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Inclusion of Religious and Moral Education as a Teaching Subject in Schools and Colleges in Ghana: Stakeholders' Perceptions

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Abstract

The main purpose of this study was to find out stakeholders' perceptions of the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in the Basic and Colleges of Education curriculum. The descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of the study consists of six hundred seventy-two (672) for the study students, Religious and Moral Education tutors and school Administrators. The simple random and purposive sampling techniques were to select 257 respondents for the study. Two hundred forty-five 245 students were randomly selected and purposive sampling technique was used to select six (6) Religious and Moral Education tutors and (six) 6 school Administrators. The main instrument for the study was questionnaire. The results revealed that, the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education in the schools and colleges curriculum will help achieve the goals of education which seek not only to assist educands to acquire the skills of literacy and numeracy but also mould their character. It is recommended that, more effective teaching methods and materials need to be developed to help learners have meaningful learning. It is also recommended that, the teaching and learning of Religious and Moral Education should be at all levels of our educational system, not only allowing the subject to stand on its own as an examinable subject, but also to help continue to inculcate and instill good morals into the individual.

1. Introduction and Background

From time immemorial, the goals of education have been to assist educands to acquire the skills of literacy and numeracy and to mould their character. It is therefore imperative to note, that education as a concept does not only take place in the school but also in the home, society and our daily lives. Education, thus, refers to the processes by which a society trains or nurtures its young to take their place in society [1].

Over the years, it has rightly or wrongly been thought that the onus of imparting knowledge on religious and morality lies with parents / guardians and educators. Interestingly however, observations have shown that parents in general have not been able to do justice to this aspect of their responsibilities. Most stakeholders contend that because most Ghanaians are either Christians or Moslems or adherents of other religions, they have a degree of grounding in moral education and, consequently the subject can easily be

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inculcated or imparted to these Ghanaians, learners inclusive. This seems not to be the case on the ground. It is in the light of this that a study revealed that most well- meaning personalities have advocated that the subject, Religious and Moral Education, be left in the professional hands of teachers alone [2].

History has it that before the Whiteman arrived at the then Gold Coast around 1472, the people of the land learnt or received new ideas and information through informal education. Customs, traditions, religion of the time, moral training and other cultural practices were transmitted in an unstructured informal manner. Later, the missionaries- Basel, Catholic, Wesley and Society for Propagation of the Gospel (S.P.G) started formal education, in a small way, by teaching the 3RS namely Reading, Writing and Arithmetic. Later religious instruction (scripture) was added. The Dutch and the Danes preached Protestantism, while the English promoted Anglican faith. The Castle Schools were opened for the mulatto children and a few of the black children from wealthy African parents [3]. The Europeans were interested in providing a school for twelve mulatto children to teach them the first rudiments of Christian religion, reading and writing [4].

The issue of morality and religion has engaged human attention over the centuries. This is because of their effects on the co-existence of human beings with one another and the world they live in and ideas concerning their relationship with forces beyond the known world. Religious and Moral Education' is a vital and indispensable part of human growth and development in the Ghanaian society. The subject reinforces the informal religious and moral training young people acquire from their homes and communities [5].

Stakeholders have had varied perceptions about the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education in the curriculum of Basic School programme of studies. While some people have been calling for its removal (dropping it), others have advocated for its inclusion. As a case in point, the Educational Review Committee's Report of 2007 recommended the integration of Religious and Moral Education with other subjects instead of leaving it as a separate subject thus devaluing its full positive impact. Various arguments have been raised by different personalities for and against the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education as a teaching subject. In the case of those who favour the exclusion of Religious and Moral Education from the school curricula as a teaching subject, the following arguments among others are advanced:

1) that over the years the values acquired have not affected students' attitude with regard to discipline,

2) that many religious bodies can take care of Religious and Moral issues of their students – members, and

3) that other subjects like Social Studies, Citizenship Education and Life Skills play the role of Religious and Moral Education.

