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Teaching Religion OR about Religion: The Paradox of Religious Education in Secondary Schools in Uganda

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Keywords:

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The article reviews the teaching of Religious Education in schools in Uganda. Uganda is a religiously pluralistic country with Christianity and Islam the most popular. Ugandans are theists, their worldview is religious and they are passionate about their faiths. Therefore, Religious Education is a fundamental subject since the early years of education as it marked the beginning of formal education in Uganda. However, whilst Uganda has a diversity of religions such as Christianity with its different sects, Islam and its sects, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Sikhism, the education system considers only Islam and Christianity. Therefore, the article discusses whether the teaching of Religious Education where only Christianity and Islam are considered is justified to be referred to as Religious Education. The article concludes that there is a mismatch between the NCDC (2008) stated goals, objectives and content of Religious Education. The objectives and goals portray a false image that RE is intended to expose learners and to achieve educational purposes. Yet, the content, approaches and teaching methods are quite contradictory. The implementation of RE in Uganda is purely confessional; it does not aim at educational goals but at deepening learners' faith distinctively. Instead of teaching about religion, learners are taught religion. The article is based on documentary analysis of the Religious Education curriculum, syllabi and teachers' and learners' handbook documents. In addition, the article analysed literature about the teaching of Religious Education including the aims and goals of Religious Education, the pedagogical approaches, methods and techniques in Religious Education in modern pluralistic communities. In identifying the appropriate literature, suitable databases were identified and used Boolean operators and proper search terms, phrases and conjunctions were used. To further ensure the credibility of the reviewed publications for analysis, only peer-reviewed journal articles with ISBN numbers and Digital Object Identifiers (DOI) were used

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INTRODUCTION

All education systems need not disregard religious beliefs, practices, cultures and history. If young people are not enabled to understand these, chances are high of developing negative stereotypes which in their extreme forms can lead to hatred, conflict and violence (Milenovic, 2013). Dever et al. (2001, p. 221) contended that, "it might as well be said that one's education is not complete without a study of comparative religion or the history of religion and its relationship to the advancement of civilisation". Some people perceive Religious Education as a subject that teaches religious doctrines of a specified religion. However, Religious Education as a school subject stands next to other school subjects such as; -geography, history, mathematics or English. While the term Religious Education gives an implication and expression that the approach, content and methodology are inclusive and do not focus on only one religion. The subject of Religious Education is highly eclectic. It takes different dimensions and different approaches in different contexts. For instance, in the developed world, implementation of RE is based on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, Article 18 which states that:

Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion; this right includes freedom to change his religion or belief, and freedom, either alone or in community with others and in public or private, to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

In this case, some people believe that teaching RE in schools violates the rights of children to be free from the imposition of religious beliefs. In such contexts, parents have the right to decide whether their children can attend RE lessons or not. Such rights are protected by the 1990 Convention on the Rights of Children (CRC) and the UNESCO Convention Against Discrimination in Education (CADE). Among other things, these conventions are intended to ensure the freedom to study Religious Education at school; parents have the freedom to withdraw their children from RE lessons.

In other contexts, Religious Education is integrated within Citizenship Education, Moral Education or Multicultural Education. Yet, some countries decide not to teach RE in public schools. Religious Education has been defined as the:

'Guided process of helping growing persons to achieve at each stage of their growth such habits, skills, attitudes, appreciations, knowledge, ideas, ideals, and intentions as will enable them at each stage to achieve an ever more integrated personality, competent and satisfying living in their social environment and increasing co-cooperativeness with God and man in the reconstruction of society into a fellowship of persons' (Wyckoff, 1968).

RE ought to contribute to the holistic development of learners cognitively, affectively and skills development. Further, RE ought to enable learners to be critical thinkers, evaluators of contexts and situations and to ably analyse knowledge and events. Milenovic (2013) observes that the school is

an institution that gives learners an opportunity through RE to;

- Get accustomed to diversity as a natural human phenomenon;
- Children and young people get an opportunity to understand their faiths and others;
- Learn heritage of all cultures;
- Present their religious tradition and contribute to understanding the complexity of various world religions and;
- Understand cultural events and religious phenomena in diverse contexts.

