RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PROGRAMMES AND MORAL DEVELOPMENT OF PRESCHOOL CHILDREN IN NAIROBI COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

This research study sought to find out how the different Religious education programmes offered by three religious groups (Christianity, Islam and Hinduism) in Kenya influenced the moral development of pre-school children in Nairobi County. The study was carried out in eight (8) religious schools which were a representation of three (3) religious groups: Christianity ((3 preschools), Islam (3 preschools) and Hinduism (2 preschools). The study was carried out within a period of three weeks in which the researchers found that each religious group had some unique contribution towards moral dimensions of the preschool children through its religious education programme. The study recommends a deliberate effort to actually teach children on how to be moral. The identities of the children and their preschools and religious affiliations were treated confidentially. Consent to observe children and have them listen to the stories was obtained from the parents/guardians/care-takers.

Keywords: Moral development, Preschool children, Religious groups, Religious education programmes

INTRODUCTION

The Learning Metrics Task Force convened by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics and the Center for Universal Education at the Brookings Institution set out to answer the question, "what do all children and youth of the world need to learn?" The Task Force identified seven areas (domains) that all children regardless of color, religion, gender or economic status, ought to learn so as to make it in the 21st century (LMTF, 2013a). One of the identified areas for children to learn is the value domain to cover social and emotional, culture and the arts. The competencies in this domain like in other domains must be measured to determine whether or not learning has taken place. Moral development falls in this domain.

Moral development as described by Ofsted (2003) and Erricker (2000) is the building of a framework of moral values which regulate the personal behaviour of individuals. It is the gaining of a sense of moral values from experience of learning, enabling one to think and act responsibly, courageously and compassionately towards themselves and other people in the society and the environment (Sandin, 1992). Erricker (2000) further notes that children who are developing morally are likely to be successful learners who have enquiring minds and think for themselves to process information, reason, question and evaluate, understand how they learn and learn from their mistakes and are able to learn independently with others. They are likely to be confident individuals who relate well with others to form good relationships as well as take managed risks and stay safe.

The purpose of moral education is not to instill values, but rather to help children address questions of values in a critical, speculative and reflective way (Mbae, 2005: Sandin 1992). Bull (1969) emphasized that children can be facilitated to learn and develop their moral principles or rules to judge and make decisions. Bull (1969) further notes that morality develops in four stages: anomy, heteronomy, socionomy and autonomy which is the highest level and for one to reach autonomy, obstacles such as authoritarianism, physical and mental punishment and indoctrination should be avoided. He therefore argues that any basis for moral education should consist of facilitating those skills which are necessary to make good and reasonable decisions and to act on them.

According to the Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (1988), moral maturity is more than just knowing what is right. This is in reflection to the thought that the world is full of people who are aware of what is right but opt to set moral considerations aside when they find it expedient to do so. The Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD) (1988), states that for one to be moral, one should be able to care deeply about doing it and to possess the will, competence and habits needed to translate moral judgment and feeling into effective moral action. This therefore exemplifies a moral person as one who portrays rationality, independence, responsibility, maturity and altruism (Bull, 1969).

Durkheim (1961) notes that the content of moral curriculum can be organised to feature in a school subject. In the history of Kenya education, moral education has been the monopoly of religious education programmes (Republic of Kenya, 1964, 1976, 1999), pastoral programmes and life skills programme for all educational levels. However, what is seemingly arising from the social life of Kenyan peoples is the weakening of the social values, ethics and morality, a manifestation that these conditions may not have been effectively taught to allow personal responsibility and commitment (Otiende, 1982; Shiundu, 1994; Republic of Kenya 2012).

In Kenya, some of the religious education programmess being offered to promote moral development include preschool Christian Religious Education programme; preschool Islamic Religious Education Programme and preschool Hindu Religious Education Programme. These programmes are products of different religious groups. However, they have a tendency to focus on rationality, responsibility, independence, altruism and maturity, key characteristics of a moral child (Groenewegen, 1993).

The preschool Christian Religious Education programme is supposed to inculcate in children social, spiritual and moral insights to think critically and make appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society. Children are also to appreciate and respect their own and other peoples cultural and religious beliefs and practices. They are also to acquire the basic principle of Christian living and develop a sense of self-respect and respect for others. Lastly, they are also to contribute positively to the transformation of self and society as a whole.

