

Assessing the Teaching Methods Adopted in the Implementation of the Confirmation Classes Curriculum in the Anglican Church of Kenya: A Study of Thimbigua Deanary

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to assess the teaching methods adopted in the implementation of the confirmation curriculum designed to teach catechism classes undertaken by learners in the Anglican Church of Kenya. The population of the study comprised 30 learners already enrolled in the confirmation classes, three evangelists, and five clergies totaling 38. Using purposive sampling five learners were selected from each of the six churches making a total sample size of 30. All five participants from each church were put into focus groups which became units of analysis. The analysis revealed that there was a low level of motivation among the students of the catechism classes to join the main ministries of the Church after the catechism class. They also affirmed that there were inadequate learning materials in all the Churches to support the catechism classes. To enhance the implementation of the curriculum, the research recommended using creative teaching methods which would also involve the learners, and flexible teaching methods among the teachers.

Keywords: *Teaching methods, implementation, confirmation classes curriculum*

1.0 Introduction

The curriculum is a road map that refers to the means and materials with which students relate to achieve identified educational outcomes. Its essential processes could be likened to the relevance of a master plan of a building to both a contractor and the builder. We can therefore deduce that like there is no building without a design or plan, hence education cannot take place without a curriculum. A curriculum consists of all the planned experiences that the school offers as part of its teaching/learning responsibility and also includes unplanned experiences as well. It contains activities planned so that learners will achieve as far as possible some set objectives. The components of a good curriculum comprise the situation analysis, objectives, content, methods, and evaluation (Audrey & Howard, 1978). It should comprise the content, teaching methods, and purpose. The curriculum should include a need analysis for the learners in its design to develop and implement the teaching and learning outcomes.

A curriculum should be relevant to the needs of the learners taking care of their environmental orientation. It should be able to communicate the intent and purpose of the overall teaching/learning outcomes while incorporating strategies for implementation and possible improvement. In essence, a good curriculum should be able to promote self-study among the

learners as well as encourage them to invent new ideas which are relevant to society. Oluoch posits that curriculum is “all that is planned to enable the students to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (1982, 7).

The researcher was interested in the assessment of the teaching methods applied in the implementation of a curriculum that is used to teach catechism classes in the Anglican Church. According to Pazmino, a curriculum is “the stated and planned events intended to yield certain educational consequences” (Pazmino 1992, 93). For a person to be given membership in the Anglican Church, they have to go through a catechism class which goes on for one year. After one year the candidate is examined to test their eligibility by answering some set questions. After successful completion, the candidate is entitled to partake of the Lord’s Table (Holy Communion) and is considered a bonafide member of the Anglican fellowship.

Problem Statement

A good and sound curriculum is necessary for every program to succeed since a curriculum plays a vital role in learning and helps in achieving good learning outcomes for all participants. It also helps the designers to respond innovatively to the needs of the learners as well as those of the community. The curriculum should help children to become responsible Christians who will grow spiritually and model good discipline in schools. This should bring transformation in relation to their learning in school, becoming confident individuals, who will effectively contribute to the needs of the church and the community at large. It is therefore imperative to assess the implementation of any curriculum to establish whether it is meeting its desired goals. The curriculum for the catechism classes was designed in 1662 under the Common Book of prayer. It has been revised several times and it aimed to bring the students to become mature Christians and initiate them to membership in the Anglican Church. The researcher has observed that there is a deterioration of moral values in our society among the members who have attended the catechism classes. Such behaviors as alcoholism, sexual immorality, early school dropouts, and decline in membership in our churches have been on the rise among the adolescent age group. Kinoti asserts that “Contemporary African society is lamenting a moral world fallen apart ... Today the African society ... seems to be in a state of near chaos in the realm of morality” (Kinoti 1992:75, 86). He states that “Elderly people lament daily that they are meeting behaviour that shocks them: sexual immorality, dishonesty, corruption, crime, violence and many other things which hasten the old to their graves” (1992, 53). In essence, the researcher sought to establish the teaching methods being employed in the implementation of the catechism curriculum.

