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Interrogating the implications for the exclusion of family, religious and moral education in infant education in Zimbabwe's updated curriculum

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Abstract

The study interrogates the continuities and discontinuities of Zimbabwe's updated curriculum focusing on the exclusion of Family, Religion and Moral Education (FRME) in the infant school. The study was carried out in Mashonaland Central Province and utilised Bindura district as a case to explore the implications for excluding FRME in the infant school curriculum. It adopted a qualitative research approach and utilised a case study research design informed by interpretivism as a research paradigm. The interpretive analysis model helped in establishing emerging patterns or themes from the collected data. Ten school heads, ten teachers in charge and 20 teachers were purposively selected on the basis of their experience and qualifications. The data collection methods were in-depth interviews and document analysis. The study reveals that FRME as one of the learning areas is only introduced at grade three. Paradoxically, the philosophy underpinning the updated curriculum emphasises morality and yet it denies a space for FRME in the infant school curriculum. The deliberate omission of FRME as a learning area in the infant school curriculum does not only pose challenges in terms of children's moral development, but also becomes a disjuncture in terms of a spiral and developmental curriculum. Thus, the study strongly recommends curriculum review to reconsider the reintroduction of FRME in infant education.

Key terms: updated curriculum, spiral curriculum, infant school, morality, Religious Education

DECLARATION: We hereby confirm that the article is our original work and has not been submitted elsewhere. All authors have approved the final article.

BACKGROUND

The study explored the continuities and discontinuities of Zimbabwe's updated curriculum focusing on the exclusion of Religious and Moral Education (RME) (now Family, Religion and Moral Education) in the infant school curriculum. It seeks to establish whether the exclusion of FRME in the updated infant school curriculum does not create a disjuncture in terms of moral development as well as in terms of a spiral and developmental curriculum. The findings of the study are analysed using Piaget's theory of moral development which clearly shows that moral development starts at infancy.

On the attainment of Independence in 1980, the Government of Zimbabwe embarked on major reforms in the education sector. The programme, Education for All in 1987, led to the construction of more schools to ensure access to education by all learners (GoZ, 2004). There was dire need too to ensure that issues of equity and equality were addressed. In the second decade of independence, there was a paradigm shift in the running of affairs in the education sector as the Government realised the need to provide quality education to the masses of Zimbabwe. In 1998, therefore, the Government set up the Presidential

Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training (CEIT) which is popularly referred to as the Nziramasanga Commission. While the Nziramasanga Commission has several recommendations in terms of the education system in Zimbabwe, one of the major findings was that, the curriculum was too academic and hence the need to review the school curriculum so that it addressed the needs of the learners and implementation.

With this background, Zimbabwe revised and updated curriculum framework for primary and secondary education to run from 2015 to 2022. The updated curriculum outlines the three learning levels as; infant school (ECD A–Grade Two), junior school (Grade 3-7) and secondary school (Form One-Form Six) (Zimbabwe Curriculum Framework, 2015).

Among other important aims, the updated curriculum was designed to inculcate awareness of heritage, culture and traditions as well as self-respect and respect for others (Unhu/Ubuntu). Accordingly, philosophical underpinning the curriculum epitomises universal human interdependence, solidarity, humanness and sense of community in African societies. It can be argued that the philosophy of Unhu/Ubuntu translated as morality can be best taught in the context of religion (Wanja, 2014). However, although religion may be perceived to play such a crucial role in the inculcation of Unhu/Ubuntu, the Zimbabwe's updated curriculum has relegated it to the periphery of the learning areas of the infant school. Infant school includes Early Childhood Development (ECD) A, ECD B, Grade 1 and Grade 2 classes (Dyanda and Dozva, 2007). In the updated curriculum, FRME as a learning area is only introduced at Grade three level. The deliberate omission of FRME as a learning area in infant school curriculum does not only pose challenges in terms of children's moral development but also becomes a disjuncture in terms of a spiral and developmental curriculum. It is against this background that the study sought to explore the implications of the exclusion of FRME the as one of the learning areas at infant school level.

