

## Proposal for a new course of action in education

Albert Runyange

Lecturer, Rwanda Teachers' College, Rukara

---

### Abstract

*The overall goal of education is also character formation and transformation among others. Furthermore, no subject should be integrated into the school curriculum as an end in itself. Nevertheless, the history of a country and its political missions ought to guide its educational policy and curriculum objectives. The author of this article intends to show that, Religious Education in the secondary school curriculum of Rwanda can play a major role in achieving the intended national goals. He further describes the scope of Religious Education and finally underlines the pertinent question as to whether it is deviating from the nationally intended goals or is in agreement with them. He uses a language of questions because he feels that his personal opinion cannot be absolute and that it is the best way of arousing education leaders' interests in finding a new or/and alternative course of action.*

---

**Key words:** Curriculum, policy, objectives, Religious Education

### Introduction

The critical and psychological background for writing this paper is based on Rwanda's past and indeed recent history of education in relation to new developments, changes and challenges that inevitably call for curriculum innovation. It analytically focuses on how Religious Education (RE) is taught (curriculum, methodology and objectives) without proposing new contents (themes) but show that there is an urge, a need and possibility to develop them.

In the National Dialogue Council of 13<sup>th</sup> – 14<sup>th</sup> December 2012, "the Minister of State for Education affirmed that *"There is a study on how values are going to be integrated into the curriculum"*. This has two implications – either integrating values into all the subjects in the curriculum or introducing a subjected, singled out and entitled 'Values Education' not however ignoring the contribution of the other subjects in the curriculum. If any of the two options above is taken, what can be the contribution of RE?

Kigali Institute of Education (KIE) founded in 1999 and Rukara College of Education (RCoE)<sup>3</sup>, KIE's affiliate that offers A1 Diplomas opened in 2008, were born with a course of Religious Studies and Philosophy (RSP). Nevertheless, this course (RSP) has been phased out in the two institutions. The present study questions whether it was proved to be insignificant as far as the national and educational policies are concerned.

To describe how severe the issue is, Rukara College of Education after only two intakes when RSP was phased out, and it had trained ninety two students as the prospective teachers of Religious Studies and Philosophy (KIE had trained a much bigger number since 1999 to 2011). These trainees or graduates in schools and varying education forums are automatically expected to be potential educational agents of cultural values transmissions and educational curricula changes or contributions.

---

<sup>3</sup>Currently, KIE is the College of Education of the University of Rwanda while RCoE is Rwanda Teachers College.

**The objectives of this article are the following:**

1. To describe the scope of RE;
2. To identify RE within the historical and philosophical perspectives of Rwandan Education sector.

**The Scope of Religious Education**

Religious Education is Religion(s) that has/have significantly benefited from professional educationists whereby religion(s) and blends educational values just like the two sides of a coin. Etymologically, religion is derived from the Latin term '*Religare*' which means binding together. It has many definitions but a more functional one is given by Schalf (1998) as "*a system of beliefs and practices by means of which a group of people struggles with the ultimate problems of human life*". These ultimate problems are summarized as, what are the origin, meaning/purpose and destiny of life/universe.

As for education, it is derived from two Latin words *educare* and *educere* which respectively mean to bring up and to bring forth. According to its etymology therefore, education means to bring forth as well as to bring up. RE as one of the variables within education therefore should contribute towards bringing forth and bringing up.

Gingel & Winch (1999) defended that there is Confessional and Non Confessional RE. This is further supported by Israel Scheffler who defended that the desirable form of RE in a society divided by basic religious creeds is that one that aims at the comprehension of, but not the inculcation of religion. Gingel et al. (1999), again defends the idea asserting that non confessional RE is secular and it is the only one compatible with the aims of autonomy, anything else is indoctrination. Israel Scheffler (in McLaughlin, 1997) contributes on this by saying that besides schools sponsored by religious communities, general public education should teach about religion but not teach religion (Siegel, 1997).

Confessional Religious Education according to Scheffler (in McLaughlin, 1997) seeks to nourish, support, mould and encourage full hearted participation and membership of a child to a distinct religious confession,. According to Gingel, (1997), forms of Confessional RE are not compatible with the needs and nature of public and secular education and what forms the largest body of its themes are doctrines.

