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INFLUENCE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION TEACHING ON CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT AMONG STUDENTS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS: A CASE STUDY OF KIRINYAGA COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

The scenario in which irrational behavior has dominated the character of the Kenyan youth has brought to contention whether the moral well-being of the youth is on a downward trend suggesting that either the teaching of moral values through C.R.E is defective or the Kenyan education system as a whole is defective. The moral character of the Kenyan secondary school student in the wider society has become an issue of concern in the recent past. Previous research reported that Kenyan students' moral standing and general conduct in the wider society reflects lack of acquisition of skills necessary to deal with challenges in the current society. Little attention has been given to the correlation between the teaching-learning of CRE and acquisition of requisite skills. It's against this background that the researcher investigated the influence of religious education on character development among students. The study was guided by Kohlberg's theory of moral reasoning which has strong implication to moral education. Descriptive survey design was used to conduct the research using ten schools, ten CRE teachers and 380 CRE students in the sampled schools. Information was collected by use of questionnaires and interview. Data was analyzed using frequency distribution tables, percentages, and bar graphs. Findings revealed that teachers rarely used the elements of skill acquisition in delivery of the content that could enable the learner make accurate moral decisions. Also, the curriculum and the syllabus guides do not elaborate on the elements of moral values teachers ought to use during C.R.E content delivery. For CRE teaching to be to be productive to an individual, the syllabus must be organized into a logical whole. This calls for systematic instruction in an organized system such as a school where youths are taught to think rationally.

Keywords: *Defective, Irrational behaviors, Moral values, Moral standing*

INTRODUCTION

Relationship between the Teaching of CRE and Character Development

Many students in the current society are entering school without the basic values necessary for life challenges. Depressing reports of students' cheating in national examinations, lack of self-discipline resulting to school unrests, drugs and substance abuse among others and a lackluster approach to schoolwork are common (Ryan and Bohlin, 1999). There has been a trend in public schools to

relinquish the role of building character, perhaps due to lack of basic moral principles in the subjects taught. According to Covey (1989), there is a shifting of paradigms from a concern for a person's personality to a concern for a person's character. Today's young people are living in an exciting time, with an increasingly diverse and mobile society, new technologies and expanding opportunities. To help ensure that they are prepared to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders and citizens who are morally sound and accountable in their actions, they need well thought out support, guidance and teaching on good morals. CRE subject needs to be made more learner-centered, to accelerate the learning of moral skills. The main goal of education is to educate people intellectually and to teach them to be morally good. Field (1996) noted that character education changed when value clarification, moral dilemma discussions, and decision-making processes replaced the traditional emphasis on learning right from wrong and acting right. These programs failed to distinguish between the personal preferences of students and true moral values. In the society today, Religious Education is considered key in shaping the moral and spiritual life of learners. In Kenya, the Christian Religious Education (CRE) curriculum is taught in all schools alongside Muslim and Hindu Religious Education that has been approved by the Ministry of Education (Education Act, CAP, 211).

One of the stated aims of education in Kenya is to promote social justice and morality by instilling the right attitude necessary for the training in social obligations and responsibilities among the youth (Republic of Kenya, 1999). The presupposition has been that the teaching of C.R.E is a critical component that enables the school going youth to acquire the above. To achieve this, it is necessary that the nation must ensure that pedagogical practices in education are geared towards realizing this aim. According to Mcphail (1982), the teaching of morals in school has become a serious concern in the world due to the increasing evidence of socially and morally irresponsible behavior on the part of the individuals. There is a moral crisis in the world which makes it clear that schools should not avoid the responsibility of teaching in the area of moral education Gay (1975). Education is a necessary driver of morality. Education must be based on moral and spiritual foundations for it to be fruitful and effective.

