

ENGENDERING POSITIVE MORAL ORIENTATION AMONG THE YOUTHS THROUGH CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR CURBING CULTISM

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Abstract

Religion is a significant force in the contemporary world. It motivates human ideas and behaviors, shaping societies, cultures and individuals. Morality or moral orientation in the light of Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) establishes therefore, in the minds of individuals the concept of right and wrong as a measure to guide the way of life in the society. The study investigated differences in students' moral orientation based on attitude to and performance in CRK. The study, an ex post facto sampled three hundred and sixty three Secondary School students in Etinan Local government area of Akwa Ibom State. Data for the study was collected using the "Students' Christian Religious Knowledge and Moral Orientation Questionnaire" and "Christian Religious Knowledge Performance Test. The data, analyzed using the t-test statistics revealed significant differences in the students' moral orientation based on their attitude to and performance in CRK. Recommendations were made based on this finding.

The youths are the greatest asset of any nation and should be well molded and nurtured for the future of a nation. The saying goes "youths are not only leaders of tomorrow, but partners of today". As a matter of fact a nation's future can be predicted based on the quality of its youths. According to Kumar (2008) if the youths lose their way or direction, it would become very serious and alarming for a Nation. According to African Youth Charter "youth" means "every person between the ages of 15 and 35 years. And in Nigeria this constitutes forty three percent of the nation's population according to the population reference Bureau (Osalar, 2012).

The increase of moral decadence in the Nigerian society makes it necessary for a second look at ways in which the right values can be brought back into the society starting with the youths. Youth restiveness has been on the increase in the country (Omede, 2012). The negative image our youths have created in the area of organized crime and other vices have contributed to the bad press Nigeria has been given among the committee of nations (Ibrahim, 2011). Acts of moral decadence and indiscipline associated with Nigerian youths accentuates the need for strong moral orientation. "In fact, in Nigeria, no one needs to look far and wide to discover the high rate of moral decadence and arrant display of wrong or negative values" (Omede, 2012: 316). Manifestations of immorality among youths include; incidences of cultism and truancy which involves examination malpractices, dissolution, self-indulgence, licentiousness... (Hastings, 1980).

The etymological understanding of the word, "morality", has its background in the Latin word, "*mores*" meaning "manners" or "moral". It means the general code of conduct in a society, or within a sub-group of a society. The Oxford Advance learners' Dictionary (2001) defines morality as "principles concerning right and wrong or good and bad behavior". Morality of an individual is defined by his ability to make the distinction between right and wrong in conduct. Orientation on the

Multidisciplinary Journal of Research Development Volume 22 No. 1, July, 2014

other hand is a function of the mind to adapt or adjust to a new environment, situation, customs, or set of ideas for the overall good of the person, be it moral or societal (Thesaurus, 2002). Thus, the moral orientation of an individual would mean his/her inclination to good or bad, or right or wrong conduct. Without morality grave problems face man especially in the social dimension and he will be deprived of a happy life. Positive moral values such as truthfulness, honesty, integrity and respect for constituted authority should be upheld, cherished and idolized by a society that wishes to survive. A sound moral character can be inculcated in youths by the parents, the society and the school. Omede (2012) identified poor morality and negative values as principal factors responsible for youth vices in Nigeria and recommended the inculcation and teaching of moral and values education in the curricular of post primary education in order to reduce cultism, armed robberies and other campus and societal vices that are traceable to them.

The teaching of contemporary Christian Religious Education (CRE) and the practices of moral orientation could be traced to ancient Greek philosophers such as Socrates, and Aristotle (Bloom, 1977; Rosen, 2005). The Socratic emphasis on virtue emphasized the mind, particularly philosophical thinking and reasoning. Socrates' own pedagogy - known as the *Socratic Method* - used successive questions to guide students from ignorance to understanding. Knowing what is good was considered the sufficient condition for individuals to be considered good and virtuous.

Aristotle's teaching and philosophy emphasized the practice of good actions, not only reason, as a means to living a life of virtue. Aristotle cared to believe that the virtuous life is attainable through the practice of specific habits and virtues. Aristotle's philosophy of virtue laid the foundation for contemporary paradigms of character and moral orientation in the lives of the youths (Hans, 1980).

For centuries, scholars have realized that Christianity as a distant religion has contributed to the total moral formation of the human person. It was in this context that the nineteenth century missionaries introduced western education in 1842 (Fafunwa, 1977; Ilori, 1994). The major curriculum content of this education was religion and moral orientation of the youths. In order to implement this context fully, adequate attention was given to understanding the true meaning of God, the relevance of God in human nature, and the activities of God in the daily lives of the people. As such, God was given the pride of place in all the established institutions. People were taught the fear of God and respect for elders. (Ilori, 1994).

