Christian Religious Studies 9. Physical and Health Education(PHE) 10. Computer Studies/ ICT	**Core Compulsory Subjects** 1. English Language 2. One Major Nigeria Language (Hausa, Igbo or Yoruba) 3. Mathematics 4. Basic Science 5. Social Studies 6. Civic Education 7. Cultural & Creative Arts 8. Christian Religious Studies 9. Physical and Health Education(PHE) 10. Basic Technology 11. Computer Studies/ ICT
Elective Subjects 1. Agriculture 2. Home Economics 3. Arabic Language	**Elective Subjects** 1. Agriculture 2. Home Economics 3. Arabic Language	**Elective Subjects** 1. Agriculture 2. Home Economics 3. Arabic Language 4. Business Studies
Note: Must offer 1 elective but not more than 2.	**Note:** Must offer 1 elective but not more than 2.	**Note:** Must offer 1 elective, but not more than 3.

Source: NERDC (2008).

This 2008 curriculum was well received by both christians and muslims, and this paper argues that it should be the status quo since it is comfortable and working for everyone in the country. At the same time one must not lose sight of the fact that the status quo has failed to foster the needed relationship between instrumental values and **religious** experience. Religion as an instrumental value is a means to achieving an intrinsic value aimed at integrated character formation of students (Glaz, 2015). The present curriculum has failed to tap into the higher levels of **religious** experience of God's presence among students to produce intrinsic values of character in them.

Table 2. The 2012 Revised Curriculum for Primaries 1-3

Basic Education (Primary 1-3)	
Minimum of 6 subjects; Maximum of 7 subjects	
Subjects	**Explanatory Notes**
English Studies	i. Official National Language ii. Medium of Instruction in schools iii. The subject predisposes itself for the infusion of the following Road Safety Education, Disaster Risk Reduction Education, Consumer Education. iv. Subject include Literature - in – English
Mathematics	i. Fundamental discipline for science and technological development ii. Important for everyday life
Nigerian Languages	i. National Policy on Education (NPE) stipulates that the medium of instruction should be the language of the immediate environment of the child. ii. Schools are free to select such Nigerian Language to be taught.
Basic Science and Technology (BST)	i. Each of the listed components will serve as themes for the Basic Science and Technology curriculum ii. Climate change is part of Basic Science theme iii. Disaster Risk Reduction Education and Consumer Education are infused into Basic Science and Technology Curriculum iv. Create enabling environment for the subject in all schools by making computers available in schools
Religion and National Values (RNV)	i. Listed components will serve as themes in the Religion and National Values Curriculum ii. Contents are planned for all children to take Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education themes iii. Separate classes should be run for CRS theme and IS theme iv. Consumer Education, Disaster Risk Reduction Education and Peace and Conflict Resolution curricula are infused into the Civic Education, Social Studies and Security Education Themes. v. Create enabling environment for the subject in all schools
Cultural & Creative Arts (CCA)	i. Important for preservation of our cultural Heritage and fostering Creativity.
Arabic Language	i. Optional

Source: NERDC (2017)

A look at the curriculum shows that primaries 1-3 students will offer a minimum of six subjects and a maximum of seven subjects. NERDC has merged religion, civic education and social studies under one subject to be taught in separate themes. The last item on the curriculum is Arabic Language which is made optional. Curiously, a look at the subject content on a different page of the NERDC website shows that Islamic knowledge is part of the Arabic Language subject. Critics question why NERDC would introduce Arabic Language instead of the Nigerian local languages that would foster national cohesion. Arabic Language appears in this curriculum from primary school to secondary school with no local Nigerian language allowed a definite space in the entire curriculum.

