

PERCEPTIONS OF NON-CHRISTIAN LEARNERS, PARENTS AND RELIGIOUS LEADERS ON SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN NDOLA DISTRICT OF ZAMBIA

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Abstract

The study mainly investigated the perceptions of non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders on multi-faith Religious Education (RE) in Zambia, focusing on selected secondary schools in Ndola district. It thus aimed at finding out the perceptions of non-Christian learners, parents and non-Christian religious leaders on secondary school RE. Being qualitative in nature, the study employed qualitative approaches, which are appropriate for studying people's attitudes, perceptions, views, opinions and feelings. This qualitative approach involved the use of interviews and focus group discussions with non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders; it also involved some relevant document analysis. The findings of the study showed that the non-Christian pupils, parents and non-Christian religious leaders perceived the senior secondary school RE syllabuses 2044 and 2046 as being more of Christian Education than

multi-faith RE as most of the topics in the syllabuses were about Christianity while their religious traditions were not adequately and correctly represented. Additionally, there were no teaching and learning materials for the non-Christian religions to facilitate proper teaching and learning.

The study therefore recommended that the Zambian secondary school RE syllabuses should be revised so that they become more inclusive in nature and content, thereby representing all stakeholders fully. In doing so, the leaders of the different religious traditions covered in RE should be consulted and involved in providing or producing relevant teaching and learning materials. The non-Christian religious leaders should be proactive in lobbying the Ministry of general Education to make Zambian RE more inclusive of their religions. Furthermore, teachers of RE should be sensitized to become more resourceful in finding relevant teaching and learning materials for topics involving non-Christian religions.

Key words: Religious Education, Multi-faith, Attitude, Perception, Religion, Christianity, Non-Christian

Introduction/Background

Zambia is a multi-religious country owing to the fact that, other than Christianity, there are other religions such as Islam, Hinduism, African Traditional Religion (ATR) and a few other minor religions existing in the country. As such, it is important that the teaching of RE in schools should include all religions found in the Zambian society, especially ATR which is the oldest religion in the country. Accordingly, during the 1977 Educational Reforms Zambia saw a fundamental reform of the education system and curriculum which led to the introduction of the teaching of the four major religions in Zambia namely, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and ATR. In addition, aspects of the Philosophy of Zambian Humanism which was largely socialist and guided the social and political system in the Second Republic (Simuchimba, 2005) were included in the syllabuses.

However, the change to multi-partism in 1991 reversed much of the gains in the pluralistic nature of RE. The declaration of Zambia as a ‘Christian nation’ by the second Republican President, Dr. Fredrick Chiluba, brought about a few unforeseen changes in the teaching of RE one of which was that the Christian rather than the multi-religious content of the subject syllabuses became more prominent. Simuchimba (2004) noted that some teachers of RE began their lessons with a prayer and a Bible reading; in some instances they even gave a brief sermon to the class. In addition, Carmody (2004) noted that even if Zambia was now officially a ‘Christian nation’, it was by no means a nation of Christians only as there were people who believed in other religions as well. Moreover, Article 1.4.1 of the amended 2016 constitution states that every person in Zambia is entitled to enjoy freedom of thought, conscience and is free to belong to any religion of choice.

Despite the lack of consensus among stakeholders, the Zambian government through the Ministry of Education has been consistent in providing for a multi-faith and pluralistic approach to RE in the country. Thus in both the national educational policy document, *Educating Our Future* (MoE, 1996) and the latest *Zambia Education Curriculum Framework* document (MESVTEE, 2013), the Ministry of Education, indicated the need for a continued educational approach to RE. Given this scenario where the Ministry of Education officially provides for a multi-faith approach to RE but

the subject syllabuses are largely Christian in content and where some of the actual practices in the teaching of the subject are not in line with the official policy, it is not clear what perceptions non-Christian stakeholders (learners, parents and religious leaders) have on the existing multi-faith RE syllabuses in secondary schools. It is against this background that the researchers were motivated to undertake this study, focusing on selected schools in Ndola District of Zambia.

Statement of the Problem

Since the mid-1980s, Zambian RE has been multi-faith in approach and the syllabuses have included the teaching of the main religions found in the country, namely Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Zambian Traditional Religion. However, despite this multi faith approach, the RE syllabuses have remained largely Christian in content, thereby raising concerns among some stakeholders (Simuchimba, 2005). Since the introduction of the multi-faith approach, there has been no major and focused study conducted to find out the perceptions of non-Christian stakeholders on the multi-faith RE syllabuses taught in secondary schools. So the perceptions of these non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders were unknown. It is this knowledge gap that this study intended to fill. If this study was not conducted, the non-Christian stakeholders' views would remain unknown and relevant authorities in the Ministry of Education would be unable to take the necessary decisions and actions to remedy the situation. Failure to address the negative perceptions, if any, would lead to the violation of these stakeholders' religious rights through education.