Educational implementation of RE ought to teach about religion other than teaching religion. As Schreiner (2002) contends, RE gives learners an opportunity to consider different answers to major religions and moral issues. It enables learners to develop their own views in a reflective way. In this way, the teaching of Religious Education puts learners' experiences at the centre of teaching. The broad goals of RE are to transmit religious knowledge and understanding, as well as to deal with human experiences and spirituality. Children need to be given an opportunity to choose whether to believe in God or not and to decide on what to believe in and also to learn how different believers experience their relationship with God.

The Essentiality of Religious Education in the 21st Century

There is an increasingly greater need for RE because the influence of religion in human lives cannot be disregarded. Interestingly, issues of faiths and religion matter to both the religious and unreligious in equal measures. On the one hand, the unreligious people work so hard to prove that religion is irrelevant and not worth any attention. People who do not favour religion create philosophies and design theories to convince the world that God does not exist. In addition, the unreligious do persuade politicians and economists to ignore the phenomenon of religion in political, economic and social affairs. On the other hand, the who believe in religion insist that religion is pertinent to humanity and religious interests have to be considered. The

proponents of RE such as Smart (1978); Grimmit (2000) and Dever et al. (2001), accentuate the value teaching of religion as a school subject to both the '*religious*' and '*unreligious*.'

In a world of competing philosophies of post-postmodernism and meta-modernism, the phenomenon of religion still impacts humanity in different ways. As Mirascieva and Gjorgieva (2011) observe, religion, education and globalisation are in a complex relationship in the view of civilisation environment. On the one hand, religion is theorised as the opium of the masses (Puniyani, 2005; Omonijo et al., 2016) and on the other as a materialistic concept (Crockett & Robbins, 2012). Nonetheless, religion as a philosophy or an ideology, whether of the 1st or 21st Century, the essentiality of religion cannot be ignored. According to Schnabel (2021), religion is only a compensatory resource to the disadvantaged groups including women, the poor, the racial minorities, among others; it is a suppressor of emancipatory political values. It is under this premise that the article argues that the teaching of RE needs to focus on educational RE aims, goals, approaches and content. Religious Education should enable young people to contribute to the unending debates about existence of God, religion, spirituality, morality, and the nature of humanity.

THE GOALS OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN UGANDA

The goals of RE in Uganda as stated in the NCDC (2008) preface of the curriculum of RE state that, 'the aims and objectives of teaching RE have come to be perceived as purely educational and not religious or denominational. Basing on the NCDC (2004) statement, the teaching of religion in schools is not referred to as Religious Instruction (RI) but Religious Education (RE). The following are the NCDC (2004) stated aims and objectives of RE in Uganda, each objective is analysed in reference to the purpose of Religious Education;

- To provide children with an insight into the nature of religion and what it means to be religious;

This objective implies that learners are introduced to religion as a phenomenon; they are not given an

opportunity to explore the origin of religion in the world, the history of world religions, their founders and the different cultural background where these religions have big populations. Such an objective gives an impression that the current teaching of RE creates a sense of wonder and curiosity. However, the objective is not achievable by the current teaching of RE.

- To help children acquire and develop skills that will enable them to appreciate religious ideas and practices;

To be able to achieve such an objective, Religious Education ought to help learners to reflect upon the experiences and mysteries of life. Secondly, it means that Religious Education gives an opportunity to develop knowledge and an understanding of the range of religious and values systems found in Uganda. Further, learners explore the doctrines, customs and religious practices of religions other than their own. The way RE is taught in the current form, learners cannot be helped to appreciate religious ideas and practices.

- To make available factual information about religion and religious phenomena;

In order to achieve such an objective, it would require that learners be taught the different dimensions of religion, develop an understanding of the influence of beliefs, values and traditions on individuals, communities, societies and cultures and; have respect for others' views and celebrate diversity in society. On the contrary, RE is only to ensure that learners commit to their religious beliefs and practices.

- To encourage attitudes of openness and sensitivity towards people whose religious beliefs and customs may be different from their own;

Achieving this objective requires that learners ought to be given an opportunity to present their religious traditions to others in classroom discussions, visiting different worshipping places for the different religions such as mosques, churches and temples and; relating experiences from other religions to their own understanding and experiences. However, the current teaching

encourages learners to stick to their religious beliefs.

- To provide in particular an awareness of the nature and claims of religions and of the part it has played in shaping the cultural and social life of Uganda;

Learners ought to be able to reflect on their religious experiences, develop a personal response to the fundamental questions in life, reflecting on their own beliefs, values and experiences in the light of what they study.

