

# ENHANCEMENT OF THE TEACHING OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES: A METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

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## Abstract

*This paper introduces two new methods the writers believe would go a long way to enhance the teaching of Religious Studies in tertiary institutions. These two methods are Intuitive Discussion Method and Expo-Discovery Method (Expository-Discovery Method). If these two methods are properly utilized by lecturers, learning would be very easy for the students because both methods are student-centred. In the academic domain, when learning is student-centered the outcomes are positive and consequently fixed in the long-term memory. These two methods have been used by the writers for years and practised by the students. The Intuitive Discussion Method and Expo-Discovery Method as coinage of the writers have passed the test of time in the teaching and learning process for years and have been proved satisfactory by the writers who have made use of them. The Intuitive Discussion Method allows students to solve problems in the classroom from their intuitions while teaching and learning take place. The Expo-Discovery Method exposes the students to new experiences as they seek solutions to problems without the lecturer being involved. In these two methods the lecturer introduces the concepts and allows the students to organize their thoughts by moving from the known to the unknown, thereby using previous experiences to arrive at new ones. The paper is centered on two theories namely Cognitive Information Processing and Constructivism. In Cognitive Information Processing, the learner's mental ability is needed. The learner thinks out how to relate new concepts to balance with the existing concepts he or she is aware of. The theory is internal, not external, that is, it concentrates on the learner's mental process. In constructivism, the learner creates the concept based on existing one. The learner is a problem-solver as he or she creates ideas and knowledge is prerogative of the learner. Each learner explores the concept and gives his or her own idea concerning the concept. The learner is an explorer and a creator. Therefore, learners are sui generis in constructing ideas. It is recommended among others that with these methods, students of Religious Studies will have to put more interest in the teaching and learning process. It will*

*also discourage students from solely concentrating on lecturer's textbooks.*

**Keywords:** Enhancement, Teaching, Religious Studies and Methodological Approach  
**Introduction**

The subject Religious Studies was brought into Africa by the missionaries who came to spread the good news (Gospel). In the course of evangelism, they had to introduce a subject like Christian Religious Studies to help penetrate the gospel message into the lives of Africans. It would rather be said that the main aim of the missionaries as regards the introduction of the subject as an academic discipline was spiritual, not really educational because by educating the people as they could not speak the native languages, the Gospel would be easily understood by the people. To achieve this aim other subjects such as Arithmetic and English Language were taught alongside with Bible Knowledge as these additional subjects were pointers to their goal. In support of this, Onsongo (2008) in Jebungei (2013, p. 271) rightly said, “CRE was introduced by the missionaries mainly for evangelical purposes. In the mission schools, the local people were taught how to read and write using the Bible as the main reference book”. 94) in Jebungei (2013, p.271) further explained:

The schools were used as focal centres for winning converts as the Christian missionaries had a preconceived idea that Africans could easily be converted to Christianity through schooling. The teaching of the Bible was emphasized and CRE formed the core of the whole school curriculum. Schools started and ended the day with prayers and hymns and although other subjects were later taught, they were only included because they were supportive to the Christian instruction.

Subsequently, after independence, government took over schools; there was a clarion call for review of curriculum in 1983. The call was as a result of criticisms leveled against colonial education, which some scholars viewed as being too arts oriented and as such lacked relevance to Nigeria upliftment, political emancipation and infrastructural development (Ocho, 2005 in Njoku & Njoku (2015, p. 176). Based on this the curriculum was altered to greatly accommodate sciences and technology, which became major subjects of the curriculum. This change has influenced the study of Religious Studies in schools as students and parents do not see it as an important subject for becoming influential in the future, thus Arinze (1982) in Njoku & Njoku (2015 P. 176) observed that this review of the curriculum made CRS not to be taken seriously as in the time of the missionaries. The subject is geared towards moral uplift of students. Religious Studies teaches students about God and also instill morality in students. As the subject has lost its taste in the contemporary society because of the little value given to it, the question is what then can be done to gain the attention of students towards the subject? Can the teaching of the subject be improved through the methods used? This brings in the reason for writing the article.

### **Conceptual Clarifications**

The main terms of the write-up are defined in this section. This will enable the readers to understand the meaning of the words.

