

Challenges Junior High School Pupils Face in Teaching and Learning Religious and Moral Education at Selected Schools in the Assin North Municipality

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ABSTRACT: *The study specifically examined challenge JHS pupils faced towards the learning of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in the Assin North Municipality. In this descriptive survey, the quota, and purposive sampling designs were used in selecting 155 respondents for the study. Data was collected through questionnaires. The study found that there are three key challenges to the teaching and learning of RME. Challenges associated with learning RME included inadequate textbooks, unavailability of other learning materials and trained RME tutors. It recommended that the respective schools seek assistance from the Municipal Directorate of Education and NGOs both local and international who can help in providing appropriate and enough RME text books. Moreover, teachers should encourage students to acquire some form of substitute reading materials, as well as provide them with comprehensive classroom notes in order to compensate for the inadequacy of reading materials. Again, qualified RME teachers should be made to teach the subject.*

I. INTRODUCTION

In Ghana, there are many reports on corruption in all sectors of work such as the judiciary, education, health, parliamentarians, audit service, police service just to mention a few. However, there is a growing trend towards linking the solution to these related social and moral harms to the teaching of moral, religious and social values in the public schools. Anti and Anum (2003) assert that to omit from the classroom all references to religion which is one concept or aspect of Religious and Moral Education (RME) and institutions of religion is to neglect an important part of human life. To them, knowledge about religion is very essential for a full understanding of our culture, literature, art, history and current affairs.

For these reasons, Ghana has given priority attention to RME which is seen as a tool for re-engineering the moral fabric of the society in the past years. RME is seen as a tool due to its aims which are spelt out clearly in the curriculum. That is:

1. To help pupils develop understanding and tolerance of other people's faith.
2. To help pupils to understand the difference between good and bad behaviours.
3. To help pupils to develop an awareness of their creator and the purpose of their very existence.
4. To help pupils to become good and useful citizens of this country, capable of maintaining peace, understanding and order in their lives and in the lives of their families.

RME is taught at all levels of education in Ghana to reinforce the informal religious and moral training the youth acquire at homes, and also to fill the moral gap because some homes are not able to provide this type of training adequately (GES, CRDD 2002). This emphasizes the seriousness the government places on the subject. The scope of RME embodies religion, morality and education.

According to Grimmitt (1973), RME found itself in the school curriculum because it satisfies the three educational criteria as follows: It encourages a unique mode of thought and awareness, which is worthwhile to man understanding himself and situations. It plays the role of widening and deepening the child's cognitive perspective in a unique and valuable way and so to contribute to his total development as a person. Effective teaching of religion can facilitate understanding and actively foster the child's capacity to think for himself (p.16).

The above criteria indicate that in the teaching of RME, the cognitive, psychomotor and affective domains need to be catered for. With regards to the cognitive domain, RME aims at providing learners with an opportunity for acquiring and mastering knowledge and understanding about the organization and development of individuals, groups and societies in order to make a reflective decision (Peters, 1966). The role of RME in the provision of knowledge compelled Hilliard (1963) to say that "...it is just because the more important facts have to be presented to children as the basis for any religious experience, that even the religiously uncommitted (but not unsympathetic) teacher can, if circumstances make it necessary to do so, at least hope to make some useful contribution to religion..."(p.26).

In terms of affective domain, RME is essentially concerned with helping learners to develop socially desirable attitudes, feelings, emotions, appreciation of self-worth. The heart is the seat of vital decisions for it is the centre of feeling and reason, decision and action, intention and consciousness (Wolf, 1974). Thus, this type of content and knowledge and skills that are stressed in RME curriculum generally depends on the affective goals that are considered as central to human growth and development (Bloom, Hastings and Madaus, 1971). Raven (1971; 1973) notes that educators generally consider affective and social objectives which are relevant to human development.

RME aims at helping learners in acquiring skills such as speaking, listening, writing, drawing sketching, role playing, reading observing, dramatizing, investigating, problem solving and reporting with respect to the psychomotor domain (Anti and Anum,2003, p.115-117). Thus, RME teachers should help pupils to gain knowledge, process information, develop the skill to examine values and to apply the knowledge and values. In short, the teaching should touch all aspects of life thereby leading to sane mind, soft heart and sound hand.

Religious and Moral Education is intended to provide an integrative education aimed at training decision-makers who could use a democratic foundation to earn their dream of the good life (Bath, 1980).Morality an aspect of RME refers to moral values that have become entrenched and recognized as basis for judging what is wrong or right in a particular society. It deals with values, attitudes, habit, deeds, actions or feelings that are either accepted or rejected by a society. In general, morality refers to quality of human acts by which we call them good or bad, right or wrong. It consists of judgment (rules, principles, ideas) that pronounce actions to be good or bad, right or wrong, just or unjust simply because of the effect they have on the feelings or interests of other people (Gyamerah, 2001; Awuah, 2000; Anti and Anum, 2003; and Kupperman, 1983).