The other school of thought on the other hand appealed to the Government of the day to re-instate Religious and Moral Education as a discipline on its own. For instance, the religious bodies spearheaded by the Catholic Bishops' Conferences' communiqué of April, 2008 attested to this view. They contended that the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education as a teaching subject has achieved in the following areas:

1) helped in moulding individuals in their moral development,

2) helped in controlling indiscipline in the society,

3) helped the individuals to appreciate their creator and tried to do what He expects of them,

4) exposed students to the three major religions that is, Christianity, Islam and African traditional religion,

5) promoted understanding and tolerance among students,

6) brought conflict under control in our societies.

Upon reflecting on these sentiments the Government of Ghana agreed to let Religious and Moral Education stand as a subject on its own which is supported by a study conducted in the United States of America observed that teachers felt that in their teacher education programmes not much training was given in character education [6]. To buttress the Catholic Bishops' Conferences' communiqué in April 2008, Religious and Moral Education Common Core Programme Curriculum for Basic 7 - 10 outlined the following aims of teaching and learning Religious and Moral Education in Ghanaian schools to encourage and enable learners to:

1) develop an awareness of their Creator and the purpose of their very existence.

2) develop an understanding and tolerance of other people's faiths and cultures.

3) draw the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours so that they can make the right decisions in any situation and thus become responsible citizens.

4) acquire the socio-cultural values inherent in the three major religions in Ghana (i.e. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional Religion) which will help.

5) them cope with the variety of moral choices they have to make in today's rapidly changing world.

6) develop the spirit of team work, collaboration and togetherness in nation-building.

7) increasingly develop the ability to respond to religious

beliefs and practices in an informed, rational and responsible way [5].

The learning and teaching of Religious and Moral Education reflect the belief that irrespective of the diverse needs of learners in Ghana's classrooms, each can be nurtured into honest, creative and responsible citizen [5, 7]. The primary focus of the study is to examine 'stakeholders' perception of the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education (R.M.E.) as a teaching subject at the Basic and Colleges of Education levels of the educational institutions in Ghana. The study was guided by this research question - What perceptions do stakeholders (Students, Tutors and School Administrators) of education hold for the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education as a teaching subject at the Basic and Colleges of Education levels?

2. Review of the Literature

2.1. The Concept of Religion

Religion is a complex phenomenon that influences the life of a person in many ways. It can therefore be inferred that religion as a concept is part and parcel of human life [8]. In religion, believers show their dependence on higher spiritual powers. It also involves code of laws that regulate the life of the believer. Furthermore, it involves commitment to the believer's object of worship and to the rest of society. It is in this wise that Wilson, defines religion as an emotion-based activity directed to the object of worship [9]. Also, Otto defines religion as the feeling of the presence of the wholly other [10]. From the above definitions therefore, it can be deduced that religion as a concept is a consciousness of absolute dependence on a higher spiritual power.

2.2. The Concept of Morality

Morality originated from a Latin word "mores", which means goodness or badness of human conduct. Morality consists of laws and conventions that serve as regulatory system for society [11]. Jenkins) also states that new born children learn many things from their parents but as time goes on their behaviour is influenced by teachers, religious beliefs, friends, print and electronic media, customs and traditions and language [12]. It is clear from the above definitions that morality is concerned with the ability to make value judgment about what is good or bad. In effect, morality refers to activities that are praiseworthy or blameworthy.

2.3. Rationale for Teaching Religious and Moral Education

The issue of morality and religion has engaged human attention over the centuries. This is because of their effects on the co-existence of human beings with one another and the world they live in and ideas concerning their relationship with forces beyond the known world. Religious and Moral Education' is a vital and indispensable part of human growth and development in the Ghanaian society. The subject reinforces the informal religious and moral training young people acquire from their homes and communities. The nation is confronted with major moral issues including corruption, poor attitude to the environment and uncritical following of certain foreign values and cultures. Education must make learners aware of the dangers these pose to themselves as individuals and the nation as a whole and make them to acquire values and attitudes that would address these challenges [5, 7].