**Religion:** Religion is an organized collection of beliefs, cultural systems, and world views that relate humanity to an order of existence. The word religion is sometimes used interchangeably with faith, belief system or sometimes, set of duties (“Religion” 2019, paras. 1-8). Religion is a fundamental set of beliefs and practices generally agreed upon by a group of people. These set of beliefs concern the cause, nature and purpose of the universe, and involve devotional and ritual observances. They also often contain a moral code governing the conduct of human affairs.

Ever since the world began, man has demonstrated a natural inclination towards faith and worship of anything he considered superior/difficult to understand. His religion consisted of trying to appease and get favours from the supreme being he feared. This resulted in performing rituals (some of them barbaric) and keeping traditions or laws to earn goodness and/or everlasting life. (“Meaning of Religion”, 2019, paras 1-2).

Antoine Vergote in Byaruhanga (2018, p. 31) states:

Religion is a symbolic practice through which believers commemorate and re-enact the emergence of a divine force in their lives. As a religious and symbolic act, the ritual embodies a faith in God not only as a meaning to which the believer adheres but also as a divine power that operates in the human act.

From the foregoing definitions of religion, it is concluded that religion has no specific definition, it is multidimensional in approach. Based on this the writers then define religion as a set of beliefs and practices centred on a supernatural reality by which individuals are consumed in order to reach their optimal goal in life.

### **Religious Studies (Education):**

Byaruhanga (2018 pp. 36-37) defines Religious Education as “the teaching about the beliefs and doctrines of particular religion (s)”. He further explained that religious education is understood in two ways. First, it means the type of education that a religious body such as the church and the mosque provide to its young and adults. In this context religious education simply means being indoctrinated into a particular religious worldview. Secondly, it means a discipline that is both theological and educational. The writers see Religious Studies or Education as a school subject that deals with the knowledge of God and inculcation of moral values in individuals to live as good citizens in a particular society.

**Christian Religious Education:** George Albert Coe in Byaruhanga (2018, pp. 41-42) said that Christian Religious Education is:

The systematic, critical examination and reconstruction of

relations between persons, guided by Jesus' assumption that persons are of infinite worth, and by the hypothesis of the existence of God, the Great valuer of persons.

Byaruhanga (2018, p. 42), further states that Christian Religious Education is “the systematic instruction of students in the Christian beliefs using the appropriate educational tools and techniques”.

According to the writers, Christian Religious Education is the basic instruction on Christian Values as centres on the teachings of Jesus Christ.

### **Theoretical Framework**

The paper hinges on two theories namely Cognitive Information Processing and Constructivism.

Cognitive Information Processing Theory is based on the thought process behind the behavior. The theory is based on the idea that humans process the information they receive, rather than merely responding to stimuli (i.e that about what is happening). The changes in behavior are observed, but only as an indicator to what is going on in the learner's head. The learner's mind is like a mirror from which new knowledge and skills will be reflected. Cognitive Information Processing is used when the learner plays an active role in seeking ways to understand and process information that he or she receives and relate it to what is already known and stored within memory. Cognitive learning theories are credited to Jean Piaget (Kelly, 2012, paras 10-11). The cognitive approach to learning theory pays more attention to what goes on inside the learner's head and focuses on mental processes rather than observable behavior (Kelly, 2012, para. 12).

In Cognitive Information Processing, the learner's mental ability is required. The learner thinks out how to relate new concepts to balance with the existing concepts he or she already knows. The theory is internal, not external which means that it deals with the learner's mental process. Constructivism refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves (Hein, 1996, as cited in Samson, 2013, p. 33). Learning is based on how the individual interprets and creates the meaning of his or her experiences. Knowledge is constructed by the learner and since everyone has a different set of experiences and perceptions, learning is unique and different for each person. Constructivist theorists believe that learning is a process where individuals construct new ideas or concepts based on prior knowledge and/or experience. This theory is used to focus on preparing people to problem-solving. Therefore, to be successful, the learner needs a significant base of knowledge upon which to interpret and create ideas (Kelly, 2012, paras 15-17). For Samson (2013, p. 35) “Constructive principles, that is, letting or challenging the learners to make discoveries (of knowledge or skills) themselves, can be traced to the Greek period”. He further emphasized that constructivism is of two types cognitive constructivism initiated by Jean Piaget and social constructivism propounded by Lev Vygotsky (Samson, 2013).

