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Appraisal of Religious and Moral Education (RME) Curriculum: Pedagogical Knowledge Practices in Junior High Schools (JHSs) in Ghana

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Abstract

The study was conducted to find out teachers' pedagogical knowledge in the teaching of RME in the Aowin municipality in the Western Region of Ghana. The descriptive survey was the design. The population included all RME students and teachers in the Aowin District. However, a sample population of 33 RME teachers and 98 students were used for the study through simple random sampling technique. Data was analysed using both descriptive. The data was organized into tables, frequencies, percentages and means in line with the research question which guided the study. The study revealed that Teachers also possess adequate pedagogical knowledge which could be used in the classroom. However, most of their motivational strategies were monotonous and their questions mostly demanded lower order thinking skills. The study recommended that teacher preparation programmes should provide opportunities for potential teachers to use pedagogy effectively in their teaching. It is further recommended that teachers vary their motivational strategies in their day-to-day activities in the classroom. They should also ask questions that demand that students employ their higher order thinking skills.

Keywords

Pedagogical Knowledge, Practices, Religious and Moral Education, Curriculum, Junior High Schools, Aowin Municipality, Ghana

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1. Introduction

This paper presents the outcome of the pedagogical knowledge of JHS RME teachers' in teaching of RME in Aowin municipality. The paper is structured into five (5) main sections namely; the Introduction, Review of the Literature, Methodology, Findings and Discussion and the Conclusion. The first section introduces the structure of the paper, the context and aims and objectives of the paper. The literature review section reviews the relevant literature on issues relating to pedagogical knowledge of teachers in the implementation of religious and moral education curriculum. The methodology section presents a broad description of the methodology and procedures adopted in the conduct of the study. Findings resulting from the study are presented and discussed in the section following the methodology and conclusion with recommendations.

Religious and moral Education (RME) is an indispensable subject in the Ghanaian educational Enterprise [2]. Religious and Moral Education continued to be part of the school curriculum in the Gold Coast during the colonial period. Under the colonial governor Sir Gordon Guggisberg, he outlined sixteen principles of Education, which was presented to the legislative council in 1925. The 7th and 8th principles made provision for the teaching of Religious and Moral Education. Whereas the 7th principle provided that character training must take important place in education, the 8th principle provided that religious teaching should form part

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of the school life [11].

In the 1961 Education Act, provision was made to put the teaching of Religion either during the first or the last period on the school time table. This conscience clause was to give room for parents who did not want their children to study the subject to withdraw them from the class during the lesson period [13]. Subsequently, in 1962 the government of Ghana under President Kwame Nkrumah decided to separate the teaching of Religious Education from Moral Education. Consequently, they proposed to introduce moral teaching in place of Religious Education in the Basic School curriculum [4]. This change however, could not be effected and Religion continued to be taught under the title 'Religious Knowledge' (R K) in the basic schools. The 2007 Education Reform under Anamuah-Mensah once again removed Religious and Moral Education from the basic school curriculum but it was reinstated in the following academic year in 2008 following the objections raised by the Ghanaian public and civil society groups [12].

Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum in Ghana consists of the three major religions in the country and many other contemporary and social issues. This coupled with the modern advancement in technology in teaching therefore, calls for teachers' in-depth knowledge in technological, pedagogical and content knowledge of the area to be able to deliver accordingly. However, as teaching practice co-coordinators, we observed that some teachers do not have adequate pedagogical knowledge to teach the subject as expected hence, resulting in problems in delivering their lessons. Teachers' pedagogical knowledge in the teaching of the subject tends to be limited because they do not know which Pedagogies to use when dealing with various topics in RME. Lessons were mostly characterised by the teacher giving out information and lengthy time spent on copying notes [18]. Indeed, technology in RME instruction can be likened to a sleeping giant [10].

Teachers however, must possess and 'pedagogical' knowledge to enable them meet this globalized World of technological and pedagogical sophistication in teaching and learning [17]. The Cambridge University (Institute of Basic Education) UK, in collaboration with the Ministry of Education, Ghana in a recent research work on 'Transforming Teacher Education and Learning' (T-TEL) in Ghanaian Colleges of Education (2014-2018) emphasized that 'Teacher Education in Ghana has focused too much on 'content knowledge' than to integrate it with technology and effective pedagogy' [17]. To them Ghanaians assumed that the content area (such as Science, Mathematics, RME, Social Studies etc.), teachers would be able to successfully teach their students. This affirms that teacher's knowledge in pedagogy is very paramount in the teaching and learning in the classroom situation. Effective usage of pedagogy aids teacher plans his or her lessons with some objectives to achieve at the end of the lesson in order to instil in the students the desirable knowledge, attitudes, values and skills [6]. Teaching is an activity which is performed by a more experienced and knowledgeable person with the view of helping the less experienced and less knowledgeable person to learn. This means that teachers should be more experienced, knowledgeable in content, pedagogy and the use of technology than the learner. It is also implied in it that teaching as a system of actions is always meant to induce learning. Teaching is also aimed at bringing about a desired change in the behaviour of the learner [9].