However, not all agree as to the importance of religion to moral development. While acknowledging that religious education in the broader sense may aid children's moral development and their adjustment to the society in which they live. Braspenning (2010) argued that rearing children with an understanding of only one religion may not contribute to their moral development. But, Meijer (1996) in his study acknowledges the influence of religious education on children's moral development as a relevant topic in multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious societies because according to him, the concept of morality traditionally has a religious connotation. In the studies of Kohlberg (1964), he included instruction and experience as among the early moral orientation approaches and found that youths who perform well in moral tests have regard for constituted authorities, they are not truant, they don't indulge in sexual harassment, armed robbery, and other vices.

Engendering Positive Moral Orientation among the Youths through Christian Religious Education: A Tool for Curbing Cultism

After Nigeria's independence in 1960, and recognizing the relevance of character formation in the post-independence educational programmes, the masses opinion led to a series of National Curriculum reforms to redirect the course of Nigerian education in the face of the new needs and aspirations of the people especially as it affects the moral orientation of the youths through Christian Religious Education (CRE). The curriculum conference spelt out in great details the national philosophy, goals, purposes, and objectives of Nigerian education, and recommended a national curriculum reform (Adaralegbe, 1972). A new set of goals like self-realization, better human relationships and national economic efficiency were identified (Taiwo, 1980), for both the primary and the secondary school levels according to the needs of the society.

When the National Policy on Religious Education was implemented in 1985, it was hoped that the system will contribute to the good of nation building. As such, top priority was given to the study of Christian Religious Education (CRE) in the Primary and Secondary Schools. It was assumed that it would bring about the much needed moral orientation in the youths – knowledge, values, behaviours, attitudes, and skills - that would ensure their effective adaptation in an ever-changing multi-faith and multi-ethnic society such as Nigeria. It was expected to contain not only the context of the Bible but also moral lessons or instructions for the youths (Adewale, 1975). This in itself is morality. In the light of the above, could Christian Religions Education, as one of the subjects studied in schools, play a vital role in engendering positive moral orientation of young people that could possibly result in a proper behavioural control in the society?

Christian Religious Education is programmed to help students to understand the role the Bible plays as a source of morality, guidance, direction and counseling (Küng, 1976). It is believed that teaching and learning the Bible would help the Nigerian Youths to prepare for useful living within the society and that the Christian Religious teacher could help the youths to improve in their moral orientation, attitudes to God and their fellow men, to their work and to the nation in general (Gaiya, 1981). In keeping with this belief the National Curriculum for Junior Secondary Schools specified the following objectives:

- i. To provide opportunity for the students to learn more about God and grow in their faith in God;
- ii. To enable students to accept Christ as the founder and sustainer of the Christian Church.
- iii. To help students apply the teaching and examples of Christ in their lives with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- iv. To develop and foster in the lives of the students Christian attitudes and values such as respect for life, respect for all men, selfless service to God and humanity. (FME, 1985 : 276)

Ever since the implementation of the Christian Religions Education curriculum, reactions of parents, people in articles and other print media seem to indicate that the programme is encountering some problems Mkena (1981). They have criticized the fact that in many of the schools, Christian Religions Education amounts to an exercise in sheer indoctrination where various denominations teach their different doctrines (Njoku, 1981). There is the problem of the subject meeting the desired goal which hangs on the moral orientation of the students. In the light of the above, this study investigates the extent to which the study of Christian Religious Knowledge can engender positive moral orientation among youths.

Research Questions

The following research questions were raised to guide the study.

1. To what extent does Post Basic students' moral orientation differ based on their attitude to Christian Religious Education?
2. To what extent does Post Basic students' moral orientation differ based on their performance in Christian Religious Knowledge?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were formulated to provide further guidance in this study.

1. Post Basic students' moral orientation does not significantly differ based on their attitude to Christian Religious Knowledge.
2. Post Basic students' moral orientation does not significantly differ based on their performance in Christian Religious Knowledge.

Method

The ex-post facto design was adopted for this study. The variables for the study are the Christian Religious Education variables of attitude to Christian Religious Knowledge and performance in Christian Religious Knowledge and moral orientation of the Post Basic students as the independent variable. The population of the study consisted of all the students in Senior Secondary School year two (SSS II) of all the Eleven (11) Public Schools in Etinan Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State. Data obtained from the Akwa Ibom State secondary Education Board, Research and Statistics Division for the 2012/2013 academic session indicated that there are about One Thousand, Nine Hundred and Sixty Three (1,963) students in all the eleven (11) public secondary schools under study.

The sample size was 363 SSII students drawn from six out of the eleven Secondary Schools in Etinan L.G.A. A multi-stage proportionate sampling technique was employed to select the sample. The six schools were selected by simple random sampling and from each school a proportional number of classes (20%) were selected. then, from each class 20% of the students were drawn to make up a total of 363 subjects. representing 5% of the population.