Usually, it is argued that these three languages: Yoruba, Hausa and Igbo are intended to resolve the controversy of supremacy and power among the over 250 ethnic groups in Nigeria. Unfortunately, the consistent geopolitical, ethno-religious and inter-cultural conflictive relationship among these three groups have failed the remedial intention and constituted a cog in the wheel of Nigeria's progress. While the increasing attitudes of sectarianism, division, nepotism, and demonization bedeviling Nigeria are largely derived from the destructive competition for supremacy and control going on among these three ethnic groups, the other 250 or more ethnic groups in the country are continually ignored, snubbed, fringed, subjugated, and forgotten or made to suffer different forms of political oppression. If one adds their legitimate grudge to the tensions existing among the three groups, Nigeria will become an oven that is heated with combustive ill-feelings. If not hijacked for vicious reasons, religion is intrinsically a tool for peaceful and collaborative existence (Nwaomah, 2011). Consequently, this paper argues that NERDC should harness religion in the manner that will douse existing tension, promote mutual respect and appreciation, advance developmental cohesion among Nigerians rather than subtly or overtly

exhibiting any form of destructive bigotry.

Table 3. The 2012 Revised Curriculum for Primaries 4-6

Basic Education (Primary 4-6)	
Minimum of 7 subjects; Maximum of 8 subjects	
Subjects	**Explanatory Notes**
English Studies	i. Official National Language ii. Medium of Instruction in school iii. The subject predisposes itself for the infusion of the following Road Safety Education, Disaster Risk Reduction Education, Consumer Education. iv. Subject include Literature - in – English
Mathematics	i. Fundamental discipline for science and technological development ii. Important for everyday life
Nigerian Languages	i. Schools are free to select such Nigerian Language to be taught.
Basic Science and Technology (BST)	i. Each of the listed components will serve as themes for the Basic Science and Technology curriculum ii. Climate change is part of Basic Science theme iii. Disaster Risk Reduction Education and Consumer Education are infused into Basic Science and Technology Curriculum iv. Create enabling environment for the subject in all schools by making computers available in schools
Religion and National Values (RNV)	i. Listed components will serve as themes in the Religion and National Values Curriculum ii. Contents are planned for all children to take Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education themes iii. Separate classes should be run for CRS theme and IS theme iv. Consumer Education, Disaster Risk Reduction Education and Peace and Conflict Resolution curricula are infused into the Civic Education, Social Studies and Security Education themes. v. Create enabling environment for the subject in all schools
Cultural & Creative Arts (CCA)	i. Important for preservation of our cultural Heritage and fostering Creativity.
Arabic Language	i. Optional
Pre-Vocational Studies	i. Each of the listed component will serve as themes for the Pre-Vocational Studies ii. Consumer Education is infused into Pre-Vocational Studies iii. Create enabling environment for the teaching of pre-vocational studies in schools

Source: NERDC (2017)

The same provisions in the lower classes apply to primaries 4-6 with a little tweaking. Students will offer a minimum of seven subjects and a maximum of eight subjects. Here, NERDC has also merged religion, civic education and social studies under one subject to be taught in separate themes. Again, the last item on the curriculum is Arabic Language and is optional. Critics question what makes Arabic Language tick in Nigeria that it must appear on the curriculum again and again. This is one of the reasons that makes CAN to look at the new curriculum with suspicion.