Objectives and significance of the study

The study's main objective was to find out and explain the perceptions of non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders on multi-faith RE in selected secondary schools of Ndola District in Zambia. The findings of this study may be helpful to the policy makers in the Ministry of Education, school administrators, and teachers of RE generally. The findings will provide data that can inform the policy makers and curriculum specialists on the perceptions or attitudes of non-Christian pupils, parents and religious leaders towards multi-faith RE in Ndola district and beyond. Additionally, the research findings will contribute to existing knowledge on the attitudes of pupils, parents and religious leaders towards RE generally. The research report or dissertation will also add to existing literature on RE in Zambia, which students and scholars of RE and religion generally might find useful and helpful.

Review of literature

Literature related to the study reviewed and discussed under three appropriate headings as follows:

RE in secondary schools

In a 2017 study, Boven analysed the field of RE in the Netherlands and Indonesia. The researcher found that children and youth attending both public and religiously affiliated schools did not learn enough about the diversity of the religious and world-view traditions that surrounded them. Contemporary policies and practices in both countries were insufficient when it came to stimulating religious literacy among the young. In Indonesia, teachers and religious scholars struggled with the question of how to make confessional RE more inclusive. In the Netherlands,

on-going discussions among teachers and religious scholars often concerned the position of religion in education in general.

Boven recommended that RE should be taught in accordance with general education criteria. It should encourage an impartial, balanced, non-discriminatory, inclusive and unbiased approach to teaching about religions and beliefs. The study by Boven is relevant to our study in that it shows how the lack of a real multi-faith approach to RE can negatively affect the attainment of religious literacy among learners in schools. This is partly what the current study is likely to bring out. However, Boven's study does not bring out the views of non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders, which the current study will endeavour to address.

In their study, Brandt, Day, Jero, Peryer and Straub (2012) sought to find out how Protestant Religious Education (PRE) promoted religious education and made an independent and necessary contribution to the general education provided by the schools in European Union (EU) member states. They found that PRE introduced pupils to, and allowed discussions of the spiritual, ethical and normative dimensions of life. The subject area introduced other religions and educated pupils about other cultures that were also formed by religious traditions. Within the school framework, PRE was related to the Christian faith in the specific tradition of the Reformation but did not duplicate the catechetical tradition of Protestant churches. The subject area was open to pupils of all faiths, and to those not professing any particular faith. Furthermore, it did not contain any missionary objective. PRE encouraged pupils to reflect on celebrations and ceremonies throughout life. It helped to build a Christian identity, widening the knowledge of all pupils and leading to a better understanding and respect of different religious traditions. The subject area also promoted tolerance, peace, justice and sensitivity to creation, thereby recognizing the importance of religion in a European as well as in a general democratic context.

The study Brandt *et al* adequately identifies the benefits of embracing the teaching of all religions in the school or curriculum through RE. Nevertheless, the study does not bring out the perceptions of non-Christian stakeholders on the religious content being offered. It is this gap, therefore, that the current study tries to fill.

Another important piece of literature was a position paper reported by Klutz (2015). In 2009 the Austrian Forum for Religious Education (AFRE) authored a position paper on denominational RE which emphasized the importance of denominational RE and rejected any form of school RE that merely informed about religion and religions. The AFRE claimed that teachers and pupils with their convictions, attitudes and beliefs were supposed to be brought into play, so that existential orientations as well as critical reflections on religion and churches were made possible in a wide variety of worldviews. With this approach, RE would have the ability to contribute to the education of young people's identities. However, the ÖRF expressed awareness of the existing multi-faith situation in schools and indicated that addressing this issue in a constructive manner was absolutely essential. Therefore, RE would keep an eye on the development of children's and young people's identities as well as on an appropriate handling of the diversity of religions and beliefs.

The AFRE position paper reported by Klutz above demonstrates the importance of both exclusivism and plurality in the teaching of RE. While the former would help to promote young people's identities, the latter would contribute to helping young people to make informed decisions about their faith. However, unlike our study, the position paper does not elaborate on the perceptions of non-Christian stakeholders on the content of RE at senior secondary school level.

Locally in Zambia, Chizelu (2006) conducted an important doctoral study in which he first explained that RE was (to-date) being taught with a single religious approach instead of using the multi-religious approach recommended by the Ministry of Education. He established that the teachers of RE were reluctant to use the multi-faith perspective directed by the state because of the influence of their religious affiliations and the (Christian) nature of the two senior secondary school syllabuses, 2044 and 2046. Being Christians, the majority of them felt that teaching multi-religious RE would compromise their consciences and faith. As such, they preferred to teach RE from a Christian point of view. With regard to content, Zambian secondary school RE was based on the Bible and Christian beliefs and values rather than those of other religions; Islam, Hinduism, and Indigenous Zambian Beliefs. Chizelu then concluded by suggesting and recommending that since the Zambian context was multi-religious, RE content should be multi-religious and serve the needs of pupils regardless of their religious faiths.