- To help children to identify those areas of human life and experience in which religion plays a significant part;

Learners need to be helped to explore the role of religion in the different lives of believers, what it means to be religious, how religion contributes to the community and society of diverse religious faiths. Such an objective cannot be achieved only if learners participate in the discussions about the characteristics of religion as a phenomenon. The current teaching of RE does not help learners understand the features and characteristics of religion in general. Therefore, such an objective cannot be achieved.

- To explore with the children the relationship between religion and other areas of experience and knowledge;

To achieve the seventh objective, learners ought to be enabled to develop critical thinking, analytical adeptness, inquiry expertise, investigative and evaluative skills, open-mindedness so as to make informed judgments about historical and contemporary religious issues. However, RE learners are instead taught one faith and cannot be enabled to develop critical skills; they are only taught that their distinctive belief is not comparable to any other. Further, learners are also taught never to criticise religious beliefs and practices because criticising religion creates doubt and is termed as blasphemy. Therefore, RE does not help learners to develop critical, evaluative and investigative skills. Instead, they are taught how to pray to God, prayerful, follow religious teachings and stand for their distinctive religious beliefs.

- To contribute towards the learner's moral development.

Learners need to be encouraged to develop an awareness of the spiritual and moral issues in life experiences in reference to religious teachings. Morality is such a broad term and at the same time, morality is relative. The current confessional approach to RE exposes learners to only one moral philosophy. The teaching leaves learners ignorant of other moral philosophies.

Noting from the above, it is plausible to conclude that the NCDC (2008) stated aims of RE are aimed at the development of a whole person and not the propagation of the faith. These aims give an impression that RE takes teaching about religion model other than the teaching of religion. However, a critical analysis of the syllabus and its objectives reflect that the implementation of religion in Uganda takes a '*teaching of religion*' model. While the goals stated above cover RE as an inclusive subject, the RE curriculum is divided into two categories; Christian Religious Education (CRE) and Islamic Religion Education (IRE). The latest rolled out national curriculum, 2014 version clearly indicates that IRE and CRE are distinctive in aims, objectives, content and content.

It is surprising to note that even when there is a notable percentage of people who believe and participate in African cultural-religious beliefs and practices, RE is purely Christianity and Islam. The missionary perception about traditional religious beliefs and practices as satanic and devilish still linger in the minds of Africans (Moscicke, 2017; Hassan, 2015; Mbiti, (1991). Yet, as Raditoaneng (2011, p. 26) observed that since Africans started to participate in critical academic arguments about African cultures and traditions, there are positive developments and interpretations of the African worldview. Today, African traditional religious beliefs and practices translate into logical meanings and have contributed to the construction of African philosophy and worldview. Besides, as Engebretson (2009, p. 19) argues that in order to learn about religion implicitly and explicitly, one must investigate that part of the arena of faith responses are designated as 'traditional belief' systems because it is in and through these religious interpretations of

meaning and purposes are made explicit in the social world.

TWO CONCEPTS: "TEACHING RELIGION" AND "ABOUT RELIGION"

Teaching religion and teaching about religion are two different approaches to teaching Religious Education in schools.

Teaching Religion

Teaching religion means that RE is oriented towards making learners understand the beliefs, doctrines and practices of the taught religion and the end result is to encourage the child to commit and practice the tenets of the taught religion. Teaching religion is described as involving a dogmatic indoctrination of children (Bartkowiak, 2015, p. 21). This model of teaching Religious Education is also referred to as mono Religious Education; it introduces only one religious' faith to learners. The mono RE approach confines itself exclusively to one religious doctrine's view on the premise that there can be no salvation outside the taught religion (Hermans, 2003, p. 339). In implementing RE, Christianity and Islam are each treated as the ultimate reality. Thus, the teaching of IRE treats Islam as the only salvation and anything out of it is irrelevant and the same applies to Christianity. The mono RE approach appropriates a particular religion such as Christianity (Sterkens & Yusuf, 2015). For example, a Religious Education that only focuses on Christianity; (CRE) the approach to teaching is devotional and encourages learners to be more committed to Christianity both in faith and practice.

