

## **Implementation of the Basic School Religious and Moral Education Curriculum in Cape Coast Metropolis, Ghana: The Learner Factor**

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**Abstract:**-The study explored extent to which Basic school pupils influence implementation of the Religious and Moral Education curriculum in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. It was an exploratory survey study that adopted the sequential explanatory mixed method as a model. One research question was formulated to guide the study. The population consisted of 515 people (446 teachers and 69 head teachers) with a sample size of 296. Data were gathered from questionnaire, interviews and observations. The convenience, simple random, stratified and the purposive sampling techniques were used to select the schools and the respondents. Frequencies, percentages, charts, tables, means, and standard deviations were used to analyze the research question. The results showed that pupils can contribute significantly to the teaching and Learning of RME because they have positive attitudes towards it. It was found that pupils were always ready to actively participate in the implementation process when given the necessary support by both school authorities and parents. On the basis of these findings, it was recommended to teachers to engage their pupils in practical and meaningful activities that are likely to make them develop special love for the subject and also to provide learners with the necessary guidance on how they should apply the content of RME to real life situations.

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### **I. Introduction**

Religious and Moral Education (RME) has become a distinct subject within the Basic school curriculum and in many other educational institutions in Ghana. It is an integrated subject made of Christianity, Islam, and African Traditional religion (Anti & Anum, 2003; Awuah & Afriyie, 2006). The subject aims at helping students to develop an understanding and tolerance of other people's faiths; to understand the differences between good and bad behaviours; to develop an awareness of their creator and the purpose of their very existence; and to help students 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 (MOE, 2008). It is in the light of this that the nature and other characteristics of the learner have to be considered. Students are considered the ultimate beneficiaries of the RME curriculum and so they are expected to influence important decisions and show positive attitudes towards its implementation. For instance, the teacher would have to take into consideration their attitudes and general developmental needs, including their mental, physical and emotional requirements. Merely viewing implementation of the RME curriculum in isolation without linking it with the influence of the learner may lead to partial conclusions. Student involvement is of paramount importance in every teaching-learning process and that is why students' involvement in RME lessons remains a top priority for religious educators. This is because when students are highly involved in religious instructions, learning becomes very effective. The level of their contribution needs to be explored, identified and brought to public knowledge so as to enhance policy making and practice (Asuborteng, 2007; Baafi, Kisseih, & Opere, 2007; Baisie, Paaga, & Quainoo, 2007; Bannermann-Mensah, 2007; Bour, 2009; Flolu, 2007; Forson, 2007; Kwabi, 2007; Opere, 2007; Regier, 2011).

Learners are considered the focal points around which important decisions about the RME curriculum are made. Learners are one key element in the education system, particularly at schools. In fact, there is growing public awareness that without the learner no serious formal education can take place. There is no effective school education without the presence of learners in sufficient number. Learners should have profound insight into what they learn so that they can apply it in real life situations. Their presence should therefore influence teachers in their selection of content and other learning experiences without which implementation cannot be complete. The characteristics of the learner include learner ability; interest; motivation; self-concept; learning style; study habits; values; aspiration; socio-economic and religious background of the learner, which he or she brings into the learning of the subject (Acland, 1963; Bloom, 2007; Boyer, 2001; Goldman, 1965; Loukes, 1961). These characteristics often serve as

input variables which jointly or individually influence what pupils learn and achieve in RME. In view of the issues raised in this write up, the study sought to investigate extent to which learner attitudes influence the teaching and learning of RME at the Basic school level in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Such factors include pupil preparation and training, pupil characteristics and attitudes, exposure to resources as well as the level of their involvements. This study is therefore premised on the view that learner attitudes have significant influence the implementation of the RME curriculum at the basic school level. The degree and how well learner attitudes influence implementation is of great concern to the researcher and this needs to be investigated.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The learner remains the ultimate beneficiary of the implementation of the school curriculum hence some studies have been done to determine various ways learners contribute to the implementation of the school curriculum. Unfortunately, very little has been done to establish how learners influence the teaching and learning of RME in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana and this study sought to fill the gap (Mumuni & Annobil, 2011; Asiedu, 2009; Mensah, 2015). This study therefore sought to explore extent (degree) to which the learner contributes to the teaching and learning of RME in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to explore various ways attitudes pupils can influence implementation of the Religious and Moral Education curriculum in the Cape Coast Metropolis of Ghana. Specifically, it was to examine their level of contribution to the teaching and learning of RME.