The Zambian curriculum framework for Early Childhood, Care, Development and Education (ECCDE) (2013:27) emphasises social, emotional, spiritual and moral development as a learning area for young learners aged 4 to 8. Similarly, the South African curriculum guidelines (2015:9) show that the ECD curriculum takes a spiral approach where social awareness as a learning area is introduced at Grade 00 through grade three. In this learning area, ECD learners are expected to demonstrate awareness and respect of religious, social and cultural differences among themselves. A study by Wanja (2014) reveals that Kenya has recently introduced Religious Education from ECD level. For Zambia, South Africa and Kenya, the teaching of RME is developmental and is introduced at the elementary stage which is typical of a spiral and developmental curriculum. Unlike the curricular for the above mentioned countries, Zimbabwe's updated curriculum has discontinued the teaching of RME in infant classes.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study is informed by Jean Piaget's theory of moral development. Piaget (1965) in Mwamwenda (2005) proposed that moral development progresses in predictable stages from a very egocentric type through heteronomous morality or morality of realism to autonomous morality or morality of cooperation (Slavin, 2012). The theory is in two stages namely the heteronomous stage which incorporates the egocentric stage and the autonomous stage. By implication, infant learners are in the heteronomous stage of moral development.

According to Piaget in Slavin (2012), the egocentric stage spans from birth to about five years. He observed that, children in this stage have no regard for rules and are incapable of engaging in cooperative activities and moral reasoning owing to egocentrism. Piaget further noted that egocentrism influences children in the heteronomous stage to perceive justice and fairness as equal treatment. The children do not consider the needs and desires of others in their perception of fairness and justice. Kuyayama-Tumbare (2014) advises that teachers can help ECD learners grow out of egocentrism by involving them in RME activities which involve group interaction, turn taking and sharing. This was feasible with the old Zimbabwean infant curriculum which included RME issues in the Social Sciences learning area.

Piaget (1965) in Santrock (2009) states that from about five to 10 years children display heteronomous morality. The term heteronomous entails that the moral behaviour of the child is externally imposed rather than self-directed. From the age of six or seven years children in the heteronomous stage become aware of rules, but view them as sacred, unchangeable and requiring strict obedience. As a result, the child obeys rules to gain adult approval and for fear of punishment, rather than the maintenance of social harmony. The child also believes in immanent justice, the idea that, if a rule is broken punishment should be meted to the rule violator immediately. Hence, FRME should be included in the infant school curriculum to provide infant learners with opportunities to gradually understand the purpose of rules and the limitations of immanent justice.

Another key aspect of the heteronomous stage as noted by Piaget (1965) in Mwamwenda (2005) is that children regard behaviour as right if significant others approve of it and wrong if they disapprove. In other words, the child's desire to gain the approval of significant others influences them to behave in an acceptable way. In the absence of FRME at infant level, teachers are denied opportunities to progressively lead learners to understand that doing something right merely to receive the approval of others is not always a sound basis of moral decision making and behaviour.

The heteronomous stage falls into Montessori's sensitive period of child development which spans from birth to five years. Montessori cited in Raskin (2018) argues that this is the period when children have the highest potential to acquire language, character and other dimensions of child development. However, with the updated curriculum, the teaching of FRME starts at Grade three when children have passed the sensitive period, delaying the teaching of FRME until children are in Grade three is bound to compromise their moral development. Since moral development is hierarchal, the exclusion of FRME in the infant curriculum may affect the smooth transition of learners to autonomous morality which is the ultimate goal of moral development.

OBJECTIVES

The study seeks to:

- Establish the relevance of FRME in infant school with reference to the Zimbabwean updated curriculum framework.
- Explore teachers' perceptions on the omission of FRME as a learning area in infant school curriculum.

