

The catholic Marianist brothers' compulsory policy of religious education as a moral saver: a case of Matero boys' secondary school in Lusaka district, Zambia

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ABSTRACT

The article focuses on the contribution the Marianist Brothers made to moral and integral boys' education in their education philosophy at Matero Boys Secondary School popularly known as MaBoys. Cox's (1994) theory of phenomenology of religion was used to generate empirical data from the religious and lived experiences of the Marianist Brothers as well as the narrated stories from both former teachers and pupils of the first twenty-five years at MaBoys. The study was purely qualitative and allowed the social phenomena to speak in its social setting. Specifically, the study used a follow-up case study design to capture and understand the Marianist applied pedagogical practices in enhancing former pupils' lives after leaving the school. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews and data analysis was done thematically from the merging themes. The findings indicated that Religious Education was the core of morality in provision of quality education. Further, findings revealed that RE was supplemented with other religious programmes which is the Marianist Brothers' initiative to impart spiritual moral behaviour in the learners through assessments. Additionally, frequent observations made by both Brothers and teachers on virtues of Christian life in areas of prayer, devotion and charity affected the learners' religiosity behaviour long after living the school. This was evident that Marianist imprint remained in the boys' lives who became responsible citizens of the nation. The study recommends that RE should be made compulsory at all levels in both faith based and public schools to promote moral values.

Keywords: Catholic, Marianist Brothers, morals, religious education

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

The Marianist Brothers came to Zambia in 1965 shortly after Zambia gained its independence. The first republican president of Zambia, Dr Kenneth Kaunda saw the need in secondary education which was not a priority to the British imperialists (Carmody, 2021). This challenge was dealt with by involving the church particularly the Roman

Catholic Church. The Jesuits Brothers from Society of Jesus (JS) religious order, were already supporting local education and had introduced a number of schools in southern region of the country (Carmody, 2021). The call was announced by the president on merit to build 27 secondary school in Lusaka. The Jesuits were brought on board of educational officials to take part in the initiative project. To utilize this opportunity,

the Jesuits invited their counterparts the Marianist Brothers of Society of Mary (SM). The Marianist Brothers came from United States of America (USA), province of Cincinnati respectively. The Brothers ardently, took up one slot to build a boys' secondary school in Lusaka's Matero township (Annunziata, 2016).

Annunziata (2016) affirmed that by 1966 the school took off its shape and enrolled the first cohort of boys. Despite being experienced in American background of teaching, the Marianist Brothers were handed with British based curriculum taught in Zambian schools. However, the Marianists' educational ministry emphasised mostly on pedagogical practices. The Brothers at MaBoys taught all basic subjects as compulsory including RE even though its status was skeptical at post-independence (Simuchimba, 2005 and Mwanakatwe, 2013). Further, Simuchimba (2005) stressed his argument that the curriculum was subject-assessment-oriented which demanded good performance progressive in nature. In faith-based schools, RE competed alongside other subjects such as English, Mathematics, science, practical oriented subjects to name but a few. The subjects in mention, contributed in producing a holistic-well-rounded-persons required for the development of the nation (Carmody, 2018). The study on religious education assessment was important because the Marianist Brothers at Matero Boys Secondary School, provided education which spelt out the values pointing to responsive graduate citizens.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Education in Post- Independence in Zambia

The Government of the Republic of Zambia (GRZ) educational document on

education, *Educating our Future* (1996: 4) indicated that, "education in Zambia is intended to serve the individual's social and economic wellbeing and to enhance the quality of life for all". To achieve this aim, there are some principles that guide educators to their endeavour in providing education to their learners. In a liberalized education system, parents have the right to take their children to a school of their choice, be it public, private, religious or communal, as long as it provides sound attitudes and transforms behaviour that can enable the learners to uphold societal needs in future. The education should work also towards a common goal of seeking to mitigate further economic problems.