### **Objectives of the Study**

The objective of the study was to examine the extent to which learner attitudes affect the teaching and learning of Religious and Moral Education (RME).

**Research Question:** What are the attitudes of pupils towards the teaching and learning of Religious and Moral Education in basic schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis?

## **II. Significance of the Study**

Having insights into learner attitudes and how this influence Implementation of the Religious and Moral Education Curriculum in the Basic school settings, would further broaden our understanding regarding how the needs, interests and individuality that children bring to every learning context is factored into the teaching and learning of RME. This study is therefore intended to sensitize policy makers, educational administrators and Basic school teachers within the Cape Coast Metropolis on the need to encourage pupils' involvement in the teaching and learning of RME.

### **Delimitation of the Study**

Although the RME curriculum is being implemented in all public basic schools across Ghana, this study was confined to basic schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of the Central Region of Ghana. Again, it is factual that RME is being taught at different levels of Ghana's education system, this study focused only on basic schools and delimited to the learner factor.

### **Limitations of the Study**

The (exploratory) sequential explanatory mixed method design may have some shortcomings of external and internal validities because variables are usually isolated or controlled and samples randomized (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2007). Similarly, the qualitative data component required the subjectivity of respondents, their

opinions, attitudes and perspectives which could contribute to some degree of biases (Oppenheim, 1992; Morrison, 1993).

## **Literature Review**

The Learner Factor Many studies indicate that a multitude of factors contribute to pupils' participation in any curriculum implementation. These ranges from individual ability, motivation, background, attitudes, general characteristics as well as the larger influences of the educational institution attended by the individual (Glatthorn, Boschee, & Whitehead, 2006; Marsh & Willis, 2007). Effective learning occurs when teachers provide students with varied learning experiences that fall within their abilities in order that they can address their individual religious and moral needs. Motivation is a key factor for effective teaching and learning, because motivation makes people do what they do. When students are motivated, their behaviour is directed toward a specific target, and is very much purposive (Asare-Danso & Annobil, 2016; Bell, 2003; Dinama & Koketso 2016; Marzano, 2003; Mumuni & Annobil, 2012; 2016; Tanner & Tanner, 2007).

The attitude of students towards the RME curriculum can be determined, among other things, by their general feelings, opinions and perception of the programme and the envisaged benefits they are likely to derive from it. Behavioural forces, cultural forces, concepts and social norms as some of the determinants of one's attitudes towards a particular curriculum (Addison, Arkoh, & Annobil, 2009; Dinama, 2013; Mensah, 2015; Mumuni & Annobil, 2013).