In a developing country like Ghana, it could be said without any hesitation that research on teachers, pedagogical knowledge of RME teaching in diverse class has not been given the needed attention it deserves, hence, little is known about what is going on in the classroom and the challenges that RME teachers are facing in terms of imparting knowledge to different students with different intellectual abilities, socio-economic background and cultures. In this study therefore, the researchers sought to understand teachers' pedagogical knowledge in Religious and Moral Education in the Aowin municipality of the Western Region. The study sought answer the research question - What is the pedagogical knowledge of JHS RME teachers' in teaching of RME in Aowin municipality?

2. Review of the Literature

Pedagogical knowledge is deep knowledge about the processes and practices of teaching and learning, encompassing educational purposes, goals, values, strategies and more. This is a generic form of knowledge that applies to student learning, classroom management, instructional planning and implementation, and student assessment. It includes knowledge about techniques or methods used in classroom, the nature of learners' needs and preferences, and strategies for assessing student understanding. A teacher with deep pedagogical knowledge understands how students construct knowledge and acquire skills in differentiated ways, as well as how they develop habits of mind and dispositions towards learning. As such, pedagogical knowledge requires an understanding of cognitive, social, and developmental theories of learning and how they apply to students in the classroom. Teachers' high pedigree in pedagogy enables them to deliver for the benefit of majority of learners in a particular class. To him therefore, it is an area in the field of education that qualifies one to be called professional. It is worth saying that; high level of pedagogical knowledge in the teaching of RME is highly

needed for teachers to be able to reach their learners with less difficulty in the classroom. Also, pedagogy is seen to entail all the god methodologies, effective classroom management techniques, class control, exhibition of high level of learner psychology, and proper teaching skills all for the benefit of learners [7].

The concept of pedagogical content knowledge is not new, the term gained renewed emphasis in teacher education [15]. A teacher education researcher who was interested in expanding and improving knowledge on teaching and teacher preparation posits that, in the course of assessment in the classroom some teachers ignored questions dealing with the concept of the lessons taught [15]. The researcher argued that developing general pedagogical skills was insufficient for preparing contents teachers as was education that stressed only content knowledge. In this view, the key to distinguishing the knowledge base of teaching rested at the intersection of content and pedagogy [15].

Pedagogical content knowledge is the intersection and interaction of pedagogy and content knowledge. PCK is consistent with and similar to conceptualization of teaching knowledge is applicable to a specific content area [15]. It covers essential knowledge of teaching and learning content-based curricula, as well as assessment and reporting of that learning. An awareness of students' prior knowledge, alternative teaching strategies in a particular discipline, common content-related misconceptions, how to forge links and connections among different content-based ideas, and the flexibility that comes from exploring alternative ways of looking at the same idea or problem, and more, are all expressions of pedagogical content knowledge and are essential to effective teaching. Teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in the teaching learning process ensures dynamisms in the classroom activities than to resort to the status-quo [15]. This is because, when teachers especially RME teachers have adequate pedagogical content knowledge, it enables them to be flexible in their teaching process and also try as much as possible to reach the learner without much difficulty. The idea of teachers' pedagogical content knowledge is highly prudent in the teaching parlance.

A research titled "ways of seeing, ways of knowing, ways of teaching, ways of learning about teaching" published in Journal of Curriculum Studies by [16] defined pedagogical content knowledge as teacher's interpretation and transformations of subject matter knowledge in the context of facilitating student learning. He further proposed several key elements of pedagogical content knowledge: (1) Knowledge of representations of subject matter (content- knowledge); (2) Understanding of student's conceptions of the subject and teaching and learning implications that were associated with the specific subject matter; and (3) General pedagogical knowledge (or teaching strategies). To complete what he called knowledge base for teaching, he included other elements; (4) Curriculum knowledge; (5) Knowledge of educational contexts; (6) Knowledge of the purpose of education [17]. To this conception of pedagogical content knowledge, others have contributed valuable insights on the importance and relevance of the linguistic and cultural characteristics of a diverse student population. While other education scholars since 1990s have expanded and promoted the development of PCK among content teachers through both teacher preparation (pre-service) and professional development (in-service); "valid" research failed to address the issue of linguistically and culturally different students as a mediating variable that should be factored into any study of effective teaching practices.