Teaching religion is only beneficial when the goal is to promote the spirituality of learners; for instance, it does not give space to critically question what is taught. Religious beliefs are taught as absolute truth. Learners are not supposed to argue or raise any doubts. The teaching is parochial, it is not intended to stimulate reason and logical arguments but centred on belief, ethos and philosophy of one religion. Learners cannot share religious experiences beyond the boundaries of their belief boundary faith. As Muhumuza (2018) observed, this is the confessional approach to RE, it is not given in an 'unbiased, objective and neutral manner. The

confessional teaching of RE disregards children's rights as it does not consider their right to freedom of opinion, to conscience, to expression and to religious beliefs of others. Such a RE approach does not help learners to appreciate the religious beliefs and practices of other people, including their schoolmates and neighbours in their communities. According to Muhumuza (2018), the confessional approach to RE makes learners appreciate only their own religious faith and traditions because they are not exposed to any other religious traditions. The teaching of religion instead of teaching about religion is characterised by the absence of neutrality, objectivity and impartiality. It creates a bias against other faiths. Consequently, a Religious Education that focuses on teaching Christianity or Islam is characterised by:

- A curriculum that presses learners to acceptance of only Christianity or Islam;
- The school encourages the practice of only Christianity or Islam; by ensuring that learners adhere to only Christian or Islamic prayers, practices and celebrations;
- The curriculum only exposes the Christian or Islamic view to learners on contemporary issues such as marriage, abortion, divorce, among others;
- The teacher is a believer and has a passion for Christianity;
- The school environment is Christian or Islam with symbols and signs that remind the learners of Jesus Christ or Prophet Muhammad, such as signs of the cross in the compound and in classes;
- Learners are also encouraged to wear or carry with them Christian or Islamic symbols and signs.

The same happens when RE focuses on Islam; only Islamic doctrines and traditions are transmitted to the learners. Subsequently, as Hermans (2003) observed, *teaching religion* transmits one religious' tradition to learners.

Teaching about Religion

On the contrary, teaching about religion implies that RE does not focus on only one religious' faith. Learners are exposed to the different religious faiths, doctrines, practices and religious experiences of different personalities. Bartkowiak (1998) observed that teaching about religion involves a historical objective and a comparative approach to Religious Education. Teaching about religion is characterised by:

- An approach to Religious Education which is educational other than devotional;
- Teaching is inclusive, it exposes learners to other religious faiths, beliefs and practices and experiences;
- Learners are not be obliged to put into practice the taught religion; religious practice is voluntary;
- The curriculum creates student awareness of religions but does not press for student acceptance of any one religion;
- The school may sponsor the study of religion but may not sponsor the practise of religion;
- The school may inform learners about various beliefs but should not seek to conform them to any particular belief.

Teaching about religion ought to be the gist of Religious Education and Religious Studies. Teaching about religion implies that Religious Education contributes to the dynamic development of children by provoking challenging questions about the meaning and purpose of life, ultimate reality, life after death, beliefs and God, morals and ethics, reason, right, wrong and positionality of man in life. When teaching about religion, the teacher ensures that classroom discussions are conducted in an environment that is free from advocacy on the part of the teacher (Feinberg, 2014, p. 401). Teaching about religion fairly and objectively, neither promoting nor denigrating religion in general or specific religious groups in particular. During RE lessons, teachers guard against injecting personal religious beliefs by teaching through attribution (e.g., by using such phrases as "most Buddhists believe..." or "according to the Hebrew

scriptures . . .”). Students may express their own religious views, as long as such expression is germane to the discussion. When teaching about religion, learners are taught what religious faiths mean to an adherent. It involves learning about the beliefs, values and practices of religion but also seeking to understand the way in which these may influence the behaviours of individuals and how religion shapes communities.

IMPLEMENTATION OF RE IN UGANDA

As mentioned earlier, RE is a pertinent subject in Uganda’s education system. It should be noted that the constitution provides for rights and freedoms of belief, worship and practices stating that;

‘Every person shall have the right to freedom to practise any religion and manifest such practice which shall include the right to belong to and participate in the practices of any religious body or organisation...’.

However, the constitution does not regulate the teaching of RE because it gives the mandate of the RE curriculum and syllabus to religious bodies. Therefore, only the mainstream religions, Christianity and Islam influence and determine what is taught in Religious Education. Consequently, religious leaders whose interests are aimed at propagating their distinctive faiths cannot allow RE implementation that may entice their young people to convert to other religions. As a result, RE has two strands; Christian Religious Education CRE and Islamic Religious Education. The rest of the faiths including Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Baha’i, Jain and African Traditional Religious Religion (ATR) beliefs and practices are left out of the RE curriculum and syllabus.

