

**RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS:  
POLICY, PRACTICE AND MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

**FASASI, YUNUS ADEBUNMI (Ph.D.)**

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Department of Educational Management,  
University of Ilorin, Nigeria.  
E-mail Address: [adefasas@yahoo.com](mailto:adefasas@yahoo.com)

**ABSTRACT**

*This paper examines policy, practice and management implications of religious education in Nigerian secondary schools. Religious education is categorized, in the National Policy on Education, as an optional subject. Its teaching and learning are inadequate in the junior and senior classes of secondary schools. This could have led to deficiency in moral knowledge of the graduates of our educational institutions, which makes them engage in different forms of corrupt practices in their professional and social lives. As government's efforts to stamp out corruption are yet to yield desired results, it is suggested that the policy on religious education should be revisited. Specifically, it is recommended that religious education should be made a core subject in junior and senior secondary schools. It is also recommended that competent teachers should be employed for the subject in all secondary schools, and that Arabic language should be given more attention in the schools in order to make the teaching and learning of Islamic Studies more effective. Finally, moral aspects of religious education should be included in the general studies courses of tertiary institutions.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Development of human resources is vital to a nation's political, social and economic survival. In realization of this, Government of Federal Republic of Nigeria is investing on education of its citizens. Thus, the Government has 'adopted education as an instrument "per excellence" for effecting national development' (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.4). Education, therefore, aims at developing skilled and

committed manpower that will be employed in establishments, organizations and industries to produce goods and services.

On employment, the individuals are expected to be hardworking, honest and obedient, so as to contribute positively towards the attainment of their organizational objectives. As a result, each establishment spells out rules and regulations which are meant to guide the employees within and outside their work environment.

Furthermore, the Federal Government has set up Code of Conduct Bureau, to monitor workers and to ensure that the establishments in which they are serving are corrupt-free. Another effort towards injecting sanity into the nation's workforce was the Federal Government's mounting of programmes such as 'War Against Indiscipline', (WAD), 'War Against Indiscipline and Corruption' (WAIC) and 'Ethical Revolution'. The Government also established the 'Economic and Financial Crime Commission' (EFCC) and the 'Independent Corrupt Practices and other related offences Commission' (ICPC). In Lagos State, the State Government initiated 'Kick Against Indiscipline'. These efforts were backed by the constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (1999), which stated that, "The national ethics shall be Discipline, Integrity, Dignity of Labour, Social Justice, Religious Tolerance, Self Reliance and Patriotism". p.13.

However, Nigeria, judged by the behaviour of her citizens within and outside the country, was rated the second most corrupt nation in the world (Noha, 2003). While the efforts towards stamping out corruption are in the right direction, one could easily conclude that they have not been effective. Corruption seems to be on the increase in all nooks and crannies of the nation.

Incidentally, the nation's education industry, which is meant to refine young Nigerians and prepare them for their future roles of projecting positive social practices, seems to be helpless in salvaging the situation. According to Ezekwesili, (2006, p.52), education is suffering from 'systemic dysfunction at all levels'. This poses a challenge to all stakeholders in education, especially policy makers, educational administrators and curriculum experts.

Religion, an aspect of school curriculum, is meant to bring moral and spiritual rejuvenation into the society. Through religion, human being has been able to know the good from the bad, the right from the wrong, and the profitable from the disadvantageous (Majasan, 1995). However, religious education as it is today seems not to have been achieving its objectives. This is probably due to existing government's policy on religious education and the manner of its implementation.

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In this paper, therefore, issues arising from government's policy on religious education at the nation's secondary school level are examined. Properly managed, religious education should be able to play its role as an agent of societal purification.

### **Government's Policy on Religious Education in Secondary Schools.**

Curriculum for Nigerian secondary education was designed by the government and its agents, based on the national needs and aspirations. The subjects to be taught in schools are stated by the government and they include religious education, among others. Religious education is also referred to as religious instruction, religious studies and religious knowledge. At secondary school level it comprises of Bible Knowledge and Islamic Studies.