However, proponents of the PCK concept say that there is special value in their work in that it has served to re-focus educator's attention. On the important role of subject-matter in educational practice and away from the more generic approach to teacher education that dominated field since the 1970s [8]. While specific term PCK is just gaining momentum in US literature, we see it addressed in published content standards by professional teaching associations as reviewed in time project (2001) and in a number of content area textbooks [14]. Pedagogical content knowledge has three components including knowledge of content, knowledge of curriculum and knowledge of teaching [1]. They are of the opinion that knowledge of content and curriculum knowledge are of great importance to knowledge of teaching because teacher's subject matter which is the knowledge of content plus the content given in the syllabus will produce effective teaching and learning. They were of the same view that content knowledge is the core component of pedagogical content knowledge [16]. However, pedagogical content knowledge is a complex construct derived from teachers' subject matter knowledge, general pedagogical knowledge, and knowledge of context and is composed of teachers' orientation to teaching the subject, knowledge of students' understanding, knowledge of the curriculum, knowledge of instructional strategies, and knowledge of assessment [5].

3. Methodology

The descriptive survey was the design for this study. The population for this study included all the teachers teaching Religious and Moral Education and Junior High School students in Aowin municipality. Simple random sampling technique was used to select thirty-three (33) teachers teaching Religious and Moral Education and ninety-eight (98) pupils in the Junior High School classes were selected as

respondents for the study. Data Collection was facilitated through the administration of questionnaire, observation and semi-structured interview guide. All thirty-three (33) teachers responded to the questionnaires and were further observed twice while they teach Religious and Moral Education lessons in a classroom setting, whiles all the ninety-eight students were all interviewed as well. The quantitative data entry and analysis were done using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 21. Data were edited, code, analyzed and results were presented in tables, frequencies and weighed means with interpretations. Generally, simple calculations of percentages were used as the main statistical method in analyzing the data.

The qualitative data was analyzed by the use of interpretative method based on the themes arrived at in the data collection. The themes were related to the research question and interpreted on the number of issues raised by the respondents.

4. Findings and Discussions

This section presented findings and discussions on pedagogical knowledge of RME teachers in Aowin municipality. The study sought to answer the research question "What is the pedagogical knowledge of JHS RME teachers' in teaching of RME in Aowin municipality?" Three sources of information were used to find answers to this research question. This included data from the questionnaire that was administered to the teachers, the structured interview with the students and the lessons observed. The section of the questionnaire that focused on this contained nine items which sought from the teachers to tell how children are involved in their lessons, how they ask and respond to students' questions, their classroom management, psychology of learning and how to assess students learning. The items were written in positive form with the responses on a four-point Likert scale measure with Strongly Disagree (SD) taking "1", Disagree (D) takes code 2; Agree (A) takes code 4 and Strongly Agree (SA) taking code 4. On the lesson observation, the observer focused on student involvement, teacher feedback, teacher-pupil relationship and the motivational strategies. The performance of the teacher on each item was scored as Not Available (NA), Below Average (BA), Average (A), Good (G) and Excellent (E) depending how expertly the teacher was able to convey his/her message to the students to ensure effective learning of students. The interview with the students also covered similar concepts. Frequencies, percentages, means and group means were used to analyze the data. Tables 1, 2 and 3 present the results of the pedagogical knowledge of the teachers who participated in the study.

Table 1. Teachers Claim of Pedagogical Knowledge.

Item	Responses				
	SD (%)	D (%)	A (%)	SA (%)	M
I know how to assess students' performance in a classroom	0	0	13 (39.4)	20 (60.6)	3.61
I know the rationale for teaching RME at the basic level.	1 (3.0)	2 (6.1)	16 (48.5)	14 (42.4)	3.30
I know that the profile dimensions in RME guides my teaching and assessment.	0	3 (9.1)	11 (33.3)	19 (57.6)	3.48
The profile dimensions for RME in basic schools are 30% knowledge and understanding, 30% application of knowledge and 40% values and attitudes.	2 (6.1)	5 (15.2)	20 (60.6)	6 (18.2)	2.91
I can adopt my teaching to suit the understanding of my students	1 (3.0)	1 (3.0)	13 (39.4)	18 (54.5)	3.45
I can adopt my teaching style to cater for the individual differences in the classroom.	0	2 (6.1)	17 (51.5)	14 (42.4)	3.36
I can use a wide range of teaching approaches in a classroom setting (collaborative learning, direct instruction, inquiry learning, problem/ project based learning etc.)	1 (3.0)	4 (12.2)	17 (51.5)	11 (33.3)	3.15
I am familiar with how students learn.	1 (3.0)	2 (6.1)	21 (63.6)	9 (27.3)	3.15
I know how to organize and maintain classroom behaviours.		1 (3.0)	11 (33.3)	21 (63.6)	3.61
Mean of Means					3.34