2.0 Literature Review

Teaching Methods in Catechism Classes

Methods are necessary for teaching as they express a teacher’s attitude and conviction. Varying teaching methods would enhance the process of implementing the curriculum. Graendoff asserts that a “Method is simply an instrument used by the teacher to communicate to the learner the knowledge, ideal or truth under considerations” (1981, 179). He states that a teacher should prepare the lesson content before determining the teaching method to be used and then select appropriate methods. The teacher should utilize a variety of methods ensuring that the methods open channels of communication (1981, 180). Byrne quoted in Graendorf defines methods as “orderly, systematic procedure employed to carry some purpose to gain some preconceived goal” (1981, 222). Methods help us to accomplish desired tasks. Lawrence describes methods as “Simply an activity designed to hook students to communicate information and meaning to teach, to insight or to encourage response” (Lawrence, 1970, 112).

Gangel asserts that “the best approach to the teaching-learning process is through a method that involves teacher and student in a mutual quest for truth” (Gangel 1968, 43). He goes further to state that this calls for prior preparation on the part of the learner as well as the teacher. In essence, the teachers of the catechism classes should be well versed in Christian education ethics where they would be willing to integrate the different approaches to the teaching-learning process to involve the learners and stimulate them to learn and desire to become teachers.

Gangel and Hendricks (2003) posit that a teacher needs to understand the criteria, learning process, and teaching schedule for the age group. This will call for the teacher to establish knowledge aims for each lesson taught; giving an assignment for the class to work on the same in the week. There is also a need to challenge and direct the interests of learners toward effective Bible knowledge. The assignments should be designed in consideration of the age levels of the learners and their abilities (Edge 1995, 17). Gangel and Henricks (2003) suggest four guidelines to help the teacher choose creative teaching methods citing that they are essential in selecting teaching methods and these are:

Make sure that the method or activity matches the learners’ level of ability and maturity; Provide several choices of activities to stimulate interest and prevent boredom; Include planned questions that assist the learner to think through the levels of knowledge, comprehension, and application; Include guidance and encouragement that sustain the learner’s interest and motivation. (Gangel and Henricks 2003, 174-175)

In the Anglican catechism, there is a great deal of memorization and recitation since the learning is designed in line with the three articles namely; The Lord’s Prayer, Apostles Creed, and Nicene Creed. Mungathia suggests four steps of memorization and recitation as follows:

Seek to make all material to be memorized meaningful to the students; Apply review principles to strengthen learning retention; When memorization has been made, allow students to demonstrate that they have achieved; Utilize the available visual materials to increase the memorization. (Mungathia 2005, 17)

It is important to understand whether the learners are making meaning in the memorization of the materials offered in catechism. When they make meaning the learners would find it easy to apply the same materials in the church context and this would help in achieving their godly purpose.

3.0 Methodology

The study adopted a grounded theory design that is not vulnerable to threats like history and based on the resources and time available, it was the view of the researcher that this design and strategy were the most appropriate for this study. The research was carried out in Thimbigua Deanary which comprises six Anglican Parishes within Kiambu District, namely, A.C.K All Saints Muchatha, A.C.K Kiogora Church, ACK Thimbigua Church, ACK St. Peter’s church Muongoiya, ACK Githima, and ACK Christ the King, Wanyori church. The respondents were those who were enrolled in the catechism classes in the year 2013 and they were between 11 – 13 years of age. They have already been baptized and anticipating being confirmed. Other respondents were the catechism teachers and the Parish vicars who are involved in the implementation process of teaching the catechism classes. The population of the study comprised 30 learners already enrolled in the confirmation classes, three evangelists, and five clergies totaling 38. Using purposive sampling five learners were selected from each of the six

churches making a total sample size of 30. All five participants from each church were put into focus groups which became units of analysis.

4.0 Results and Discussion

Teaching Methods

Research question one sought to identify the teaching methods which are used during the implementation of teaching the confirmation catechism classes. The researcher gathered that the major teaching method is through repetition of the teachings which is meant to make the students internalize them thereby putting in into memory. In educating we are to teach learners to have a firm faith in the Lord Jesus Christ and according to Downs they need to attain spiritual maturity. In essence, their faith would affect the “cognitive, the affective and the volitional” (1994, 18). Though it is good to memorize the curriculum, it would be hard to establish whether it has affected the three domains hence the need to employ different methods of teaching in the implementation of the curriculum. According to Audrey and Howard, we should pay attention to recalling what has been learned, comprehension, and application of the entire curriculum (1978, 69).