Many studies have investigated the relationships that exist between pupils' attitudes and achievements and performance in Religious and Moral Education. Loukes (1961) found that high achievement and intellectual readiness were related to pupils' readiness for religion. Acland (1963) and Loukes (1961) used young children and adolescents ranging between 5 and 19 years in structured interviews and found that effective teaching and learning of RME related significantly to children's performance in religious and moral education. Goldman (1964) studied about 50 children and found that high achievement and interest were related to their physical, emotional and intellectual readiness for religion. He found that underachievers had significantly poorer mental attitude than overachievers. Differences that approached statistical significance were sheer inexperience, immaturity of all kinds, emotional instability, and feelings of inadequacy. Grimmit (1978) also studied the relationship between pupils' religious characteristics and performance in RME in grades three through six. He investigated 40 pupils and found a relationship between immaturity and readiness for religion with correlation .72 at the third grade and .62 at the sixth-grade level. Goldman (1965) also found not only a significant relationship between readiness for religion and religious achievement and understanding but also children were highly motivated to study religion when they are of right ages. Studying some young children and adolescents, Goldman (1964) found that the group with limitations in their religious thinking had more negative conception about religion than the groups who had no limitations in their religious growths and thinking. It was for this reason that Goldman called the stages of their religious development as pre-religious thinking and sub-religious thoughts stages I & II. His study revealed that the younger the child, the lower his religious reasoning (judgements) and the older he or she is, the more complex his/her religious reasoning. In an investigation of the relationship between pupils' attitudes and implementation, Acland (1963) and Loukes (1961) found that good academic achievement and successful implementation of the RME curriculum was more likely to be influenced by positive attitude and high level interest by pupils. They also concluded that a pupil was more likely to consider himself/herself well-adjusted and well-motivated by exposure to a lot of religious experiences and rate of natural growth. Acland (1963) found evidence of young children making immature judgements about problems, situations and people due to restricted religious experience; and Loukes (1961) found a significant difference in favour of adolescents in the areas of giving in-depth meaning of religious statements, hypothetic thinking and consistency in religious thinking and how these influence their study of religion. Other investigations of children and adolescents support the finding that a relationship exists between implementation of the RME curriculum and mental or chronological age of pupils. Researchers (Annobil, 2011; Anti & Anum, 2003; Asare-Danso & Annobil, 2016; McKibben, 2004) found that young people who are successful in their study of RME are those who have positive perception, dispositions and passion and vice versa.

## **Methodology**

The study employed the sequential explanatory mixed method design to collect data from questionnaires, interviews and observation (Creswell & Plano-Clark, 2007). The design (approach) combined both qualitative and

quantitative methodologies for data collection and analysis (Alhassan, 2007; Cresswell, 2009; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 2003).

## **Population, Sample and Sampling Procedures**

The population consisted of a total population of five hundred and fifteen (515) people made of 446 RME teachers and 69 head teachers from 61 public basic schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis of the Central Region of Ghana. A sample size of two hundred and ninety-six (296) respondents consisting of 284 RME teachers and 12 head teachers were purposively sampled for the study. The sample size (ie 296) formed 57.4% of the total population of the teachers and head teachers in the study area (Krejcie & Morgan, 2006). The teachers were used for both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study. Twelve (12) of the teachers were purposively selected and interviewed while six (6) of them were conveniently used for the observation. The 12 head teachers were also interviewed.

## **Instrumentation**

Data were collected through questionnaires, lesson observation and interviews using relevant checklists and schedules. The questionnaires consisted of 18 closed ended questions and were structured on the five-point likert-type scales ranging from “Strongly Disagree” (SD) to “Strongly Agree” (SA). Twelve (12)-item semi-structured interview guides (schedules) with both closed and open-ended items were also developed for both teachers and head teachers to answer (Borg, Gall and Gall, 2007; Oppenheim, 1992). Finally, data were collected from lesson observation using a 41-item observation guide. All the three (3) instruments went through the necessary refinement and pre-testing to ensure their validity and reliability (Buku & Taylor, 2006; Cohen, et al., 2007; Morrison, 1993). Issues about credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability were catered for.

## **Data Collection Procedures**

The first stage of the data administration procedures involved collection of questionnaire data from the teachers who were sampled for the study. In all 264 of the (out of 284) teachers returned the completed questionnaire giving a high return rate of 93.5%. The second stage of data collection involved interviewing selected teachers and head teachers to obtain more in-depth qualitative information to compliment the qualitative data. The teachers were interviewed on one-on-one basis to prevent any external influences. The third stage of data collection involved one set of observation of RME lessons in the schools.