Source: Field Data, March, 2018

Table 1 reveals that all the 33 teachers who responded to the questionnaire asserted that they know how to assess the performance of their students. This recorded a mean score of 3.62 implying that teachers have expert knowledge in assessing students. Assessment plays an important role in the teaching and learning process as it informs teaching. Knowledge of the rationale for teaching RME will inform the teacher as to the approach to use in teaching and which aspects he/she should emphasize. Results from Table 1 reveals that 30 teachers representing 90.9% said they know the rationale of teaching RME in our basic schools whiles only three representing 9.1% claimed they have no knowledge of the rationale for teaching RME in our basic schools. This implies that, most of the teachers are better poised to adopt the most effective approach to fulfill the rationale for the subject. In line with this, 30 teachers (90.9%) asserted that they have knowledge of the fact that the profile dimensions guide their teaching and assessment. It recorded a mean score of 3.48 implying that most teachers are aware of the essence of the profile dimensions in teaching

and assessment. When asked to indicate the profile dimensions of the subject, 26 of them representing 78.8% asserted to the correct proportions of the profile dimensions with a mean score of 2.91. This means that, most of the teachers have knowledge of the profile dimensions of RME. However, it can be elicited that some of the teachers are only aware of the existence and essence of the profile dimensions but do not know what is contained in it which has implications on which aspect the child's development they emphasize in their teaching and assessment.

Table 1 also reveals that 31 teachers claimed they adopt teaching strategies to suit the understanding level of their students. Similarly, 31 teachers representing 93.9% said they adopt teaching styles that cater for the individual differences in the classroom. This means that, the pedagogy that teachers adopt are student centered rather than teacher centered. There is also a majority claim among the teachers that they can use a wide range of teaching approaches in a classroom setting including collaborative learning, direct instruction, inquiry learning, problem/ project based learning etc. From Table 1, 28 teachers representing 84.8% alluded to this claim whiles 5 teachers representing 15.2% reported otherwise. Also, 30 out of the 33 teachers claimed they have adequate knowledge about how children learn. This implies that, they are better placed to tailor their instructional strategy to enhance the understanding of concepts in the classroom. Finally, 32 teachers representing 97% said they know how to organize and maintain appropriate classroom discipline for smooth teaching and learning. This represents an overwhelming confidence that teachers have about their ability to adequate managed their classrooms.

Generally, groups mean score of 3.34 indicates that teachers are of the opinion that they have adequate pedagogical skills in teaching RME. As to whether the claim of teachers really reflects what happen in the classroom, their lessons were observed. Table 2 presents the results of how teachers demonstrated their pedagogical competencies in the classroom.

Table 2. Teachers' Pedagogical Practices.

Item	Responses					M
	NA (%)	BA (%)	A (%)	G (%)	E (%)	
Students involvement	12 (18.2)	6 (9.1)	2 (3.0)	7 (10.6)	39 (59.1)	3.83
Teacher-pupil relationship	8 (12.1)	10 (15.2)	2 (3.0)	6 (9.1)	40 (60.6)	3.91
Questioning skills	10 (15.2)	16 (24.2)	7 (10.6)	7 (10.6)	26 (39.4)	3.35
Feedback techniques	13 (19.7)	5 (7.6)	2 (3.0)	9 (13.6)	37 (56.1)	3.79
Motivational strategies	10 (15.2)	44 (66.7)	2 (3.0)	4 (6.1)	6 (9.1)	2.27
Response to students questions	14 (21.1)	6 (9.1)	2 (3.0)	26 (39.4)	18 (27.3)	3.42
Selection and use of TLMs	12 (18.2)	4 (6.1)	6 (9.1)	14 (21.2)	30 (45.5)	3.70
Classroom management	2 (3.0)	16 (24.2)	4 (6.1)	12 (18.2)	32 (48.5)	3.85
Mean of means						3.52