The forgoing study by Chizelu is related to our study in the sense that it covers many aspects of RE in Zambia, including the problem of the subject being predominantly Christian, which we also raise and discuss. However, while Chizelu's study focused on teachers as the main respondents, this study involved different non-Christian stakeholders, including pupils, parents, and religious leaders. Its findings will therefore be broader than those of Chizelu's study.

In 2016 Chizambe conducted a study aimed at finding out the attitudes of teachers of RE towards syllabuses 2044 and 2046 in the grant-aided, government or public, and private schools in Kapiri-mposhi District of Central Zambia. Interviews were used to collect data from the head teacher and three teachers of RE at each of the selected schools. Data collected revealed that the teachers of RE syllabus 2044 had negative attitudes towards syllabus 2046, describing it as too biblical, rigid, and not good for learners of today. Similarly, the teachers of syllabus 2046 had negative attitudes towards syllabus 2044, describing it as Catholic-oriented, political and difficult to teach. The study therefore, established that teachers of both syllabuses 2044 and 2046 had both positive and negative views on the two syllabuses, with each group of teachers having positive views about their syllabus and negative views about the other syllabus. The study recommended that the Ministry of General Education (MoGE) through the Directorate of Curriculum and Standards and CDC should either revise or merge the two syllabuses to foster harmony among the teachers. Additionally, relevant departments should provide schools with teaching and learning materials for both syllabuses in order to enhance the quality of teaching and learning of the subject.

This study by Chizambe is important to our study because it investigated teachers of RE's attitudes towards the two senior secondary school RE syllabuses, which serve as important reference points in our data analysis and discussion. However, our study goes far beyond Chizambe's by

investigating more stakeholders (non-Christian pupils, parents and religious leaders)'s perceptions of the two senior secondary school syllabuses, 2044 and 2046 and recommending that these should be taken into consideration in the revision of the syllabuses.

According to Mwale, Chita and Cheyeka (2016), the teaching of RE in Zambian schools became pluralistic owing to the fact that the status of other religions was legally at the same level as that of Christianity during the Second Republic. Other than the four major religions, RE also encompassed the teaching of Humanism, a philosophy adopted by the first Zambian President Dr. Kenneth Kaunda, which put man at the centre of all activities. However, the change to multi-partism in 1991 reversed much of the gains in the pluralistic nature of RE. The declaration of Zambia as a Christian nation by the Second Republican President, Dr. Fredrick J.T. Chiluba, made things worse as the Christian content of the subject syllabuses became more pronounced than multi-religious aspects. Currently, Zambia RE is not wholly multi-faith but just includes basic facts about the other main religions, i.e. Islam, Hinduism, and African Traditional Religion. So more could be done to make the subject more inclusive of the minority religions.

The foregoing study by Mwale, Chita and Cheyeka is very important to our study because it tries to explain the origins of pluralism and multi-faith RE in Zambia, which is an important background point to this study. The authors' conclusion that more needs to be done to make Zambian RE more inclusive is also very important because that is the direction which this study takes by bringing in the perceptions of non-Christian stakeholders to contribute towards the development of the subject.

Simuchimba, Cheyeka and Hambulo (2018) discussed RE as a school subject in Zambia in the last fifty years (as at 2014). They explained that the subject owes much of what it is today to the Christian missionaries who arrived in the 19th century. Their evangelical efforts were significant in shaping the educational enterprise as a whole and the nature of RE in particular. The authors then traced the historical evolution of RE in the country in order to provide an understanding of its changing faces in the past 50 years of independence. They showed how RE was transformed from an evangelical tool in the 1960s and 1970s to an educational subject from the 1980s onwards. In recording this history, they also provided an understanding of the place of religion and its value in the Zambian education system. They concluded their study by recommending that although the Zambian RE had attained the status of an educational school subject, it still needed to develop further in order to become fully relevant to modern democratic and pluralistic Zambian society.

The study by Simuchimba, Cheyeka and Hambulo is yet another important work which provides a very good foundation for our study. However, this study will go further by bringing out the views of the non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders and recommending that they should be included in the future development of the subject.

Perceptions of non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders on multi-faith RE in schools

A study aimed at establishing parents' experiences with and perceptions of their children's RE in Finland by Mesto (2019). RE is a mandatory subject in Finnish schools and is taught in groups consisting of children with the same religious backgrounds. The study found that despite the sometimes inadequate arrangements for Orthodox RE in schools, the parents were mostly happy with the subject and with their children's RE teachers. RE made the minority religious affiliation of Orthodox children both visible and invisible: their difference from the majority was exposed, but minority RE classes often took place outside of regular school hours and even outside of school premises. Although Mesto's study shows the views of parents as stakeholders in the teaching of RE, it does not bring out the views of other stakeholders such as religious leaders and learners. This is where our study goes beyond Mesto's work by including the perceptions or views of these other stakeholders in the teaching of RE in Zambia.