## **Results and Discussion**

Frequencies, percentages, charts, tables, means, and standard deviations were used to analyze the research question (Field, 2009). The interview data were manually analyzed into themes taking into consideration significant statements, common patterns, as well as commonalities and differences in the themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006) whereas the observation data were analyzed using summative content analysis (Green, Salkind & Akey, 2000; Flick, 2000).

The findings are presented and discussed in relation to the research question based on quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. Table 1 shows results about the pupils’ perceptions of their attitude and characteristics which contribute positively or negatively towards the teaching and learning of RME in basic schools in the Cape Coast Metropolis. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1- The pupils' perception of their attitudes toward RME

ITEM	SD (%)	D (%)	U (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M (SD)
1. Pupils find RME very interesting	2 (0.8)	9 (3.4)	14 (5.3)	150(57.0)	88(33.5)	<b>4.2 (0.8)</b>
2. Pupils become happy if it is time to study RME	2 (0.8)	12 (4.6)	28(10.7)	157(60.2)	61(23.8)	<b>4.2 (0.8)</b>
3. Pupils are willing to study RME.	1 (0.4)	8 (3.1)	22 (8.4)	158(60.5)	72(27.6)	<b>4.1 (0.7)</b>
4. Pupils tolerate other religious faiths through the study of RME	7 (2.7)	14 (5.3)	32(12.2)	150(57.3)	59(22.5)	<b>4.0 (0.9)</b>
5. Pupils see RME as unique as any other subject	11 (4.2)	27(10.3)	55(20.9)	109(41.4)	61(23.2)	<b>3.7 (1.1)</b>
6. Pupils participate actively in RME lessons	9 (3.4)	17 (6.4)	18 (6.8)	133(50.4)	87(33.0)	<b>4.0 (0.9)</b>
7 Pupils are satisfied with the materials available to support their study of RME	63(23.9)	74(28.0)	46(17.4)	59(22.3)	22 (8.3)	<b>2.6 (1.3)</b>
8. Pupils are satisfied with support they receive from their parents to enable them study RME	50 (19.1)	63(24.0)	56(21.4)	67(25.6)	26 (9.9)	<b>2.8 (1.3)</b>
9. Pupils develop better relationships with their teachers through the study of RME	4 (1.5)	21 (8.0)	40(15.3)	139(53.1)	58(22.0)	<b>3.9 (0.9)</b>
10. Pupils have the intention of pursuing RME to the highest level	15 (5.7)	27(10.3)	112(42.7)	70(26.7)	38(14.5)	<b>3.3 (1.0)</b>
11. Pupils submit homework on RME in time.	12(4.5)	21(8.0)	32(12.1)	132(50.0)	67(25.4)	<b>3.8 (1.0)</b>

Source: Field Data - Questionnaire (May, 2015) Key: SD = Strongly Disagree (1.00 – 1.80); D = Disagree (1.81 – 2.60); U = Uncertain (2.61- 3.40); A = Agree (3.41 – 4.20); and SA = Strongly Agree (4.21 – 5.00); (%) = Percentage, M = Mean, SD = Std. Deviation, Mean of Means score = 3.7 □ Agree (A); Mean of Standard Deviations.

From Table 1, the high mean scores obtained on each of the statement, except for items 7 and 8, reveal that majority of the pupils in the metropolis possessed positive attitudes towards the teaching and learning of RME in their various schools. The results show very high mean scores between 4.2 and 3.3 and low standard deviation scores between 1.0 and 0.7 for many of the items. The table recorded mean of means score of 3.7 and mean of standard deviations of 1.0. This is an indication that the pupils were ever ready to study RME. For instance, the first item from the Table shows that as many as n=238, 90.5% of the teachers either ‘agreed or ‘strongly agreed’ that the pupils find RME very interesting subject to study. This item recorded a mean score of 4.2 (SD 0.8). Again, majority of the teachers (n= 218, 84%) felt (agreed/strongly agreed) that pupils become happy if it was time to study RME. Item two recorded a mean score of 84.1 (SD 0.8). Additionally, as many as 230 (88.1%) of the teachers either agreed or strongly agreed that pupils were willing to study RME while 9 (3.5%) either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement.