Source: Field Data, March, 2018

Results from Table 2 indicates that out of the 66 lessons observed, students' involvement in 39 lessons representing 59.1% was recorded excellent which 10.6% were recorded as good performance. Meanwhile, 12 lessons representing 36.4% never involved the students. A mean score of 3.83 is indicative of the fact that, students' involvement in lessons was good. This is in line with what they claimed they know and do in Table 1 that they adopt teaching strategies that are learner centered than teacher centered. Teacher-pupil relationship had a group mean of 3.91 suggesting that the relationship was good and as such promoted effective teaching and learning. Table 2 reveals that the questioning skills, teachers' feedback techniques and classroom management techniques were good as they recorded mean scores of 3.35, 3.79 and 3.85 respectively. This result confirms what they said they do or have knowledge about in Table 1. However, the teacher motivational strategy recorded a mean score of 2.27 which indicates a below average performance. Most of the motivational strategies of the teachers were monotonous and as such lost value to the students. This does not agree with what they say about their motivational strategies. This might be attributed to probably the relative lack of knowledge about motivation and how it should have been carried out.

In general, the pedagogical competence of the teachers observed revealed groups mean score of 3.52 which is indicative of good display of pedagogical competence. As to whether this assertion goes a long way to improve the performance of the students, students were interviewed to indicate the pedagogical competence of their RME teachers. The interview was semi-structured. Their responses were put into various themes and reported using descriptive statistics. Table 3 presents the results of what the students said their teachers do which is indicative of the pedagogical competence of the RME teachers.

Table 3. Pupils Views on Teachers' Pedagogical Knowledge.

Item	Response	No.	%
How does your teacher involve you in class	Group work	53	54.1
	Question and answer	40	40.8
	No opportunity	5	5.1
Does your teacher teaches systematically	Yes	88	89.8
	No	5	5.1
	Sometimes	5	5.1
Does your teacher fairly distribute questions	Yes	85	86.7
	No	11	11.2
	Sometimes	2	2.0
Does teacher pay attention to all students	Yes	89	90.8
	No	7	7.1
	Sometimes	2	2.0
Does your teacher motivates you to learn	Yes	86	87.8
	No	12	12.2
How does your teacher motivate you to learn	Counseling and guidance	53	61.6
	Provides role models	23	26.7
	Reward and punishment	9	10.5
	Group work and competition	1	1.2
Frequency with which teacher marks and discusses assignments	Rarely	6	6.1
	Occasionally	22	22.4
	Always	70	71.4

Source: Field Data, March, 2018

From Table 3, out of the 98 students who were interviewed, 93 of them representing 94.9% said their teachers involve them in their lessons whiles only five pupils representing 5.1% disagreed. Of those who claimed their teachers involve them, 53 of them said the teacher does this through group work whereas the remaining 40 said they do so through question and answer. This confirms the earlier assertion of teachers and what was observed in their respective classrooms. Eighty-eight of the pupils think their teachers teach them systematically whereas only five (5) think they never do. On the teachers questioning techniques, 85 (89.8%) of the students said their teachers fairly distributes their questions thereby catering for the unique needs of students. Eleven students representing 11.2% however thought otherwise. Also, 89 students said the teacher attends to every student in the classroom. On the issue of motivation, 87.8% of the students claimed that their teachers motivate them whiles 12.2% said their teachers do not motivate them to learn. Of those who claimed their teachers motivate them, Table 3 suggests that they do this through guidance and counseling (61.6%), provision of role models (26.7%), reward and punishment (13.6%) and group work and competition (1.5%). On the issue of assessment, 70 (71.4%) of the students reported that their teachers always assess them. None of the students reported that their teachers never assess them.

From the information gathered from the three sources, teachers have a great store of pedagogical competence including strategies which attend to the unique needs of the child, classroom control, questioning skills and maintaining a favourable relationship with the students. Their motivational strategies rather need to be improved so as to encourage children to learn. This confirm the findings a study reported that the pedagogical knowledge of teachers was rated high in the TPACK model [9]. This is a welcome news as that teachers' high pedigree in pedagogy enables them to deliver for the benefit of majority of learners in a particular class [7].

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

Teachers' pedagogical knowledge is enough for effective teaching and learning in the classroom. This implies that the teacher training institutions are doing well in their pursuit to produce quality teachers for our schools.

Teachers seldom put into practice what they have, it is recommended that teacher preparation programmes should provide opportunities for potential teachers to use pedagogy effectively in their teaching. Consequently, supervisors in basic schools including head teachers and circuit supervisors should strengthen their supervisory activities on what teachers do in the classroom rather than concentrating on what teachers say they can do or are doing. It is further recommended that teachers vary their motivational strategies in their day-to-day activities in the classroom. They should also ask questions that demand that students employ their higher order thinking skills.

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