Similarly, Finn (2009) investigated parents' and teachers' views on the nature and purpose of RE in Victoria, Australia. The study found that most parents and the teachers were in agreement in most areas of RE, especially in areas associated with values, morality, individual spirituality and what might be termed religious literacy. Many parents endorsed the school as the primary place for their children to receive information about religion and chose to distance themselves from the RE process in favour of allowing the experts to take on the role on behalf of the family. Some parents also wished the school could take full responsibility of educating children about religion, with the expectation that the children would be fully exposed to the Catholic religious traditions, its teachings, ethics, liturgy and social justice practices.

The study by Finn above partly brings out the role of parents in the teaching and learning of RE. However, the study focuses only on Christianity, especially Catholicism, and does not bring out the views of non-Christian parents and non-Christian religious leaders. This is the gap which our study tries to fill by investigating the views and perceptions of non-Christian parents and religious leaders in Zambia, particularly those in Ndola District of Zambia.

Locally in Zambia, in his doctoral study Simuchimba (2005) investigated the views of Christian and non-Christian religious leaders (the Church umbrella bodies, top Moslem, Hindu and African Traditionalist leaders) on Zambian secondary school RE. His study found that there were mixed views among the religious stakeholders with the Catholic and main line Protestant church leaders having no big problem with the design of the RE syllabuses, the Evangelical church leaders expressing dissatisfaction with the lack of evangelical or biblical focus of the syllabuses, and the non-Christian leaders expressing dissatisfaction with the inadequate coverage of their religions in the syllabuses. Simuchimba recommended that in order to enhance the educational adequacy of Zambian RE, there was need for the Ministry of Education to consult and involve the non-Christian church leaders in future revisions of RE syllabuses, though both the Christian and non-Christian stakeholders had to accept that the RE syllabuses had to continue developing along the constitutional and education policy provisions for the subject.

This study by Simuchimba is very important to our study as it raised and discussed several issues that we also raise here. However, the main difference between the two studies is that this current study goes beyond the earlier study by bringing the views and perceptions of more stakeholders, the learners and parents, into consideration and discussion.

Methodology

The qualitative, descriptive design strategy was used in this study. According to Awoniyi, Aderanti and Tayo (2011), the descriptive design is concerned with collection of data for the purpose of describing and interpreting an existing condition or situation, practices that prevail, and held points of view. So the design was particularly chosen for its effectiveness in systematic collection and analysis of data in order to answer questions on a given problem. Currently, there is need to address various questions on the perceptions of non-Christian stakeholders towards the current multi-faith senior secondary school RE in Zambia, and Ndola district in particular. Bryman (2008) observes that qualitative research is a strategy that usually emphasizes words rather than quantifications in the collection and analysis of data. Thus the study discusses and explains stakeholder's views, perceptions and opinions on multi-faith RE in senior secondary schools with little if any quantifications.

MacMillan and Schumacher (2001) define a population as a group of elements or cases whether individuals, objects or events that conform to specific criteria, and to which we intend to generalise the results of research. The population for this study comprised of all the 29 public, mission and private secondary schools in Ndola District. The respondents included all non-Christian pupils, parents and non-Christian religious leaders in Ndola district. Thus all the secondary schools in Ndola District formed the target (or general) population and the sampling was done from them. White (2005) defines a sample as a group of subjects or situations selected from a larger population; it can also be described as the total number of units from which data can potentially be collected. Similarly, according to Kasonde-Nga'ndu (2013), a sample is the number of participants or elements selected from a universe to constitute a desired representation of a given population. In line with both these definitions, the sample size for this study comprised of 30 non-Christian learners of RE, 9 non-Christian parents, and 6 non-Christian religious leaders, bringing the total number to 45 participants or respondents.

The researchers employed purposive sampling techniques to arrive at the respondents to participate in the study. The researcher purposively targeted categories of stakeholders who would provide the information needed for the study. These were non-Christian pupils, parents and religious leaders. These were targeted because going by the objective of the study, they qualified to be the key informants. The non-Christian parents and religious leaders would provide original, genuine views and feelings about the multi-faith RE syllabuses taught in Zambian senior secondary schools. As the non-Christian learners of the multi-faith RE syllabuses in secondary schools, the pupils' views on the syllabuses would complement and enrich their parents and religious leaders' views and opinions on the multi-faith RE syllabuses.

According to Kasonde-Ng'andu (2013), research instruments refer to the tools a researcher uses in collecting the required data. In this study, the researchers used interviews with parents and religious

leaders, and focus group discussion with the learners to collect primary data. In addition, document analysis was used to collect additional secondary data from relevant documents and books, especially the senior secondary school syllabuses. These methods yielded adequate information to address the research problem. The triangulation of methods was needed because it helps to overcome flaws that are inherent in the use of one method only. As much as possible, open questions were used in order to allow for objective discussion with the respondents.