The GRZ document (1996) reports that the government also chose to decentralize education as one of its principles to suit the local environment, which provides a wider world view to the learners. The localised activities that educators impart in the learners might help to make them (learners) responsive. Decentralization promotes broad-based participation in management of children with great emphasis placed on creativity, innovation and imagination (GRZ educational document, 1996).

Further, the government allowed various stakeholders to share in decision making and to take responsibility in participating in education at the local level. GRZ document reports (1996) that decentralization fosters a sense of local ownership and promotes better management of schools. The GRZ document was relevant to the current study as it adopted some of the values espoused in the GRZ educational document of 2013: 'Educational Curriculum Framework'. Additionally, the 1996 document emphasizes that, "a conducive learning environment, is one that is caring, supportive, with motivating and teaching materials activities, learners can develop holistically". This can help to strengthen the social, economic, and

political well-being of Zambia. This is what the researchers sought to find out, whether Marianist Brothers in their subject assessments considered and integrated the values, ethos and charism of the Marianist brothers which took place during teaching and extra-curricular activities to produce holistic persons.

In the process of interaction between the learner and the learning environment, a fully developed and accomplished human being, might be formed. This is a human being who might exhibit the values of excellence, professionalism, integrity, humility, discipline, and hard work among others. It is imperative to note that these fundamental values were attained by boys at MaBoys through compulsory RE lessons and other religious activities done within the school calendar.

Religion and Morality

According to Simuchimba et al (2018), there is something imperative about morals that men and women must discover and to which they ought to conform. However, for religious minded-people, something imperative is God, Allah, Brahman, and so on. The imperative thing (God, Allah and so on) is the source of moral law. Additionally, he observed in his study that religion and morality go together. To teach a person religion includes giving him or her moral training. Simuchimba et al (2018) conclusion indicated that Religious Education and Moral Education are inspirable. Furthermore, Moral Education is teaching young people what elders have decided as good behaviour. It also means that young learners are trained to obey by adhering to certain habits.

Mwewa (1977) argued in the same way as Simuchimba (2018) on the importance of moral education. According to Mwewa (1977), moral education is fundamental aspects of humanity. Each society, expect its members to possess acceptable traits such as honesty, truthfulness, kindness, sympathy, and many others. Further, moral education can be referred to the teaching of children to acquire those virtues and moral values that would help them individually to live a good life and

be productive members of the community. Mwewa (1977) further emphasised that, learning through religious and moral education enabled children and young people to attain discernment, and critical thinking and to act decisively when making moral decisions. Consequently, such action may lead learners to make positive differences in their social setting by practicing the belief and values (Mwewa, 1977 and Simuchimba, 2005).

Most importantly, Mwewa (1977) argument that, “Zambian traditional culture could only be understood and embraced through Christian values.” He further inter-twinned the Zambian values with Christianity without allowing Zambian traditional values to surpass the Christian values. The integration of Zambian and Christian values might play a vital role in society, by shaping people’s typical moral behaviour.

Additionally, Mwewa (1977: 122) stated that, “morality differs from custom or tradition.” He explained that tradition is a belief whereas custom is the way of doing something that has existed for a long time among a particular group of people. He further indicated that a set of these beliefs or customs are those of religious or cultural aspects. In his further explanation Mwewa (1977) noticed that customs and traditions have standards, but these are more cooperate than personal.” Customs primarily focus on outwardly following socially accepted norms rather than on understanding the underlying motivations and personalities of individuals involved. Additionally, established codes of behavior passed down through generations are seen as embodying the collective welfare of the community (Mwewa, 1977).

