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CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION: A TOOL FOR CHARACTER AND SKILLS DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract
Christian religious education is pivotal to character and skills development. It is a type of education that tries to achieve the integral development of the individual. It moulds the character, inculcates discipline and morals in the individual. It brings peace and progress to the nation, promotes social harmony and cohesion, personal sacrifice, service mentality and integrity that make for individual and national development. Religious education is relevant to national and individual development, for no nation or individual can develop without discipline and moral. This paper wants to look at the role of religious education in forming the character and skills of individuals.

Introduction
There is no doubting the fact that our society is today filtered with all kinds of nefarious activities as a result of moral decadence. Thus kidnapping, cyber crime, robbery of all kinds, child-trafficking, sexual immorality, cultism, thuggery, examination malpractices among others are in the increase day by day in our society. When one looks at these social problems, one would, wonder the effect of religious education being imparted in the students in our various schools because students are also the ones who make up the society. One would wonder if religious education has any positive or negative effect on character formation of individuals.

However, despite the above backdrop, religious education has a place in the character formation and skill development of individuals. It is important to make this type of education

compulsory to all students at all levels of learning. Instead of designing it as a departmental program in tertiary school, it is suggested that it be introduced as a general course for all students. This is because every individual needs moral and morality is embedded in religious education. Ekpunobi (1982) is in line with this view as he says, "The fallen moral standards in our society should move us to think more about meaningful teaching of religion in our schools". Cox (1966) is even more pragmatic in his submission, for according to him, the goals of teaching religion in schools should "seem adequate to the teacher, worthwhile to the children and useful to the community".

The above views submitted by Ekpunobi and Cox indicate the fact that religious education is a *sine qua non* at all levels of our learning. The aim of this paper therefore is to determine the place of religious education in character formation and skills development of individuals.

Conceptual Framework

To embark on this *excursus* it is important to define the key concepts that will help us as the study progresses. Thus the following concepts will need to be defined: Religion, education, character, skill, and religious education.

Religion

The term *religion* is difficult to define. Both now and in the past there has not been a broad consensus definition of the term. Different authorities have attempted to define religion yet there is no universally acceptable definition of the term. In line with this, Oduyeye (1987) stated that "religion can be better explained than defined". Asalu (2005) noted that "the object of religion is for the most part invisible and spiritual beings and are not subject to scientific observations as such and are conceived in different ways by different people". The information given by Asalu is a fact if we consider that some people give worship to cosmic objects or impersonal power; even, some religions have no object of worship at all (Okeke, 2008).

However, despite the differences, Okeke (2008) noted that the commonly acceptable definition is that "religion is a relationship between man and the sacred". Asalu (2005) sees religion as "an encounter between man and a transcendent deity conceived as a personal being capable of communication with man". Going further, Okeke (2008) says that "religion

is a rapport with a being that transcends man and the world of experience and contains the acts in which such a rapport is translated as belief, prayer, sacrifice, love or fear, etc".

Education

Ewelukwa (2011) defines education as "the instruction or training by which people learn to develop and use their mental, moral and physical power". This definition offered by Ewelukwa is a restricted sense of education. Okeke (2011) offers another restricted meaning of education. According to him, "education is a life-long process, involving activities, which are directed to the formation of the human person: body and soul". But broadly considered, Okeke (2007) stated that "education embraces such activities as: teaching, information, training, in various disciplines, instruction on the art of living, initiation into formative culture". Okeke (2011) makes a remarkable submission on the role of education in character formation thus "in education properly conceived, both intellectual, that is, cognitive, affective and technical, that is, psycho-motor formations are necessary, yet they are insufficient if moral formation is neglected, hence the three domains of education must stand on the ground of spiritual or religious education, without which education has no foundation".

Character

The word *character* can be seen as mental qualities that make one person or race different from others (Hornby, 1989). It is a distinctive differentiating mark. The word also denotes the essential qualities and personality traits of a factional or real individual. It is a composite of good moral qualities typically of moral excellence and firmness blended with resolution, self discipline, high ethics, force and judgement.

Character also depicts emotional, moral, psycho-attitudinal reaction of a person which sometimes manifests physically from the individual. Character can be positive or negative depending on the individual acting.

Skill

The word *skill,* according to Hornby (1989) is "an ability to do something expertly and well". Skill also means an experience gained through training or learning. Thus we say "skill acquisition", that is, to acquire or gain experience or new knowledge on a

particular kind of thing through training or learning.

Christian Religious Education

Christian religious education is component of the holistic-oriented education, by means of which the student is led towards progressive habitualization for social duties towards the community to which he belongs and in which he has a share (Okeke, 2011). Generally, Christian religious education is to lead the students towards the acquisition of human and Christian values which are indispensable for living an integral life (Okpaloka, 1983). Simply put, the purpose of Christian religious education is to effect integral formation. This integral human formation includes holistic, developmental, social and personal harmony (Okeke, 2011).

In line with the above, Sinistero (1970) stated that Christian religious education "guides the intellect to construct for itself correctly its entire microcosm, its values, its ends and what it ought-to-be; all this being a unique training by means of which it is formed to exercise free choice".

Christian Religious Education And Character Development

Christian religious education aims at making man a *homo agens*, a logical consequence of a *homo sapiens*, for as the saying goes, *knowledge breeds action,* and man can only act to the measure and extent to which he knows and is informed (Okeke, 2011). Okeke (2011) further stated that "the whole process of the formation of a *homo sapiens* and a *homo agens* is characteristically developmental, and so the purpose of Christian religious education is anchored on the gradual development of the student to attain human and moral maturity". Christian religious education seeks to assist every person in developing his or her unique capabilities and talents, so that each one, having received a solid formation, may as a good citizen, contribute to the welfare and further development of the community (John Paul II, 1980).