According to White (2008), data analysis is the climax of a research study and involves selecting, categorising and comparing, synthesising and interpreting the information gathered to provide explanations of the phenomenon of interest. Accordingly, upon the completion of interviews all audio-taped data were transcribed into Microsoft Word format. Data collected were coded and then analyzed repeatedly involving re-reading the interview transcripts to identify themes emerging from the respondent's answers. Afterwards, the coded data were analysed using a quick impressionistic summary corresponding to the emerging codes and research questions of the study.

Findings

The findings of the study are presented according to the main research questions and emerging themes from the data as detailed follows.

1. What are the perceptions of non-Christian learners on the current multi-faith RE in selected secondary schools of Ndola district?

In order to find out their perceptions on the current multi-faith senior secondary school RE, the non-Christian learners were asked what they thought about the RE they were learning in their schools. In response to this and other follow up questions, the learners gave various views from which the following themes emerged.

RE is not interesting

Generally, the learners complained that as a subject RE, was not interesting because it focused mainly on Christianity with very little on other religions. The learners expressed disappointment that the senior secondary school RE content was biased in favour of Christianity as the two syllabuses had little material content on other religions. For example, a grade 12 Moslem pupil from school 'A' said, "RE is not exciting because from grade 10 to 12, most of the stories are about Jesus." In addition, a Hindu learner from school 'B' said:

RE is boring because most of the content is on Christianity and there is very little on our religion. Actually, teachers fail to give more details on our religion when we ask questions during lessons.

Similarly, another Moslem learner complained: "RE contradicts our religious beliefs because during RE lessons, we are told that Jesus is the Son of God and he is God, but according to our religious beliefs and faith, Jesus is not God." Furthermore, a Moslem learner from school 'C' explained that:

There is no difference between what is taught in the church and what is learned in RE in class. I think for many Christian learners, RE lessons are just like a continuation of church lessons. Our religion is not there in what is taught.

Lack of relevant materials on non-Christian religions

The learners generally indicated that there were no reading materials on other religions as some of them had never even seen any other scriptures apart from the bible. A learner from school 'A' said: "There is little or no materials in our school on Hinduism, Islam and Zambian Traditional Religion, which makes learning about these religions difficult for us." Another learner from School 'C' added:

Learning about our religions is supposed to be enjoyable but it is challenging due to the lack of materials and information about these religions. Sometimes we are made to use photocopied materials, which are not clear and do not give us a full picture of what we are learning about.

Similarly, a learner from school 'D' added:

There are no religious materials in my school on non-Christian religions; materials like Hindu books and the Qur'an. I have never seen the Qur'an or any other religious books. Sometimes our teacher takes passages from writings on the Holy Scriptures of these religions and translates them, but the information is not very clear as it is not the original.

In concluding this section on the perceptions of non-Christian learners on the current multi-faith RE in senior secondary schools, the foregoing data indicate that the subject is not interesting to them, that the content of both syllabuses 2044 and 2046 is biased towards Christianity, and that relevant teaching and learning materials on the non-Christian religions is scanty.

2. What are the perceptions of non-Christian parents and religious leaders on multi-faith RE in selected secondary schools of Ndola district?

In order to find out their perceptions on the current multi-faith senior secondary school RE, representatives of the non-Christian parents of the Christian learners were asked what they thought about the RE their children were learning in schools. Similarly, the sampled non-Christian religious leaders in Ndola district were asked to give their views on the multi-faith senior secondary school RE syllabuses in secondary schools. In response to these and other follow up questions, both parents and religious leaders gave various views from which the following themes emerged.

RE is more Christian than multi-religious in content

All the non-Christian parents and religious leaders interviewed were unanimous in pointing out that the RE syllabuses' content was Christian with very little to do with other religions. One Hindu parent from community 'A' observed that secondary school RE syllabuses (2044 and 2046) were more Christian in nature and did not give much attention to other religions, which was not good for Hindu children. An African traditionalist parent from community 'A' had the following to say:

It is all Christianity. No African culture and traditions are taught in our schools. The behaviour of the youth is cut and paste; they copy Western culture. This has significantly resulted in the erosion of our Zambian cultural values and we are losing our identity.

More or less summing up the parents' and religious leaders' perceptions on the senior secondary school RE syllabuses, a Muslim leader from community 'C' put it this way:

It is not a bad idea for our children to learn about Christianity, nor is it to read the Bible in its totality. But what we are crying for, as non-Christian leaders [and parents] is that we should not have a syllabus that categorically spells out that our children should belong to religion A, B, C or D. Instead, let the syllabus fairly and significantly cover all the religious faiths found in Zambia. Only then shall we say it is a fair subject. For example, look at English, Mathematics and Science; no one complains that they are biased subjects. That is our humble request concerning RE.