- Expose challenges posed by deferring the introduction of FRME in infant school if there are any.

- Proffer recommendations on embracing FRME as a learning area in the infant school.

METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a qualitative research approach and utilised a case study research design informed by interpretivism as a research paradigm. Interpretivism is a research paradigm which is based on the belief that reality is socially constructed during interaction and that the goal of social researchers is to understand what meanings people give to that reality (Neuman 2014:51).The study used Bindura as a case to study implications for excluding FRME in the infant school curriculum. There is a strong need to understand the importance of FRME within the context of culture and child development. All this entails attaching meanings to life experiences. The word qualitative implies an emphasis on the qualities of entities and on processes and meanings that are not experimentally examined or measured in terms of quantity, amount, intensity or frequency (Patton, 2007). The qualitative approach gathers information as text based units, which represent the social reality, context and attributes of a phenomenon. Qualitative findings may be transferred to other settings or contexts or they may involve theoretical generalisation, where findings are extrapolated in relation to their theoretical application (Neuman, 2014).

DATA COLLECTION METHODS

In-depth interviews

The study used in-depth interviews to generate data on the implications of excluding FRME in infant education from school heads, teachers in charge of infant schools and teachers teaching infant classes. According to Cohen et al (2007:228), in-depth interviewing is a qualitative method which involves open-ended, relatively unstructured questions in which the interviewer seeks in-depth information on the interviewees' feelings, experiences and perceptions of a given social phenomenon on their own terms and in the context of their situation. In other words, the interviews captured perceptions of the curriculum implementers on the exclusion of FRME from the infant school curriculum.

Documents review

A desk study was conducted to gain deeper knowledge on the centrality of FRME to child development as well as to appreciate the cultural context surrounding child development. Zimbabwe's updated curriculum framework and curricular for schools in other countries like Zambia, Kenya and South Africa were reviewed to bench mark good practices in teaching RME..

SAMPLING

The study purposively selected 10 schools in Mashonaland province in Bindura district (five urban and five rural) to create a comprehensive perception of the phenomenon under study. From these schools, 10 school heads 10 teachers in charge and 20 teachers were purposively sampled. Purposive sampling is a non-probability sampling method in terms of which participants are selected for a specific purpose, usually because of their unique position, experience and knowledge (Baxter & Jack, 2008: 9; Cohen et al, 2007:114). Patton (2007:181) adds that the thrust of purposive sampling is to identify information-rich sites. In this regard, research participants were sampled on the basis of

their positions in the school, qualifications and experience. In so doing, more teachers with in infant teaching experience were sampled.

ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics in research involve considerations such as fairness, honesty, respect for the integrity of individuals and the confidentiality of certain information (Schutt, 2009:72). First and foremost, we sought permission to get into schools from the provincial education director. The participants in the various research sites were informed about the purpose of the study and of the possibility of policy recommendations for the infant school curriculum review. Informed consent is the most fundamental ethical principle that is involved in research. Participants must understand the nature and purpose of the research and must consent to participate without coercion (Burns, 1997:18). Christians (2000:138). Anonymity and confidentiality were also observed throughout the research process. "Anonymity means that the researcher will not and cannot identify the respondent. Confidentiality means that the researcher can match names with responses but ensures that no one else will have access to them" (de Vaus 1995:337). The study did not mention names of schools and participants to ensure their privacy and confidentiality of information.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Through document review, it was observed that, the updated Zimbabwean curriculum framework stipulates the following seven learning areas for the infant school curriculum:

- Indigenous Language
- Visual and Performing Arts
- Physical Education
- Mathematics and Science
- Family and Heritage Studies
- Information and Communication Technology (Zimbabwe Curriculum Framework 2015:31).

It can be observed that Religious and Moral Education is conspicuous by its absence from the selected learning areas. Curriculum review which was a recommendation by the Presidential Inquiry into Education Commission was meant to make the education system more relevant to the needs of Zimbabweans because Zimbabwe had inherited a curriculum from the colonial regime which did not directly address the needs of Zimbabweans.