The teachers stated that the main aim of teaching confirmation catechism classes is to help learners become mature Christians. They agreed that there were no written down aims to help in implementing the catechism classes. One of the teachers stated that the catechism classes were meant to help the learners understand the Anglican Church in a better way, noting that learners understand the structure and leadership of the church and its liturgy. Another teacher added that the learners would be able to understand the traditions, faith, and beliefs of the entire church. This would help them to know the pillars of the Anglican Church as well as teach them to understand the teachings on prayer and respect for others which would translate to a deeper understanding of the Bible. Another teacher stated that the aims were not stipulated and thus there was no uniformity since every teacher taught using assumed aims.

Learners on the other hand did not know the main aim of attending the catechism classes. One focus group stated that they attended the classes so that they could start taking Holy Communion. Another group stated that besides taking Holy Communion they were looking forward to join the teenager’s class. One of the groups stated that they were attending the classes to help them become better Christians. Asked if they knew what it meant to become better Christians, one stated that they would have to be followers of Jesus and be able to obey him.

Students were sometimes divided into small groups which are meant to help work together in groups and hence promote memorization. The learners in the focus groups stated that teachers asked them to read the questions many times. In those small groups, they were asked to read assigned questions before gathering together to recite as one group. The researcher observed this methodology when she visited the different classes being taught. She also observed the challenge in some learners trying to master the questions in their mother tongue which is not used in school and this derailed the learning process. The learners from the six parishes sometimes met together in one of the churches where they practiced their knowledge of the different questions. This was meant to help competition where children from every parish want to outdo the others hence encouraging them to study hard. The teachers attested to the fact that children were meant to memorize the questions. The researcher gathered that there were no other activities involved in teaching the classes.

Discussion

Considering that a good curriculum should address the three domains of learning, it would be evident for the curriculum designers to include learning aims that would be guiding the implementers; therefore, this should also help them in establishing methods that would help address the learners holistically.

Relevant Teaching Methods would Enhance Internalization of the Catechism

We are living in a technological age and majority of the schools are using technology to enhance learning. The church, however, seems to be dragging behind since the methods being used are the old methods of memorization. Though a good method, it is one of the many that could help in facilitating the implementation of the curriculum. Some of the teachers suggested that they would use videos, field trips, and dramatization to promote learning. The learners stated that they would like more methods to be included where they suggested videos, dramatization, and field trips as some of the methods they would prefer. One focus group stated that they would prefer a book with illustrations since the prayer book is quite plain. Another group stated that they would prefer a simplified book that would be accompanied by plays for them to act on the same teaching. Learners from one group suggested that songs can be incorporated into the curriculum citing that it is hard to forget a song if well grasped.

5.0 Conclusion

Participants described the learning/teaching experiences in relation to the ways the teachers handled them in class. They indicated that there was a low level of motivation among the students of the catechism classes to join the main ministries of the Church after the catechism class. They also affirmed that there were inadequate learning materials in all the Churches to support the catechism classes. There was an indication of poor assessment strategies citing that they only do the assessments as a group. These observations do not indicate a pleasant experience in the implementation of the catechism classes. The students, however, indicated the usefulness of rote learning citing that memorization and repetition were the major modes of instruction.

Data indicated that while memorization of scriptures is good, learners would need to be helped to process their struggles in relation to the word of God. When this is not done the learners may never be able to apply the contents of the curriculum which will translate to spiritual struggle. The struggle could lead to learners being influenced negatively and hence a decline in moral values.

6.0 Recommendations

- i. Have the curriculum designed to include different teaching methods which would be relevant to the age group and in compliance with the 21st-century methods of teaching. The methods should include videos, group discussions, field visits, and dramatization
- ii. Encourage the teachers to be proactive in helping learners who are not well versed in using their mother tongue and using English as the language for assessment.

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