Christian religious education, in its developmental function seeks to help the human person to progressively attain real development and liberation, which will always be self-development and self-liberation. And in this process of development, it is truth which will make him free and help him to grow. Truth comes through the acquisition of

knowledge, gained through research and through continuous effort, dedication and creativity (Okeke, 2011). Human life is not only developmental, it is also social. Christian religious education, therefore, concerns itself also with the formation of the human person to attain social harmony, in consonance with his nature as a social being (Okeke, 2011).

In the light of the above, Christian religious education aims at inculcating in the students the sense of not only moral virtues but also social virtues and as well fosters the students in social living. It also seeks to guide human being in the evolving dynamism through which he shapes himself as a human person, armed with strength of judgement and moral virtues (Okeke, 2011).

Christian Religious Education and Skills Development

As has been gleaned above, the word *skill* is understood in two senses. First, it is an ability to do something expertly and well. Second, it is an experience gained through training or learning. The question that requires an answer in this context is: what is the role of Christian religious education in skills development of a person?

The importance of Christian religious education in skill development cannot be over-emphasized. Christian religious education is a discipline that deals with man's morals and integrity within the society. In the course of interacting with his physical and social environment he comes across certain problems and challenges in his efforts to attain an orderly, more meaningful and purposeful life (Okebukola and Kosoko-oyedeko, 2007). Anyacho (1994) emphasized that the general purpose of Christian religious education is "to help learners inculcate moral uprightness, social justice, well meaningful environment through the acquisition of relevant knowledge, practical skill, etc". Skill development is an important aspect of Christian religious education for both formandee and formator, that is, the learners and the teacher.

Christian religious education inculcates in the students skills which include intellectual and manipulative; examples of the skills include thinking or reasoning critically, solving problems, finding information (research skills), giving direction (Okebukola and Kosoko-oyedeko, 2007). Unfortunately, the goals of Christian religious education have been implemented in all levels of education for many years now

without success in terms of inculcating the values and skills of good citizenship, and this explains the reason for increase in crime in our society as enunciated in the introductory part of this study. Besides acquisition of knowledge there are other practical ways through which skills can be developed and improved. Using teachers and students as an example. These practical ways include:

1. Ability to stand before the audience courageously. A teacher, for instance, should be able to stand confidently before his students and adequately disseminate information, no matter the age and intellectual capacity of his students.
2. He should be able to use and manifest adequately various skills like set- induction, verbal and non-verbal cues in his contact with the learners.
3. Good physical conduct before the audience is very important. Ability to dress well and neatly; use of polite language and modest or prudent in relating with others can contribute to one's self-confidence and earn him respect.

Other skills that need to develop include writing neatly, correctly and clearly on the chalk-board important information in a logical and orderly manner; making use of information and Communication Technology. According to Lillian (2002), "Development of Information and Communication Technology has turned the world into global village". The teacher can also use the computer, I-pad and other communication gadgets like the internet to communicate online with the students.

Maintaining good relationship with students is a very good skill. A teacher should work for the improvement of individual students. He should be fair and firm in decision. The methodology of teaching in schools today is constantly changing. Because of this, the teacher should be abreast with the current method of teaching Christian religious education (Okebukola & Kosoko-oyedeko, 2007).

Furthermore, another way of skills development as maintained by Nebo (2015) is "to ensure that teachers are better trained, that they are given more opportunity to improve themselves, acquire more skills, more didactic teaching skills and then do more research". On the part of the students, Nebo (2015) was of the opinion that they should be "encouraged, challenged, go to the internet, go to google, download

information, come to class, challenge (your) teacher".

Information can also be borrowed from other source. In accordance with this Nebo (2015) encourages both students and teachers thus, "we have MIV, Havard university, Californian Institute of Technology, they now have open webs and universities can get (these) materials free of charge and use the same materials that the best universities are using in the world, to teach (your) own students".

Conclusion

Human development is pivotal to every other development. Education is the fundamental means of human development which in turn is the foundation of national development (Okeke, 2015). Christian religious education prepares people to be useful and reliable citizens. The role of Christian religious education is to help one adopt moral character that will benefit both the individual and society. Both school, home, church and society contribute in character formation and development of a person. Walberg and Haertel (1997) are of the view that "character emerges from the more general individual environment, interactions from which students construct their sense of themselves". There is no simplistic formula or model for building character. Schools contribute to character development to the extent to which they constitute environment conducive to more general, social and emotional development, and more specifically moral environments in which students are treated fairly and with respect, and which convey and enact through teacher behavior and school policy a general climate in which morality is valued.

Recommendations

This study depicts Christian religious education as a veritable tool for character and skills development. In other words, it helps to model the character and skills of individual. But this depends to a large extent the attention given to it by both the learner and the facilitator or teacher. For instance, in a situation where the course is not effectively taught it will make no impact on the behavior of the learner. As a result, Christian religious education teacher should adopt effective method of teaching. A teacher with good qualities and teaching methods effect a positive change in the student. Students look at such teacher as a model and try

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to copy the teacher consciously or unconsciously.

Ineffective teaching of Christian religious education brings about fall in moral standards in the society and therefore rise in crime rate. To shun this, parents, teachers and other stakeholders should try to uphold the tenets of morality so that the young ones can copy and adapt.

Character and skills development have to do with conscious efforts made by an individual in order to acquire the knowledge. Learning is a permanent change in behavior. Where the parties, that is, the teacher and learner are not directly involved, it becomes obvious that neither character nor skills can be developed because learning has not taken place.

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