The presidential commission was directed to enquire into the inherited system of education as to the relevance, quality and orientation in the rapidly changing socio-economic environment and to make recommendations for fundamental changes to the current curricular at all levels (GoZ, 1999:558)

The Commission of Inquiry into Education questioned the dominance of Christianity at the expense of other religions like African Traditional Religion. It then becomes even more questionable with the omission of FRME in the updated infant school curriculum. FRME is conspicuous by its absence in the under-listed learning areas for the infant school curriculum. The reasons given for omitting this important learning area are not very clear and convincing. Commenting on the justification for the omission of FRME in the infant school curriculum one school head had this to say:

Of course the curriculum developers had their reasons for omitting FRME as a learning area in the infant school curriculum. One such misguided reason was that religion tends to indoctrinate learners and young learners are still incapacitated to choose a religion of their liking. FRME is not about converting learners to certain religious convictions. That line of thinking shows lack of understanding the role FRME in school curriculum.

A similar response was echoed by another school head:

I think one major reason for omitting FRME as a learning area in the infant school curriculum could be the assumption that young learners are not yet able to comprehend things of a spiritual nature. Yet young learners are very much able to understand morality when taught using appropriate media. Hence the assumption that issues covered in RME tend to be a bit abstract for young learners could be misguided and deferring the learning area to grade three can only cause discontinuities in moral development.

The sentiments above clearly show serious lack of understanding of the nature and role of FRME in the infant school curriculum on the part of the curriculum designers. It is important to note that the content delivery of FRME relies more on the multi-faith approach, without emphasising on one specific religion. The focus of FRME as a learning area is pivoted on the inculcation of moral values through religious stories and teachings. In other words, the thrust of FRME in the infant school curriculum is not on converting learners into particular religious practices but merely inculcating moral values in learners at this elementary stage of their learning, growth and development. For Kenya, religious education is geared towards continuous moral and spiritual development of children through Christian Religious Education, Islamic Religious Education and Hindu Religious Education from pre-school (Njuguma, 2012).In other words, the Kenyans have embraced the multi-religious nature of their society.

Emphasising on the importance of FRME in the infant school curriculum a teacher in charge in the infant school explained:

Religion is a vehicle through which morality can be inculcated in learners, particularly young ones. The updated curriculum creates a paradox by emphasising the principles of ubuntu on one hand and rejecting such principles at the foundational stages of children's learning experiences. The omission of religious education creates discontinuity in the moral development of young learners and this defeats the purpose of the philosophical underpinnings of the updated curriculum.

The same sentiments were shared by another teacher during interviews:

Moral values such as sharing, empathy, sympathy love, work ethic as well as being honest can be best taught in the context of religion. It is only reasonable that such values which happen to be part of philosophical underpinnings of the updated curriculum be introduced from the on-start. The updated curriculum is guided by the philosophy of ubuntu hence religious education becomes inevitable in the infant school curriculum.

In Zimbabwe, the Commission of Inquiry into Education and Training concluded that the country did not have a clearly articulated philosophy of education and that, consequently, there is no clear national vision to guide formulation of the goals of educational excellence (GoZ,

1999:25) hence the current curriculum is informed by the philosophy of ubuntu. Paradoxically, the updated curriculum denies FRME a space in the infant school curriculum and yet the inculcation of ubuntu (translated as morality) in learners is the philosophical underpinning of Zimbabwe's updated curriculum. From the Piagetian theory of moral development standpoint, moral development starts at infancy through adulthood (Slavin, 2012 & Mwamwenda, 2005). Juxtaposing the Zimbabwean curriculum framework with either the Kenyan curriculum or Zambian curriculum framework shows that, other nations have rightfully considered RME from infancy while Zimbabwe's curriculum falls short in terms in this regard. It can thus, be argued that by refusing RME a space in the infant school curriculum, the Zimbabwean educators have created a disjuncture that impedes moral development in young learners.