According to Kombo (2005), Religious Education enables students acquire the desired beliefs, values and practices of the society which enable them to live in harmony with other members of the society. Harding (2005) states that Religious Education should facilitate desirable changes in an individual since it encompasses theoretical, practical, moral, spiritual, human and divine aspects. Teaching religion in schools encourages children to be responsible and spiritually sound adults. According to Eric (1994) one's education cannot be complete without a study of religion and its relationship to the advanced civilization. Religious education is, therefore, important in any education system. According to Chesaro (2003), CRE fulfills this by inculcating a positive attitude in the learner about God, self, others and the environment we live in. This, he notes, helps children to grow into self-disciplined, self-reliant and integrated citizens. Barret et al (1973) argue that RE contributes to the production of good citizens through character building and fostering high moral standards. This prepares the learners to take their rightful place in the society. Ochar (2008) similarly observes that the society does not need an education that prepares learners only for academic excellence and demonstration of skills. Rather the society needs an education that makes learners morally equipped for useful and purposeful services to themselves, the nation and to live in manner required by God. Religious and moral education therefore becomes important in the secondary school curriculum.

Religious Education in Africa could be traced long before the coming of Christian missionaries who termed Africans as heathens and uncivilized. Mbiti (1969), observed religion as the strongest element in the traditional background that exerted the greatest influence upon the living and the people concerned. Religious teachings have been regarded as the vehicle by which moral standards were inculcated in Africa (Amugune, 2005). Mbiti (1969) further notes that religious education bore the responsibility of inculcating in each generation those forms of knowledge, values and attitudes which the society needed in order to prosper. He further observes that religion provides mankind with moral values by which to live. Chesaro (2003) supports this when he notes that no society can exist without morals and discipline for its welfare and that of the individual. He observes that it was morals which build relationships between people and the world around. Therefore, CRE is an effective regulator of

the children's behavior and act as a channel through which the moral demands of the society are conveyed to the child for it is a strong instrument in instilling discipline among students.

In Kenya, the role of education in the development of good character and the formation of high moral standards among the youth through school is a strong educational goal (Oanda, 1995). Indeed, one of the goals of education has been to promote sound moral and religious values (KIE, 2006). Lantos (2001) observes that character education is accomplished by teachers and parents striving to be good role models to the students. Adeyemi (2009) argues that the influence of the teachers and parents on students shape student behavior in the society. Students often look upon their parents and teachers as role models on matters of unity, honesty, justice and fairness, responsibility, caring, respect and trustworthiness. The school authorities also have a role to play in shaping the character of students and especially the enhancement of unity as a value among the students.

Cox (1983) noted that teachers of religious education should have a religious commitment so as to handle the diverse materials in the syllabus. This is because religion is still the major source of normative orientation in the modern society (Tritter and Francis, 1992). In a study by Ziro (2002) on students' unrests, it was established that a genuine and purposeful commitment to the teaching of religious values could foster human moral values, which are elements of self-discipline. Events of school unrests and general indiscipline in secondary schools seem to negate the objectives of teaching CRE in secondary schools in Kenya. This called for filling a research gap arising from the need to investigate and influence of religious education in character development to secondary school learners. This study filled the gap by answering the question: what is the role of CRE in inculcating moral values to students in secondary schools Kirinyaga County.

Rationale for the Study

Today, there is renewed consensus concerning core values that transcends cultural, political, and religious boundaries. These core values comprise the basis of modern character education. Respect, compassion, responsibility, honesty, integrity, and fairness are the building blocks of character education programs that are emerging across the nation. This new character education movement is based on the belief that the violent, dishonest, irresponsible, and destructive behavior of today's youth is the result of the absence of good character. Character education is more than banners, slogans, and words on the school's marquee sign. Reading stories with moral, writing essays on the heroes, reciting slogans, and role-playing are all fine, but they will not necessarily change a student's behavior.

