

Restructuring Religious Education for Development Sustainability in the 21st Century Nigeria

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Abstract

The importance of education to national development and growth especially in Nigeria cannot be overlooked. It plays vital roles in the resources essential for societal growth and it should be noted that these resources include human resources as individuals are responsible for nation building. Education comprises basic knowledge and skills required for sustainable living. These knowledge and skills constitute moral values and codes which are learnt through religious education. Hence, religious education remains vital and relevant particularly in the 21st century Nigeria. In the 21st century, religious education in Nigeria continues to experience problems ranging from the implementation of irrational educational policies by the constituted authorities particularly against educational system, poor funding, mismanagement and misappropriation, political instability, bad governance, just to mention a few. It is not a dispute that these lingering issues have indented the place of religious education and its values in the educational system which has been debased. Nevertheless, acquiring quality education should be measured on global standards, such that the acquired knowledge could match up with the global scale. Therefore, it is crucial to revisit and reconstruct religious education particularly to conform to the 21st century Nigerian society. This is to attain a stable and life - long relevance within the Nigerian educational system. It is a qualitative discourse and it engages primary and secondary sources of data information, it adopts the functional theory which spells out the functions of religious education to the national development particularly in the 21st century as well as the theory of relevance which reflects the relevance of religious education as tool to instill morals and mould individuals into good and patriotic citizens. It includes discussions on the challenges militating against religious education in the 21st century. The relevance of religious education at this era, and recommended suggestable strategies to sustain its relevance further into the future.

Keywords: Religion, education, religious education, restructuring, life - long relevance.

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Introduction

Education is the bedrock for the socio - economic and political development of any society. This perhaps explains why Adeolu posited that education is the “unquestionable pathway” to the development of any individual (Adeolu, 2020). Hence restructuring in the education sector as a process of reforms and amendments should not be an integral part of any social institution particularly at the national level. Reform is inevitable. More so that it is required and essential for the longevity and continuity of a systematic process or procedure. The educational system in Nigeria is liable to reforms and amendments, as such that it meets up with the trending demands and requirements and keeping pace with the global education standards and quality, (Ilori, 2005). Religious education is part of the Nigerian curriculum and not excluded from reforms and amendments due to its inadequacies.

Education in Nigeria could be attributed to several positive implications, which have fostered the advancement of the nation. Nigerian education in decades has been known to be a tool for direction, adjustment and self - actualization (Ola - Ojo, 2015). It has been a transformation tool for social change and socialization. Education holds great relevance to the citizens and the larger Nigerian society. As Agbonlahor states: education helps to build human resources, mould characters and personality, empower and discipline, foster a democratic citizenship, and also facilitate good leadership and efficiency (Agbonlahor, 2011).

However, one could clearly observe that the current disposition of religious education and educational system in Nigeria is not pleasant, it is losing its relevance such that Nigerians no longer prioritize education coupled with the fact that religious education is becoming dormant, less valued and being substituted with some other forms of education. For instance, civic education or citizenship education. Religious education is losing its relevance, admits irrational educational policies resulting from religious sentiments, selfish pursuits particularly among the stakeholders in education sector in Nigeria.

Functionalist Theory on Religious Education

The functionalist theory is an approach that focuses on the functionality of religious education. It should be noted that this approach reiterates that the functions of education and functions of religion as separate bodies, are as well conjoined as religious education. The functionalists stress that religious education satisfies some essential needs of people, such as: group cohesion, companionship and socialization (Segal, 2005). According to this perspective, the society is an embodiment of many parts connected to each other and bonded together by values, (Hammack & Ballantine,

2009). The functionalist approach places more importance on social relations as compared to individualism, it maintains that the continuity of the society supersedes the existence of the individual. Hence each member of the society plays a functional role in maintaining a balance in the society and the continuity of the society. To the functionalist, religious education helps to meet the needs of society and maintain stability. Religious education gives a sense of identity

through the imparting of core values and designation of relevant roles, (Hammack & Ballantine, 2009). Meanwhile, Strenski in 2006, explained further that the positive growth and development of a society is based on established societal values and these values aid social unity, social identity, cooperation and social goals (Strenski, 2006). However, these values are attained through religious education.