RE must be inclusive of other religions

The parents and religious leaders were of the further and related view that secondary school RE must be inclusive of all the religions in Zambian society and Ndola district in particular. One Muslim parent from community 'B' said: "RE is a good subject for children to learn, but it needs to be inclusive of all other religions so that we the parents are comfortable with what they are learning." Asked to give examples of what he would like to be taught in the senior secondary school RE syllabus, the Muslim leader from community 'B' said: "The Muslim beliefs and practices are as follows: 'Allah', 'the Prophet Muhammad and his teachings', 'Behaviour of a good Muslim', 'the Five Pillars of Islam', and 'the Qu'ran or Koran.'" He added that the young people in the country also needed to know more about the Muslim festivals or holidays just like Christian holidays like Easter were well known.

A Hindu leader from community 'A' added:

The children should be given practical preparation for a committed religious life. They should learn the 'dialogues' [similarities] between the different religions. They should further learn about the justifications each religion has for its key beliefs. Prayer, worship and right moral behavior must be part of what they learn and do.

Responding to the same question, another Hindu leader from community 'C' suggested that the syllabus should include the teaching of important Hindu beliefs such as 'Brahman', the 'Paths to Salvation', 'Re-incarnation' and practices such as 'Meditation' and 'Yoga'. He added that the children should also learn: 'Introduction to different religions', 'unity or oneness of the religions', and the 'need for religious tolerance and understanding of each other.'

A Traditionalist parent from community 'A' observed that the children should learn about African traditions since they are Africans; if possible, they should learn what young people undergoing initiation learn in initiation ceremonies. Another Traditionalist parent from community 'C' further explained and suggested as follows:

There should be family and community values enshrined in the RE syllabus. We had our own ancestral spirits and way of praying as Africans. For instance, we used to go to the shrines to pray to our god for rains, called Chipimpi, in times of drought; and rain would come. That was not witchcraft. Due to degeneration of cultural beliefs and values, today we have issues of prolonged drought. Ancestors had their own way of preserving and supporting life. Hence the knowledge of African culture and traditions should be embedded in our school syllabuses.

In response to what else she would have liked to be taught to her followers in RE at senior secondary school level, another traditionalist leader from community 'B' had this to say in Bemba:

Tulelanda pa ntambi shesu, imikalile yesu, imifwalile, imitundu, na fyonse ifyalecitika inshita yakale ifyo ubwina Christu bwalesha. Kale abana abanakashi baleicindika, neyi imipamba tulemona ilecitika tayafulile. Amasukulu kayatwafwe ukipitila muli subject iyi pakutila abana bafundwe ifyakuisunga ukukonka nolutambi lwacikaya.

Literally translated:

These days girls are not taught anything traditionally because of Christianity, which is a foreign religion, has taken over from African Religion. The negative impact of this is that our children fail to look after themselves, they are raped because of their indecent dressing; they are defiled and so on because of their careless life styles. Schools through RE should help us to teach our children, especially girls, how to take care of themselves according to our traditions.

Responding to the question on what should be included in the RE syllabuses, yet another Traditionalist leader from community 'B' proposed the following topics:

- African cultural history
- Indigenous African religious heritage
- Zambian culture
- Indigenous Zambian religious beliefs and values
- The Traditional concept of God
- Ancestral spirits
- Strong moral teaching
- Expected conduct of different members of the family and community

In concluding this section on the perceptions of non-Christian parents and religious leaders on the content of current multi-faith RE in senior secondary schools, it is clear that they perceive the syllabuses to be more Christian in content than multi-faith and that the subject should therefore become more inclusive of other religions in the country than it is now.

Discussion of Findings

This section discusses the findings of the study. The discussion is done under two main thematic headings derived from the findings:

RE is more Christian than multi-religious in content

In response to questions on the nature of Zambian secondary school RE, the non-Christian learner respondents were unanimous in asserting that the subject was mainly centred on Christianity and the Bible as almost all the topics from grade 10 to 12 were about Jesus and the Christian religion. The non-Christian parents and religious leaders also complained that the subject syllabuses were predominantly Christian in nature and content. This finding is in agreement with Mudjdrica (1995), Simuchimba (2005), Kamanga (2013) and Chizambe (2016) who all found that syllabuses 2044 and 2046 were still largely Biblical and Christian in nature and content. Mujdrica (1995)

and Simuchimba (2005) further pointed out that syllabuses 2044 and 2046 were actually 75% and 82% Christian, respectively, in content.