Lickona (1992) stated that schools need to do more than concentrate on the cognitive side of character. He reported that schools need to bring students to the emotional side of character, where they feel and commit to virtuous behavior, and to the action side of character, where students change inappropriate behaviors and practice positive moral actions. Wynne argued that many educators have placed too much emphasis on how students reason about moral issues rather than how they conduct themselves. What and how students think clearly influences that person's character; however, the measuring rod of society is not what or how people think, but how they conduct themselves. A student is judged by whether he or she is polite, whether he or she tells the truth, whether he or she observes the rules, and whether he or she is respectful to teachers and fellow students. Wynne (1988) stated that many schools teach character directly and have developed curricula and set aside class time to focus on issues of character. Although these programs may occasionally be beneficial, he argued that it is far more important that the teachers and entire school carry out activities designed to build character. Further, he stated that the overall conduct of the adults and students in the school should reflect a concern for character and that this concern should be interwoven throughout the school program hence the need to assess the role of Christian religious education on character development among secondary school learners. In Kenya, the role of education in the development of good character and the formation of high moral standards among the youth through school is a strong educational goal (Oanda, 1995). Indeed, one of the goals of education has been to promote sound moral and religious values (KIE, 2006). According to Chesaro (2003), CRE seeks to fulfill this by inculcating a positive attitude in the learner about God, self, others and the environment we live in. This, he notes, helps children to grow into self-disciplined, self-reliant and integrated citizens. Barret et al (1973) argue

that RE contributes to the production of good citizens through character building and fostering high moral standards. This prepares the learners to take their rightful place in the society. Ochar (2008) similarly observes that the society does not need an education that prepares learners only for academic excellence and demonstration of skills. Rather the society needs an education that makes learners morally equipped for useful and purposeful services to themselves, the nation and to live in manner required by God. Religious and moral education therefore becomes important in the secondary school curriculum.

Theoretical Framework

In 1966, Lawrence Kohlberg linked his cognitive-development theory of moral reasoning with the practice of moral education in schools (Leming, 1993). According to Mulkey (1997), Kohlberg's theory was based on six stages of moral reasoning, whereby children could move from their present level of moral reasoning to the next higher stage through discussion about the behavior chosen in a particular situation. In the first stage, children are guided by rewards and punishment. As they move to the second stage, reciprocity becomes prominent and children will do things for others if they get something in return. At stage three, the child's behavior is controlled by adult or peer approval. At the fourth stage of moral reasoning, behavior is based on respect for authority. Moving to the fifth stage, what is right is determined by the child's personal values and opinion. Finally, at the highest stage, the child's conscience determines what is right and wrong. Here, respect for individual life and human dignity are guiding principles. Kohlberg theory of moral reasoning applies to this study in that Kohlberg would wish to see people advance to the highest possible stage of moral thought. According to him, for children to reorganize their thinking, they must be active. Turiel (1966) found that there was some change when children listened to adults' moral judgments. The theory suggests that teachers can have a strong influence on the morality of the learners if they became their moral mentors.

The theory applies to this study since in the teaching-learning of CRE; teachers have a stake in the transmission of morals. Buchner (1997) argues that teachers ought to be good role models to the learners. He observes that during adolescence age, learners are in need of role models, and they tend to take on these models from all professions that are close to them; whether mass media, parents and family or their teachers. Buchner (1997) adds that no printed or spoken word can teach young minds what they should be. It is not the books on the shelves but what the teachers are themselves that can teach young minds what they should be. This means that the subjects teachers teach, the decisions they make and how they react to classroom situations reveal their moral thoughts, emotions and habits. Thus, according to Buchner (1997), teachers are the role models to students and hence influence student's moral development. Thus, Kumar (2010) appeals to teachers to uphold moral values since they are found to be the catalyst of social change. However, if the teachers fail to become moral mentors, the learners get mentoring from other sources and this determines the rule and principles the children will set regarding their morality. Lantos (2001) observes that character education is accomplished by teachers and parents striving to be good role models to the students. Adeyemi (2009) argues that the influence of the teachers and parents on students shape student behavior in the society. Students often look upon their parents and teachers as role models on matters of unity, honesty, justice and fairness, responsibility, caring, respect and trustworthiness. The school authorities also have a role to play in shaping the character of students and especially the enhancement of unity as a value among the students. In this study, teachers of religious education should have a religious commitment so as to handle the diverse materials in the syllabus. This is because religion is still the major source of normative orientation in the modern society.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Studies on the Teaching of CRE and Moral Development