According Sheikh (2012), preschool Islamic Religious Education programme operates on the ideals of producing all-rounded and morally upright individuals who can serve as good example for the society as they learn the principles of Islamic religion as well as excel in their day

to day affairs of globalised world. Sheikh's focus seems to be on having children who are responsible.

Lovat (1995) explains that the basic aim of preschool Hindu Religious Education (HRE) is to expose children to the principles and philosophies of Hindu religion which they can relate to their daily life. The programme seeks to inculcate into children five fundamental human qualities which include spiritual qualities, moral qualities and mental qualities. The HRE programme is fundamental in preserving Hindu cultural heritage. It aims at fostering creative thinking and problem solving skills through the children's holistic growth and personal social competence. Also, the programme is geared towards enabling the child to face the challenges of emerging social issues.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of the study was to investigate how the different religious groups in Kenya influenced the moral development of preschool children through the religious education programmes they offered in preschools. Moral development in this case was perceived under the aspects of responsibility, maturity, independence, rationality and altruism as emerging from religious education programmes (preschool Christian Religious Education, preschool Islamic Religious Education and preschool Hindu Religious Education).

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

This research study employed the natural setting of qualitative research design. The design was suitable for the research study since according to Bogdan & Biklen (1992), it inculcates a natural setting as the source of data and the researchers would be the key instruments. The design focus on being descriptive also allowed data to be collected in form of words and pictures .This allowed the researchers to analyse it with its richness and as closely as possible to the form in which it was collected. This therefore ensured that every bit of information was used in describing preschool children's moral development in

The target population in the research study comprised religious groups' pre-schools within Nairobi County. Nairobi County was most suitable for the study since it is cosmopolitan and therefore a better representation of the religious groups that were focused in the study. The Ministry of Education Science and Technology (2004) statistics indicated that by 2002, there were 3000 nursery schools in Nairobi County which were run by private investors, community groups and government run schools also known as public schools.

The researchers determined the sampling size using stratified random sampling which according to Kothari (1990) is normally applied if a population from which a sample is to be drawn constitutes of a heterogeneous group. The researchers divided the population of the different categories of preschools into different strata consisting of three Christian schools, three Muslim schools and two Hindu schools.

The researchers collected data from the children in the selected pre-schools using observation method, storytelling and documentary analysis. Kothari (1990) sited observation method to be a suitable method for qualitative design since the information obtained would relate

to what was currently happening and neither would it be complicated by either the past behaviour or future intentions or attitudes of the children. Story telling on the other hand according to Heo (2003) was suitable since it enabled the researchers to gather first hand experiences and reactions from the children as they listened and commented to the story. Various documents used in the teaching of the three programmes were analysed as a way to establish the extent to which they displayed focus on preschool children's aspects of moral development. Miles and Huberman (1992) recommend use of documentary analysis as a way to enrich other responses.

The researchers observed different moral characteristics inculcated by the children as they went through their day-to-day activities. Each characteristic was represented by different remark statements that the researchers expected would be manifested by the children in regard to the characteristics. In responsibility, the researchers observed whether the children were keeping clean and disposing litter as was expected of them; completing work in class without being reminded; taking care of personal possessions; praying before eating; telling the truth, and apologizing when they did something that was wrong.

The characteristic on independence was based on whether the children could work without supervision, whether they would independently choose toys to play with; involve themselves in pretend play, concentrate while doing their class work as well as dressing and undressing themselves when there was need to do so. Altruism on the other hand was based on whether the children would play with others; share what they had with others; say sorry when something happened to one of them as well as assist a peer with a task. In rationality, the researchers monitored whether the children would visit the toilet when the need arose, wash hands after visiting the toilet, sit quietly in class, say thank you in appreciation, as well as control their emotions. The aspect of maturity was represented by observing whether the children would eat or drink what had been offered, line up to walk in or out of class, listen to the teacher as well as wait for their turns.

The research's observations were carried within three weeks period with the researchers carrying out the observations along with the other activities that had been organized to take place. In each school that the researchers visited, the research observation would take place from morning during assembly time to the time the classes were over and the children would be picked to go home.