Table 4. The 2012 Revised Curriculum for Junior Secondary School (JSS) 1-3

Basic Education (JSS 1-3) Minimum of 9 subjects; Maximum of 10 subjects	
Subjects	**Explanatory Notes**
English Studies	i. Official National Language ii. Medium of instruction in schools iii. The subject predisposes itself for the infusion of the following Road Safety Education, Disaster Risk Reduction Education, Consumer Education. iv. Subject include Literature - in – English
Mathematics	i. Fundamental discipline for science and technological development ii. Important for everyday life
Nigerian Languages	i. Schools are free to select such Nigerian Language to be taught.
Basic Science and Technology (BST)	i. Each of the listed components will serve as themes for the Basic Science and Technology curriculum ii. Climate change is part of Basic Science Theme iii. Disaster Risk Reduction Education and Consumer Education are infused into Basic Science and Technology Curriculum iv. Create enabling environment for the subject in all schools by making computers available in schools
Religion and National Values (RNV)	i. Listed components will serve as themes in the Religion and National Values Curriculum ii. Contents are planned for all children to take Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education themes iii. Separate classes should be run for Christian Religious Studies theme and Islamic Studies theme iv. Consumer Education and Disaster Risk Reduction Education are infused into the Civic Education, Social Studies and Security Education themes. v. Create enabling environment for the subject in all schools vi. Important for preservation of our cultural Heritage and fostering Creativity.
Cultural & Creative Arts (CCA)	i. Tourism is a theme in Cultural and Creative Arts Curriculum
Arabic Language	i. Optional
Pre-Vocational Studies	i. Each of the listed components will serve as theme for the Pre-Vocational Studies Curriculum ii. Consumer Education is infused into Pre-Vocational Studies Curriculum iii. Create enabling environment for the teaching of pre-vocational studies in schools
Business Studies (Junior)	i. It is desirable for every child to have some idea of Business enterprise ii. Entrepreneurship is treated in Business Studies iii. Consumer Education is infused into Business Studies Curriculum
French Language	i. Nigeria's second Official Language ii. Nigeria is surrounded by Francophone countries iii. The study of French language will make our children more competitive at the global level

Source: NERDC (2017)

The table shows that Junior Secondary School (JSS) students are to take a minimum of nine subjects and the maximum of 10 subjects. The provisions for religion and national value in this JSS curriculum are the same as with the primary curriculum. Critics like CAN allege that in the northern part of the country, getting a French teacher is difficult, and administrators who are mostly Muslims make little or no effort at getting French teachers.

On the basis of these deficits therefore, students are compelled to choose Arabic language in the absence of French. The obvious question is, how will abandoning the indigenous Nigerian languages, and officially adopting yet another colonial language such as French, Arabic, German, Spanish or Italia, etc. foster the national cohesion and peaceful co-existence that NERDC vows to promote via the religious education curriculum?

Table 5. The 2012 Revised Curriculum for Senior Secondary School 1-3

Senior Secondary Education (SSS 1-3)	
Minimum of 8 subjects; Maximum of 9 subjects	
Subjects	**Explanatory Notes**
English Studies	i. One of the compulsory subjects. Each student is to take the four (4) compulsory cross-cutting subjects listed.
Mathematics	i. One of the compulsory subjects. Each student is to take the four (4) compulsory cross-cutting subjects listed.
Civic Education	i. One of the compulsory subjects. Each student is to take the four (4) compulsory cross-cutting subjects listed.
Trade/Entrepreneurship Studies	i. One of the compulsory subjects. For the Trade/Entrepreneurship subject, each student is expected to select one (1) Trade/Entrepreneurship subject from the list of 34 Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects listed.
Humanities	i. This is a field of study. Each student may then choose two (2), three (3), four (4), or five (5) subjects from each of their preferred Four Fields of Studies depending on their potential, interest and capability such that the minimum number of subjects. ii. If students select two (2) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select two (2) or three (3) subjects from any other Field of Study or from Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects. iii. If students select three (3) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) or two (2) subjects from any other Fields of Studies or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects. iv. If students select four (4) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) more subject from any other fields of study or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a maximum of nine (9) subjects. v. If students select five (5) from a Field of Study, they have already selected a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
Science & Mathematics	i. This is a field of study. Each student may then choose two (2), three (3), four (4), or five (5) subjects from each of their preferred Four Fields of Studies depending on their potential, interest and capability such that the minimum number of subjects. ii. If students select two (2) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select two (2) or three (3) subjects from any other Field of Study or from Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects. iii. If students select three (3) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) or two (2) subjects from any other Fields of Studies or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects. iv. If students select four (4) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) more subject from any other fields of study or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a maximum of nine (9) subjects. v. If students select five (5) from a Field of Study, they have already selected a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
Technology	i. This is a field of study. Each student may then choose two (2), three (3),