Unfortunately, the mean score of the item 7, ‘Pupils are satisfied with the materials available to support their study of RME’ was 2.6 with a standard deviation of 1.3. This suggests that the learners are not satisfied with the few materials that are available to support the study of RME in their schools as expected of them. This was very much evident in their rating of item 7, where 63 (23.9%) and 74 (28.0%) respectively ‘strongly disagreed’ and ‘disagreed’ with the statement while 59 (22.3%) and 22 (8.3%) respectively ‘agreed and strongly agreed’ with the statement. Again, from the table, 56 (21.4%) of the teachers were unsure and undecided about the support pupils receive from their parents to enable them study RME in their schools. This result necessitated the item to attract a low mean score of 2.8 (1.3). From the high mean of means score of 3.7

and mean of standard deviations of 0.9, it is reasonable to draw a preliminary conclusion that majority of the pupils had positive attitudes towards the teaching and learning of RME in the Cape Coast Metropolis.

### **The Interview Data**

The interview data revealed seven sub-themes as some of the ways pupils influence the teaching and learning of RME. These are pupils' passion for the subject, regular attendance to RME lessons, comportment during lessons, active participation in lessons, show of interest, having advance knowledge of the subject because of their religious backgrounds, the practical nature of the subject, and it is easier to learn RME.

These issues are best expressed in the following citations:

*The pupils show very good attitude towards RME. They also have passion for the subject. This is because I teach the subject well and so when there is time for RME I see my pupils coming in their numbers (PT 4, Interview data, 2016).*

Another teacher postulated that

*About 70% of the pupils show positive attitudes toward RME in the school. This is because they comport themselves when I am teaching this subject. They also participate actively when RME lessons are in progress. Sometimes I teach them not steal and so when they find anything that belongs to their friends they bring it to me (JHST 4, Interview data, 2016).*

Another important topic which I discussed with the head-teachers during the interview section had to do with the pupils' attitude towards RME. The themes generated from their responses were parallel to those of the classroom teachers. Thus almost all the head teachers interviewed indicated that majority of the pupils in their schools show positive attitude towards teaching and learning of RME. Their themes are best expressed in the following quotations:

*You know RME is a practical subject so the pupils always love to be in their classes to welcome their teachers and to contribute to RME lessons. Yes the pupils want to take RME to the higher level (HT 6, Interview data, 2016).*

In the same regard, another head teacher was of the view that:

It is evident from the themes and data presented from the respondents that learners have a positive attitude toward the implementation of the RME curriculum. For example, 3 out of the 6 head teachers provided almost the same answers as those of the teachers that the pupils approached the study of RME with seriousness. This result complements the finding from the quantitative survey.

### **Lesson Observation**

The lessons observed revealed that the pupils were involved to some extent in the teaching and learning of RME. For example, from all the 6 lessons observed, all the teachers (PT 1, PT 2, PT 3 and JHST I, JHS II and JHS TIII) sought to involve the pupils to some extent in their RME lessons. However, they were often made to work together as one whole group in the same activities at the same time. For instance, they were made mostly to listen to the teacher (PT1) as he delivered his lesson, which included extensive narration, procedural instruction, demonstrations and brief lectures. The process was however interspersed with some informal contributions from the pupils in the form of answering oral questions. The lessons which were observed were on different topics.

### **Discussion**

The questionnaire, interview, and observation data gathered showed that the pupils have positive attitudes toward the teaching and learning of RME. The high mean of means score of 3.7 from the questionnaire results (See Table 1) shows that almost all the pupils have positive attitudes toward the teaching and learning of RME in the metropolis. The attitudes stated in the questionnaire agree with those mentioned in the interviews as well as those observed. It is evident from the themes and the data that emerged from the interview sessions that the pupils had positive attitudes toward the implementation of the RME curriculum. It emerged from the themes that both the teachers and head teachers were satisfied with the attitudes pupils show towards RME.