THE DEVELOPMENTAL NATURE OF MORALITY

Most school heads and ECD teachers expressed disappointment with the omission of FRME in the updated infant school curriculum as it tends to pose serious challenges in terms of a spiral and developmental curriculum. Theories of moral development, for example Piaget's (1962) moral development theory emphasises that moral development starts at infancy and increases with each stage of moral development (Mwamwenda, 2005& Slavin 2012). By implication, the omission of FRME in the infant school curriculum points to the inadequacies of the infant school curriculum that impedes a smooth transition in terms of moral development from one stage to the other.

On the issue of developmental curricular, one school head had this to say during interviews;

It is only rational to consider FRME as one of the learning areas in the infant school curriculum because it is a critical component of a spiral curriculum. Deferring it until the fifth year (Grade three) *of the primary school is rather too late. Introducing religious education at ECD A level helps to bring consistence and continuity in the delivery of a spiral and developmental curriculum*.

A Teacher in Charge (TIC) in the infant department concurred and added:

What you need to understand here is that, infant education provides the foundation of later education. Introducing FRME later in grade three is like building a house without a foundation. Morality should be inculcated in young learners at a tender age through a spiral curriculum. I strongly believe that simplified religious and moral values should be introduced at ECD A and these should get complex as learners go up the grades until one understands moral dilemmas.

A grade three teacher shared her experiences:

What I have observed is that, introducing FRME at grade three poses pedagogical challenges because children learn from known to unknown. For FRME at grade three it is difficult to work with children's assumed knowledge because they have none of it. One has to teach basic content that should have been taught in infant classes and this stalls progress.

Similar sentiments were shared by one experienced ECD teacher:

Moral values are best taught in the context of religion. Denying religion a space in the infant school curriculum is a very big mistake. It is very critical to instil moral values in young children through religion. Concepts in religion at infant level can be

simplified and introduced sequentially and developmentally.

Sentiments by most school heads and teachers show that, by deferring the introduction of FRME to grade three, Zimbabwe's updated curriculum denies young learners an opportunity to acquire moral values because morality is best taught in the context of religion (Asare-Danso, 2018:41). Similarly, Khan (2008) argues that religion and moral development are inseparable, given that religion drives people's behaviour and actions in a more productive direction and pointed out that religion enables young people to understand the importance of physical, social, emotional and spiritual well-being. In the same vein, Cherry (2014)) observes that an education system without religious education could only bring disaster to schools when they produce bright but intolerant and violent people. In support Thungu (2010) says that teaching of religion and social ethics is a foundation for continued survival and enhancement of the quality of life in society and no society exists without moral values and religious education enriches peoples' morals for the welfare of individuals and society. This does not mean that moral values cannot be taught in other contexts, it is possible to teach moral values in the context of other subjects but religion remains the best context for inculcating moral values in young learners.

The teaching of religious education is also a human rights issue. In her study in Kenya, Wanja (2014) argues that teaching of religious education content fulfils a child's right as every child has a spiritual right to the Creator and relate with Him well enough in life. Another study by Cherry (2014) supported the idea that children of 6-10 years old are ready to understand religion and its complexity. By implication, FRME is a necessary pre-requisite learning area in the pre-school as it enables pre-schoolers to develop morally and emotionally. According to Kohlberg (1987) children can make moral decisions about what is right or wrong, hence he believed that the objective of moral education is the reinforcement of children to grow from one stage to an upper stage (Santrock, 2009). Similarly Piaget (1962) in Santrock (2009) observed that from the age of six or seven children in the heteronomous stage become aware of rules, but view them as sacred, unchangeable and requiring strict obedience, hence findings of the study show that FRME should be introduced in the infant school curriculum to provide infant learners with opportunities to gradually understand the purpose of rules and the limitations of immanent justice. Kenya has since rectified the mistake of omitting religious education as a learning area in the infant school curriculum. According to Kenya Institute of Education (KIE) (2006), religious education component is a new inclusion in the ECD education curriculum, all along, it has been cited as a serious omission because religion plays a major role in any society. Unfortunately, Zimbabwe has taken a retrogressive trajectory in this regard.