According to Mahatma Gandhi, the goal of education is character building meant to develop courage, strength, virtue and societal – citizenship values (Vidya, 2001). The idea of character formation is in the background of all religions but the form of groupism that religion has taken to-day is dangerous to this idea (Chaube, 1998). Accordingly, Religious Education (RE) ought to be modified and be called moral education or education of values, or character education. That is, adaptation of RE in the curriculum which is suited to the principles of humanity.

Methods of teaching RE per se refer either to confessional or non confessional RE. However, the most important one which is peculiar for a secular pluralistic setting is The Life Approach Method. Onsongo (2010) defines Life Approach as "*starting to teach with the real and concrete and the present situations of the learners,*

and letting them arrive at a religious understanding of those experiences". Therefore, the criterion for the choice of themes for study in RE, and the way of handling them in classroom (objectives and methods) should change from the traditional ones of converting children to more educational ones.

In the publication *Methodologie Catechetique* (1992), which was meant for catholic students of Rwanda, the following methods which indeed imply the life approach methods/themes were recommended:

1. *Unity principle* which emphasized progression by means of unified revelation;
2. *Inductive principle* which implies the need to acquire knowledge from concrete to abstract; and
3. *Experience principle* which requires the presentation of the message of God in liaison with the learners' concrete life at home and with friends".

The issue to investigate is whether, really the Life Approach Method was applied in Rwanda's school system. The writer is personally pessimist about this because the above methodology was for only catholic students yet Rwanda was and still is a secular republic.

Furthermore, to some critics, three institutions are worth blaming for the 1994 genocide against the Tutsi because they had moral obligation over the people – these are the school system, the political system and the church. This is defended by the fact that the degradation of moral values in the decades that preceded the 1994 genocide started in education (Gatwa, 2005). The school system, agents in school and curriculum were no longer transmitters of civic and patriotic values whereas the Catholic Church was the single most powerful institution after the government in the country, Ibid.

Before looking at the circumstances surrounding RE in Rwanda's secondary School curriculum, the writer has decided to look at the situation in other countries both in the region and those that have had political experiences almost similar to Rwanda.

Onsongo (2010) argues that the teaching of Christian Religious Education in Kenya has undergone tremendous changes over years. Though it traces its origins to the coming of the European missionaries who taught it in order to gain Christian converts, after independence, attempts were made to make education relevant to the needs of the Kenyan society. Various educational commissions were appointed to survey the existing educational resources, curriculum, and methodology, and advise the government accordingly. This never ignored RE just as other subjects in secondary school curriculum.

In respect to the teachings of Christian Religious Education in schools, a joint church panel was set up in 1968 to work on a syllabus which could be more relevant to the Kenyan situation (secular and public). A committee of Catholics and Protestants from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda and Zambia under the title "Rubaga Workshop", prepared syllabus 223 "Christian Living Today" in 1970. According to Balyage (1998), this syllabus emphasized life-related themes.

The second Christian Religious Education Panel met in 1980 to review the syllabus developed after independence. They reviewed all the syllabi from primary and secondary schools, teacher training colleges, up to

university, Okullu (1987). In general, the syllabus of RE that was developed was optional, bridged across all denominations, applied in all public schools, influenced by the World Council of Churches Ecumenical Movement and moved away from “Bible Themes” to Bible studies and “Life Themes” in order to respond to the needs of the post – colonial society.

Balyage (1998) presents the following syllabi as the predominant ones that were developed and were a bridge between the two major Christian ideologies (Catholicism and Protestantism) and the state: These are 224 RE based on St. Luke’s Gospel. It was introduced in Kenya and Uganda in 1972 and 1974 respectively and 223 RE also called Christian Living Today. It was introduced in 1974 as an alternative to the former as it was socio-anthropological in approach.

Accordingly, Baur (1994) calls this syllabus that was developed henceforth, a ‘life – approach syllabuses based on the religious, psychological and social needs of the students. To him, it led to ecumenical achievements whereby doctrinal barriers were diminished and students did not experience any problem in joining with prayer in another church.