Religious Education in Faith Based Schools in Zambia

Simuchimba (2005) described the benefits of teaching Religious Education (RE) as a curriculum subject in Zambian schools. In mission run schools especially Catholic schools, the subject has been made

compulsory and learners take it from Grade 8 to 12. RE as a subject is a viable vehicle to transmit Moral Education (ME) to learners from multi-cultural beliefs and backgrounds. Religious Education includes educative aims of promoting religious literacy or a critical understanding of different religious traditions and helping to impart life skills such as critical and analytical thinking, logical argumentation, innovativeness, and positive attitudes such as respect and tolerance for other people's views, beliefs and values (Simuchimba, 2005). Kamanga (2013) in his unpublished work entitled, 'Religious Education in Zambia: Towards Religious Literacy, Religious Pluralism and Liberalism', highlighted how RE as a subject benefited learner in teaching of morality and moral values. He agreed with Grimmitt's (1987) work (old though it might seem) which states that:

RE being in the service of education rather than religion; this means that the subject should serve educational aims and not those of religion. As such, despite being called Religious Educators, RE teachers are essentially secular educators concerned with the educational value of studying religions with a prime commitment to achieving educational goals by conforming to general educational principles.

Additionally, Kamanga (2013: 67) asserts that, "the study of religions has an important contribution to pupils' personal, social and moral development." Kamanga (2013) describes Moral Education (ME) as the inculcating of desirable positive attitudes, values, and forms of behaviour through the teaching of different religious and cultural beliefs. The dual affirmed that morality is an essential part of all religious cultures and teachings, and expect that moral values and behaviour result naturally from the

learning of these beliefs (Simuchimba, 2005 and Kamanga, 2013).

Simuchimba (2005), Kamanga (2013) and Muyuni (2024)'s views on teaching of RE to learners were relevant to the current study because they focused on values like those imparted by the Marianist Brothers of MaBoys. Additionally, RE was taught to all pupils (Grades 8 to 12) at MaBoys.

METHODOLOGY

The research was purely qualitative in nature (Bryman, 2017) and used a follow-up case study design to investigate the first twenty-five years of the Marianist Brothers' provision of education at MaBoys. Further, the follow-up case study was appropriate because the researcher traced the participants who were at MaBoys during the period under scrutiny (Selvam, 2019). The study used purposive (typical) sampling to sample the key participants and relevant to this study who had adequate knowledge about the Marianist Brothers' contribution to the teachings of moral values to boys coming from different religious background. This study drew on a diverse range of perspectives from 35 participants, comprising 3 school administrators, 5 Marianist Brothers, 5 former teachers, 2 Catholic Education secretaries, and 20 alumni who were part of the initial core of the Old Boys Alumni Committee (OMBAC). The former students were recruited using Respondent-Driven Sampling (Heckathorn, 2004). To ensure a robust and multi-faceted understanding, data was gathered through a combination of in-depth Semi-Structured Interviews, Focus Group Discussions, and a review of relevant documents. By employing multiple data collection methods, the research findings were validated and reinforced (Patton, 2020).

FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Religious Education as a subject and Religious Activities

At Matero Boys' Secondary School, Religious Education (RE) is a mandatory subject for all students across all grades. Aligning with the national curriculum's 2013 revised framework, RE derives its objectives from this broader educational framework. According to the Headteacher, making RE a compulsory subject at the school supports its mission to cultivate critical thinkers who can analyze and apply essential values in their everyday lives. Moreover, the RE curriculum encompasses the study of various religions, enabling students to gain a deeper understanding of their own beliefs and those of others, fostering a culture of mutual respect and awareness. The Headteacher currently at the helm offered their thoughts, stating the following:

In Catholic-based schools, RE is not just another subject to check off the list, but a vital component of a student's holistic education, aimed at fostering personal growth and spiritual development. The RE teachers play a critical role in mentoring and inspiring their students, empowering them to become individuals who live out their values and principles in their daily lives, and make a positive impact as they grow and develop.

The Headteacher further emphasized the importance of RE in their school, highlighting that:

it's not just a theoretical subject, but a hands-on and experiential aspect of their education. To support this,

the school has implemented a weekly programme every Wednesday, where students from different faith backgrounds come together with their mentors to explore and discuss religious teachings, share biblical knowledge, and foster spiritual growth. This programme is an integral part of the school's curriculum and is mandatory for all students.