The inclusion of FRME education in the ECD and Education curriculum inculcates a spirit of belonging, tolerance and cooperation. Piaget's (1962) theory of morality indicates that there is a direct correlation between a child's cognitive development level and his or her moral reasoning (Slavin, 2012). Sentiments by the research participants show that the deferring of the introduction of FRME in the infant school curriculum only creates hiccups in moral development for young children. In her study in Zimbabwe Kuyayama-Tumbare (2014) advises that teachers can help ECD learners grow out of egocentrism by involving them in religious and moral activities which involve group interaction, turn taking and sharing. Another study by

Asare-Danso (2018:40) in Ghana confirms that children should be encouraged to develop a sense of moral autonomy when they are young and as such, they need a kind of moral education that will challenge them to take moral decisions on their own. Like Piaget, Kohlberg (1987) observed that in order for a child to advance to a more developed level of morality, he or she must develop an equivalent level of intellectual ability. This justifies the implementation of a spiral and developmental curriculum where FRME is introduced at infancy through adulthood.

Comparatively, the old infant curriculum tended to be more effective than the updated infant curriculum because it addressed RME issues in the Social Sciences learning area and allowed for the developmental nature of morality. However, it would be misleading to over romanticise religious education as if it does not have weaknesses, a study by Lickon (1991) in Kenya revealed that curriculum content for religious education in Kenya tended to overlook the practical aspects of morality because some children in school remained intolerant and violent. This points to pedagogical approaches that may not be appropriate for inculcating moral values. In other words, approaches for FRME should be guided by developmentally appropriate practices in ECD. It is also important for teachers to note that moral learning in classrooms does not only occur through the formal curriculum but also through the hidden curriculum (Kohlberg, 1987).Sentiments shared by the different educators above reveal the challenges that are posed by a curriculum framework that defers the introduction of FRME to grade three. It impedes the smooth transition of moral development from one stage to the other. In other words, it poses challenges with the implementation of a spiral and developmental curriculum.

One teacher revealed that work ethic is another critical moral value enshrined in religious education which is missing in the updated curriculum:

The teaching of religious education also assists in the inculcation of work ethics in young children. Work ethic is a critical moral value for the success of any community hence the need to teach such moral values at infancy. Unfortunately, even the family, religious and moral education as learning area at grade three does not cover issues of work ethic. I think the issue of work ethic should be introduced at infancy through adulthood.

Another teacher concurred and added:

Another important moral value entrenched in religion is that of work ethic. It is only important that this important moral value be inculcated in young children at the elementary stage of their learning.

With regards to the relevance of work ethic as a moral value, a senior ECD teacher had this to say during interviews:

You need to understand that religious values tend to eliminate or reduce corruption, graft and laziness at work places. Such values are critical to the prosperity and development of any given society. It thus becomes very critical to inculcate work ethics through religious teachings to young learners. This is the problem with the updated curriculum it introduces FRME at grade three and I think this is rather too late.

The above sentiments further emphasise that the philosophy of work ethic in the context of religion should form part of the themes for infant education because values taught at that tender age are likely to endure forever. Weber's (1930) theory cited

in Ritzer (2012) shows a strong relationship between religious values and work ethic which tends to promote development in a given society. The inculcation of work ethic in young children can thus become a foundational basis for the spirit of work ethic and development in a given society. The perceptions of school heads and teachers on the influence of religion on work ethics reveal the critical role of religion in the infant school curriculum, hence the challenges that come with denying it a place in an educational curriculum. As already alluded, analysing the new curriculum framework for Zimbabwe reveals that, religion as a learning area is only introduced at Grade 3 level. Even so, Family, Religious and Moral Education as a learning area covered at that level does not cover work ethics. By implication, the deliberate omission of FRME as a learning area in infant school curriculum does not only pose challenges in terms of inculcating work ethics in young children but also impedes a spiral and developmental curriculum.