Teaching of Islamic Religious Education

The terminology “Islamic Religious Education” (IRE) implies that the teaching stresses ultimate reference to Allah as known through his prophet Muhammad.

Purpose and Aims of IRE

The aims and objectives of IRE distinctively indicate that IRE is aimed at furthering an understanding of only the Islamic faith. For

instance, the aims of teaching IRE are stated in the NCDC (2004, p. 34) as follows;

- To cultivate in the student a deeper understanding of Islam and its relevance in life today;
- To equip the student with an adequate basis for further study of the subject;
- To deepen the student’s knowledge of Islam by exposing him/her to the basic sources of faith;
- To introduce the student to the origin and development of the Islamic legislation;
- To enable students to appreciate the rich Islamic heritage with particular reference to its political, social, economic, religious and cultural history;
- To enable the student to appreciate that Islam is one of the major civilisations that has enlightened the African continent;
- To enable the student to realise that there is a trend of Islamization of African culture;
- To enable the student to appreciate the fact that Islam can ably thrive in the absence of the Arab culture.

Moreover, the curriculum further states that the IRE syllabus is based on the assumption that the student has a solid background in Islam. The document adds that the syllabus covers the Holy Book, the origin and development of Islamic legislation, Islamic political, social, economic, religious and cultural history, Sharia and its application, and the interplay between Islam. Besides, the curriculum states specific aims objectives of IRE, for instance; these are some of the stated aims of the different IRE papers as stated in the NCDC (2004, pp. 36-39) curriculum;

(i) **Paper 1:** introduction to the study of the Quran

General aim: To cultivate in the student a ‘deeper understanding of Islam and its relevancy in life today

General objectives:

- By the end of this course, the student will be equipped with an adequate basis for further study of the subject;
- To deepen the student's knowledge of Islam by exposing him/her to the basic teachings of Hadith;

(ii) **Paper 11: Introduction to Habit and Fiqh**

General aim: To introduce the student to the origin and development of the Islamic faith legislation

General objectives:

- Explain the science of the traditions of the prophet (ILMAI-Hadith)
- Appreciate that the Islamic legislation is still viable in the contemporary world
- Appreciate that the Islamic law is backed up with authentic documentation

(iii) **Paper 111: History of Islam**

General aim: To enable students to appreciate the rich Islamic heritage with particular reference to its political, social, economic, religious and cultural history.

General objectives:

- To explain the contribution of Islam in influencing the lives and aspirations of the different people in the world;
- To express appreciation of the rich Islamic heritage;
- To explain the historical aspects of Islamic civilisation;
- To appreciate the role played by Islam in the civilisation of the Arabian Peninsula.

(iv) **Paper IV: Islam in Africa**

General Aim: To enable the student to appreciate that Islam has been one of the major civilisations that have enlightened the African continent.

General objectives:

- To appreciate that Islam can be a religion for all humanity;
- To realise that there is a trend of Islamization of African culture alongside the Africanisation of Islam;
- To appreciate the fact that Islam can ably thrive even in the absence of the Arab culture.

Given the aims and objectives of IRE as stated above, it is tenable to conclude that the model and approach to IRE is automatically oriented towards teaching Islam but not about religion. IRE is taught in a way that strengthens the beliefs of learners. The teachers in this case are devout Muslims and sometimes Sheikhs. Besides, many school symbols and signs are Islamic, Muslim rituals and celebrations are regarded highly. On the other hand, other religions such as Christianity, Hinduism, Buddhism, African Traditional Religion and others that have believers in Uganda are disregarded in the IRE syllabus.

The Teaching of CRE

The term "Christian Religious Education" gives an impression that the teaching makes ultimate reference to only Christianity. The CRE national curriculum syllabus also deviates from the general goals of RE as stated in the syllabus preface. The following section gives an outline of the aims and content of the CRE curriculum and syllabus.