During an interview with the Old Matero Boys Alumni Committee (OMBAC), it was revealed that the students had successfully adjusted to their new surroundings. When further queried about their experiences with the religious programs at Matero Boys, the OMBAC Chairperson, who was also part of the first graduating class of 1970, shared their thoughts as follows:

When we came to this school, we were coming from different backgrounds and communities, but once we were here an attempt was made to provide some direction in what we were expected of and one of the things deliberately put in place was the aspect of religious programme. This spiritual dimension helped to calm down certain weird behaviour that some of the boys wanted to introduce in the school.

He went on to elaborate how the religious programs at Matero Boys played a significant role in instilling Christian values in the students, shaping their character, and fostering a strong moral foundation. He highlighted how these programs helped the boys develop important life skills, such as empathy, compassion, and kindness, and guided them in becoming responsible and ethical individuals. He further added:

Once they came, the boys began to learn that at MaBoys there was not only obtaining quality education but also the spiritual dimension. So, every Wednesday, learners met as groups and discussed the same theme. The school was Catholic, but everyone was allowed to practice their faith during that period. These religious programmes benefited the boys even when they left school. Moreover, I think the intention of Marianist education was to shape the boys for a better future.

Br. Given also pointed out:

The Wednesday Religious Programme also help learners to bring out and share those values learnt in RE. We all know that out there in the world, there are strong forces, therefore school leavers from MaBoys will endure such things because of the strong background laid in acquiring moral values.

The Headteacher elaborated on how the Wednesday Religious Programme has become an integral part of the school's teaching and learning activities, highlighting its role in creating a inclusive religious structure that caters to the diverse spiritual needs of the school community. He noted that the Wednesday timetable has been carefully crafted to include a dedicated period for religious activities, from 11:00 am to 1:00 pm, where students and staff can engage in shared prayer, worship, and reflection, allowing each individual to deepen their relationship with God in a way that resonates with their personal beliefs.

One former teacher had the following to say:

the main concern of the administrators has always been to be respectful of the religious persuasion of every staff member and pupil. Hence, the belief is that God is personally working with each one of us and desires that we are with Him for all eternity.

Formation of Faith

The Religious Education subject also provided ways and means for the learners to come to a fuller and deeper understanding of the content of Christian life as one former pupil from 1986 G12 exit explained:

RE as a subject set us to acquire moral values that helped us attain faith and will live with this faith we have learnt from school even long after in life. We may find it difficult to abandon the faith they learnt from school.

T.2, a former teacher at MaBoys from 1994 to 2001, reflected on the impact of religious classes on students, stating that these classes helped them develop a profound sense of God's presence and guidance in their lives. The primary goal of teaching religious activities was to instill the principles of Christ's teachings, enabling students to build a strong spiritual foundation and cultivate a deep understanding of the 10 Commandments. Ultimately, the school's overarching objective was to nurture students' faith in conjunction with their academic and personal growth, empowering them to become well-rounded individuals with a strong moral compass.

Br. Stan gave his lived experience as follows:

In my second month of teaching at MaBoys, I was asked to submit a report concerning the Christian life of the school. Although I was there for a short period,

I could say there were visible, supportive structures available to encourage the building up of the Christian life within the school. Since we had an environment in which most of the people were Christians it showed that we had a Christian environment.

Further, Fr. Jansen explained:

I understand Christian environment to be a situation in which people come together because they want to, in a regular way, over a period, to share and celebrate that which unites them as Christians, namely the person and message of Jesus Christ. This, therefore, was enhanced through teaching RE to all our boys and having interdenominational religious gatherings every Wednesday.

During the interview, the Marianist Brothers indicated that the Marianist mission had two key areas thus, instruction and education in a High School setting. Fr. Jansen said:

Religious programmes and the building of Christian community, which have for our goals the understanding of and formation in Christ are the immediate practical consequences of the Marianist apostolic vision applied to the high school setting. These are the supporting structures wherein the works of instruction take place. The Marianists instruct only to edify members of community. We therefore instruct to achieve something beyond instruction, namely

education, to produce citizens with proper character.