Many homes and communities may be unable to provide this type of training adequately due to demands of modern environment. It therefore becomes the task of the school to provide this type of education in order to help learners to become morally responsible and patriotic citizens. Furthermore, the spread of education across all sectors of the Ghanaian society, and the changes in the way of life of people as a result of education, population growth, and contacts with the outside world, tend to introduce all manner of both positive and negative influences [5, 7]. In general, young people readily and unconsciously assimilate all types of influences (good or bad), if they do not have proper guidance. It is therefore important that society provides them with a type of education that will make them acquire sound religious and moral principles; and also develop appropriate attitudes and values that will help them to make good choices and decisions in their adulthood for the good society [5, 7].

2.4. Teaching and Learning Philosophies of Religious and Moral Education (RME)

The learning and teaching of Religious and Moral Education reflect the belief that irrespective of the diverse needs of learners in Ghana's classrooms, each can be nurtured into honest, creative and responsible citizen [5, 7]. The teaching of Religious and Moral Education (R.M.E.) should be learner-centred rather than teacher-centred. There is a Chinese proverb that states "I hear, I forget; I see and I remember; and I do and I understand." This is interpreted to mean that when learners are fully involved in teaching and learning processes, they tend to develop great interest and subsequently contribute actively to lessons. In the same vein, it is expected that the teaching and learning of Religious and Moral Education would be participatory, and not be turned into preaching sessions. Learners would become passive learners when Religious and Moral Education teachers attempt to impart every information solely by themselves, and this may not encourage effective teaching and learning [5, 7].

Teaching resources play key roles in teaching and learning processes. Without them, learners are likely to find it difficult to understand various themes and concepts (topics) they study. Teaching resources such as charts, real objects and drawings help to make lessons interesting and practical. The R.M.E. teacher should therefore be resourceful and be able to find the relevant teaching materials that may be needed for the lessons. It will be highly essential for teachers to use audio-visual resources such as films and videos in their lessons for learners to acquire the right knowledge, values, attitudes and skills needed. They will also acquire some language skills and other core competencies from the topics they study and this will facilitate their learning of Religious and Moral Education and other subjects on the school timetable. In addition, the teacher is expected to relate the various topics to the practical situations in their daily lives.

The best way of learning Religious and Moral Education is through practical activities like demonstrations, role plays, recitals, games, group work and visiting important religious and historic sites. There should be more demonstrations throughout the lessons. Children can get a clearer picture of lessons and store the facts in memory and practice when they are encouraged to take active part in the lessons that involve demonstrations and other practical activities.

In educational principles, the child's GENERIC SKILLS are fully developed only when enough demonstrations and activities are undertaken. Some of them have the ability to dance, sing, draw, dramatise or make models, and all these potentials are to be developed through the teacher's assistance and resourcefulness. Games arouse the interest of children to take active part in lessons. They may include chain games whereby a child may ask another child a question and continue in the same order throughout the class. The teacher is at liberty to introduce appropriate games in the lesson.

Learners are to be encouraged to work in groups, carry out some of the functions of the teacher and act as a leader of the group. The teacher should guide learners working in groups so that there is a balance between teacher-centred lessons and the lesson which gets out of hand because of lack of control. The rationale of this philosophy is to inculcate the spirit of team work, consensus building and tolerance in order to ensure peace and unity [5, 7]. This implies that, religious and moral education will help form and reshape the moral behaviours of learners to become acceptable, responsible, and participatory citizens.

