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Influence of Teachers' Perceptions on Practicability of the CRE Curriculum on Students' Moral Reasoning in Public Secondary Schools in Nakuru County, Kenya

Pauline Wanjiru Githaiga

Assistant Lecturer, Department of Curriculum Instruction & Educational Management,
Egerton University, Kenya

Joseph Mworira Wamititu

Associate Professor, Department of Curriculum Instruction & Educational Management,
Egerton University, Kenya

Lydia Nkatha Kinuthia

Lecturer, Department of Clothing Textile & Interior, Egerton University, Kenya

Abstract:

Moral reasoning is important as it equips students with skills to distinguish between right and wrong. It is taught in Kenyan secondary schools through Christian Religious Education (CRE) and other carrier subjects. Despite exposure to moral reasoning content, the moral reasoning level of students in public secondary schools in Nakuru County is generally unsatisfactory. Teachers are the implementers of the CRE curriculum and their perceptions of its practicability play a key role in equipping students with moral reasoning skills. This study examined the influence of teachers' perceptions on practicability of the CRE curriculum on students' moral reasoning. The study adopted the ex- post facto research design, co-relational type. The accessible population comprised all the 332 CRE teachers and 10603 form four CRE students in the county. A sample of 186 teachers and 386 form four students were selected using stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques. Data was collected using the CRE Teachers Perceptions Questionnaire (CRETCPQ) and the CRE students moral reasoning achievement test (CRESMAT). The reliability coefficients of CRETCPQ and CRESMAT were estimated using the Cronbach Alpha method and Kuder Richardson 20 formula respectively. The reliability coefficients of CRETCPQ and CRESMAT coefficients of were .898 and .805. The influence of teachers' perceptions of practicability of the CRE curriculum on students' moral reasoning was established using simple linear regression. The results indicated that teachers' perceptions on practicability of the CRE curriculum do not influence students' moral reasoning. The results of the study can be used by teachers to enhance moral education content delivery. The results can also be used by school managers strengthen moral education and instructional methodologies adopted in their programmes.

Keywords: Christian religious education, curriculum, influence, moral reasoning, perceptions, practicability

1. Introduction

Every school has a responsibility to develop the moral reasoning competencies of its students (You & Penny, 2011). It is important to provide students with moral reasoning competencies because it equips them with the ability to distinguish between right and wrong and make right judgments (Dimana, 2012). Sober (2009) asserts that the type of moral training provided to student determines the quality of adults they become to their families, community and nation at large. Moral reasoning is defined as the conscious effort to make informed and responsible judgment about matters of moral importance (Straughan, 2000). Indicators of moral reasoning include; integrity, self-control, honesty, respect, patriotism, peaceful resolution of conflicts among others (Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development [ASCD], 2001).

Moral reasoning training is provided to learners in the schools because it makes them be aware of what is socially acceptable when dealing with other people and also provides them with a sense of politeness and lawfulness. In Kenya, moral education is provided to secondary school students to equip them with moral reasoning skills and foster good morals (KIE, 2002). Students are trained to reason morally through carrier subjects such as Social Education and Ethics (SEE) and Christian Religious Education (CRE) among others. CRE has been viewed for many years as one of the means of restoring morals and social order in society. According to Landmann, (2013), there has always been a close link between religion and moral education. For example, in traditional African communities, initiation ceremonies, rituals, beliefs, habits and practices, among others, were both religious and educative in nature.

CRE is one of the carrier subject used to enhance the acquisition of morals among students in secondary schools in Kenya. Its objectives and content is geared towards training of morals and is deemed as an important instrument in the making of the nation by inculcating of desirable interrelationships among people and nations (Kenya Institute of Education

[KIE], 2002). The CRE curriculum stipulates that students who interact with its content should acquire social; spiritual and moral insights to think critically; and make appropriate moral decisions in a rapidly changing society, appreciate and respect their own; and other peoples' culture (Kenya National Examination Council [KNEC], 2016). In addition the curriculum should promote international consciousness through the understanding of universal brotherhood and sisterhood; and contribute positively to the transformation of self and society as a whole. CRE is a compulsory subject in Christian Religious inclined public secondary schools in Kenya in the first two years and an elective in the third and fourth years.