		four (4), or five (5) subjects from each of their preferred Four Fields of Studies depending on their potential, interest and capability such that the minimum number of subjects.
	ii.	If students select two (2) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select two (2) or three (3) subjects from any other Field of Study or from Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
	iii.	If students select three (3) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) or two (2) subjects from any other Fields of Studies or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
	iv.	If students select four (4) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) more subject from any other fields of study or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
	v.	If students select five (5) from a Field of Study, they have already selected a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
	i.	This is a field of study. Each student may then choose two (2), three (3), four (4), or five (5) subjects from each of their preferred Four Fields of Studies depending on their potential, interest and capability such that the minimum number of subjects.
	ii.	If students select two (2) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select two (2) or three (3) subjects from any other Field of Study or from Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
Business Studies (Senior)	iii.	If students select three (3) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) or two (2) subjects from any other Fields of Studies or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a minimum of eight (8) or a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
	iv.	If students select four (4) subjects from a Field of Study, they can select one (1) more subject from any other fields of study or Trade/Entrepreneurship subjects to make a maximum of nine (9) subjects.
	v.	If students select five (5) from a Field of Study, they have already selected a maximum of nine (9) subjects.

Source: NERDC (2017)

The curriculum does not mention any religious subject in the Senior Secondary School. However, the curriculum gives room for school administrators to decide additional fields of study in line with the provisions in the humanities section. Critics like CAN argue that such vagueness leaves Christians much more vulnerable in the highly Muslim dominated northern Nigeria, and at worst, leaving out Christian religious studies as a subject in the curriculum would affect those students who intend to study it at tertiary levels. This paper argues that the current process cannot secure a trustworthy pedagogy that is not bias-laden but much more inclusive. There is need for a critical pedagogy which offers insights to help religious educators "achieve the goal of becoming trustworthy educators for students coming from a wide spectrum of **religious" traditions** (Trelstad, 2008)**.**

Judging from the above, one may conclude that given the dicey place of religion in Nigerian politics the criticisms leveled against the revised curriculum cannot be glossed aside. The best scenario is allowing both Islam and Christian religious studies as stand-alone subjects in the curriculum. At the same time, to accomplish the intended learning goals of NERDC as per the Religion and National Values subject, Nigerian education planners should evolve effective ways of teaching these two religions in line with NERDC general framework which is the intent of this paper as applicable to Christian Religious Studies.

Effective teaching methods are primarily necessary for attaining learning outcomes in any subject not excluding Christian religious education (Byaruhanga, 2018). Nigeria has been struggling with how best to adapt a fitting teaching method for religious education in its primary and secondary schools. During the time of the colonial administration up to the end of the 1980s Christian religious education subject was titled Bible Knowledge, and later changed to Christian Religious Knowledge and then Christian Religious Studies at the moment. The terms speak for themselves. The focus of the teaching methods was on the intellectual growth of knowledge without little daily applications. For long, the rote or banking method which consists of memorization, discussion and storytelling approaches dominated the teacher-student classroom pattern thereby making students

passive listeners rather than active participants in the construction of morality (Njoku & Njoku, 2015).