Instrumentation

The instruments used to obtain data for the study were two; a researcher developed questionnaire titled "Students Christian Religious Education and Moral Orientation Questionnaire" (SCREMOQ). The psychometric instrument SCREMOQ was used to elicited responses from the subjects on the independent sub-variable; students' attitude to Christian Religious Education and the dependent variable moral orientation. These were measured on a four- point scale of strongly agree-4, agree-3, disagree-2 and strongly-disagree-1. The second instrument was a performance test constructed by the researcher the "Christian Religious Education Performance Test (CREPT) consisting of 40 items from first term Senior Secondary year two (SSII) CRK syllable. In order to establish their reliability the instruments were pre-tested, the collected data were subjected to estimation of the reliability co-efficient using Cronbach's Alpha test for SCREMOQ and Spearman Brown Coefficient for CREPT. The reliability co-efficient obtained for SCREMOQ and CREPT

Engendering Positive Moral Orientation among the Youths through Christian Religious Education: A Tool for Curbing Cultism

stood at .72 and .75 respectively. The reliability values were considered adequate for the instruments to be used for the study.

Data Analysis

Data collected was collated and analyzed using mean score and the t- test statistics to determine if there were any statistically significant difference in the mean attitude and performance scores of students based on their moral orientation at 0.05 alpha levels. A decision rule of 2.49 mean score and below for negative attitude and 2.50 and above for positive attitude to CRK; and also 50 and above as high and 49 and below as low for performance mean score was used to classify the students into the independent variable sub-groups.

Results

Students' Moral Orientation Based on Attitude to CRK

Table 1: A t-test Analysis of Students' Moral Orientation Based on Attitude to CRK

Attitude to CRE	N	Mean	SD	t-value	t-critical	df
Positive	311	41.32	2.74	13.65*	1.96	361
Negative	52	35.46	3.55			

*significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 1 show that the calculated t-value of 13.65 at 361 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha of significance is greater than critical t-value of 1.96. The null hypothesis is rejected. Thus, there is a significant difference in youth's' moral orientation based on their attitude to Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK). Youths that have a positive attitude towards CRK have better moral orientation than those that have a negative attitude to CRK (41.32 vs. 35.46).

Students' Moral Orientation Based on Attitude to CRK

Table 2: A t-test Analysis of Students' Moral Orientation Based on Performance in CRK

Performance in CRE	N	Mean	SD	t-value	t-critical	df
High	288	41.33	2.72	10.18*	1.96	361
Low	75	36.23	4.30			

*significant at 0.05 alpha level

Table 2 shows that the calculated t-value of 10.18 at 361 degrees of freedom and 0.05 alpha level is greater than critical t-value of 1.9. The null hypothesis is rejected. There is a significant difference in students' moral orientation based on their performance in Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK). Students with higher performance in CRK subject do exhibit better moral orientation than their counterparts with lower performance (41.33 vs. 36.23).

Discussion

Students' Moral Orientation Based on Attitude to Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK)

The result of testing hypothesis 1 revealed a significant positive difference in students' moral orientation based on their attitude to Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK). Youths who had a positive attitude to CRK showed better moral orientation. These students are more likely to cultivate better moral values and orientation. This finding does contradict studies that religious education does not inculcate moral values, Braspenning (2010). However, empirically it is revealed here that in the Nigerian context it may not be the case. This is acknowledged in Meijer (1996). In ancient Greece, for instance, moral education was imparted largely through religious literature in the forms of legends about the gods and heroes of Greece (Bloom, 1977).

Students' Moral Orientation Based On Performance in Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK)

The result of testing hypothesis 2 revealed a significant positive difference in youths' moral orientation based on performance in Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) test. Students who performed very well in the test exhibit better moral orientation than their counterparts with lower performance. The Christian missionaries brought formal education to Nigeria primarily to propagate Christianity. In the process schools were established. Those who performed very well in school were rated to have high moral orientation (Lawal, 2002). This is in line with Kohlberg (1964), findings that youths who perform well in moral tests have regard for constituted authorities, they are not truant, they don't indulge in sexual harassment, armed robbery, and other vices.

Conclusion

The study has shown that students' moral orientation can be influenced by their attitude to the subject Christian Religious Knowledge and also their performance in the subject. This goes to say that students' who have a positive attitude to CRK will have better moral orientation and will likely be better behaved. Similarly, students who perform well in the subject have a more positive moral orientation. Thus, teaching youths CRK at the Post Basic level can engender better moral orientation and help to curb manifestations of delinquent behaviours such as cultism among youths in Etinan Local Government Area of Akwa Ibom State Nigeria.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of this study.

1. The teaching of CRK in schools should be made compulsory (for Christians) at the post basic level where it is an optional subject.
2. The curriculum and instructional delivery should emphasize more on morals as lessons to be learnt.
3. Teachers should be tutored on best instructional delivery practices of CRK content in order to make their CRK lessons fascinating and enjoyable so as to make students develop positive attitude towards the subject and hence enhance high performance.
4. Secondary school students should be encouraged to perform well in Christian Religious Education through adequate provision of text books, teaching and learning materials. There is need for experts in the area to be encouraged to write books conceptualized in the Nigerian setting.

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