Furthermore, a publication entitled *Education Conflict and Social Cohesion*, edited by Harley and Tawil (2005) includes countries that underwent conflict and see education as a means of achieving social cohesion. It is co-authored with Rwanda having a specific chapter entitled *Redefining Rwanda’s Future: The Role of Curriculum in Social Reconstruction*. Contrary, other countries in this publication which are multicultural and/or have undergone situations of insecurity and disunity view RE in the curriculum as an instrument of socio – cultural restoration and reconstruction. Examples are the following:

In Bosnia Herzegovina, in the post conflict era, (in the year 2000), a category of disciplines called the national group of subjects that included Religious Instruction were confirmed. However, this Religious Instruction in particular was criticized for being confessional and hence a new discipline entitled Culture of Religions focusing on religion as a historical and cultural study was piloted.

In Ireland in the 1980’s, the Roman Catholic Church, the Church of Ireland, the Presbyterian Church and the Methodist Church formed a working group that designed a core syllabus. This however only proved as a model of Christian cooperation and unity leaving other religions and philosophies aside. In 1999 therefore, there was proposed a shift in RE towards understanding world religions by including religions like Islam and other minor Christian denominations and philosophies. This led to the revision of the previous syllabus and the rising of the status of RE in school curriculum.

In Israel, there have been open conflicts with its Arab neighbors since its formation whereby the sacred instead of appeasing has nourished that conflict. Again, because of its historical and political background, Israel has for so long supported Religious Instruction. However, facing this situation above, a number of innovative educational experiments have been undertaken with an aim of educating the Muslim, Jewish and Christian children together under the slogan ‘Living together in the holly land: Respecting differences’, Amor. Following this

motive, in 2000, there was published a trilingual program in Hebrew, Arab and English called Shalom, Salaam and Peace respectively with an aim of exposing the learners to each others' religion.

### **A Critique and a Historical Overview**

Rwanda being also part of the African sub-region that was colonized, there are still indicators that the "pre-colonial religion was actually everyday life" (Mbiti, 1969), from which historical pasts that Kasenene (1998) deduces that "religion is the most important guardian of African social and moral values", an education that was integral and complete such that it left no one aside.

During colonialism however, the primordial objective of school education had been to expand the influence of Christianity characterized by mistrust of traditional values, Republic of Rwanda (2003). RE was totally confessional, denominational and dominated by the Catholic Church, and thus, neither national nor ecumenical. The whole process of teaching it was in the hands of the clergy whose approach is known to be unquestioned obedience and submissiveness (Catechetical).

The other hidden agenda of colonial education was divide and rule and indeed RE was supposed to be one of the instruments to be used in achieving that. Therefore, we can begin to see how a very dangerous bomb (genocide ideology) was absentmindedly manufactured throughout the peaceful years of the *Abazungu* domination. According to Baur (1994), with independence (the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> republic) education was tightly controlled by the state but not nationalized. However, instead of correcting the mistakes of the colonial legacy, education continued to be used as an instrument of divisionism. A good example is the organic law N° 1/85.

This law contradicted the objectives of national education set in the reforms of 1977 because it institutionalized a policy of quota system in education based on region, ethnicity, religion and gender and thus too divisionistic. These objectives were democratization of education, linking the school towards national development and production, formation of students into cadres desirable by the nation through the professionalization of the taught and learnt disciplines and reinforcement of a national culture. Furthermore, throughout this time, respective Religious confessions were responsible for the teaching of Religion in schools through appointing or recommending the respective teachers. The role of the state was only salary payment. Its principle objective was faith fostering and it did not favor the secular and multi-religious nature of the public school system.

Following the genocide, education is tasked as an instrument supposed to transform the Rwandan citizen into a skilled human capital for social economic development of the country, promoting science and technology, critical thinking and positive values, Republic of Rwanda (2010). This should be inherent in all the taught/learnt disciplines, their objectives and methods of delivery though the task of abolishing the organic law N° 1/85 in 1995 is greatly recommendable anyway.

In 1995, with the repatriation of Rwandan refugees from various cultures of the East African sub-region, RE temporarily developed into a non-confessional, respectable and nationally examined discipline until 2002. However, it was gradually phased out following the curriculum reform of 1996 – 1997, when it was debased to a

confessional and a non respectable discipline. The present study is concerned that its educators are absent mindedly acting as instrument of religious indoctrination which divisionism, contrary to the original mission of the post-genocide education. For example, it is stated in the 1996 syllabus of Religion that teaching it is of a faith-fostering role meant to prepare students into the mission of their respective religious confessions. Inter-disciplinarity, and socio-cultural morals are not highlighted. That is, Rwandan teachers teach a faith they belong to, and likewise, students are expected to study religion in their respective religious confessions.