In constructivism, the learner creates the concept based on the existing one. The learner

becomes a problem-solver. Each learner explores the concept and gives his or her own idea about the concept. Here the learner is an explorer as well as a creator.

### Methodological Approach to the Teaching of Religious Studies

There are many approaches to the teaching of Religious Studies or Education.

These approaches as highlighted by Samson (2013, pp. 48-55) are:

1. **Confessional Approach:** This approach was introduced by the missionaries which they used to evangelize the people through formal education. This approach culminates into indoctrinating the students, therefore teaching becomes one-sided. The intent of the teacher is converting students to a set of beliefs. The approach is not appealing to today's educators as students are devoid of critical thinking skills. It is not good for a heterogeneous class, that is a class where the students are of different religious persuasions. Different approaches of teaching RE (Religious Education, Emphasis ours) have developed as a reaction against the weaknesses of the confessional approaches (Cox, 1983; Groenwegen, 1993 as cited in Samson, 2013, p. 50).
2. **Phenomenological Approach:** This approach to teaching concentrates on feelings, thoughts and experiences. The phenomenological approach is the objective study of all religions from the point of view of the adherents of a given faith (Smart 1971; Wright & Vale, 1997 as cited in Samson, 2013, p. 50). One of the advantages of the phenomenological approach is that it helps students to study, understand, appreciate and tolerate people with different faiths (Groenwegen, 1993 as cited in Samson, 2013, p. 51).
3. **Experiential Approach:** The approach emphasizes the need to understand the inner spiritual aspects of religion (Watson, 1993; Wright & Vale, 1997 in Samson, 2013, p. 52). The experiential approach, through meditation and stilling exercises, helps students to understand their own inner world, that is, spiritual experiences which in turn helps them to value other people's spiritual experiences (Groenwegen, 1993 in Samson, 2013, p. 52).
4. **Ethnographic Approach:** The Ethnographic approach takes care of the multiplicity of interpretations and expression within a faith tradition (Wright & Vale, 1997; Cooling, 2003 in Samson, 2013, p. 52). The Christian Religion has doctrines which the various denominations differ from each other, but with this approach these biases are subdued. Therefore, Smith, (1995 in Samson, 2013, p. 53) opined that "A Joint CRE syllabus takes care of the interdenominational differences".
5. **Thematic Approach:** This approach teaches religious content by themes cutting across several religions. Such themes include pilgrimage, religious buildings, sacred books or celebrations (Wright & Vale, 1997 as cited by Samson, 2013, p. 53). Thematic approach is also possible within the same religion (Chapman 1975); NDC

& MOES, 2008 as cited by Samson, 2013, p. 53). The thematic approach makes CRE (Christian Religious Education, Emphasis ours) more relevant to the lives of the learners (Rutebuka, 1984; Maani & Kenyi, 2005; Groenwegen, 1993 in Samson, 2013, p. 53).

6. **Religious Literacy Approach:** With this approach learners become aware of the functions of religion in the life of individuals. The Religious Literacy Approach equips students with key skills which they use to explore and understand religious explanations about different aspects of life before they make their own conclusions (Cooling, 2003 in Samson, 2013, p. 54). This approach to teaching of Religion as seen by Epstein, 2002 & Kyriacou, 1997 in Samson, 2013, p. 54) is similar to the constructivist approach as it is learner-centred where the learners are contributive to their learning.
7. **Learner-Centred Approach:** This approach is equivalent to discovery method. According to Cox (1983) in Samson (2013, p. 54) “The teacher makes up his/her mind in advance on what students should discover”.
8. **Life Approach:** Life approach is a teaching method that is concerned with critical thinking and it also accommodates full participation of students as it lays on their experiences. Therefore, Onsongo (2001) as cited by Jebungei (2013, p. 272) sees life approach as “starting to teach with the real and concrete and the present situation of the learners, and letting them arrive at a religious understanding of those experiences”. The approach implies that God speaks to the people through their situations and experience and emphasizes the use of the learner's day-to-day experiences as the basis of teaching CRE (Jebungei, 2013, p. 272).