Purpose and Aims of CRE

The syllabus clearly states that the purpose of CRE is to deepen the Christian faith to the learners, summed in the phrase 'instilling Christian values in learners' (NCDC, 2009; NCDC, 2004, pp. 23-32). The aims include;

- To develop an awareness and knowledge of God's presence and purpose in the world as revealed through His creation, the Bible, the Christian community, the life and teaching of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit living in the church today;
- To develop Christian virtues of love, joy, peace and service in the child, and build a personal

Christian ideal to inspire his/her development and maturity;

- To live a committed Christian life following in the footsteps of Jesus Christ;
- To get knowledge of the teachings of the Bible and apply it in the Christian life or churches today;
- To appreciate the common elements in traditional religion, other religions and Christian beliefs;
- To develop the Christian moral values of honesty, concern for others, sharing, tolerance and justice;

These are some of the stated aims of the different CRE papers;

(i) Paper 1: The Old Testament:

Aim: To enable the student to gain insights into the unfolding of God's self-revelation to mankind and to the people of Israel as recorded in the Old Testament, as part of the basis of Christian living today.

Objectives:

- Instilling an understanding of Israel's life and thought throughout the Old Testament
- understand the relationship of the old and new testaments; continuity, discontinuity and the fulfilment of the old and new testaments.

(ii) Paper II: The New Testament:

Aim: To enable the student to gain insights into the unfolding of God's self-revelation to mankind as recorded in the New Testament as the basis of Christian belief and living

Objectives:

- for candidates to show an understanding of the period of oral transmission of the faith;
- the transition from oral tradition to written documents;

- development and recognition within the Christian community of the written documents which we have before us in the New Testament

(iii) Paper III: Christianity in the East African Environment

Aim: to enable students to understand Christianity in East African against the background of African cultures.

(iv) Paper IV: Christian Approaches to social and ethical issues

Aims and objectives:

- Enable students to apply to these issues Christian insights drawn from the Bible, from acknowledged official church statements and from relevant literature
- To enable students to appreciate the distinction between Christianity and culture and the need to communicate Christianity in a cultural context

Just like IRE, the purposes and aims of CRE are clearly devotional and confessional. Besides, most of the missionary founded schools have Christian signage in the compound and classes, it is also mandatory to say the Christian prayers and other religious practices. While the major RE goals stated in the curriculum and syllabus preface are educational, the IRE and CRE purposes, aims, and content are not educational but devotional and confessional. It is arguable that the current model and approach to RE clearly reflect a hard version of mono Religious Education.

In Uganda, there is a mismatch between the NCDC (1994;2004; 2008) stated aims and goals for RE and the actual implementation of the curriculum and syllabus. The stated aims and goals of teaching RE reflect an inclusive RE that exposes learners to a variety of religious beliefs and practices. However, the teaching of RE has never moved away from confessional and doctrinal approaches and methods that were introduced by the Christian missionaries and Muslim Arabs.

A COMPROMISE BETWEEN “*TEACHING RELIGION*” AND “*TEACHING ABOUT RELIGION*”: A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION PARADOX

The RE paradox in Uganda’s education system dates back to the time of missionaries who introduced formal education in Uganda between 1886 till independence. When missionaries and Arab traders introduced foreign religions, Ugandans were quick to embrace them. Originally, when the Kabaka invited Europeans to Uganda, he wanted them to teach his people new knowledge and skills. However, the missionaries, namely the Christian Missionary Society (CMS) and the White Fathers were the first to respond to Kabaka’s call yet their intention was to propagate their different religious doctrines and convert people. The Arab traders who had arrived in Uganda earlier in 1844 had already embarked on teaching Islam and converting people. The Kabaka allocated land to the three religious groups which became their bases. The missionaries constructed homes that came to be known as missions or parish and later constructed schools. Each mission or parish had a church and a school. The churches at the missions were intended to take care of pupils’ spiritual needs and for the community around the mission. Each of the two Christian missionary groups founded their own schools; the Roman Catholic teachers were referred to as *Bafalansa* (*French people*) and the Protestants teachers as *Bangereza* (*British People*). The major aim of the constructed schools was to teach the Bible and religious dogma, the rest of the skills such as reading, writing, numeracy, agriculture and technical skills were secondary. The missionaries founded education, the aims and objectives of converting and entrenching religious doctrines in churches were the same for teaching RE in schools. As Scalon (1964) observed that in setting schools, missionaries hoped that literacy skills would lead an individual’s having not only a better understanding of Christianity’s scope but also a greater appreciation of his responsibilities as a convert. RE came to be an extension of the Sunday school catechism. Their perception, content and approaches and methods of teaching Religious Education were purely faith-based and confessional, rather than educational. Ugandan’s education system focused on promoting faiths through schools and the religious life of learners; it did not aim at a