Student discipline has been a major determinant of not only student retention in schools but a morally adjusted person in the society, both in the present and future days in life. Literature reviewed showed that studies have been done in many parts of the world on the importance of CRE in bringing character change. However, in Kirinyaga County, studies have not been done to establish whether CRE leads to character change among learners. In an attempt to fill this gap, this study sought to establish the role of CRE in character development among secondary school students in Kirinyaga

County. Other studies have also looked into the general development and implementation of CRE syllabus in schools, CRE teaching methodologies as recommended and practiced in different parts of the globe and more so the methods that are geared towards inculcating or instilling moral skills with the students without specifically looking into the criteria or relationship between the teaching of CRE and character development.

Lickona (1992) stated that schools need to do more than concentrate on the cognitive side of character. He reported that schools need to bring students to the emotional side of character, where they feel and commit to virtuous behavior, and to the action side of character, where students change inappropriate behaviors and practice positive moral actions. Wynne argued that many educators have placed too much emphasis on how students reason about moral issues rather than how they conduct themselves. What and how students think clearly influences that person's character; however, the measuring rod of society is not what or how people think, but how they conduct themselves. This study fills this gap of knowledge by looking into whether the teaching of CRE influences school discipline among secondary school learners.

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

The study used descriptive survey design. Nwadiuro (1997) defines research design as a structure of a research that defines what to do and how to do it. It involves the structuring of variables in a manner that enable their relationship to be determined. Kombo (2002) observes that descriptive research design collects information that describes or answers questions concerning a current situation such as school. Gay, (1995) asserts that survey design can be used to assess cause and effects of events. According to Orodho (2005), descriptive survey deals with incidences, distribution and interrelationships of educational variables. Descriptive survey design entails an in-depth empirical collection of data about a phenomenon. According to Orodho (2005) and Kothari (2002), this design describes the nature of phenomena, examines actions as they are or as they happen rather than manipulation of variables. The design helped to gather data from teachers of C.R.E and form two C.R.E students in secondary schools. The form two classes were chosen because it is at this level of psycho-social development that making skills to make accurate moral decisions is perceived to be challenging (Lahey, 1995). The study population comprised of 380 students and 10 C.R.E teachers. The study sampled the C.R.E teachers by simple random sampling technique. Using the Fischer et al. (1995) method of determining sample size, students were randomly sampled for the study. The instruments used in the study included: an in-depth interview schedule and both open and close ended questionnaires which evaluated teacher knowledge and planning to teach acquisition of moral values in the teaching-learning of CRE in secondary schools. Piloting of the instruments was done in-order to determine both reliability and validity of the research instruments. The quantitative data obtained from the graphic observation rating scale and the learner's test were coded and analyzed using descriptive statistics like frequency counts and percentages. The information was then presented in form of frequency distribution tables. The data gathered from the in-depth interviews and document analysis were transcribed and organized thematically before analyses and interpretation. This design was found suitable for the study because it enabled the researcher to collect facts and views from diverse categories of respondents such as students, teachers and heads of institutions. The gathered data was summarized and interpreted for the purpose of clarification.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Research findings revealed that CRE as a subject had a great stake in the moral development of the young people in secondary schools. Its syllabus content was also rated by heads of discipline, teachers and students as good in moral development. However, its teaching methodology had watered down its effectiveness in terms of moral development. Government through the MoE should intensify on inspection to ensure methods adopted in classes are not just teacher- centered but value oriented. It is also important for the government to ensure that there are enough trained teacher counselors in all public schools to supplement CRE moral objectives. Findings also showed that some of the major vices in schools as violence, sexual harassment, lesbianism, homosexuality, and bullying, pre-marital sex among others are still persistent. Ninety percent (80%) of the sampled heads of discipline indicated to have dealt with vices related to sexuality within a period of one year. five (5%) of the

heads of discipline observed that they had even suspended some students on the same vices in an effort to correct the behavior in schools. These forms of immorality were taking place in schools where CRE was being taught and against a background of strong religiosity.