Christian Religious is a compulsory subject during the first two years of the 4-years secondary school cycle but is elective in the third and fourth years (Itonga, 2011). This means that all learners are exposed to CRE instruction during their secondary school education. Despite exposure to moral education, the moral reasoning level of most secondary school students in Kenya is unsatisfactory (Itolondo, 2011). The increase in the number of reported cases of immoral behaviour, drug abuse, bullying, cheating in examination, stealing, and raping in school's country wide are indicators that moral education has not achieved its intended objective of assisting learners to make right judgements (Government of Kenya, 2013). The challenges of making the right judgments experienced in schools at the national level are also encountered in secondary schools in Nakuru County. A taskforce report on factors affecting quality of education in Nakuru County identified drug and alcohol abuse, gang-like activities, watching pornography, early sexual debut and theft as the most prevalent immoral activities in secondary schools (County Government of Nakuru, 2014). The frequent students engagement in immoral activities suggest that the moral reasoning training in the county has not been effective.

Literature indicates that students' moral reasoning is influenced by factors such as; formal education, religious beliefs, family and social interactions. Mayhew, Seifert and Pascarella (2010) noted that education provides contexts and practices that encourage students to engage in divergent perspectives when approaching problems or issues which is conducive to moral reasoning growth. Stapleton (2013) established that religion affects learners' moral reasoning as their decision-making is based on faith. Culture has also been associated children's with moral development as it depends on the social environment that they live in (Zhang, 2013). Killen and Ruthland (2011) identified families and social groups as the two most important social contexts in which children's morality is formed and fostered. A study conducted in Lari division, Kiambu County, Kenya revealed that mass and social media influence value systems and moral development of learners (Kinoti, 2016). Jebungei (2013) noted that education policies and practices that emphasis science subjects over humanities reduce that popularity of critical subjects like CRE and Social Education and Ethics (SEE) which are useful in moral education. This affects teachers and learners attitudes and perceptions towards moral education carrier subjects. Jebungei contend that teachers' perception of the CRE curriculum plays a significant role in equipping learners with moral reasoning.

Effective implementation of moral education through CRE and other carrier subjects depends on the perceptions of the teacher. Perceptions affect the way the teacher plan for instruction that enables students to interrogate issues that affect them and the community at large. According to Lulley (2009), the teacher is required to help stimulate the students to reflect, analyse, and synthesize information; and apply it to their daily lives. The teachers can only do this if they perceive CRE as an important subject whose content can be used to solve life dilemmas. Positive perceptions assist teachers to select appropriate instructional methods which will enhance acquisition of moral reasoning. However this appears not to be the case as teacher claim that CRE curriculum is not practical to implement as it is too wide given the coverage time frames (Kutto, 2013).

The foregoing literature suggests that teachers do not have positive perceptions of the practicability of the CRE curriculum. This may impact negatively on their work as implementers of the CRE curriculum that covers moral reasoning and explain the low moral reasoning levels of secondary school students in Nakuru County. The objective of this study was to examine the influence of teachers' perceptions on practicability of the CRE curriculum on students' moral reasoning in public secondary schools in Nakuru county, Kenya. The study tested a hypothesis which states that teachers' perceptions of practicability of the CRE curriculum do not influence students' moral reasoning.

2. Methodology

This study was conducted in Nakuru county Kenya and involved public secondary schools. It adopted the ex post facto research design of correlational type. The target population of the study comprised of all secondary school CRE students in the county and their teachers. The accessible population comprised of all CRE teachers and form four CRE students in public secondary schools in six of the nine sub counties of Nakuru. The three sub counties were not included in the study as they were used for piloting the study instruments. The accessible population was 332 CRE teachers and 10603 form four CRE students (Nakuru County Director of Education, 2014). A sample of 186 teachers and 384 students selected using stratified, proportionate and simple random sampling techniques were involved in the study.