Br. Stanley emphasized that the Marianist Brothers' educational approach focuses on two crucial areas: cultivating moral character and fostering a Christian environment. To achieve this, they prioritize teaching Christian values and creating a supportive community that nurtures spiritual growth. The ultimate goal is formational, providing a space where students can freely explore and deepen their faith. By emphasizing these two areas, the Marianist Brothers aim to create apostolic centers in their high school settings, remaining true to their educational philosophy of forming apostles and building a community that embodies the spirit of the Family of Mary.

DISCUSSIONS OF FINDINGS

Religious Activities

The Marianist Brothers at MaBoys prioritized Religious Education and religious programs to cultivate well-rounded graduates. By integrating these elements into the school calendar, they created a holistic learning environment that nurtured students' spiritual growth alongside academic development. The Wednesday religious programs, which catered to diverse faith backgrounds, played a significant role in shaping students' moral character. Former pupils who participated in FGDs credited these experiences for instilling moral values that guided their personal and social lives beyond graduation. The Secretary General of OMABAC and the current Head teacher corroborated this, with the latter highlighting the benefits of compulsory Religious Education in laying a strong moral foundation. This foundation empowers students to become morally upright individuals, as demonstrated by the Secretary General's professional experience, where his faith guided his actions as a Managing Director.

Br. Given's perspective resonates with the findings, emphasizing how the school crafted a platform for religious growth. By integrating religious teachings into the curriculum, the Brothers and teachers created a supportive environment where individuals could explore and deepen their faith. As students embraced the Marianist values, they began to view the school as a sacred haven, where they could engage in religious activities and foster a personal connection with God. The designated sacred time, from 11 am to 1 pm, enabled students and staff to unite in prayer, worship, and sharing, according to their respective faiths, promoting a sense of community and spiritual development.

The results from the former chaplain and the Marianist Brothers' legacy on their learners show a profound and lasting impact on their lives. The religious classes and activities provided learners with a sense of divine presence and direction, enriching their understanding of Christ's teachings and the Ten Commandments. This, in turn, helped learners cultivate empathy towards other religions, expanding their spiritual horizons and deepening their personal faith. As Cox (1994) and Kristensen (1960) assert, exposure to diverse religious activities fosters empathy and enriches spiritual experiences. The former pupils at MaBoys, from various religious backgrounds, came together in shared religious activities, sharing beliefs and values, and strengthening their faith. This collective experience enabled them to grow spiritually and personally, demonstrating the transformative power of empathy in deepening one's spiritual connection.

This correlates with what Simuchimba (2005) noted at post-independence that RE was made compulsory subject. At MaBoys, RE and other religious activities were made compulsory and examinable to produce holistic human capital expected to take up different responsibilities in a newly independent nation, Zambia.

Faith Formation

Undoubtedly, integrating RE with the Wednesday Religious Programme supported learners in understanding fundamental religious values and applying them in daily life. This aligns with Grimmitt (1987), who argued that studying religion enables pupils to grasp core values, appreciate how religious beliefs shape cultures and personal histories, and navigate personal beliefs and behaviours (Grimmitt, 1987). Moreover, learners were encouraged to take responsibility for their decisions, particularly in matters of personal conduct. Most importantly, the religious programme equipped the boys to confront worldly challenges and resist prevalent vices. After graduation, many joined governmental and parastatal organizations, potentially encountering issues like corruption, tribalism, and bribery. The solid foundation from their education at MaBoys likely empowered them to uphold moral integrity in their careers. While not flawless, their upbringing at MaBoys may have made it difficult for them to abandon their acquired values and faith. The Head teacher's endorsement of compulsory RE at MaBoys emphasizes its practical role. Unlike traditional subjects like Chemistry or Mathematics, RE instilled moral values essential for lifelong faith.