### **Critical Questions and Observations**

The observations made above about the currently used Rwandan syllabus, also prompts the author to raise the following observations:

- Rwanda is a secular republic according to its constitution of 2003; therefore, recommending a confessional RE to a secular, multicultural, public and multi-religious school/setting is questionable.
- The syllabus is not ecumenical, and thus, is a hindrance to the national policy and ambition of unity and reconciliation.
- In this post-genocide Rwanda, emphasis ought not be placed on what differentiates people, rather on what unifies them. Hence, religious beliefs in a multicultural, multi-religious and secular educational setting, these are expected to be the guiding principles. Accordingly, morals, ethics and religion are convertible terms and fundamental principles common to all religions and are the ones which should be regarded as core to religious instruction (Aggarwal, 1996).
- Should the tax payers' money be exhausted on teaching something whose objective is deepening into the students the fundamentals of his/her faith and in order to prepare them into the mission of their respective Religious faith, rather than something which is ecumenical, civil, national and secular?

The emerging conclusion is that RE program as it is taught in Rwanda today, seems to contradict the very missions and goals of the education sector, which was planned to give rise to a free citizen who is liberated from all kinds of discrimination and promoting a culture of peace (Republic of Rwanda, (2003 and 2010). A situation that brings into view even more questions:

- How can one be free and with the culture of peace inculcated when they are only taught religions they belong to? Rwandan learners on the contrary seem not taught about 'the other' (peace education), and not liberated from discrimination and prejudice.
- What view does a learner in denomination A for example, have for peers in denomination B, C, D, E etc, especially when testimonies of Rwandan families who were killed in churches are still alive and visible.
- Can the meaning of divine love ever be translated into inter-religious, secular and even cultural perspectives for different ages of learners?
- How can a school ever be effective in moral development, while dividing students into groups according to their respective religious confessions, in both public-secular-multi-religiously schools and purely denominational schools?

- In the post-genocide Rwanda, and the modern world that values cultural diversity, can there be any moral reasons that warrant learning in groups of religious identity?

Besides, the present study has observed with concern that if any Rwandan schools have attempted to implement this mode of RE, it is only the major ones: Islam, Catholicism, Protestantism; and Seventh day Adventism. The minority groups are compelled to study a faith they don't belong to. A situation that brings into view the issue of violation of fundamental human rights or freedom of belief, within the very educational setting that is expected to teach them. Furthermore, in the curriculum reform of 1996 - 1997, Religion and Ethics were separated each to be taught alone. It is further recommended in the ethics syllabus that its teacher is supposed to be a Rwandese who is well versed with the Rwandan culture. This apparently, emphasizes Rwandese cultural values in Ethics, yet it does not take a Rwandan alone to teach about universal values like justice, peace, tolerance, human rights, gender, solidarity and democracy, which are apparent in the Rwandan constitution (Republic of Rwanda, 2003).

The syllabus of religion of 1996 also goes further to recommend that a syllabus of ethics (Morals) should be designed for students who are neither Muslims nor Christians. But what does this mean? This possibly means anticipation that in Rwanda there are some people who are not religious. But according to Mahatma Gandhi, not having a religion is like not having principles or like a ship without a compass, Aggarwal (1996). Therefore, Rwanda does not deserve people without religion and as is if that is not enough, the national moral ideology can be channeled through RE

This further means that in a public school system, when it comes to the study of Religion, students should be divided into groups of Muslims alone, Catholics alone, Protestants alone, Adventists alone and the minority and those who do not have an identified religion alone. This means that the groupism in religions already resented by Chaube (1998) is now being transferred to class.

Following the restructuring of Rwanda's educational system in 2009 and introduction of the free Nine Years Basic Education with the associated curriculum reform, the teaching of RE was further devalued. It was declared to be elective hence a further confirmation of the traditional confessional RE. Therefore, the kind of RE that can be uniquely essential as an instrument of unification and thus foster positive values like critical thinking, Rwandan culture, peace, unity and reconciliation (Republic of Rwanda 2010), either is not valued, ignored or both.