THE CONTRIBUTION OF FRME TO CHILD DEVELOPMENTAL DOMAINS

Family, Religious and Moral Education contributes tremendously to the child developmental domains. Teaching and learning in ECD classes focuses on the child developmental domains which include social, emotional, linguistic and intellectual development among others (World Bank, 2013). Interviews with ECD teachers revealed that FRME has a critical role in enhancing these developmental domains through religious stories and teachings. An interview with one experienced ECD teacher reveals that;

The focus of learning in infant education centres on the development of social, emotional, intellectual, linguistic as well as psychomotor skills. Religious stories and moral values provide a great opportunity for developing such skills. Thus, the omission of religious education in the updated infant school curriculum points to the inadequacies and short comings of a curriculum.

Another ECD teacher concurred and said:

Religious stories are very critical in developing young learners in the different developmental domains. They promote linguistic, social, emotional as well as intellectual skills. Thus, deferring the introduction of religious education until grade three is denying young children an opportunity for development and growth in these different domains.

The same sentiments were echoed by a TIC in the infant department:

For infant learners, FRME is not only about inculcating moral values but it enhances intellectual, linguistic as well as social and emotional skills through stories, drama, songs and rhymes derived from different religions in that particular community. The old infant school curriculum was more effective in this regard because it introduced RME right from ECD A.

The Sentiments from school heads and teachers reveal the critical role played by FRME in enhancing child development in the different domains. As enunciated by the research participants, FRME through religious stories, drama, songs and rhymes contributes immensely in developing intellectual, linguistic, social and emotional skills in young children. These skills form the foundational basis for children's later learning and constitute preparedness for formal learning(Wanja, 2014).Similarly, Montessori cited in Raskin (2018) argues that this is the period when children have the highest potential to acquire language, character and other dimensions of child development. Thus, rejecting FRME a space

in the infant school curriculum does not only affect the moral development of young children, but also the other developmental domains (emotional, social, linguistic and intellectual development). This impies that, FRME becomes one of the critical learning areas for the infant school curriculum which cannot be ignored. In this regard Zimbabwe should learn from other countries like Zambia, South Africa, Kenya and Ghana.

CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that Zimbabwe's updated curriculum framework has deliberately omitted FRME as one of the learning areas in the infant school curriculum. This has not only caused a disjuncture in terms of a spiral and developmental curriculum but also impedes progression of moral development as well as other developmental domains. Although moral values can be taught in other subject areas, it is best taught in the context of religion. While other countries like Kenya and Zambia have reintroduced RME in ECD curriculum after having experienced challenges posed by its omission, Zimbabwe has taken a retrogressive trajectory by removing FRME in the infant school curriculum. The sentiments shared by participants are that the deliberate omission of FRME as one of the learning areas is not only detrimental to moral development of young children but also impedes a spiral and developmental curriculum. RME has been seen to contribute to the inculcation of work ethic as well as social, emotional, intellectual and linguistics skills for young learners and these are critical for formal learning preparedness.

RECOMMENDATIONS

FRME has been seen to be very critical for both the developmental domains and moral development of young children. It is against this backdrop that the study recommends review of the updated infant school curriculum to reconsider FRME as one of the learning areas of the infant school curriculum. It is also recommended that the learning areas in FRME be expanded to include work ethics from ECD A through grade seven. Judging from the sentiments by the participants, it becomes important for curriculum developers to take cognisant of the multi-religious nature of the Zimbabwean society and consider the multi-faith pedagogical approach to inculcate values of tolerance and respect for diversity.

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