Inclusion of religious education in the curriculum makes it a part of the entire education system, which the government intends to utilize as a tool for national development. Thus, it is considered relevant to the needs of Nigerian citizens. It is probably in recognition of this, the government stated that: "Opportunity shall continue to be made for religious instruction...." (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004, p.10).

In junior secondary schools, the government gave guidelines on choice of subject, which could be offered by students. There are three groups of subjects. They are group 'A' core subjects; Group B; Pre-Vocational Electives; and, Group C: Non-Prevocational Electives. (See Appendix 1). Religious knowledge is one of the three subjects under group C. Others are Physical and Health Education, and Arabic. As stated in the policy, every student must offer a minimum of 10 and a maximum of 13 subjects in the following order:

- a. All the eight subjects in Group A
- b. At least one subject each from groups B and C (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2004 pp 19 & 20).

At senior secondary level, the curriculum consists of three groups of subjects. These are: Group A: core subjects; Group B: Vocational electives, and Group C: Non-vocational Electives. Bible knowledge and Islamic studies are two out of sixteen subjects in-group C (See Appendix 2).

The government has stipulated the mode of subject selection from each group. Students are expected to take the six core subjects in group A and a minimum of one and a maximum of two from the list of elective subjects in group Band C.

Choice of subjects at both junior and senior secondary levels is a matter of government policy. The Government decides on subjects to be offered, prepares subject content and gives approval to its implementation. This implies that policy-making on all aspects of school curriculum lies with the government.

### **Practice of Religious Education in Secondary Schools**

Government policy on religious education is implemented in secondary schools. In the process, the principals and their subordinates are expected to comply with Government's directive. They also consider learners' interest and abilities. At junior secondary level, religious education is not included among compulsory subjects. Hence, students may not include it in their chosen subjects. At senior secondary level, selection of religious education is open only to willing Arts students. In practice, therefore, it is not all students that offer the subject at junior secondary level. The number that offers it at secondary level would be fewer.

In allocation of teaching periods on the school timetable, the practice is to give priority to all core-subjects in the junior secondary curriculum. The elective subjects are to share the remaining periods. In this situation, religious education hardly gets two periods per week. In senior secondary levels, religious education does not feature in science, social sciences and vocational students' classes. It appears on art classes' timetable.

Therefore, it could be inferred that acquisition of knowledge in religious education is inadequate for many students in secondary schools. Some students may not have the opportunity to offer it at all. This practice has been in vogue ever before the introduction of National Policy on Education (Ozigi & Canham, 1979). The new policy merely endorsed and documented it.

Also, as a result of optional status of the subject, many school administrators, teachers, students and parents do not attach importance to its acquisition. They see it as irrelevant to professions which are science or social science based. They also see it as a subject, which could be learnt informally at home or semi-formally in religious institutions. Some even prefer other elective subjects as better alternatives in their choice of subjects for arts-related professions.

Moreover, the status of religious education as an optional subject could have affected the level of recognition given to its teachers. The society, within and outside the

school system, seem to recognize the teachers for their pastoral services, more than their roles in religious and moral instruction.

Conclusively, Islamic study, one of the subjects under religious education, has its own peculiarity. It has a complementary subject, which is Arabic language, and without which its teaching and learning will be ineffective. Incidentally, Arabic as a subject on school curriculum hardly surfaces on junior and senior secondary schools timetables.

### **Implications for Policy Makers and Practitioners**

National policy on religious education views the subject as an academic discipline. Also, students have the feelings that they do not need its knowledge in order to become a professional. However, religious education could enhance performance in every profession. Moral and ethical values expected of good professionals are initially imbibed from religious education. Therefore, a comprehensive planning of the curriculum, which takes care of moral upbringing of all prospective manpower of the nation, is required.

Educational managers are expected to ensure the development of human resources for various sectors of the economy. They should work towards an all round development of students in their institutions. In doing this, religious education, which is the only subject on the curriculum that directly addresses moral issues, should be given adequate attention.