This above mentioned restructuring of the curriculum led to the abolition of sociology, psychology and philosophy whereby the only surviving and respected discipline that can be used to inculcate values into students is only history, Civics and general paper. If we are committed to the training of learners who have a critical mind, we should not strictly do away philosophy and sociology and even introduce other subjects which are missing like literature, music, fine art and non confessional RE.

With the regional integration of Rwanda into the East African Community in 2007, it is intended that all the member countries implement some uniformity in their educational system which however must observe some particularity to each country. Rwanda for example, because of the experience of genocide must emphasize on teaching unity and reconciliation, and ought to thoughtfully chose the appropriate host *subject in the syllabus for*

*its integration.* This theme can successfully and meaningfully be integrated into the syllabus of a non-confessional RE as follows:

1. Unity and reconciliation in the traditional pre-colonial Rwandan society,
2. Unity and reconciliation according to Christianity (Old Testament and New Testament ),
3. Unity and reconciliation according to Islam (Qur'an),
4. Unity and reconciliation in modern (post genocide) Rwanda.

This is an approach that can be applicable specifically in non-confessional RE and facilitate problem solving and peace education.

Furthermore, the integration of Rwanda into the East African community has exposed Rwanda curriculum to a comparative liaison those in Uganda, Kenya and Tanzania that have relatively developed and emphasized non-confessional RE for their secondary education. Rwandan higher institutions of learning should for example be ready to receive students from secondary schools of these countries, and vice versa. Hence, the present study questions the comparative RE-related contents that the students from the respective educational backgrounds will be able to present for equal and fair competition.

One of the key factors guiding the goals of the post-genocide Rwandan education sector is to emphasize both Rwandan and universal values of justice, peace, tolerance, respect of human rights, gender equality, solidarity and democracy. These are themes that are supposed to be in a non confessional RE syllabus. These are almost the very values in the Ugandan O' Level Christian RE syllabus (work, justice, service in society, loyalty, happiness, life, success, family life, sex, marriage, love, etc). "To develop in the Rwandese citizen an autonomy of thought, patriotic spirit, a sense of civic pride, a love for work well done and global awareness" in education sector policy goals (Education Sector Strategic Plan 2005-2010: 5), implying that schools ought to aim at creating citizens with critical mind in relation to national goals.

But which other subjects in Rwandan school curriculum includes these themes (love, work, justice, peace, tolerance, human rights, gender, solidarity, sex and democracy) with confessional RE. Political education (Civics) which too, is non- examinable and thus not emphasized though supposed to be oriented towards life and national moral goals (application of justice, peace etc to normal life) but not examination. Experiences in schools continue to show evidences of the relationship between emphasis and examination. E.g., it is rare to find schools and/or students who are interested in teaching/studying non examinable subjects (e.g. Religion and Civics) however interesting they may be.

There are still a hanging questions that still need to be tackled: What is the Justification of having Confessional Religious Education in our Secondary School Curriculum? The emerging alternative response is the obvious nationally strategic policies of the education sector that promotes science and technology with special attention to ICT than any other subjects (Republic of Rwanda, 2003). The study questions whether the national attention to ICT, is equally aware of the immoral dangers associated to internet e.g. cyber sex (pornography) which is so psychologically destructive to the youths and adolescents.



Indeed, Rwanda as a developing country needs to emphasize on the teaching of science subjects as precursor to its dream of technology-lead economic development. However, special emphasis on science alone without disciplines that inculcate morals and civil virtues might end up creating a skewed society. In the same way, until a legislative foundation for Confessional RE in Rwanda's secondary school syllabus, outstanding questions that deserve urgent answers will continue to be raised.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

RE is either a confessional or a non-confessional subject and Rwanda's educational policy designers will have to make appropriate choices that fit its post-genocide contexts and situation. RE should not be construed to mean that all religions are the same, or that one religion is better than the other, or grouping learners under specific religious beliefs. Currently, RE in our secondary school curriculum is a faith-linked, fostering religious doctrines rather than a knowledge-fostered that favors social and personal reflection.