The two approaches to the teaching of Religious Studies as initiated by the writers are:

- a. **Intuitive Discussion Method:** This method allows students to solve problems in the classroom from their intuitions while teaching and learning take place. The method requires critical thinking on the part of the students. The lecturer introduces the concept and the students discuss it without being dependent on existing materials. Otherwise, the method is learner-centered. The method develops the thinking faculty of the learners. It is similar to constructivist approach. It involves creativity, that is, students creates their own ideas.
- b. **Expo-Discovery Method (Expository Discovery Method):** This method exposes the students to new experiences as they seek solutions to problems without the lecturer being involved. The lecturer introduces the problem for the students to solve on their own. Each student strives to find solution to the problem. They move out to seek answers to the situation at hand. This method is discovery approach to learning. It exposes the students to the world around them as the lecturer is not seen as the sole accumulator of knowledge.

These two methods are student centred. For this reason, the outcomes of learning are fixed in the long term memory.

## Qualities of a Good Teacher of Religious Studies

The success of students at times depends on the professional and personal qualities of the teacher. Byaruhanga (2018, pp. 229-240) outlined the following as the qualities of a good teacher of Christian Religious Education:

- a. **Acculturation:** This has to do with modifying groups' and individuals' culture, behavior, beliefs and values by borrowing from or adapting to other cultures. A good teacher of Christian Religious Education should be seen as a provider of culture and one who is cultured. He or she must be knowledgeable in culture and its values and be ready to transmit it to the students.
- b. **Guide:** A good teacher of Christian Religious Education should have the ability to identify a potential in a student and help such student to realize the potential. As in the past a good teacher of Christian Religious Education tried to mold the student to be like him or her or still better than him or her. In the contemporary times, a good teacher of Religious Education notices the student's fears, anxieties, and shortcomings, and has the confidence that there is something that needs to be developed in the student and works towards it by having a friendly relationship with the student which eventually arouses the interest of the student to learn. A good teacher of Religious Education should know the level of understanding of the students for him or her to know the appropriate teaching methods or techniques to teach the students.
- c. **Competence:** A good teacher should be conversant with the syllabus. This can only be realistic if the teacher is able to overcome some of the uncommon failures in the teaching of the subject. These uncommon failures in the presentation of the subject matter can be overcome if, the teacher knows the general aim of teaching the subject. This knowledge helps the teacher in gathering important materials and in choosing relevant methods to be used in teaching. The teacher of Religious Education should be well trained in the skills of teaching the subject. Teachers should engage in refresher courses, seminars and conferences to get updated and add to their former training as the teaching skills change from time to time.
- d. **Communicator:** A good teacher of Christian Religious Education should have communication skills. Communication is more than writing notes on the chalkboard or lecturing. It is more than asking questions about facts and term it a discussion. Communication means transmitting facts from the teacher to the students. If the student does not get the message, it then means that communication has not taken place. Good teachers are those who have developed strong communication skills to enable them transmit messages to different students with different temperaments.
- e. **Christian Religious Principles:** A good Christian Religious Education teacher is expected to follow the Christian Religious Principles which will help the students to reach the required highest religious purpose in life. In the course of teaching the Christian Religious principles to the students, the teacher should not in any way present the traditions and dogmas of other religions in a sense that is inappropriate,

but speak positively about other religious denominations and traditions. Care should be taken by the teacher not to stick to his or her own religious views, thereby disregarding the views of the students.