Generally, both Islamic and Christian religious education are expected to expose students "to the knowledge and values [of practical living], respect for authorities whether spiritual or temporary; and equipping the learner with appropriate attitude and moral values required for co-existence with others in any given human environment" (Njoku & Njoku, 2015, p.10). While acknowledging the challenges of a monolithic approach to religious education *(Jawoniyi, 2009)* this paper argues that the whole of instructional methods employed in religious education in Nigeria need to be updated *(Baiyeri, 2015)*. Such updating means that Christian religious education teachers as implementers of curriculum should be trained and retrained most especially in innovative teaching methods. The training of Nigerian religious teachers by Nigerian educational experts should be encouraged and developed by NERDC. The trend of committing the training of Nigerian teachers in the art of teaching to expatriates: European and Americans, does not acquiesce with the ongoing African renaissance for addressing Africa's problems with African solution, the current government's campaign for the production and patronage of "made in Nigerian goods and services" and the paradigmatic movement towards the indigenization of knowledge and methods in Africa. Also, considering that foreign facilitators will certainly operate with their epistemological background far more than Nigeria's (Africa's) values and purviews, and because of their lack of professional knowledge about Nigeria's educational goals, NERDC is thus compelled by reason to encourage local content that will advance its educational goals. It was in this light that Ake (1981) argued for the indigenization of Nigeria's social and economic processes to advance Nigeria's cohesion and development ownership. The controversy about the religious education curriculum can be exploited by NERDC as a potential for significant transformation in Nigeria. This is what this paper attempts to do in the next section using Christian religious studies.

3. Approaches to Christian Religious Education

Christian religious education recognizes the usage of a culturally responsive pedagogy in forming young people in faith. According to Dallavis (2011), this approach acknowledges the intersection of culturally responsive **pedagogy** and environmental contexts. Dallavis argues that theories of culturally responsive **pedagogy** explore "how religion, a dimension of student culture that has largely been overlooked in the literature surrounding culturally responsive **pedagogy**, can inflect cultural competence as a key component of culturally responsive **pedagogy**." This approach resonates with Jesus' catechetical approach. Jesus' model begins with what is known and proceeds to divine revelation, and then comes back to practical implications. Jesus used parables, stories and daily life experiences to teach us about the life of God in the Spirit and how we ought to live our daily lives. In the light of this, one can argue along with Groome (1999, pp. 14-25) that the purpose of Christian religious education is (a) to work for the Reign of God, (b) to foster lived Christian faith, (c) to promote the wholeness of human freedom that is fullness of life for all, and to work toward the transformation of our *being*.

This paper acknowledges two differing approaches to moral education in school systems, namely, the *moral construction approach* and the *handed down approach*. The moral construction approach favored by Piaget and Kohlberg believe that learners can derive morality by social interaction and principled reasoning in a classroom. On the other hand, the handed down approach championed by behaviorists, Freud and educator-philosopher Nel Noddings argue that principles of morality should be actively passed on from elders to the younger ones including teachers in a classroom setting (Bergin & Bergin, 2015, pp.398 - 401), a trajectory that is acquiescent with Nigeria's cultural context. Against this background, this paper considers the contributions of the educational techniques, principles, and methods of two renowned religious educationists: Thomas H. Groome and Jane Regan, with the aim of adapting such principles for Nigerian schools.

3.1. Groome: Shared Christian Praxis

Thomas H. Goome's (1999; 2011) method for religious education is known as "shared Christian praxis." This is a practical religious education approach that is highly acclaimed as dialogical. Each of the three components is descriptive of the approach: *Shared* means that learners are to engage in a conversation with each other, and the teacher (Christian educator) should help foster a conversation between their lives and the biblical text. Groome calls this, "The Christian Story and Vision." *Christian* here refers to specifically Christian narratives but not religious experience at large. Thus, Groome highlights the importance of "the Christian Story." *Praxis* refers to the transforming action that changes existing practices. Theory and practice are weaved together. We move from practice into theory back to transforming practice (praxis). His work and method is accepted and admired by many as a religious education model. For Groome (2011), this is a "life to faith to life approach …[that] encourages a teaching/learning community of active participation, conversation and presentation in which people share their reflections upon their own lives in the world around a generative theme of life" (p.60). For Groome then experience is a vehicle of God's revelation. Thus, Christian religious teachers are to transform the very being of their students. This teaching method can be modified for both primary and secondary school classrooms.