Change is a factor in life provided that what is changing to is moral, conventional and socially just. If the traditional values and methods have been proved archaic and inappropriate, and alternatives have been proposed for Rwandan youths in terms of modern faiths, then, education is another sure means of continued alienation of the next generations. Education is a process through which all national human resources are produced through relevant training, and therefore all subjects in the training curriculum should be focused to the national policies and priorities. However, RE as it is in today's Rwandan secondary school curriculum, is contradictory to some of these objectives of the education sector which promote positive values (both Rwandan and Universal), that include critical thinking, Rwandan culture, peace, unity and reconciliation and the overall goal, vision and mission of the national educational sector.

For the reason above, it is important for Rwandan educational policy makers to understand RE as a discipline and a body of knowledge whose theory can be translated into positive practice that conform to the national philosophy and history. Though RE is no longer in the secondary school curriculum as a taught subject in its own right, it is impossible to totally phase it out primarily because of the power of religious confessions in Rwanda's educational system. However, non-confessional RE does not necessarily replace extracurricular religious activities such as evening prayers and moral discussions forums. It is only concerned with teaching about 'the others' beliefs, faiths, values, morals and secular values so that a learners grows a morally responsible citizen, with ethical maturity, and this is in conformity with the national policy goals.

### **REFERENCES**

- Aggarwal, J.,C., (1996), *Theory and principles of education; Philosophical and sociological bases*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House Ltd.
- Amor, A., *The role of religious education in the pursuit of tolerance*, <http://www.abc.net>. (Last accessed on 4<sup>th</sup> May 2013)
- Balyage, Y., (1998), *The Christian religious education syllabi for secondary schools: An Adventist assessment and a Proposal*. Kampala: Bugema University.
- Baur, J., (1994), *2000 Years of Christianity in Africa*. Nairobi: Paulines Publications Africa.

- Chaube S., P., (1998). *Comparative education*. New Delhi: Vikas Publishing House PVT Ltd.
- Gatwa, T., (2005), *The Churches and ethnical ideology in the Rwandan Crisis 1900 – 1994*, Wifp and Stock Publishers.
- Gingel, J., and winch C., (1999). *Key concepts in philosophy of education*. New York: Routledge.
- Government of Rwanda, (2005). *Constitution of the Republic of Rwanda*. Kigali: National Human Rights Commission.
- Harley, A., and Tawil S. (Eds), (2005). *Education, conflict and social cohesion*. London: Library of congress.
- Kasenene, P., (1998). *Religious Ethics in Africa*. Kampala: Fountain Publishers.
- Mbiti, J., S., (2002). *African religion and philosophy*. Nairobi: East African Educational Publishers.
- McLaughlin, T., H., (1997). *Israel Scheffler on religion, reason and education*. London: Cambridge University Press.
- Okullu, H., (1987), *The church and politics in east Africa*. Nairobi: Act Print Ltd.
- Onsongo, K, J., *The life approach method in teaching CRE in secondary schools*, CUEA, <http://www.fiuc.org/jaup/esap/publications/cuea/aejourn1lifeap.php> (last viewed on 12<sup>th</sup> May 2013).
- Perraudi, A., (Ed), (1992). *Methodologie catechetique*, Conference Episcopale du Rwanda, Commission Episcopale Liturgique et Catechetique. Kigali : Eglise Catholique.
- Republic of Rwanda, (1998). *The Rwandan O'Level Religion Syllabus*. Kigali: MINEDUC.
- Republic of Rwanda, (2005). *Education sector strategic plan; 2005 – 2010*. Kigali: MINEDUC
- Republic of Rwanda, (2006). *The O'Level Ethics Syllabus*. Kigali: MINEDUC.
- Republic of Rwanda, (2010). *Education sector strategic plan 2010 – 2015*. Kigali: MINEDUC.
- Republic of Uganda, (2005). *The Uganda O'Level CRE Syllabus*. Kampala: Ministry of Education & Sports.
- Schalf R..B., (1998). *The sociological study of religion*. New York: Library of Congress.
- Siegel, H., (Ed), (1997), *Reason and education; Essays in honor of Israel Scheffler*. Dordrecht: Kluver Academic Publishers.
- Vidya, R. T.(2001). *Education thought and practice*. New Delhi: Sterling Publishers.