These findings agree with the report given by the Commission of Education in Morals and Ethics (1994) indicating that students need to be trained in religion and morality in order that they would develop appropriate attitudes and values in life. The results also confirm the assertions by researchers (Goldman, 1965; Loukes, 1961)

that students are willing to study religious education (RE) in order to facilitate their understanding and foster their capacity to think for themselves through relevant motivation. This implies that religion should not be taught for missionary purpose (which seeks to expose pupils to a particular religious faith) but must be concerned with the personal needs and moral development of young pupils.

The observation revealed among other things, that the students show interest in RME lessons; they are happy when it is time for them to study RME; they are willing to study RME; they tolerate each other and are fully cooperative during teaching and learning of RME; they see RME as unique as any other subject and are ever prepared to study it. Again, the students were very supportive with regard to resolving vital issues, which were raised in the lessons. It is worth mentioning that a sizeable number of the pupils had some materials to enable them to study RME. Finally, not only did they exhibit high sense of good behaviour but they were not influenced by their religious affiliations. The result is similar to studies conducted by Loukes (1961) which indicated that high achievement and intellectual readiness were related to pupils' readiness for religion. Acland (1963) and Loukes (1961) used young children and adolescents ranging between 5 and 19 years in structured interviews and found that effective teaching and learning of RME related significantly to children's performance in religious and moral education. What this implies is that the advancement of dogmatism and teaching of beliefs as if they are well-digested facts should not be the primary role of religious education in religiously pluralistic state such as Ghana. Teachers should not omit the religious needs of their pupils instead their approaches to teaching should be highly intellectual and not results in promoting any form of religious faiths.

At the school level, curriculum implementation requires interaction between teachers and pupils because pupils contribute to teaching and learning of RME by expressing their views, opinions, feelings and general dispositions about the subject; and in so doing get the opportunity to make important suggestions such as which methods and instructional materials are more appropriate for teaching and learning (Bell, 2003; Marzano, 2003; McKibben, 2004). It is when both teachers and pupils play their roles well that they can achieve their dreams. This kind of cordial relationship may be what has created the positive and healthy among pupils and their teachers. This will auger well for serious academic work and good interpersonal relationships which are key for successful school education.

### **Conclusion**

- a. In relation to students' attitude towards the implementation of the Religious and Moral Education curriculum, both teachers and their head teachers expressed that the pupils had a positive attitude toward the curriculum implementation process.
- b. They both reported that the pupils were always motivated to actively participate in the implementation process.
- c. The positive attitude the pupils possessed helped and led them to tolerate their colleagues of other religious faiths in and outside the classroom.
- d. The teachers further indicated that the pupils had developed better relationships with their teachers as a result of studying RME.
- e. It was also clear from the study that most of the pupils had the intention of pursuing RME to highest academic level.
- f. Unfortunately, most of the teachers reported that contribution from some parents was lacking because most of the pupils did not have RME curriculum materials to facilitate their learning and others did not receive support from their parents to enable them study RME effectively.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

- Teachers should avoid all forms of teacher-centred approaches of teaching and rather engage students in practical and meaningful activities which are likely to make them develop special love for RME.
- Teachers should guide their pupils to participate and apply what they learn to real life situations.
- Schools and parents should support pupils' learning of RME so that it will subsequently lead them to pursue the subject further.
- Schools should support pupils' learning of RME in order that pupils would develop good moral character as they grow into adulthood.
- RME teachers should consider the developmental limitations of pupils and work towards addressing them. For instance, teachers should provide information and assign tasks in RME that will address immaturities and limitations of pupils.

- The RME curriculum should seek to facilitate the systematic development of mental capacities of pupils, to facilitate their manipulative or psychomotor skills, and also to develop their values and attitudes.

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