3.2. Regan: Communities of Practice

Jane Regan (2014) highlights the centrality of ongoing religious education in the context of the postmodern world. How do we pass on the Christian story under such circumstances that differing opinions claim to hold sway and everyone appears to be right? She proposes a transforming learning approach to religious education. By transforming learning she says it is a movement through four moments that are closely related to each other: "(1) questioning the present perspective, (2) exploring alternatives, (3) applying the transformed perspective, and (4) reintegrating and grounding of new perspective" (Regan, 2014, p.87). For Regan learners should examine issues in their learning faith communities through mutually engaging interactive conversations that draw on their personal experiences, their cultures, traditions, and religious traditions. They may read the Bible and church documents; and listen to each person's perspectives, discern the questions, issues, insights that come from the conversations, propose responses and, in this way, become a learning community. The learners' experience of educating and being educated in faith is the starting point of such conversations. This teaching method can be adapted to a secondary school classroom setting.

In adapting both Groome's *shared Christian Praxis* and Regan's *Communities of Practice* to primary and secondary school settings, one may rely on Vygostsky's pedagogical understanding as a good guide. Vygostsky's theory of cognitive development known as socio-cultural theory expands the constructivist cognitive theory of Piaget that "depicted learning as a very *constructive* process: Children create (rather than simply absorb) their knowledge about the world" (Ormrod, 2016, p.279). In other words, knowledge is acquired through "a process of construction rather than duplication (creating a mental copy of what is observed)" (Bergin & Bergin, 2015, p.105). While in Piaget "social interaction is so important for development" (Ormrod, 2016, p.283) he nevertheless focuses on learning as development of internal mental processes.

Vygotsky accepts that "learners' immediate environmental circumstances and supports can significantly enhance their thinking and learning" (Ormrod, 2016, p.303). The socio-cultural theory emphasizes the interplay of "social interaction, historical context, and culture" on the learning process (Bergin & Bergin, 2015, p.123). There is a great deal of overlap between Piaget's cognitive development and Vygotsky's socio-cultural theory, but Vygotsky strongly recognizes the role of an advanced assistant (teacher) in what he calls the zone of proximal development. The teacher facilitates learning through scaffolding (modeling students to master new skills), classroom discussion (a supporting learning environment that critique's a student's reasoning), and reciprocal teaching (students take on the teacher's role in the class or group discussions to summarize, question, clarify and predict a subject matter). Here, the experiences of learners count.

4. Prioritizing Learners' Experiences

This paper recognizing Christian religious education as a lifelong process underscores the importance of experience in learning processes. Three notable educationists with transforming approaches to education are studied in relation to Christian religious education: Paulo Freire, John Dewey, and Maria Montessori. Their approaches can be adapted in religious education on how to incorporate experience in forming the characters of young students.

4.1. Paulo Freire

Freire (2012), the Brazilian educator sees a link between personal change and social transformation in education at large, and in this case religious education. For him education is never neutral so the method adopted in educating a person matters. He distinguishes between banking concept of education and problem posing approach geared toward critical inquiry and conversion of a person. He says inability to question leads to complacency whereby people take for granted that things are supposed to be the way they are. He opposes this as "false consciousness." He rather emphasizes problem-posing education which is 'dialogical' as it encourages the student-teacher and teacher-students dialogue. When dialogue is taken away, the learner is reduced to "receiving, filing and storing the deposits" (Freire, 2012, p.72). He therefore advocates a praxis that involves reflection and action. He strongly believes that true perception of anomalies in critical education (problem solving approach) is impossible without action: "discovery cannot be purely intellectual but must involve action; nor can it be limited to mere activism, but must include serious reflection: only then will it be a praxis" (Freire, 2012, p.133). Praxis means the transformation of an existing practice which in this case is the life of the student. This comes with 'true reflection' which automatically leads to 'action,' and any dichotomy between the two is false (a false consciousness). Praxis, as Freire puts it, is "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" and that becomes the 'raison d'etre' for social transformation. Esther Akinsola (2011) corroborates this in her presentation of *Omoluwabi* as a holistic approach to education among the Yoruba people of western Nigeria. Utilizing the Yoruba epistemology she draws out integral methods that could ease the construction of knowledge in an African child within cultural and environmental contexts relevant to his or her cultural roots and global age requirements.