The non-Christian learners also claimed that RE as subject was boring because both syllabuses 2044 and 2046 had very little content on their religions, which topics were also not well taught by their teachers who failed to give more details on those topics. These findings are in line with Mujdrlica (1995) who suggests that the two senior secondary school syllabuses need to be developmental as opposed to being static and include divergent views or information from other religions. The findings are further in line with the views of John Mudalitsa (2019: 5) that Zambian RE needs to be renewed, reformed and revitalized.

Another point raised by the learner respondents was that RE contradicted some of their religious beliefs, especially those about Jesus. The Muslim learners pointed out that while during RE lessons, they learn that Jesus is the son of God and is God, according to their religious beliefs and faith, Jesus is not God. This finding is supported by the Qur'an, the Islamic Holy Book, which says the following about Jesus: 'Jesus was a righteous prophet' (Surah, 6: 85); 'Jesus was not crucified' (Surah, 4: 15); 'Jesus was not the son of God' (Surah, 9: 30) and 'Jesus was not God' (Surah, 5: 17). The parents also supported the learners by claiming that there was wrong information about Islam, Hinduism and even Zambian Traditional Religions in the current RE syllabuses and that the content was of little relevance to non-Christian learners. This is in line with Simuchimba (2005: 181) who also found that some non-Christian stakeholders saw little or no value for their children in the Zambian RE syllabuses.

Lack of teaching and learning materials on other (non-Christian) religions

One important grievance the non-Christian learners had about senior secondary school RE in their schools was that there was scanty information on their religions, i.e. Islam, Hinduism and Zambian Traditional Religion, which made it very difficult for them to learn about these religions. This finding is partly in line with Chizelu (2006: 147) who indicated that in view of the lack of materials on other religions, (Christian) teachers of RE syllabuses 2044 and 2046 need to be careful in their teaching of the non-Christian aspects of the syllabuses to avoid creating problems. The finding (on scanty information and relevant materials on other religions) is also partially confirmed by the performance of some learners in examinations they attempted but failed to give correct answers to questions on Islam (ECZ, 2012: 23). However, the finding above is contrary to the aims of the two syllabus documents (MESVTEE, 2013) which indicate that learners are to be helped to acquire knowledge and develop understanding of the main religious beliefs found in Zambian society. Indeed, if information about other religions is inadequate and the teachers of RE have inadequate reference materials, the learners, both Christian and non-Christian, cannot develop the desired knowledge and understanding of the religions concerned.

Additionally, I feel that the lack of teaching and learning materials on other religions is a serious matter as it does not only lead to poor performance by learners but it also makes the teaching of those of topics involving non-Christian material difficult and expensive. This is because teachers have to look for resource persons from these religions to invite to class or arrange for trips to mosques or Hindu halls and shrines where learners can access materials like Muslim and Hindu

books as well as scripture like the Qur'an and the Vedas. Although some teachers may try to be resourceful by getting passages from the Muslim and Hindu scriptures, translate or paraphrase them, the information or final versions of these scriptures are somehow distorted and not like the originals.

RE should be more inclusive of other religions in Zambian society

Having explained and complained that the senior secondary school RE was more Christian than multi-religious in content, the non-Christian parents and religious leader naturally wanted something to be done to correct the situation. Accordingly, the non-Christian religious leaders called for their involvement in the syllabus design. This finding is in line with Simuchimba's (2005) and Carmody's (2006) studies which both suggested that in order to achieve real multi-faith RE, the leaders of the main religious traditions in the country would need to be consulted in deciding the content to be included in the syllabuses. Additionally, Henze (2000: 33) also observed that for successful RE in any country, there must be continuing dialogue between religion and state controlled education. Although Ministry of Education may deem this to be practically difficult to implement, the religious leaders can be consulted at least in the initial stages of RE syllabus design or revision.

On the nature of RE or syllabuses 2044 and 2046 offered to their children, most parent respondents complained that the content is not very beneficial to the non-Christian children as they learn a lot about Christianity and very little about their own religions. The non-Christian parents feel that their secondary school children are not mature enough to defend their religious beliefs when criticised by their Christian colleagues in class. This made their children always feel segregated against and unsafe. This finding is related to the point Simuchimba (2001: 113) makes about violation of non-Christian learners' rights through a predominantly Christian RE syllabus. Thus while Christian learners will be in jovial moods because they are at home with the content of the syllabuses, non-Christian learners will be gloomy because they do not associate with the unknown RE syllabus content. This finding is also in line with Simuchimba (2004) who observes that mono-faith RE promotes religious absolutism, where the beliefs and values of the one religion being taught are taken as the absolute truth and superior to any others, while multi-faith RE promotes religious neutrality where the beliefs and values of different religions are taken as truth-claims of equal value in the religious education of the young learners. Similarly, the finding is supported by Chizelu's (2006: 1) doctoral study, which showed that Zambian RE was (and still is) being taught with a '...single religious approach instead of using a multi-religious perspective as directed by the Ministry of Education.' The single or predominantly Christian approach can only make non-Christian learners gloomy and inactive in class.