It was evident from both the students, teachers and heads of discipline that CRE content was indeed perceived as a source of moral development for students. Although all the teachers were found to be academically and professionally competent, they did not appear to use higher value adding methodologies in imparting moral skills during the CRE lessons. Most of them employed lecture and question and answer methods at the expense of methodologies that augured well with the teaching of affective skills. Putting it in different words, CRE content was found to promote moral values by both teachers and students, however, the teaching methodologies of CRE at the sampled schools were largely teacher- centered at the expense of the more helpful learner-centered approaches. The diverse methods that CRE teachers employ during teaching help learners to understand the lesson and practice what they learn. The teaching methods and techniques take care of individual differences in children. Findings reveal that the use of affective valuing skills as opposed to over-reliance on cognitive strategies opens up the possibilities for free choice and critical decision- making abilities on moral habits. The models of valuing that are used in teaching CRE are important for they capture affective aspects of learning morals. From the aforementioned results, it can be noted that learners in the sampled schools were not instilled with the skill of cooperative learning and helping relations for valuing as expected. In the areas where the learners manifested scanty knowledge of the skill, it appeared there were cases of chance and not a consequence of planning skilful value instruction by the teachers. Findings also revealed that teachers did not ask learners thought provoking questions on moral issues with reference to the affective domain objectives. They said most of the questions they asked centered on the cognitive domains of teaching C.R.E as this is what the examination demands.

Findings indicated that students' expression on morality was noted as deprived in most aspects. Results on their moral expressions were in no doubt a reflective of the fact that teachers in their classroom interactions with the learners did not inspire in their behavior those characteristics or moral values which would enable the learner to see those values that may be of importance in their lives and even in the life thereafter in the society. There was a general feeling from the findings that issues of morality were a source of concern to both teachers and students' themselves. Findings also revealed that teachers were playing several roles in the establishment of morally upright students in the sampled schools. Their teaching methodologies were also noted to be short of the recommended methods of inculcating skills in cognitive, affective, psychomotor and social relating domains. Their personalities were not perceived as commanding great respect from the students. Findings from all respondents also indicated that teachers were found to have a great input in the way they conducted themselves, far and above what they presented from the CRE syllabus in classes.

Results obtained from this study indicated that both students and teachers were positive about CRE as a subject. Students in the sampled Schools appreciated CRE subject both as a vehicle for good moral development and a vehicle for better grades in examinations. The latter point came out far much stronger than the former whereas the priority of passing the examination seemed to override the bigger picture of developing morally stable or holistic persons. Teachers ranked CRE subject selection as motivated by easiness of the subject in comparison with other subjects. This may be seen as a rather off-side position for the society needs morally upright people. Findings also reveal that where the value model is not used in a CRE classroom leaning, the affective personality of the learner which will make him/her value self and others is not developed. Such learners do not realize the value of corporate morality. Self-esteem, created by the value model, is important to character development because morality begins with valuing the self (Boss, 2001).

Results obtained from this study revealed that students' moral development depended heavily on schools input. There is, therefore, a need for the principals to: ensure that the parents and the communities surrounding their schools are sensitized on the need for moral education, ensure that teachers are not promoting examination performance at the expense of gaining important moral skills in CRE lessons and finally ensure that the reward systems in schools reinforced more often morally

upright students. Results obtained from this study as well as from other similar studies done earlier indicated that teachers' method of teaching, their personality and accessibility to learners had an input in their moral development.