At school level, therefore, the subject needs proper planning and staffing with competent personnel. Students also need to be counselled towards understanding its moral and ethical values, in addition to its academic significance.

### **Recommendations**

It should be realized that there is a moral dimension to all professions. This is probably the reason why each profession has its ethics, which workers are expected to uphold. Unless the moral aspect is adequately catered for, the nation's investments in all sectors of the economy can hardly be productive. School administrators are to rise up to this challenge. Hence, the following suggestions are worthy of consideration.

Religious education should be made a core subject in all classes of junior and senior secondary schools. For six years of secondary education students will acquire

knowledge on different aspects of moral education. This will prepare them towards high moral standard of life in the larger society and in the work environment.

Also, competent teachers should be appointed for religious education in all secondary schools. Parents-Teachers Association and other associations should assist in this direction as they do for other subjects and programmes in schools.

Islamic education has its own peculiarity. Its teaching and learning are easier with the knowledge of Arabic language. Hence, it is recommended that Arabic language should be given more attention in terms of teaching and learning.

For continuity after secondary education, moral aspects of religious education should be entrenched into General Studies courses of tertiary institutions. Thus, graduates of our educational institutions will be morally conscious in whatever profession they find themselves.

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## Appendix I

### Junior Secondary School (JSS) Subjects

#### Group A .Core:

- (i) English
- (ii) French
- (iii) Mathematics
- (iv) Language of environment
- (v) One major Nigerian language other than that of the environment.
- (vi) Integrated science
- (vii) Social studies and citizenship education
- (viii) Introductory technology

#### Group B Pre- Vocational Electives

- (i) Agriculture
- (ii) Business studies
- (iii) Home economics
- (iv) Local crafts
- (v) Computer Education
- (vi) Fine Arts
- (vii) Music

#### Group C Non-Prevocational Electives

- i) Religious knowledge
- ii) Physical and Health Education
- iii) Arabic

**Selection of Subjects at JSS:** Every student must offer a minimum of 10 and maximum of 13 subjects;

- All subjects in group A
- At least one subject each from groups B and C.

**Source:** Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) National policy on education. (4<sup>th</sup> Edition) Lagos: NERDC pp. 19 & 20.

## Appendix II

### Senior Secondary School (SSS) Subjects

#### Group A: Core

- (i) English language (ii) Mathematics  
(iii) A major Nigerian Language (iv) One of Biology, Chemistry, Physics or Health Science (v) One of Literature-in-English, History Geography or Religious Studies (vi) A vocational subject

#### Group B: Vocational Electives

- (i) Agriculture (ii) Applied Electricity (iii) Auto-Mechanics  
(iv) Book-Keeping & Accounting (v) Building Construction  
(vi) Computer Education (vii) Commerce (viii) Electronics  
(ix) Clothing and Textiles (x) Food and Nutrition  
(xi) Home Management (xii) Metal work (xiii) Technical Drawing (xiv) Wood work (xv) Shorthand  
(xvi) Typewriting (xvii) Fine Art (xviii) Music

#### Group C: Non-Vocational Electives

- i) Biology (ii) Chemistry (iii) Physics  
(iv) Further Mathematics (v) French (vi) Health Science  
(vii) Physical Education (viii) Literature-in-English (ix) History  
(x) Geography (xi) Bible knowledge  
(xii) Islamic Studies (xiii) Arabic (xiv) Government  
(xv) Economics (xvi) Any Nigerian Language that has orthography and literature.

#### Selection of Subjects at SSS

Every student shall take the six core subjects in Group A and a minimum of one, and a maximum of two, from the list of elective subjects in Groups B and C, to give a minimum of seven and maximum of eight subjects. One of the three elective subjects may be dropped in the last year of senior secondary school course.

**Source:** Federal Republic of Nigeria (2004) *National policy on education*. (4<sup>th</sup> Edition). Lagos: NERDC pp. 19 & 20.