3. Methodology

The descriptive survey design was used for the study. The population of the study consists of 672 for the study students, Religious and Moral Education tutors and school Administrators. The simple random and purposive sampling techniques were used to select 257 respondents, two hundred and forty-five (245) students were randomly selected, six (6) Religious and Moral Education tutors and six (6) school Administrators (Principals and Vice Principals) were also purposively selected for the study. Table 1 below shows a total of two hundred and forty-five (245) Religious and Moral Education students made up of one hundred and forty (140) males and one hundred and five females (105) who were offering Bachelor of Education in Religious and Moral Education constitutes students selected for the study. The main instrument for the study was questionnaire. Data entry and analysis was done by using the SPSS software package version 20. The data was edited, coded and analysed into tables, frequencies, percentages with interpretations.

Table 1. Distribution of Form Two Religious and Moral Education (RME) Students in the three Colleges of Education in the Central Region of Ghana.

Colleges of Education	No of students enrolled for RME		No of students selected	No of respondents Male Female	
	Male	Female			
Foso	200	100	110	73	37
Komenda	189	78	97	67	30
OLA	-	105	38	-	38
Total	389	283	245	140	105

4. Findings and Discussions on Stakeholders' Perceptions for the Inclusion of Religious and Moral Education as a Teaching Subject

In finding answers to research question one, items from section B of the questionnaires were used. From the study, it was realized that 208 of the students representing 84.9% supported the inclusion of Religious and Moral Education as a teaching subject. This means that, one cannot do away with Religious and Moral Education when the issue of education is being discussed. This is shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Respondents' Perception of Religious and Moral Education being Core Subject.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	37	15.1	-	-	1	16.7
True	208	84.9	6	100	5	83.3
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

There were 37 students representing 15.1% who were not in support of the view that RME is a core subject and therefore should not be included as a teaching subject. This assertion of Religious and Moral Education being core to educational system was also supported by responses from both the tutors of Religious Moral Education and school administrators where all of them agreed with the exception of one administrator who had a different view altogether, that other disciplines are equally important to any Educational system. Despite the few dissenting views, the responses are indicative of the fact that the importance of Religious and Moral Education in our educational system cannot be overemphasized. This point is corroborated Takahashi (1988), who is of the view that the teaching of Moral Education in particular, and Religious and Moral Education in general places importance upon attitudes of respect for humanity, independence, and the capacity for problem-solving.

It is pertinent also to note that, apart from Religious and Moral Education being core to the educational system, many of the respondents were of the view that Religious and Moral Education is necessary for the total development of an individual. For instance, from Table 3, 238 of the students representing 97.2% shared this opinion of Religious and Moral Education being necessary for the total development of the individual.

Table 3. Respondents' Perception of Religious and Moral Education being Necessary for the Total Development of an Individual.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	7	2.8	-	-	-	-
True	238	97.2	6	100	6	100
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

It must be noted that not only do students share this view point but also the tutors and the administrators as well. This is again indicated in Table 3 where all the tutors and the administrators assert to this view, thus, agreeing with a study that, Religious and Moral Education, among other disciplines, shall aim at the full development of personality, striving for the rearing of the people, sound in mind and body, who shall love truth and justice, esteem individual values, respect labour and have a deep sense of responsibility, and be imbued with the independent spirit, as builders of the peaceful state and society [13]. Religious and Moral Education curriculum also support the assertion that, the subject is a vital and indispensable part of human growth and development in the Ghanaian society. The subject reinforces the informal religious and moral training young people acquire from their homes and communities. RME should be used as tool to make learners aware of the dangers these pose to themselves as individuals and the nation as a whole and make them to acquire values and attitudes that would address these challenges [5, 7].

The overwhelming responses from the respondents could be attributed to the fact that the moral development of an individual goes a long way to help develop a nation, since moral decadence or social vices in a society destroys the social fibre of that society. This is supported by views on the fact that Religious and Moral Education stem the tide of moral decadence in the society as 213 of the students' responses representing 86.9% agreed to this assertion as seen in Table 4.