4.2. John Dewey

John Dewey, an American philosopher and educationist advocates for experiential learning. Dewey teaches that education should connect learners with the activities that they live and do in their communities which will give them real, guided experiences that will foster their capacity to contribute to society. For Dewey (1997), learning is reflecting upon human experiences, and humans are forced to reflect especially when they are confronted with problems. Dewey opts for a shift from the traditional understanding of education to "progressive education." This means that we rely on practical experiences of studied subjects. At the same time he cautions that, "Education and experience cannot be directly equated to each other" (p.25). Therefore, the *quality* of experience is not to be taken for granted because "the effects of experience is not borne on its face" (p.27) value but from deep interaction of social effect with the transformation on/inside the student. This is similar to what Nigerian educators argue for when they call for a retrieval of child education pedagogies that are basic to traditional Nigerian society whereby children are taught through cultural techniques that are embedded in their worldview. These may involve employing proverbs, riddles, folktales and myths to impart moral lessons (Esere, Idowu & Omotosho 2011; Asue 2012).

4.3. Maria Montessori

Maria Montessori, an Italian medical doctor (pediatrician) was very much interested in children that she sought to replicate her teaching success of disabled children with other children. Combining psychiatry, education and anthropology she introduced the method of "leading the child from behind." Montessori believed that every child is uniquely endowed with potentials that could be helped to uncover, and should not be treated as a "blank slate" waiting to be written upon. Her main contributions to child pedagogy are:

- The capacity for learning resides in a child and could be developed by a natural life-supporting environment
- The importance of granting liberty to a child, allowing the child's potentials to unfold.
- Observing and continually adapting the environment to assist a child develop his/her potentials, physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually (Driscoll & Nagel, 2008).

In line with the above, the African educator Bame Nsamenang (2011) argues for participatory learning processes that emphasize developmental learning and a child's agency arguing that "children's development and learning can be understood only in the light of their cultural practices and livelihood circumstances" (p.235). One thing that runs through the works of all the studied scholars is the 'value of experience.' As a work in religious education one must be aware that experience is central to every approach. Students' experience must impact the type of curriculum that a teacher designs for a Christian religious education class.

5. Designing a Christian Religious Studies Curriculum

In designing a Christian religious education curriculum in Nigeria a teacher could be undergirded by Vygostky's theory which recognizes that "an interaction, sometimes called mediated learning experience, encourages the child to think about the phenomenon or event in particular ways" (Ormrod, 2016, p.311). Participation in adult activities (guided participation), apprenticeships (a form of guided participation), acquisition of teaching skills (and ability to share/teach new knowledge to others), and dynamic assessments (of both the actual and potential levels of development) are vital in shaping the child's mental development as the child interacts with the environment and culture.

Byarunhanga (2018) calls for flexibility on the part of a religious education teacher. Such a teacher should not rigidly follow preplanned lessons but should insert students' experiences spontaneously as he/she goes along. In designing a Christian religious education curriculum therefore the teacher should start from a) ongoing experience to b) biblical text/Christian teaching down through the years, and then come back to c) transforming experience. This means jogging from current practices, then linking that with the Christian understanding and arriving at concrete steps that would transform the current practices for life flourishing choices. The following are good tips in evolving a lesson plan:

Ongoing Experiences/practices
- In preparing for a teaching or learning event, instead of focusing on "What am I going to tell them? rather think of "What am I going to ask them?"
- Dwell on contemporary concerns by taking stock of what is happening in the life of your students (or, in personal study, your life). What is happening internally, interpersonally, internationally?

The Bible/Christian story
- Demonstrate how the biblical texts and church documents of the day's class address the students' concerns?