The researchers also used different stories in the research study. The stories were based on the different aspects of moral development. There was a story on responsibility for example where by children were told a story about two boys who had picked money to pay for the school trip without permission. The boys could not admit that they had picked the money until when their mother depleted them of supper and breakfast. It was not until when they said sorry that their mother forgave them and gave them something to eat.

The story on altruism on the other hand was about a doctor whom, even though he had a very sick son after having been involved in an accident and was admitted in hospital decided to answer a call on duty by attending to an emergency case in another hospital where he operated on the patient for four hours. The relatives to the patient had been furious that the doctor had taken so long to arrive as well as not briefing them about their patient whom he had just operated on but were later appreciative when they were told that he had just left his son who was very sick to attend to them.

The children were also told a story that depicted on maturity as a moral development aspect. In this case, the children were told about a teacher who decided to go to school even though she was not feeling well. The teacher could not do much in class and sat on the desk the whole day. When the children realized that their teacher was unwell, some of them decided to help her arrange the books and toys on the shelf. The children also spoke in whispers so that they could not disturb her and when the teacher spoke, the children would listen attentively and carry out what they had been told diligently. This made the teacher so appreciative and was happy that she went to school even though she was not feeling well.

Independence as an aspect of moral development on the other hand was represented in a story where by children were told about two children whose parents had died. The children were left under the care of their grandmother whom despite of her old age, took good care of them. When she died, the children were left on their own and had to look after themselves. There was a man who visited them one day and offered to take them to his house where he would look after them. The children refused to go with him and said that they had promised their grandmother that they would never leave her alone. The man was so ashamed since his plans to sell the house as well as the piece of land were thwarted.

The aspect of rationality was represented in a story where by the children were told about a boy who always wished that he could fly like a bird. The boy would always wake up very early in the morning and observe the birds flying. Later the boy discovered that he could be a pilot when he grew up. He worked hard in school, passed with good grades and later became a pilot. The children were told that it was upon them to decide what they wanted to be in future and that they could also choose on how well to behave. They were told that it was them to decide and work hard towards achieving it.

The researchers analysed different school documents and their relevance to the moral development. In each document, the researcher analysed different contents as they featured in the documents. The documents included: the programme of activities or the school time table; the schemes of work; the school fliers; the school brochures; the school lesson plans; the bulletin boards; the work sheets as well as the learning resources which in this case were represented by the charts. In all these, the researchers analysed the songs that were to be sung by the children, activities that the children had to do, discussions that the children were to be involved in, the objectives as represented in the schemes of work, the resources, the contents of the subject matter, the school's mission, vision, values, the schools logo, name, themes, theme colours, drawings and paintings as well as the writings that appeared in them.

Story telling was done in the classroom. The children would sit on the carpet/mat in most schools while in those schools where there were no carpets/mats; they would sit on their chairs which were arranged in a straight line. The researchers would sit on the carpet/mat while facing the children, and would narrate the stories to them. The researchers would then ask the children questions based on the aspect of moral development that was being represented in the story. This would allow the researcher to get the children's feelings through their reactions to the story as well as the responses they gave.

The observation schedule on the other hand was done as the children embarked on their day-to-day activities. This was done in and out of the classroom. The researcher observed and noted keenly what transpired as was guided by the observation schedule. The researchers accompanied the children in all places and even participated in some of the activities that they carried out. This helped them get firsthand information on their behaviour.

Documentary analysis was done independently with the researchers analyzing all the documents attentively. The aim was to gather how the content in the different documents endowed the different aspects of moral development. The researchers also analysed the charts on the walls as well as the bulletin boards and noted how relevant the content was to the moral development of the children.

The three instruments were piloted to check on their validity. This was done in three schools (not in the main study).each representing the religious groups in the study. This helped to check out whether the stories, observation schedules as well as the documentary analysis were a representation of the full content of what was being studied. Based on the findings of the pilot study, the researchers modified the stories as well as the observation schedule to fit the children's age groups.

Test- retest reliability technique was used to check on the stability and consistency of the stories, documentary analysis as well as the observation schedule. The three instruments were administered to the same three schools twice at different times. There was period of two weeks between the first administration and second administration. Using Pearson's product moment correlation coefficient, a correlation coefficient of 0.72 was obtained from the stories, 0.81 from observation schedules and 0.74 from documentary analysis. This implied that the instruments had an element of consistency and therefore dependable..