Two instruments; CRE Teachers' Perceptions Questionnaire, (CRETCPQ) and students Moral Reasoning Test (CRESMRAT) were used to gather data. The teachers' perceptions on practicability of the CRE curriculum in enhancing moral reasoning was measured using a set of 15 close ended items. The teachers were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the items which were then converted into scores (Strongly Disagree = 1, Disagree = 2, Undecided = 3, Agree = 4, Strongly Agree = 5). The scores of items were averaged and then transformed into the perception on CRE curriculum practicability index (overall mean). The teachers curriculum practicability indices were converted into perception levels using the scale; Negative (M = 1.00 to 2.33), Neutral (M = 2.34 to 3.66), Positive (M = 3.67 to 5.00). The levels were then summarised using frequencies and percentages. The students' moral reasoning level was measured using the moral reasoning achievement test. The test had two sections; A which had 17 multiple choice items

and B which had 15 open ended dilemma issue items. The items measured moral reasoning in personal, family, social and national areas, and global domains. A correct response to a multiple choice item was awarded one (1) mark whereas an incorrect response was awarded a zero (0). A wrong answer to a defining issue test item was awarded a zero while a correct answer was awarded a point. A correct answer to a defining issue test item with an explanation was awarded two points.

The face and content validity of CRETCPO and CRESMRAT were examined by five research experts drawn from the Department of curriculum Instruction and Educational Management of Egerton University. The experts identified seven weaknesses in the data collection tools and gave suggestions how to improve them. The poorly constructed items were rephrased before the instruments were used in the field. CRETCPO and CRESMRAT were piloted and their reliability estimated using the Cronbach Alpha and Kuder Richardson (KR) 21 formula. The reliability coefficients of CRETCPO and CRESMRAT were .898 and .805 respectively. The data tool was deemed reliable as its reliability coefficient was above 0.7 level as recommended by Panayides (2013).

The collected data was coded and keys keyed into the data file. The file was checked for errors and data analysed with the aid of the Statistical Package for Social Science (SPSS). The influence of the teachers' perception on moral reasoning was established using simple regression. Dummy variables were created before running the regression since teachers' perceptions (negative, neutral and positive) was at nominal scale while moral reasoning was measured at interval scale. Oyeka and Nwankwo (2014) recommend use of dummy variables when explanatory variables are at nominal or ordinal scale for regression to correctly test association between constructs.

3. Results and Discussion

This study examined the influence of teachers' perceptions on practicability of the CRE curriculum on students' moral reasoning. It first established the teacher's perceptions on practicability of the CRE curriculum indices as shown in Table 1.

Statement	n	Mean	SD
My school appreciates role of CRE curriculum in promoting moral education	126	3.96	1.12
My school has the capacity (human resource and facilities) to implement aspects of the CRE curriculum geared towards enhancing students understanding of personal identity and moral values	127	4.53	0.73
Positive morals and national values can be realized through the CRE curriculum	126	4.58	0.73
The CRE curriculum is structured such that those who are exposed to it are able to differentiate between right and wrong	127	4.32	0.91
The current secondary school CRE curriculum does not encourage learners to practicing the moral attributes taught.	127	3.72	1.20
The CRE curriculum does not allow teachers to emphasize the importance of moral reasoning.	129	3.09	1.39
The content of the secondary school CRE curriculum does not help a learner to understand the importance of one being a responsible citizen.	129	3.58	1.24
The CRE curriculum does not encourage a learner to interrogate day-to-day moral issues.	129	3.47	1.26
School are able to implement the CRE curriculum because they have appropriate and relevant materials and facilities for teaching of moral reasoning.	121	3.42	1.26
The CRE curriculum have several missing gaps which do not encourage learner acquire knowledge on moral reasoning.	126	3.14	1.25
Teachers have problems delivering content of CRE curriculum as they are not familiar with the methods of teaching moral reasoning.	125	3.42	1.31
The main concern of the CRE curriculum is students' academic achievement in the subject, not on moral development of the students	128	3.27	1.41
Implementing the CRE curriculum is a challenge since it encourages memorization and not application.	129	2.72	1.40
The moral reasoning component of the CRE curriculum is not supported with appropriate reference materials in the library	128	2.64	1.23
Broadness of the secondary school CRE curriculum does not give the teacher room to apply appropriate moral reasoning teaching methods.	128	2.44	1.29
Curriculum practicability index	129	3.43	0.70