In addition, Grimmitt's (1987) assertion learning about religion and learning from religion the essence is to find meaning in humanity provoked by ultimate questions. This is in line with Cox (1994) and Smart (1969)'s phenomenology of religion which states that religion provokes challenging questions about ultimate meaning and purpose of life, beliefs about God, the self and right or the nature of reality and wrong and 'What it means to be human?' In the same view Grimmitt (1987) also was concerned with ultimate question such as what it means to be human. Grimmitt found out that such a question provokes man's great awareness of his own uniqueness as person and developed a universal human nature. Marianist

Brothers offered religious education which enabled learners to have meaning and purpose in life, as shown in their after-school life experiences. Most of the former pupils who were interviewed valued religious life and embraced the virtues of trustworthy, excellence, honesty, integrity, respect, tolerance and honour, professionalism, discipline and hard work.

The study's findings revealed that pupils who actively participated in the religious program received certificates, regardless of their denominational affiliation. The school administrators prioritized respect for the beliefs of all staff and pupils, while also requiring every pupil to take religious education as part of the curriculum. In-depth interviews with Br. Stan highlighted the Marianist Brothers' emphasis on instructing pupils in the Christian way of life to foster morally upright individuals. This was made possible by creating a supportive Christian community environment. The first Head teacher of MaBoys stressed that both religious education and the Wednesday religious program were crucial in achieving the Marianist Brothers' goal of creating apostolic centers in high school settings and living up to their educational philosophy of forming apostles and building the Family of Mary. Additionally, Br. Eric's insights revealed that the Brothers believed in a personal God who works with each individual and desires a eternal relationship with them. This belief underpinned the Brothers' efforts to nurture Christ-like qualities in MaBoys pupils, with God's guidance and presence in their endeavors.

Religious instructions provided to graduates at MaBoys were similar with what Grimmitt (1987:225) postulated that

What pupils learn from their studies in religion, concerns learning about themselves, discerning ultimate questions, and signals of transcendence in their own experiences and considering how they might respond to everyday issues.

Further, learning from religion causes learners to hold beliefs, values and make faith responses from what they have learned.

At MaBoys the Marianists imparted beliefs and values into their learners, which they used later in life to serve in the different spheres they found themselves in. However, it might be rather a daunting task to have learners, especially boys, adhere to a religious programme designed to take place during class time. While the programme enhanced the pupils' spiritual growth, it might also be true to state that the academic performance of learners might have been affected in one way or the other. Besides, the pupils who led the religious programmes might not have been conversant enough to preach to fellow learners. As such, the time for the programme could have been reduced to half an hour per week instead of the allocated two hours. Nevertheless, as shown from the findings from the former pupils, the programme helped them to acquire good morals, character and values which they applied in life after school. Hence, it is worth noting that the character of the learners was evident to be seen as holistic and well-rounded persons.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the Marianist brothers made Religious Education (RE) compulsory, enabling learners to cultivate a personal relationship with God. The faith they developed during their school years inspired former pupils to embrace virtues of hope and faithfully serve others. In the Zambian context, the Christian moral values taught at MaBoys enriched the education system, complementing traditional values in the Matero community. Despite their diverse religious backgrounds, the boys assimilated and associated themselves with Catholic moral values. The character traits they acquired benefited them in their future roles, instilling diligence and dedication. The

Marianist Brothers' presence at MaBoys brought about behavioral change in boys from varied social backgrounds. By integrating moral values into Zambia's education system, the Brothers promoted spiritual and social development in learners. The MaBoys environment served as a moral compass, shaping boys' behavior and inspiring them to emulate their educators' values long after graduation.

RECOMMENDATIONS AND FUTURE SUGGESTIONS

In view of the results of the study and the conclusion drawn, the following recommendation and suggestion were made:

- i) The study recommends that RE as a subject to be taught as compulsory in all schools to benefit all learners in acquiring moral values which might help them face vices in life and be responsive citizens to the expectations of the nation and the world at large.
- ii) The current study investigated on the first twenty-five years with the original set up of the first Marianist Brothers, hence there is need for another research to review the current moral teaching integrated with the revised curriculum of 2013 and beyond at MaBoys in the absence of the original pioneers.

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