Our lives are shaped by two forces of which often we are hardly aware: The moral code to which we subscribe and the law of the society of which we part (Hoose, 2000). Moral claims abound in everyday life. Each of us demands that others do what is right towards us, and we make moral judgments of others (Bayles and Henley, 1992; Gula, 1989). Moral education is about the study of morality. It concerns learning about good conduct, including all manners and thoughtfulness. It is the development of character, the stable qualities of a person that as revealed in action (MOE, Teacher Trainee College Syllabus, 1998). Parents are the first moral educators of a child and should therefore be sensitive to common sense and developmental needs of children.

In the school situation, moral education is often taught by example. Young people imitate the attitudes the adults display around them (Anti and Anum, 2003; Stone, 1980; Sewall, 1995). Kilpatrick (1993) asserts that schools cannot be expected to inculcate and enforce ideals of character that are at variance with the dominant values of the community or spirituality fragmented culture. According to Tamakloe et al. (1996), socialisation of children, which entails transmission of society's culture, becomes necessary as a way of inducing society's youth into the community. School education aims at achieving this objective. Sewall (1995) posits that virtues

such as charity, modesty, mercy, respect, forgiveness and humility, as most Ghanaians understand them, are deeply rooted in moral teachings.

Washington D.C. based Character Education Partnership (C. E. P) recognises that educators must teach children to know the difference between right and wrong (C.E.P, 1992). Lickona (1991) undertook a research work and concluded that what is new – and hopeful – is that the trend toward community rediscovery of consensual values that make character education possible in our public schools. Damon (1995) has observed that, in order to flourish, young people must move beyond their egoistic desires so that they can “acquire a living sense of what some religious traditions have called transcendence” (p. 81). Finally, the best way for students to develop a moral sense is through co-operative learning and methods that give students responsibility for choosing how much to learn, in what way to learn, what part of a topic to learn, or in what other to learn something (Guide to Moral Education, 1990; Harmin, 1990).

Peters (1966) argues that for something to count as “education” a minimum of knowledge, understanding, and some kind of cognitive perspective must be involved. He contends that knowledge widens and deepens one’s view of things. Smart (1968) explains that the task of the teacher of religion is to show what is unique about religion and morality and to help pupils to think religiously, morally or a better term, theologically. This is entirely in keeping with the view of education as the initiation of young people into what is worthwhile”. The aim of RME is that of creating pupils’ certain capacities to understand and think about religion and morality (Smart, 1968). Hirst (1973) argues that RME should be concerned with “teaching about religion and morality” rather than “teaching religion and morality”. This view sees RME as an academic exercise, dispassionate and objective.

In spite of the fundamental role of RME in promoting and shaping the religious and moral lives of pupils, experience has shown that RME is a dull subject taught at JHS level of Education. This is because; their interest towards the subject is very low and discouraging due to challenges pupils faced when learning RME. It is however, not clearly known the specific problems of JHS pupils in the AssinNorthMunicipalitytowards the teaching and learning of RME. This study therefore seeks to investigate the deficiencies in the teaching and delivery of RME at AssinNorth Municipality, Ghana.

II. METHODS

The design used for the study was a descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey design was used to report real conditions on the ground. Since the research was conducted in the natural setting of the respondents, the design was aimed principally at describing, and documenting aspects of a situation as it naturally occurs rather than explaining them (Politand Hunger, 1995). This design has an advantage of producing a good amount of responses from a wide range of people. A significant advantage of the descriptive survey design is that it has the potential to provide a lot of information obtained from quite a large sample of individuals (Fraenkland Wallen, 2000).

RME teachers, and JHS pupils in the Assin North Municipality of the Central Region formed the study population. 155 respondents made up of 150 JHS students and five JHS teachers formed the total population used. A combination of simple random and purposive sampling procedures were used to select the respondents for the study.

Questionnaire was the main instrument used for gathering primary data. This type of instrument was chosen based on the fact that, it is designed for self-administration and is possible to include a larger number of subjects than is practical with interview (Ary, Jacobs, and Razavich, 1990). Again, questionnaire turns to be cheaper in terms of expenses and time involved as compared to interviews and observations. The questionnaire was made up of close-ended questions and few open-ended questions.