Table 1: Teachers Perceptions on CRE Curriculum Practicability Index

The results indicate that the item means ranged between 2.44 (SD=1.29) to 4.58 (SD=0.73) out of a maximum of 5. An examination of the results indicates that the item "It is important to impart positive morals and national values through

the teaching of CRE" had the highest mean ($M = 4.58, SD=0.73$). This means that teachers strongly believe that CRE is key in imparting morals and national values to students. However, the item which states that "Broadness of the secondary school CRE curriculum does not give the teacher room to apply appropriate moral reasoning teaching methods." had the lowest mean ($M = 2.44, SD=1.29$). The low mean score implies that the teachers agreed with the statement. It means that the teachers consider the curriculum too broad to complete the within the given time while applying methods appropriately to enhance moral reasoning. The teachers perceptions of the curriculum practicability index was 3.43 ($SD = 0.07$) and was rated average given that it was measured out of 5.00.

The indices of the teachers perceptions of the CRE curriculum practicability were converted into perception levels using the scale; Negative ($M = 1.00$ to 2.33), Neutral ($M = 2.34$ to 3.66), Positive ($M = 3.67$ to 5.00) and summarised using frequencies and percentages as shown in Table 2.

Perception n = 120	Frequency	Percentage
Negative	5	4.2
Neutral	71	59.2
Positive	44	36.7

Table 2: Teachers' Perception on CRE Curriculum Practicability in Enhancing Students' Moral Reasoning

The results in Table 2 indicate that the perception of majority (59.2%) of the teachers on practicability of CRE curriculum was neutral. Slightly more than a third (36.7%) had a positive view of practicability of the curriculum while a few (4.2%) held a contrary opinion. The results show that the CRE teachers have a neutral perception of the practicability of the CRE curriculum. Scholars have attributed this to several factors. Njoku and Njoku (2015) attribute the neutral stand of the teachers to poor understanding of pedagogical and theological aims of the subject, societal moral decadence, low job motivation, poor communication technique, wide CRE curriculum and abstract nature of content. Highberg (2010), Abu-hamdan and Anda (2014) consider negative attitudes towards CRE and incompetence in handling the subject as the reasons behind the teachers neutrality on practicability of the curriculum.

The students' moral reasoning was measured using CRESMRAT. The test mean scores are presented in Table 3.

Test Maximum Score	N	Mean	SD
Multiple Choice 17	363	13.21	1.99
Defining Issues 30	362	16.26	6.22
Moral Reasoning Test Total 47	362	29.50	7.26

Table 3: Moral Reasoning Test Means and Standard Deviations (SD)

The results in Table 3 reveal that the students' multiple choice test mean ($M = 13.21, SD = 1.99$) was fairly high given that it was marked out of 17. The mean ($M = 16.26, SD = 6.22$) score on the defining issue test was average as it was marked out of 30. The overall moral reasoning mean ($M = 29.50, SD = 7.26$) score was also rated average given that it was measured out of 47. On the basis of the overall mean, the students' moral reasoning level was rated average. The results support those of Gallagher's (2011) who note that moral reasoning of students was moderate. The findings of the study contradict those of Maiyo's (2015) who established that whereas that CRE plays an important role towards moral development of students, it was not effective in developing learners' moral reasoning as schools place more emphasis on science subjects and students pursue CRE only for academic purposes.