Zambian Traditionalist parents also pointed out the need to include more African Traditional religious beliefs and values in the two senior secondary school RE syllabuses. They feel that nowadays the boys and girls do not know much about their traditions and are living in a 'wilderness' or a world of their own where it is difficult for them to appreciate themselves and the world around them. This finding is supported by the Syllabus 2044 Chief Examiner's Report (ECZ, 2012: 22) where most pupils were reported to have failed to give correct answers on a task that asked them to give examples of rites of passage from their traditions. The finding is further

supported by Cheyeka (2013) who supports and advocates for increased teaching of Zambian Traditional Religions in Zambian RE. Furthermore, both the national education policy document, *Educating Our Future* (MOE, 1996: 29) and the supplementary policy document, *Zambia Education Framework 2015* (MESVTEE, 2013: 8) call for promotion of an appreciation of Zambian cultures, traditions, customs and values among learners. Naturally, RE seems to be better placed as a school curriculum subject to promote what the official documents and the respondents are calling for.

Another related finding was that most of the non-Christian parents and religious leaders take their children to private schools where no one forces them to take a subject that borders on accepting beliefs that are contrary to their home faiths. As a possible solution to this problem, the respondents suggested that more content from other religious traditions should be added to the RE syllabus and the subject made compulsory in all schools. This finding, particularly on the addition of more material or topics from other religions, is in line with Mujdrica (1995) who proposed that 33% of the senior secondary school RE syllabuses should be devoted to non-Christian religions in the country. Similarly, the finding is in line with Kamanga and Simuchimba's (2015) view that the senior secondary school RE syllabuses were not broad enough to promote the kind of pluralism and liberalism, that would make learners freely discuss and appreciate different religious faiths and traditions in class. Additionally, the finding is in line with Simuchimba (2005) and Carmody (2006) who both recommended that Zambian RE needed to become more plural and inclusive and proposed that the Ministry of Education needed to set up an all-inclusive task force to look at the syllabuses and make them more inclusive at all levels.

In terms of what they wanted the RE syllabuses to include, the findings revealed that African Traditionalist parents and religious leaders wanted their children to learn more about Zambian traditions, customs and values; Hindu parents and religious leaders wanted key Hindu beliefs to be introduced; while Moslem parents and religious leaders wanted lessons based on the Quran and quotations from the Holy Book to be included. The non-Christian parents and religious leaders lamented that most of their children have little knowledge of who they are, where they are coming from and where they are going culturally and that they needed to develop a sense of identity and belonging even as they were prepared for life as citizens in a plural society. This finding is in line with Simuchimba (2005: 174) who showed that the Muslim, Hindu and African Traditional Religious leaders wanted many aspects of their religions to be included in the Zambian school RE syllabuses. The finding is also partially supported by MOE (1996: 5) and ECZ (1983: 3) documents, which spelt out that the spiritual and moral values taught in school RE should be drawn from the four main religious traditions in Zambian namely, Islam, Hinduism and Zambian Traditional Religion. Furthermore, the finding is line with Mudalitsa (2019) who recently recommended that Zambian RE needs to deal with all religions wisely and fairly.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Going by the main objective of the study, the findings and discussion above, it is **concluded** that the non-Christian learners, parents and religious leaders perceive the current multi-faith RE in senior secondary schools in Ndola district as biased in favour of Christianity. The non-Christian learners find the subject uninteresting with relevant teaching-learning materials on non-Christian

religions either scanty or lacking completely. The non-Christian parents find the subject unsuitable for non-Christian children as there is very little of their home background beliefs and values in the RE syllabuse. Similarly, the non-Christian religious leaders find the content of both syllabuses 2044 and 2046 to be unfair and biased as the syllabuses are predominantly Christian in nature and not fully multi-religious.

With regard to the recommendations of the study, and on the basis of the findings and conclusions above, we **recommend** as follows:

1. The Ministry of Education through the Curriculum Development Centre should revise the current senior secondary school RE syllabuses, 2044 and 2046, with the involvement of non-Christian stakeholders to make them more educational, inclusive and pluralistic.
2. After revision of the syllabuses, the Ministry of Education through the Curriculum Development Centre should engage the non-Christian stakeholder religious organisations like the Islamic Council of Zambia and Hindu Association of Zambia to help in the provision or preparation of appropriate teaching-learning materials for use in the teaching of RE in secondary schools.
3. The Ministry of Education through the Directorate of Curriculum and Standards should sensitise secondary school teachers of RE on the need to research and be more resourceful in the teaching of non-Christian topics of the RE senior secondary school syllabuses.
4. Non-Christian religious leaders and organisations should be pro-active in lobbying the Government through the Ministry of General Education, first to have the RE syllabuses revised to make them more inclusive of their religions, and second, to seriously involve or consult them whenever the RE syllabuses are revised.

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