Functionalists posit that religious education serves two basic functions, these are: (i) The latent functions. (ii) The manifest functions. Hammack & Ballantine describe the manifest functions as the intended functions through policies, social patterns and social actions (Hammack & Ballantine, 2009). These are the expectations and fulfillments of the social Institutions. These manifest functions include: (a) change and innovation (b) socialization (c) social control (d) role allocation (e) cultural transmission. The latent functions are regarded as the processes and actions that social Institutions put in place to achieve the expected goals. These functions are not usually obvious. They include the establishment of social networks, engaging in group works, creating generation gap and restricting activities. The key functionalists include: Emile Durkheim, Parson, Davis and Moore (Segal, 2005). At this juncture, it should be indicated that despite the strengths and significant functions of religious education, its positive functionality has been criticised. It is stated that religious education also impacts negatively to the society as it creates room for inequality, social discrimination, social stratification and competition (Durkheim, 1956).

The Theory of Relevance

Hulleman & Harackiewicz describe the Relevance Theory as the framework for understanding the interpretation of utterances (Hulleman & Harackiewicz, 2009). The theory was propounded by Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson on the basis of the principle that every utterance made has a dot of information relevant enough and worthy of the efforts involved in processing it. Hence, the theory becomes applicable to religious education in the sense that it plays significant roles individually and collectively. These roles are relevant to social developments of society and the nation at large. However, the problem arises when this relevance is faced with threats; when it loses its worth particularly at national level, and its value declines. Hence there is need for restructuring, reforms or amendments.

Religious Education

It should be noted that religious education is a combination of two independent phenomenal terms, “Religion” and “Education”. Religion according to the Webster dictionary is simply the belief in and worship of a superhuman, especially God or gods. It is further explained that it includes a social cultural system, designated behaviours and practices, beliefs, prophecies, ethics, sacred places that connect humans to the transcendental and spiritual elements. This view is supported by Stibich who particularly included holy places, religious feasts, religious symbols, meditation, even prayers and ecstatic expressions, (Stibich, 2021). At the other

end, education is a process that involves receiving and giving instructions, particularly in a formal manner, within the four walls of the classroom. More so, it is the impartation and acquisition of knowledge to prepare oneself for sustainable life (Gerald, 2019). The Britannica summarises education to be the transmission of knowledge, skills, and character traits. Nevertheless, education could be formal or informal, classroom or out of classroom. Therefore, religious education could be described as the impartation of knowledge about religious beliefs, doctrines, customs and rites for intellectual, moral and personality development.

Education in the 21st Century (The Nigerian Experience)

Deducing from the Gregorian calendar, the 21st century is the current era. The 21st century took its count from 01 January, 2001 (MM) and will end on 31 December, 2100 (MMC). It is the first century of the third (3rd) millennium. Driscoll described the 21st century as the Machinery Age and this is due to the rapid and massive series of technical innovations and technological growth and development; individually and communally (Driscoll, 2023). Explaining further, Driscoll said that learners at this age are referred to as the generations and generation Alpha, learners bred with advanced technology, both in the home and within the walls of the classrooms. The century is controlled by the younger generation with vast knowledge and great skills in technical abilities brilliant with the use of electronic applications and programmed codes, unlike the older ages who flipped pages. In fact, more than half of Nigerian learners are technologically literate, well skilled in computers and computer programming, and brave with codes alongside the appropriate application. It should be acknowledged that these learners do not necessarily need to be taught or tutored to attain such knowledge and skills. They are able to do that by themselves, at their chosen pace and with utmost comfort. It is also deduced that learners in the 21st century do not limit their acquisition of knowledge and skills to their immediate environment. However, they explore beyond the national borders of Nigeria. Al- Hassan observes that the 21st century learners particularly in Nigeria, explore the international educational terrains to seek knowledge and skills, this is possible via the series of electronic and computerized software applications and programmes coupled with the borderless experience learning by travelling off the shores of Nigeria (Al- Hassan, 2015). Students and learners in Nigeria today are intelligent, independent and very capable, their vast knowledge and skills in technology have opened international doors, their technological knowledge and skills now rate at international level, as compared to decades ago. They fit well into the global educational growth pace as well as they interact excellently with their international counterparts.