III. RESULTS

The adequacy of textbooks in the schools for RME was first examined. The results were disaggregated according to the schools as shown in Figure 1. It was shown that 56.8 percent of the respondents noted that textbooks for RME were not available in their schools. This was expressed by the majority of the respondents from Ghana Oxford JHS (63.6%), Atwereboanda JHS (57.1%), AssinAhiyrensuDonkorkrom JHS (54.2%),

AssinFoso Presbyterian JHS (77.3%) and AssinFosoAnsarudeen JHS (51.7%). On the other hand, a greater portion of the respondents from Nyardoam JHS (43.5%) noted that RME textbooks were available but they were inadequate. This showed that the challenge of unviable textbooks was peculiar to Oxford JHS, Atwereboanda JHS, AssinAhiyresuDonkorkrom JHS, AssinFoso Presbyterian JHS and AssinFosoAnsarudeen JHS.

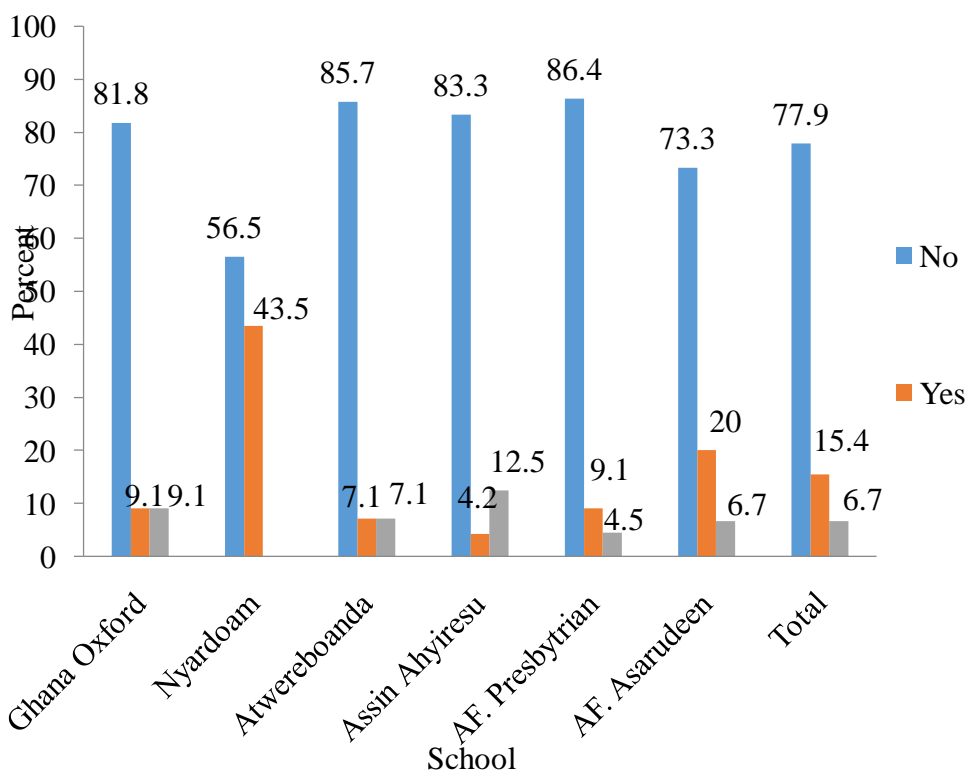


Figure 1: The Need for More RME Textbooks by Schools

Given the fact that, in most schools, there were no RME textbooks available, the study explored the alternatives that the students used in their studies. Generally, 77.9 percent of the respondents indicated that they had no other alternatives to the textbooks. This was expressed by the majority of the respondents from each school, as shown in Figure 1. The results suggested that the problem of unavailability of text books or the substitutes for textbooks was prominent across all the schools.

For those who used substitutes for textbooks, the study explored the types of books which they used in place of the approved textbooks for RME (Figure 2).

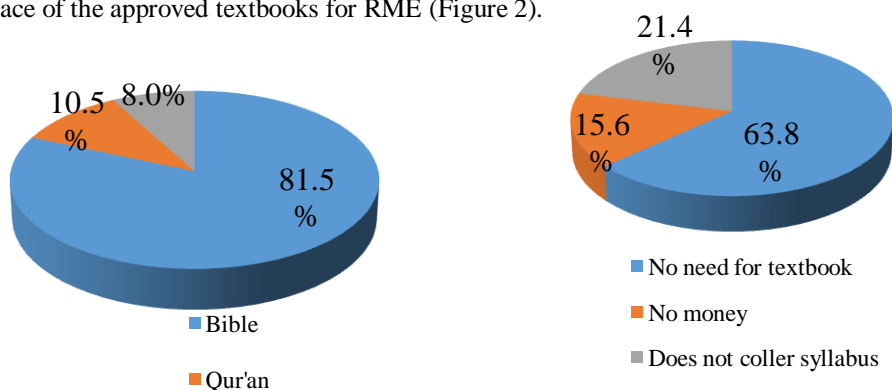


Figure 2: Additional reading materials and reasons for not acquiring substitute textbooks