Each remark statement, response or observation that the researchers got from the three instruments i.e. storytelling, observation schedule and documentary analysis were counted based on their frequencies.

Ethical concerns also took precedence during the research study with the researchers seeking permission from the relevant authorities such as the heads of schools and guardians who gave consent for the study to be carried out as well as collecting data through photographing. Confidentiality and anonymity of the respondents and pre-schools identities in which the research took place were also observed.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The religious education programmes that were considered in the research study include Christian religious education, Islamic religious education and Hindu religious education. The moral development was broken down into moral characteristics of responsibility, maturity, independence, rationality and altruism.

The two researchers observed indicators of these different moral characteristics i.e. responsibility, maturity, independence, rationality and altruism as they featured in the different

syllabus, lesson plans, schemes of work, timetables, books/worksheets, school diaries, charts, brochures, fliers and school magazines. The data collected insinuated that moral characteristics as observed in Table 1 received different levels of priority from the different religious groups. Responsibility and maturity for example had the highest frequencies. This was followed by altruism, independence and rationality consecutively. Table 1 shows the frequencies of various moral characteristics per religious group and religious education programme.

Table 1: Frequencies for various religious groups and religious education
          programmes

Religious Education Programmes	Responsibility	Maturity	Independence	Rationality	Altruism
	f	f	f	f	f
Christianity Christian Religious Education	65	53	46	40	41
Islam Islamic Religious Education	56	38	32	35	36
Hinduism Hindu Religious Education	53	45	34	33	36

From Table 1, Christianity which offered Christian religious education was leading in all aspects of moral development with responsibility having a frequency of 65.   This was followed by Islam which offered Islamic religious education and having a frequency of 56 in the aspect of responsibility. Similarly Hinduism which offered Hindu religious education was third with responsibility as the highest having a frequency of 53. These results may be attributed to what the society expects of its population in that any education given should make children be responsible and accountable in what they do (Bennaars, 1994; Republic of Kenya, 2005).

The researcher observed the aspects of responsibility and maturity being inculcated at different instances during religious education programmes in the different religious schools where the study was done. In one of the Christian schools for example, pre-school children were observed requesting for sharpeners to sharpen their pencils while the teacher was busy guiding a child on work that was to be done in class. While in an Islamic school for example, children were observed

putting back their cups on trays and throwing the banana peels in the dustbin. The same was also observed in a Hindu school where pre-school children in one of the classes were quite busy arranging crayons in tins and collecting those that had fallen on the floor while the rest sat quietly on the carpet. Being responsible and mature are key behavioural milestones for a child growing and developing as stipulated and supported by Berk (2000). Groenewegen (1993) also points out that all children should be provided with opportunities to demonstrate that they are responsible and accountable for their actions.

Maturity which came second to responsibility as observed in Table 1 was also a priority in the religious education programmes offered in the schools. In one of the Christian schools for example, the researchers observed children sitting on the carpet with their feet and arms crossed, facing the teacher and listening quietly. The researchers also observed children in a different Christian school during a Christian Religious Education lesson practising for a music competition exhibiting maturity as they recited their poems. They stood during the required time without any complaint. According to Bull (1969), they could have chosen to do other things, but they figured out that this was the best option for the time being.

From one of the stories about some children helping their teacher who was not feeling well arrange books on the shelf, the children were asked whether it was good that the children in the story did that. All the children 24 (100%) agreed that it was good for the children in the story to have helped their teacher who was not feeling well. Wilder (2004) supports the development of maturity in children. According to him, maturity develops from infant stage to childhood stage and to adult stage and that at childhood stage is the time children learn to do what they do not feel like doing and must sought out feelings from imagination to reality. At this stage the adult is quite important because this is the time children need feedback on guesses, attempts and failures as they learn and it is the time they are taught the big picture in life.

From the results in Table1, the researchers also found out that children were developing the moral characteristic of independence. From the documentary analysis of the three religious education programme syllabuses, it was clear that independence as a moral characteristic featured. Independence featured in terms of content children had to choose to do on their own. For instance, they were expected to choose what they had to draw of animals created by God. To Bennaars (1994) independence marks children's autonomy, a key focus of being human.