The results observed in Table 3 showed that the students' moral reasoning level was moderate despite exposure moral education curriculum. Maiyo (2015) contend that though CRE plays an important role towards the development of students moral reasoning, the major impediment to its effectiveness is the emphasis placed on science subjects and the fact that the subject is optional in Kenya. The average moral reasoning level observed from the study may be attributed to social norms, culture and traditions of the students. Another contributing factor to the students averages moral reasoning may be due to the teaching approach used in teaching CRE in secondary schools. Ming'yue (2013) asserted that the methods used to teach moral reasoning influence the capacity of learner to reason.

3.1. Influence of Teachers' Perceptions on the Practicability of the CRE on Students' Moral Reasoning

The influence of teachers' perceptions of the practicability of the CRE curriculum on students' moral reasoning was determined using simple linear regression. A hypothesis which states that teachers' perceptions of CRE curriculum do not significantly influence secondary school students' moral reasoning was tested. The results of the regression test are shown in Table 4.

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t-value	p-value
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
(Constant)	29.963	0.524		57.184	.000
Negative perception dummy	1.656	2.106	.042	.786	.432
Positive perception dummy	-1.400	.791	-.094	-1.77	.078

Table 4: Regression Test Results between Teachers Perception on CRE Curriculum Practicability and Students Moral Reasoning
 $R = .109$, $R^2 = .012$, Adjusted $R^2 = .006$, $F(2, 360) = 2.163$, $p > 0.05$

The regression test results in Table 4 indicate that the association between teacher's perception on the CRE curriculum and students moral reasoning was not statistically significant at .05 level. This implies that teachers' perceptions of the CRE curriculum does not influence students' moral reasoning. On the basis of this observation the first hypothesis which stated that teachers' perceptions of the CRE curriculum practicability do not influence secondary school students' moral reasoning was accepted.

The results in Table 4 revealed that the teachers' perceptions of the CRE curriculum did not influence students' moral reasoning. The results in Table 4 support those of a study conducted Ming'yue (2013) in China which showed that teachers were of the view that their main task is to improve students' scores in national examinations. This view leads to lack of commitment to teaching moral reasoning. The results are also in harmony with those of Nderitu (2016) who noted that teachers strongly disliked topics related to moral values such as abortion, drug and substance abuse and dignity of life as it leads to confrontations with parents and society at large the teachers often adopt defensive tactics like avoiding such topics and this impacts negatively on learning outcomes. A study by Itolondo (2012) revealed that CRE teachers were demotivated because they felt they were not given recognition by the government like the Mathematics and Science teachers. The neutral perceptions posted by CRE teachers in this study could be due to discontent with

4. Conclusion

The results of the study indicated the students overall moral reasoning mean scores was $M = 29.50$ ($SD = 7.26$) out of 47. The results also showed that the perception on practicability of CRE curriculum of majority (59.2%) of the teachers was neutral. The results of the hypothesis test indicated that the influence of teachers' perceptions of practicability of the CRE curriculum on students' moral reasoning was not statistically significant. On the basis of these results the students' moral reasoning level was rated average while the teachers' perception of the practicability was neutral. It was furthered concluded that teachers' perceptions of the practicability of the CRE curriculum do not influence students' moral reasoning.

5. Recommendation

The results of the study revealed that the students' moral reasoning level was average. The results also revealed that the teachers' perceptions of CRE curriculum was neutral and did not influence students' moral reasoning. The neutral perception suggests that teachers may not have a good grasp of the core objective of teaching CRE. This may compromise their preparedness and delivery of moral reasoning content. There is need to have regular workshops for the teachers to enhance their knowledge ability of the subject and its core mandate. This could make the teachers develop positive perception towards CRE curriculum practicability and improve delivery of content and students' moral reasoning levels.

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