It was found that 81.5 percent of the respondents indicated that they have the Bible as a substitute textbook. On the other hand, 10.5 percent of the students used only pamphlets or the Quran. Yet, 8.0 percent of the respondents used both Bible and Qur'an. This can be explained by the fact that the Bible and Qur'an represent the main study books in Christianity and Islam, respectively. The choice of the Bible and Qur'an can also be explained by the fact that Christianity and Islam are the first two major religious beliefs in the county.

For the respondents who used no substitutes to textbooks, the majority (63.8%) indicated that there was no need for other reading materials apart from the text books. On the other hand, 15.6 percent noted that they had no means with which to purchase additional textbooks or reading materials. Moreover, 21.4 percent of the respondents noted that other books did not cover the syllabus for the school-based RME.

The study also examined the challenges in learning RME with respect to the availability of teachers to teach the course. In all the schools, the respondents unanimously indicated that there were teachers available to teach the RME course. In most cases (78.1%), there was one RME teacher in the schools. In some other cases (19.9%), there were two RME teachers. Ghana Oxford JHS (9.5%) of the respondents indicated that, there were up to four RME teachers.

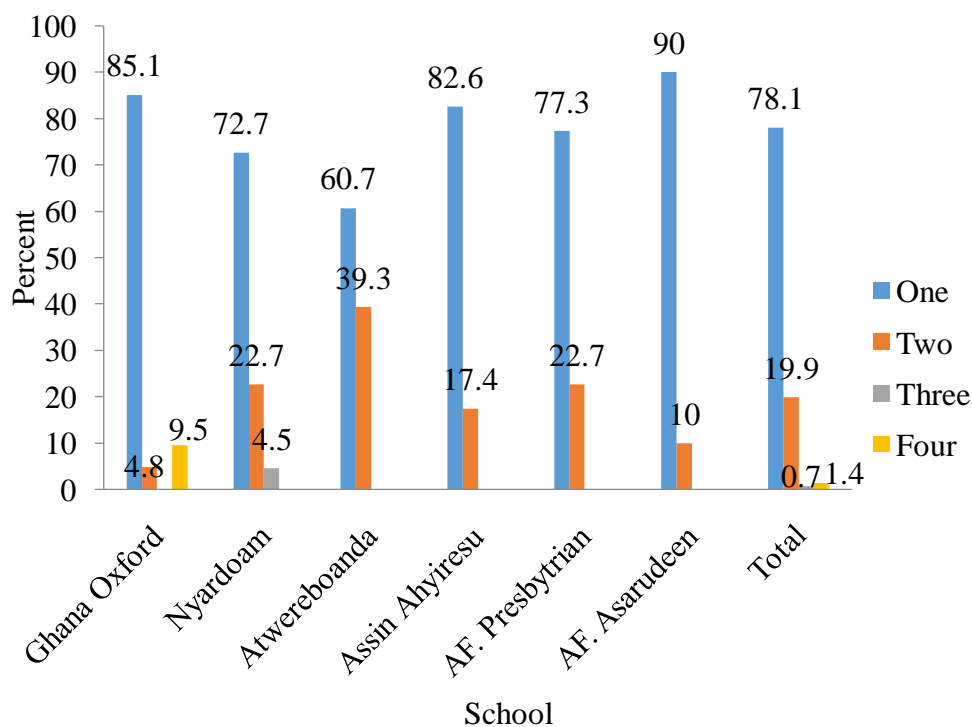


Figure 3: Number of RME Teachers by Schools

The students' opinions about the need for more RME teachers were also examined as shown in Figure 8. It was found that 54.5 percent of the sampled students were of the view that the number of RME teachers in their respect schools facilitated effective teaching of the RME course. This was confirmed by respondents from all the schools, with the exception of the majority of the students from Atwereboanda JHS (70.4%) and half of the students from AssinAhyiresu JHS (50%).