good education in our schools, nor a good significant contribution of religious education in the upbringing of our young people. Subsequently, the main subject of missionary schools was religious knowledge (RK) and for Moslems, it was knowledge of the Quran. To the missionaries, spreading Christianity was the overriding reason for constructing schools, as a report of the Uganda department of education quoted missionaries stating that, “...the idea that dominates our school system may be summed up clearly and concisely first and foremost, the spiritual interests of the child are paramount to every other matter and these divine interests are supreme” (Ssekamwa, 1997, p. 29). The protestant and Roman Catholic missionaries took charge of the entire education system. They not only took charge of the affairs of education management and administration; they greatly influenced the teaching of Religious Education as a school subject at all levels of education. The Muslims were left out and only joined later joined formal education later. Consequently, all categories of schools, namely, the catechist schools, village schools, vernacular schools, central schools and even high schools had Christian instruction as a compulsory subject (Ssekamwa, 1977). The subject of Christian Instruction (RI) was an instrumental subject and consisted of catechism instruction, prayers and practice.

Since schools were built along religious lines, children attended schools of their religious faiths; thus, protestant children were not allowed to attend Roman Catholic schools and vice-versa. Much later, the Arab Muslims also started their own schools, the Quran or *madrasas* schools that focused on Quran reading and memorisation, Islamic worship, prayer, principles and practices. The Muslim parents never wanted their children to attend Christian schools as they would be influenced by the teachings of Christianity and vice-versa. In 1963, the All-Africa Council of Churches (AACC) held its first meeting in Kampala and Uganda Joint Christian Council (UJCC) was established. UJCC brought all Christian denominations together including the Uganda Orthodox Church, Seventh Day Adventists (SDA) and all the different groups of Pentecostal churches. Through UJCC, there was a paradigm shift in the implementation of RE. Christian denominations started working together and decided to have an ecumenical Religion Education

(CRE) curriculum and syllabus instead of catholic and or Anglican education. Nevertheless, as Byaruhanga (2018) observes, students who choose to take on CRE are ‘separated from the rest to learn about Christianity within a religious framework’. To date, even after reviewing the secondary school curriculum, Christian students learn *only* Christianity and Muslim students learn *only* Islam.

CONCLUSION

The implementation of Religious Education in Uganda is purely monolithic, it focuses on re-emphasising the respective religious faiths of the learners. Besides, the doctrines are presented as the ultimate reality. It is arguable that the current approach does not give learners the opportunity to learn about each other’s religions. Learners are not introduced to the religions in society and the world. Consequently, learners remain ignorant, filled with indifference, misconceptions and prejudices even in their adult lives. In Uganda, Religious Education provides inadequate education about religion to learners as it fails to introduce them to the reality of religious and cultural diversities in modern society. It is difficult for Uganda to drift away from ‘*teaching religion*’ to ‘*teaching about religion*’ because;

- Formal education was started by missionaries/Muslim Arabs with an aim to propagate Christianity/Arabs; therefore, it is difficult to separate religion from the education system;
- In Uganda, many schools popular are faith-based schools and are also managed by priests and;
- While the education Act of 1963 took over formal education and regulated the school curriculum and syllabus, the same Act gives faith-based schools the mandate to participate in the management of their schools.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The article proposes an overhaul of the Religious Education curriculum and syllabi and content knowledge. Uganda’s Ministry of Education to design a strategic plan to fulfil the interests of the founders of education (missionaries) and at the

same time draw RE inclusive pedagogical approaches of teaching about religion. It is critical that the ministry understands the dangers of teaching using pedagogical approaches that focus on teaching for commitment to a particular faith. In a religiously pluralistic community like Uganda, teaching for commitment creates divisionism and disunity and this is dangerous for social harmony, peace building and a culture of tolerance. The confessional approach is indoctrinative, suppresses freedoms of consciousness and fails to inculcate a culture of inter-religious dialogue and tolerance. All learners should be exposed to the study of world religions and should be combined in the teaching/ learning of Religious Education and should be jointly examined. Separating IRE and CRE should be discouraged. Learning Christian catechism, Ibadan and Thanawi (Islamic theology) should strictly be left for religious leaders and at churches and mosques.

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