Table 4. Respondents' Perception of Religious and Moral Education being able to Stem the Tide of Moral Decadence.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	32	13.1	-	-	1	16.7
True	213	86.9	6	100	5	83.3
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

This is however not to say that, all the students agreed to the importance of Religious and Moral Education being necessary for the total development of the individual. No matter the minute number, as seen in Table 3 where 7 students representing 2.8% disagree to this assertion that the subject is key to the total development of the individual, all efforts must be put in place to ensure that the individual is wholly developed to help achieve a nation of high moral standards to diffuse the minds of the few 32

students (13.1%), as seen in Table 4, who believe that Religious and Moral Education cannot stem the tide of moral decadence, and here Religious and Moral Education plays a major role. It must also be put on record that responses from the tutors support that of the students on the view that Religious and Moral Education stem the tide of moral decadence as seen in Table 4, where all the tutors agreed to the assertion. This again was supported by most of the school administrators, where all, except one, believe that Religious and Moral Education can help stem the tide of moral decadence in the society. The results therefore confirm the work done by whose results also indicated

that moral education is part of the solution to the perceived moral decadence in the society [14].

It is in the light of the above that respondents agree to the view that Religious and Moral Education should be taught not at the basic level alone but even at the colleges because children at their early stages when trained, or acquire the basic moral values, are able to carry it out through their life time. This is represented in Table 5 where 215 students representing 87.7% were of the view that there is the need for teaching Religious and Moral Education at the basic level.

Table 5. Respondents' Perception of the need for Religious and Moral Education to be taught at the Basic Level.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	30	12.3	-	-	-	-
True	215	87.7	6	100	6	100
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

It is also interesting to note that not only do most of the students believe or agree to the point that Religious and Moral Education should be taught at the basic level but also the tutors as well as the administrators share similar sentiments. The results above therefore reiterate that moral

education be taught in schools [15, 16].

In a similar response, as seen in Table 6, 208 (84.9%) of the students also agreed that the teaching of Religious and Moral Education should continue to the Colleges of Education.

Table 6. Respondents' Perception of the need for Religious and Moral Education to be taught at Colleges of Education.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	37	15.1	-	-	1	16.7
True	208	84.9	6	100	5	83.3
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

This is again corroborated by all the tutors. It can therefore be concluded at this point that the importance of Religious and Moral Education in the life of humankind cannot be overemphasized. There was however an interesting phenomenon in the responses from the administrators. Even though 5 (83.3%) of them were of the view that Religious and Moral Education should be taught at Colleges of Education, there was a dissenting view from one (1) of them, (Table 6). There were those also who were of different opinion that Religious and Moral Education should not be taught at the basic level let alone at the colleges of higher learning. For instance, at the basic level, 30 of the students, representing 12.1% as seen in Table 5, had this opinion that Religious and Moral Education need not be taught. In a similar view, as seen in Table 6, 37

(15.1%) of these students also agreed that Religious and Moral Education should not be taught at the colleges. The response from the respondents implies that, in other to ensure a society of high moral standards RME should be a beacon to reduce immoral act in the community. A research supported current study that moral education needed to be taught at the higher institutions to check indiscipline and sexual harassment in school [17].

Again, despite these divergent views on whether the subject should be taught at the various levels of our educational system or not, almost all the responses, 240 representing 98% from the students, all the tutors and administrators were of the view that teaching Religious and Moral Education promotes religious tolerance. This is indicated in Table 7.