Transforming action/praxis
- Guide the students to construct an activity that will transform or address the consensually identified social concern.

The role of a religious educator is to create a good focus that allows openness and flexibility of learners, in discussing their past and new experiences. The religious educator must be aware of the fact that learners have basic religious knowledge and experience. The responsibility of the religious educator is to journey with them by meeting them where they are and co-journey with them in this process of learning about their faith or religion. It is advisable to be more of a facilitator, for example, in making use of Groome's *Shared Christian Praxis*, a religious teacher could only learn to craft questions that will help students stay engaged throughout class sessions.

Students should be encouraged to apply the knowledge they acquire in a religious class. The false dichotomy between Christian religious education and moral education should be bridged. Students are expected to learn Christian religious principles and apply them in their lives (Byaruhanga, 2018). Christian religious education is about Christ and how he directs our daily lives as we express faith in him. So, as a way of encouraging students to apply the knowledge acquired in a Christian religious education class, in designing any curriculum the focus should be on performance assessment and construction of student portfolios/eportfolios. Performance assessments "engage students in activities and tasks that require application of knowledge and skills" (McMillan, 2014, p.211). On the other hand, "a portfolio can be defined as a purposeful, systematic process of collecting and evaluating student formative and/or summative assessments to document progress toward that attainment of learning targets or show evidence that learning targets are being achieved" (McMillan, 2014, p.246). Drawing on the constructivist learning theory, performance assessment engages the meaningful experiences of students and applies their knowledge to target learning goals and activities. It builds on students' earlier content knowledge, process skills, and work habits by strategically placing them in the lessons or units that enhance learning as students internalize what is learned. As an integral part of teaching and learning, performance tasks should not be considered as "add-ons" at the end of a Christian religious instruction class.

How can one create a favorite portfolio or an authentic assessment in a classroom? Baiyeri (2015) suggests that we make use of innovative technologies to enhance our religious education presentations. There are many materials out there. In researching for this paper, we came across a beautiful article on how to integrate technology into the creation of portfolios. It is an article written by Heather Hiles titled, "Five Ways to Use Online Portfolios in the Classroom." It can be found on this website: http://www.edutopia.org/blog/use-online-portfolios-in-classroom-heather-hiles. The author recognizes the different portfolio platforms that exist to assist both teachers and students - such as Digication (www.digication.com), Pathbrite (https://pathbrite.com/), Taskstream (https://www1.taskstream.com/) and Epsilen (http://corp.epsilen.com/). The amazing thing about these is that feedback tools are embedded into them so that interaction between students and teachers is enhanced. Since the digital world is transforming the way we teach and learn, it is imperative that teachers make use of the vast educational technologies in many ways; and in this case, by helping students to create portfolios in ways that would meaningfully document and apply their learning experiences.

6. Conclusion

This article acknowledged both the controversy surrounding religious education and the deficiency in the teaching methods adopted in delivering Christian religious education in Nigerian primary and secondary schools. It argued that Christian religious education like other forms of education is a lifelong process and at the same time a theological enterprise. Utilizing the different approaches to religious education, and learning from the historical approaches to education in general, the paper proposes that any meaningful Christian religious education curriculum in Nigeria must be situated within the experiences of the students and the challenge to Nigeria's peace and development. This entails adopting the practical religious educational approach of moving from life experiences to Christian texts and back to daily living which gradually leads to praxis (transformed practice). Groome sums it as faith education "From Life to Faith to Life". This learning approach easily relates Christian religious education to the daily experiences of people, and thus enables learners to interpret and understand their experiences from a practical religious education perspective. Learners learn best when they start from what is within their own experiences. Always remember that many biblical stories and concepts may appear remote to children in today's world. Designing a Christian religious education curriculum that is embedded in practical education methods will use (children) learners' experiences as kick-off point for inquiry into deeper and fuller implications of the Christian story.

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