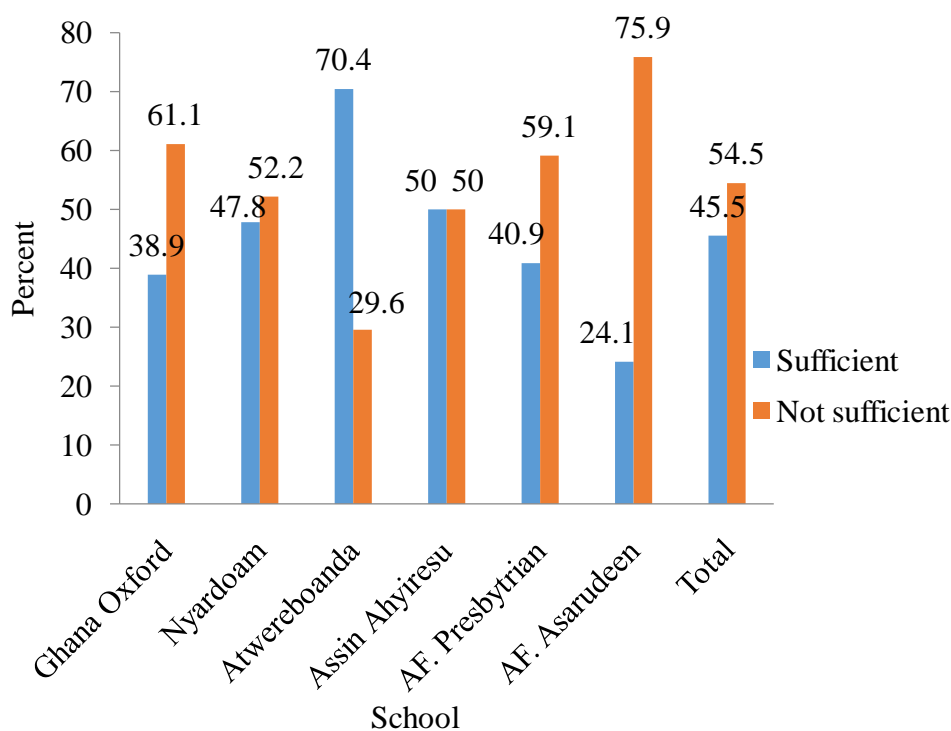


Figure 4: Sufficiency of RME Teachers by Schools

IV. DISCUSSIONS

According to Kwao (2002), the challenges that students face in RME may be related to the teaching style, the learning strategies, the students' interest and other miscellaneous factors such as availability of textbooks, reading materials and the learning environment. This study explored these challenges in relation to their prevalence in the schools.

The inadequacy or unavailability of teaching and learning materials, such as textbooks has been noted by Farrant (1980) as a major learning challenge in the formal educational system. In this study, the inadequacy or unavailability of textbooks for RME was confirmed by the respondents who also generally agreed that there were not enough textbooks or they were not available. One key respondent explained that the number of students had increased without proportional refurbishment and stocking of the school's reading and learning materials.

The study went further to explore the alternative books that teachers and students use in the teaching and learning of RME. Surprisingly, the majority of teachers and students indicated that they do not use any alternative books for the teaching and learning of RME. Those who indicated that they used alternative books for the teaching and learning of RME, mentioned the Bible and Qur'an. Only a small fraction used RME pamphlets in addition to Bible and Qur'an. This is consistent with Anti and Anum (2003), assertion that the key challenge to studying RME in schools is inadequate teaching and learning materials.

Responses of five teachers also confirmed that the schools generally did not have sufficient teaching and learning materials to facilitate the teaching of the RME course in the respective schools. The teachers indicated that not all the students had the textbooks required for teaching the course. It was, however, found that the RME textbooks were designed to reflect the RME syllabus and this facilitated the teaching and learning process. The teachers also noted that RME course was not designed with focus on its integration with the other courses of study. Therefore, RME was disassociated from the other courses which made its academic application in the other fields difficult.

The responses were confirmed by respondents that, there was at least one RME teacher although in all the cases, they were not exclusive to teaching RME. Based on Barcena and Jorer (1993) indication that the unavailability of teachers was a major problem to learning RME in some schools, the study indicated that the problem of unavailability of teachers was not prominent among the study institutions. This may be explained by the fact that the problem of unavailability of teachers is often a problem of rural communities (Anti and Anum, 2003), whereas AssinFoso was an urban area.

In line with examining the challenges in RME course, it was noted that none of the teachers, as at the time of the survey, had ever participated in any in-service training or workshop on the RME subject. This, according to Awuah (2000) often has negative implications of the teaching process. Awuah (2000) emphasizes that poor in-service training or the lack of it often leads to ineffective classroom delivery.

Conclusions

The study concluded that RME studies were mostly challenged by unavailability of textbooks. This was worsened by the fact that most of the students did not have substitute learning materials. There was, however, adequate number of teachers to teach the subject, but most of the teachers did not study RME as their elective during their training in their respective colleges. Again, the teachers have never attended any workshop or in-service training on the subject RME.

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