Results indicated that parents on the other hand were contributing very minimal moral skills to students whereby the whole responsibility of taking care of the youths was left out to the teachers. There is, therefore, a need for parents to understand their role of molding the character of their offspring, not abandoning their responsibility to teachers. It is also important for parents to understand that home environment is an important socializing agent of children, and hence make the homes conducive for children's moral growth and development. In addition, there is need for parents to understand that they should not frustrate their children when they do not perform well academically. Instead, they should give them moral support and follow up their children's academic progress with the school.

Findings clearly show that a lot should be done in the teaching of moral values to learners. In cases where a learner is not made to acquire the skills of moral reasoning on religious matters, the learner may only memorize the C.R.E content without knowing how they affect his/her life as a person living with other members of human community. Moral reasoning enables the learner to emancipate self from blind indoctrination that one may be a victim of, if not taught to think critically and morally upright.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Teachers should cultivate an atmosphere of trust and act as role models in order to encourage and motivate students to learn, abstaining from behavior like drunkenness, chain smoking at school and even extreme relationship between male and female students of the opposite sex. It is also important for teachers to enhance effective communication systems in schools in order to curb discontentment which leads to strike. Teachers' pedagogical practices should also be geared towards building the learner competence with regard to acquisition of moral insights, and the need to develop corporate morality. This may be achieved by encouraging the learner to absorb the spirit of teamwork and being accountable to the others in school. Parents need to create conducive home environment for the child's upbringing, moral development and provide attention required by the children.

There is need for much more concerted effort needs to be employed to help shape the moral fabric in the society. This is because Today's young people are living in an exciting time, with an increasingly diverse and mobile society, new technologies and expanding opportunities. To help ensure that they are prepared to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders and citizens who are morally sound and accountable in their actions, they need well thought out support, guidance and teaching on good morals. CRE subject needs to be made more learner-centered, to accelerate the learning of moral skills. This calls for concerted efforts by all stakeholders in the education sector to put in place intervention measures that are geared towards enhancing students' moral development. Key among these measures may include imparting life skills to students and the sensitization of parents and members of the community on the importance of moral education for their children which will lead to ensuring that students remain in school until completion. Education policies should also be enforced, bearing in mind the current and emerging issues in educational sector. Government through the MoE should intensify on inspection to ensure methods adopted in classes are not just teacher-centered but value oriented. It is also important for the government to ensure that there are enough trained teacher counselors in all public schools to supplement CRE moral objectives. CRE should be made compulsory for all students to be exposed to the Christian values. To make the inculcation of moral values possible in schools, the administration should ensure that school rules are seriously followed by the learners and strict measures taken against those who break them. Educators especially quality assurance officers should make visits to the schools to ensure that teachers use learner-centered methods that can enhance character change. They should also ensure that teachers use the recommended resources of teaching rather than the commercial revision materials aimed at passing examinations. CRE teachers should select methods which aim at making teaching learner-centered and help to bring about positive behavior change (Kenya Institute of Education, KIE, 2006). One of

such recommended methods is discussion. According to KIE (2006), this method gives the learners an opportunity to express their ideas in the topic being taught. This enhances the learner's participation and arouses their interest in the lesson.

It may be concluded that the learning experiences provided to the C.R.E studies are less than wholly worthwhile. It may also mean that the nature of teaching and methodology in teaching C.R.E has failed to inculcate the ability to acquire moral values by the learners. Almost all the teachers never planned or adequately used the right approaches in teaching moral values to learners. In order to bring forth a morally mature individual, C. R. E must be used to achieve the noble goals of education in Kenya. Thus a link must be made between C.R.E and the national goals of education, for example, national unity. This is because the government wants all its citizens to work together in harmony. In Kenya today, there are people of different nationalities, ethnic groups, different church communities or denominations. The government wants us all to deepen our realization of what we have in common, rather than the differences that exist. The C.R.E teacher should foster national unity by showing pupils practical ways of eliminating any element in their lives, their speech, and behaviour which goes against this goal or philosophy of national unity.

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