Table 7. Respondents' Perception of Religious and Moral Education Promoting Religious Tolerance.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	5	2.0	-	-	-	-
True	240	98.0	6	100	6	100
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

The truism of the above assertion is the fact that the society is pluralistic and therefore we all need religious tolerance for peaceful co-existence which in the long run will enhance the total development of the nation as opined by Farrant that "ethical standards, moral behaviour, and standards of judgement are the product of religious training" [18]. In furtherance to the promotion of religious tolerance, one cannot deny the fact that, making informed choices, and by extension, valued judgments, go a long way to promote peace, unity and stability in a society. The findings of the study were supported by philosophy of the Religious and Moral Education curriculum that "The learning and teaching of Religious and Moral Education reflect the belief that irrespective of the diverse needs of learners in Ghana's classrooms, each can be nurtured into honest, creative and responsible citizen" [5]. This role can effectively be promoted by the study of Religious and Moral Education. It is in the light of this that 235 (95.9%) of the students totally agreed to the fact that the teaching of Religious and Moral Education enable students to make valued judgment, even though 10 (4.1%) disagree to this assertion. This is shown in Table 8.

Table 8. Respondents' Perception of Religious and Moral Education Enabling Students make Valued Judgements.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	10	4.1	3	50.0	3	50.0
True	235	95.9	3	50.0	3	50.0
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

The study further revealed that not only the students believe in the fact that the study of Religious and Moral Education instils some sense of responsibility in the individual by enabling them make valued judgements, but some of the tutors and administrators as well think along the same line as again seen in Table 8 where 3 each of the tutors and administrators agree that Religious and Moral Education enable students to make valued judgements. This principle agrees with the assertion that the study of Religious and Moral Education provides learners with appropriate attitudes and values that enable individuals to make correct choices [8]. Much as one agrees from the discussions above that Religious and Moral Education is key to ensuring total development of not only the individual but also the society as a whole, care needs to be taken in ensuring that the rights of the individual are upheld by not indoctrinating the individual. It is in line with this view that 204 of the students representing 83.3% agree to the fact that Religious and Moral Education should be taught without indoctrinating the students to ensure that the rights of the individual are equally respected. This was however disagreed by 41, representing 16.7% of the students. This is indicated in Table 9.

Table 9. Respondents' Perception of Religious and Moral Education helping Teach Without Indoctrinating Students.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	41	16.7	-	-	-	-
True	204	83.3	6	100	6	100
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

In addition to the students' popular view on the fact that Religious and Moral Education should be taught in a way as not to indoctrinate the students, results from Table 9 show that both the tutors and the administrators share the same point of view. These results therefore agree with the assertion made that Religious and Moral Education can be taught without indoctrinating the learners when certain principles are followed [19]. To achieve the rationale for instituting Religious and Moral Education, there is the need to avoid the temptation of indoctrination and therefore Religious Education and Moral Education should go hand-in-hand. This view is supported by responses from students where 154 (62.8%) of the students, all the tutors and administrators as seen in Table 10 agree that Religious Education should not be treated separately from Moral Education to ensure smooth interpretation of the two related concepts.

Table 10. Respondents' Perception of Religious Education being Treated Separately from Moral Education.

Response	Students		Tutors		Administrators	
	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent	Frequency	Percent
Untrue	154	62.8	6	100	6	100
True	91	37.2	-	-	-	-
Total	245	100	6	100	6	100

From the above point of view, the researchers concluded that, it is not difficult to teach Religious and Moral Education as

an integrated subject and for that matter, one can confidently handle the two concepts of Religious Education and Moral Education to ensure a better understanding to promote the role of Religious and Moral Education in the development of the individual in particular and the nation as a whole.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study revealed that, the role of the subject in the society and its inclusion in the curriculum as a teaching subject cannot be overemphasized. Its inclusion will thus help achieve the goals of education which seek not only to assist educands to acquire the skills of literacy and numeracy but also mould their character.

It is recommended that, more effective teaching methods and materials need to be developed to help learners have meaningful learning. In ensuring meaningful learning therefore, one need to help learners become involved actively in constructing their knowledge and organizing it in a way that can help them apply the needed information correctly. It is also recommended that, the teaching and learning of Religious and Moral Education should be at all levels of our educational system, not only allowing the subject to stand on its own as an examinable subject, but also to help continue to inculcate and instill good morals into the individual.

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