From the researchers' observations as children learnt either Christian religious education or Islamic religious education or Hindu religious education, independence among the children was being encouraged by the teachers through the work and activities they gave in class and as had been stipulated in the schemes of work, lesson plans and the class time-table. For instance, in one Hindu school that was observed, children made personal decisions on what story books they were to read and where they were to sit when reading them. Each child selected a story book from the shelf as they had been instructed by the teacher and would sit either on the carpet/mat or on the desk to read them. This is in line with Frankel (1990) who notes that the foundations of independence begin in earliest infancy and that the type of attachment formed between adults and children at infancy affects their independence. According to Frankel (1990), children who are securely attached as infants are more likely to show age appropriate independence, curiosity and

creative problem solving abilities during childhood and adolescence. To Bennaars (1994) independence at early stage of education prepares a child to be democratically free later in life.

Altruistic characteristic was also displayed by children in the different religious group schools that the researchers visited. Christian schools that the researchers visited emphasized much on altruism among its children. This as the researchers realized was through the term activities that the schools had come up with such as visiting the orphans in the children's homes. There was also the Christian calendar for the children and which as the researchers observed, one of the activities that the children were to indulge in was to visit the sick as well as pray for their little friends. The children were also supposed to do activities that would please their family. It was interesting listening to a prayer of a five year old child who prayed for a sic friend in class as they learnt their Christian religious education on prayer.

Children were also taught how to appreciate animals and to take care of them thus extending the kind gestures to animals too. In one of the Christian schools that the researchers visited, there was a chart on the notice board that cautioned children not to kill butterflies and were being requested to let them grow. The researchers also identified one of the topics in the schemes of work as "Taking care of Domestic Animals" whose objective was to identify the animals and take good care of them. This was significant since children were to appreciate the animals as God's creation and therefore take care of them. When done they would contribute towards the sustaining of their environment (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

Rationality among the children on the other hand was also a moral characteristic that was observed among the preschool children as part of the religious school education programmes. In all the observed schools, it was noted the way children lined up as they walked out from the classroom to the playground. In one Christian school for example, it was observed that the pre-unit children lined to have their books marked by their teacher. The children lined up because it made sense to them that it would be easier for the teacher to mark one book at a time rather than when they were so crowded. In an Islamic school also, children lined up to say the prayer before going into and out of the washroom. In another Christian school, children sat quietly in class doing their work. In a Hindu religious school, the researchers observed children picking their table napkins before they went to eat their snacks which they were to use in wiping their mouth after eating. All these activities were done because they made sense and would have made it easier for the children themselves and for those that were around them.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings of the study, it is clear that religious education programmes have a contribution to give in regard to the preschool children's moral development. The Christian education programme in Christian schools has fairly been able to address the aspects of responsibility and maturity in children as displayed by the contents of the syllabus, schemes of work, lesson plans and the activities carried out in class. However, the aspects of independence, rationality and altruism have not been well catered for by the same. On the other hand, Islamic religious education programme in schools has invested much on maturity and rationality aspects through the practices and the Islamic content learnt in school. This means that the rest of the aspects which include responsibility, independence, and altruism have moderately been emphasized in the learning

content in the syllabus. Moreover, findings of Hindu Religious education programme offered in Hindu religious group schools has accentuated the aspect of responsibility more. This is followed by maturity, independence, altruism and rationality respectively. This means that religious education programmes have still more to do in regard to all aspects of moral development of the preschool children. It is also clear that leaving children's moral development to only the religious education programmes is limited for children's wholistic development as their moral decisions are depicted in all the learning activities. The researchers therefore recommend that:

The Ministry of Education through Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development should come up with a curriculum that directly addresses valuing skills as body of knowledge for children to interact with as they learn religious education.

This will support what the Learning Metrics Task Force (2013) recommends for children in the 21st century in that value education can be taught and it can be learnt as a way to enhance children's moral development.

In the training of teachers, use of stories may be encouraged as a way to enhance children's critical thinking in making of choices in all activities in class so that as they learn, all aspects of moral development can be addressed.

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