To keep relevance in the 21st century, particularly in Nigeria, education should include imparting into learners the appropriate skills required for sustainable and stable life. These skills and knowledge must be complemented with the appropriate moral codes, ethical teachings, religious values, that will help to foster positive moral personality needed by individuals to live a purposeful life. This shows the relevance of religious education in the 21st century. The 21st

century education in Nigeria flows in a pattern that helps learners to grow intellectually and confidently, more so religious education provides the moral and religious backup to push their confidence towards positive and purpose yielding goals (Anderson, 2004). In view of this, P21 identified four skills essential for purposeful education pursuit in this era. These are: creativity (the ability to relay and replicate knowledge and skills acquired), critical thinking (the ability to reason positively, to be able to proffer solutions to tasks), communication (ability to interact positively within and without the subject environment) and collaboration (this is the ability to participate in communal projects or group assignments, to be able to take up role plays in life, to be responsible). Digital integration is also fundamental to attaining a thorough 21st century education. However, it should be utilized strategically to build and improve learners and not just being a teaching method as it is presently the case in Nigeria, (Driscoll, 2023). More attention should be paid to digital technology in Nigeria, such that Nigerians can compete effectively with the modern world, (Al - Hassan, 2015).

The Relevance of Religious Education in Nigeria

Ilori (2005), posits that religious education is an all-round education. It aims at moulding learners mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. This makes it a force as it indulges the learners to add value to life and existence. Therefore, in 21st century Nigeria, religious education becomes more necessary in a society shaken by social maladies and moral backwardness among the youths and adults.

Relevance of Religious Education

The following are the relevance of religious education: moral development as religious education develops sound characters and it is a means towards reviving the moral inadequacies of Nigerian learners, making them to become good and patriotic citizens (Korb, 2014). Another relevance of religious development. In an attempt to train clergymen, religious education involves spiritual, physical, and intellectual development, (Oladeji, 2014). In addition to this is nation building. Nation building in Nigeria is a phenomenon attached to the dilemma of a people characterized by diversities but bound together by a common historical experiences. To this end, nation building is about participation in which all citizens regardless of ethnicity, religion, political affiliation and social class, cooperating with the government in order to maintain law and order. In addition, Kayode highlights some other relevance of religious education in Nigeria. These include: promoting national unity and international understanding, curbing and eradicating social inequalities, poverty, prostitution, highway robbery, hunger, epidermis, illiteracy, ignorance, injustice, corruption, electoral malpractice and other vices of individuals that pose threat to national reputation, (Kayode, 2019), providing individual happiness and pleasure, self-realization, public morality and aesthetic development. However, the (National Policy on Education 2013) emphasizes that Nigerian education at all levels is to be channeled towards inculcating values such as : respect for the worth and dignity of the individual, faith in man's ability to make rational decisions, moral and spiritual principles in inter - personal and human

relations, shared responsibility for the common good of the society, promotion of the physical, emotional, and psychological development of all children, and acquisition of functional skills and competencies necessary for self-reliance, (FRN 2013). Sustaining the Relevance of Religious Education in Nigeria in the 21st century. In contemporary Nigerian society, religious education is more necessary than ever owing to the high rate of social maladies and moral backwardness among the youths and adults alike. The unhealthy and unpatriotic attitudes of citizens have made the nation's economy vulnerable to series of threatening occasions and circumstances such that national values are being trampled on and consequentially, its national reputation disregarded and disrespected internationally. Religious education is known to teach and impart morals and values such as respect, honesty, truthfulness, hard-work and diligence, tolerance and the likes. However, when there is a decline of relevance, these moral values become insignificant. The decline of relevance of religious education in Nigerian society is as a result of the mis-prioritization of national goals, mismanagement of available national resources, inappropriate educational policy implementation and execution by the stakeholders, selfish political aspirations, religious intolerance and conflicts, lack of and inadequate motivation of teachers and learners, alongside the indolent and nonchalant attitude of learners towards personal development, (Ajayi & Fabunmi, 2013). This has become a national issue and has aroused several debates and arguments and has also affected sectors of Nigeria's economy. More so, there are other deterrents affecting the relevance of religious education in this era, particularly in Nigeria. These include:

1. Funding and financing challenges.
2. Manpower challenges.
3. Information and Media Technology challenges.
4. Economic challenges.
5. Competence challenges. (Agbonlahor, 2011).

Conclusion

Religious education at whatever level is sine qua non to national development. The paper identifies several challenges militating against the sustenance and goals actualization of Religious Education. These challenges range from the inadequate educational policies, misappropriation and mismanagement in the implementation and execution of education and national policies, political interference of selfish political aspirants, and leaders, inadequate and uneven allocation of human resources particularly in schools and educational boards. For instance, when an engineer is made to oversee education matters, displacing the professionally trained and skilled educators, as well as low remuneration or welfare motivation for religious educators. There is need for a major reform and restructuring of the Nigeria's education system and a review within the stakeholders. It is now pertinent that the relevance of religious education in Nigeria particularly this 21st century, is one of the major keys to sustainable and stable growth and development, individually, communally and nationally.

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