- f. **Perseverance:** As usual teachers experience difficulties in the teaching – learning process. This is as a result of the existing nature of the teaching and learning process. The teacher should be courageous not to accept defeat. The teacher of Christian Religious Education should develop a positive attitude towards the subject, and this attitude comes from preparing lessons, schemes of work and methodology in delivering the lesson. With this the teacher will enjoy the teaching-learning process as he or she will enter the classroom fully prepared to deliver lessons to the students for the acquisition of knowledge, skills and development of acceptable attitudes.
- g. **Responsible:** Good teachers of Christian Religious Education should be responsible. In Christian Religion, this quality is measured in terms of how much the teacher is interested in the subject and in the students. If a teacher has no interest in the subject and in the students, the result is a negative attitude portrayed by the students towards the subject. The teacher must be committed to the students to enable the student achieve his or her purpose. Committed teachers are student-centred. A responsible teacher enjoys teaching the subject and places students at the centre of everything.
- h. **Imaginative:** A good teacher of Christian Religious Education should be able to instil imaginative quality in the students for them to be interested in the subject. For this quality to be developed, the teacher should have well-prepared lesson plans. When a teacher is imaginative, the teaching-learning process becomes lively as he or she answers correctly questions posed by the students. In this way, the teacher will be able to guide the students in facing challenges from scientific and social changes. For the teacher to develop imagination he or she should be flexible and always ready to accept suggestions from students.
- i. **Humour:** A sense of humour is useful in the Christian Religious Education class. A teacher's sense of humour is seen in the way he or she shares with students some amusement in a situation. Such amusement might be a joke. A teacher will gain his or her students' confidence by being efficient and showing polite respect for students and humour. The teacher's sense of humour should be such that he or she exercises order and control of the class. The teacher should be conscious of making jokes so that the students will not be tired of constant jokes. The ability to employ humour to yield good result and establish a friendly atmosphere without being too friendly, requires high discipline on the teacher's side.

### Challenges Facing the Teaching and Learning of Religious Studies

There are challenges facing the successful teaching and learning of the course. These challenges are:

- a. **Instructional Resources:** The teaching and learning of Religious Studies is faced with inadequate textbooks and classrooms for the teaching and learning process. Scarcity of Classrooms sometimes affect the time allotted to teach the course as students run around looking for free classrooms to stay and receive their lectures. This is supported by Dinama, Jeremiah Sihlupheki-Jorowe, Keakantse, Kemoabe, Kgaswe, Motshosi & Sebina (2017, p. 76) as they view shortage of textbooks and classrooms as major challenge. Some lecturers cannot produce textbooks as the students are few in number. This is because the production cost is high.
- b. **Teaching Methods:** Some teachers do not use varying teaching methods in delivering their lessons. Different methods of teaching should be adopted by the teacher to accommodate the different learners in a class. Methods that are learner-centred are best to actualize learning. Dinama, Jeremiah, Sihlupheki-Jorowe, Keakantse, Kemoabe, Kgaswe, Motshosi & Sebina (2016, p. 77) are of the view that if teachers continue to vary their teaching methods and involve students, learning could be fruitful and lead to improvement in students' academic performance.
- c. **Negative Attitude Towards the Subject:** Students have negative attitude towards the subject. They see the subject as less important unlike the sciences. Some who are studying it in the university see it as a last resort as they could not meet up with the cut off mark of other desired courses. Negative comments by some of the stakeholders negatively influence the attitudes of the learners when it comes to choice of the subject for career choice since negative comments lower the status of the subject making the implementers lack the morale to effectively play their role in the implementation process (Amugah, 2017, p. 23)
- d. **Use of Non-Specialists for the Subject:** In some secondary schools some teachers who teach the subject are specialists in other areas. The subject is seen as Bible-centred which anyone can teach and if not handled well students will lack interest in the subject and this leads to discarding it as a career choice in the university. The University of Worcester Summary Report on Conference (2013, p. 13) confirms that the non-specialists being used to teach Religious Education may not have the required subject knowledge to provide pupils with an informative experience and answer their questions.

## Recommendations

The following recommendations account for the use of these innovative method-Intuitive Discussion Method and Expo-Discovery Method (Expository-Discovery Method):

- With the methods, students of Religious Studies will have to put more interest in the teaching and learning process.
- The methods will discourage students from solely concentrating on lecturer's textbooks.
- The method will make students have the zeal to discover things for

themselves outside the school environment, thereby making them research-oriented.

- The methods will help develop students' thinking skill. This will make students value Religious Studies as their interest is aroused.

## Conclusion

Education is the backbone of every nation. For the economic growth of a nation to be achieved, the citizens must be educated. The teaching of Religious Studies to students is important because it instils morality in them, thereby molding them to be good citizens. Proper teaching methods should be used to actualize this dream of instilling morality and fear of God in the future leaders. Methods that are learner-centred are recommendable because when learning is learner-centred the outcomes are positive and fixed in the long term memory.

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