

Assessing the Suitability of the Content and Teaching/Learning Activities 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 evaluate the suitability of the content and teaching/learning activities 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 content consisted of deep theology which needed to be handed over a longer period for the learners to grasp and understand the content. To enhance the implementation of the curriculum, the research recommended breaking down the curriculum into chewable topics which would be more relevant to real-life issues.

Keywords: *Content, teaching/learning activities, implementation, confirmation classes curriculum*

1.0 Introduction

The curriculum is a road map that deals with the means and materials students use to achieve certain educational outcomes. Its fundamental process can be compared to the relevance of the building master plan to both contractors and owners. We can therefore conclude that education cannot take place without a curriculum, just as there is no building without a design or plan. The curriculum consists of all planned experiences that the school offers as part of its teaching/learning responsibilities and also includes unplanned experiences. It contains activities that are planned in such a way that learners achieve as many set goals as possible. The components of a good curriculum are situational analysis, objectives, content, methods, and assessment (Audrey and Howard 1978). It should contain content, learning methods, and objectives. The curriculum should incorporate learner needs analysis into its design to develop and implement teaching and learning outcomes.

The curriculum must meet the needs of students and pay attention to the orientation of their environment. It should be able to communicate the intent and purpose of the overall learning/teaching outcomes while incorporating strategies for implementation and possible

improvements. A good curriculum should be able to encourage independent learning of students and encourage them to develop new ideas that are relevant to society. Oluoch suggests that the curriculum “is all that is planned to enable students to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (1982, 7).

The researcher is interested in assessing the adequacy of the content and teaching and learning activities in delivering the curriculum used for teaching the catechism in the Church of England. The curriculum, according to Pazmino, is "a defined and planned event designed to achieve certain pedagogical consequences" (Pazmino 1992, 93). To become a member of the Church of England, one must complete a year's course of catechism. After one year, candidates are tested to see if they can answer certain questions. Upon successful completion, the candidate is eligible to attend the Lord's Supper (Holy Communion) and is considered a true member of the Anglican Communion.

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 evaluate the suitability of the content and teaching/learning activities for the implementation of the curriculum.

2.0 Literature Review

Learning Activities of Catechism Classes

Learning activities could be defined as tools designed to develop and implement as a way of involving the learner to become a participant in the teaching/learning process. They are necessary for ensuring the implementation of a given curriculum because they enhance learning since learners will not have an opportunity to get bored. Farrant asserts that “A good teacher will always use the activity as a means to an end and select with care activities he uses so that they serve best the process of teaching” (1989, 133). In essence, Christian educators should look for ways to bridge the gap between content and methodology to help the learners get into the right relationship with God by using creative activities. The teacher would therefore need to plan for activities for the catechism class which would help the learners to grasp the concept with ease.

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 to be 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

Contents and Teaching/Learning Activities

The learners seemed to have different views on the content and activities employed in teaching the confirmation curriculum. The researcher gathered that they used the Book of Common Prayer to learn the content. They are taught about God, the church, and the recitation of the creeds.

The teachers agreed that they used the Book of Common Prayer to teach content in the confirmation classes. However, they had varied ways of using learning activities. One teacher stated that she used Bible knowledge assessment as the only activity. Another teacher mentioned that he goes further to using illustrations and explaining the use of liturgical colours and explains their meaning. Visual aids were also used by some teachers in explaining the different themes. One teacher stated that the use of items like an egg helps a lot in explaining the Trinity. One of the teachers engaged the children in a Bible study to help them understand the word of God better where he majored in teaching about the prophets and the book of Romans. Demonstration method is also used.

The main method of teaching catechism is through memorization as stated by one of the respondents: "The teachers open the class with a word of prayer and then continue with the children reciting the assigned portion in the Book of Common Prayer. They keep practicing that and once the teacher is satisfied, they close with a word of prayer." The teachers concurred that the curriculum restricted them to teach well since the children were asked the same questions during their confirmation. This caused them to emphasize memorizing the questions that they felt did not adequately meet the needs of the children. Although children at this stage are very active, they did not engage in other activities due to the limitation of time.

The Vicars felt that the curriculum emphasized fulfilling God's mission as learners were taught how to be grounded in the Christian faith and how to pray. According to them, the curriculum is based on the word of God which prepared the learners for maturity. They learned about the church traditions which were meant to prepare the individual to become a responsible participant. They noted that there were no accompanying materials to help the learners understand the curriculum better.

The respondents stated that the biggest challenge was the education system in our Kenyan schools which loads the learners with too much work and usually the students are preoccupied with the school work. This leaves them with little time to engage with the catechism lessons and they seem to learn only when they meet together. The other challenge cited was that the classes were delivered using the mother tongue which was not being taught in school. Though learners spoke the language, they were not able to make meaning of the different words used in the Book of Common Prayer. The respondents felt that it would be necessary to have supplemental materials to help the learners understand and internalize the contents. This would call for creativity by ensuring that the learners are kept busy and enjoy the learning. The respondents felt that there is a need to rethink the teaching methods which would translate to a shift in the confirmation curriculum. One of the vicars felt that engaging the catechism teaching in Sunday school ministry would go a long way in helping incorporate the teachings from Sunday school and perfecting the same when the learners attend the classes.

One of the vicars noted that little learning takes place during the catechism classes since the catechism teachers were always rushing to make sure the students were able to memorize the many questions to avoid embarrassment during the confirmation day. In line with this, the researcher noted that parents were not actively involved in the learning of the catechism lessons among their children. In essence, to ensure the effective participation of parents they would need to be empowered and oriented in the implementation of the curriculum and be encouraged to follow up on the children. This participation would help the catechism teachers and learners would be able to grasp the contents faster.

Discussion

Bearing in mind that a good curriculum is “all that is planned to enable the students to acquire and develop the desired knowledge, skills, and attitudes” (Oluoch 1982, 7). It would be necessary to simplify the catechism by using words that would be understood by the students. It would also be necessary to give the learners options so that those who would wish to learn in English would do so since it is easier to learn with the medium being used in schools.

Too Much Content Could be a Barrier to the Learning of Catechism Classes

The researcher gathered from all the participants that the content was heavy and carried many questions. Learners at ages 11 – 13 are explorative and very active. The content of the catechism classes is heavy theologically and the learners may not be able to break it down into chewable material. While it is important to teach the doctrines of the church, it would be necessary to break the doctrines into topics that are elaborated for the learner to understand and internalize the same. Memorization of sixty-one questions set in the Book of common prayer is not a viable way considering the current trends in education. One of the catechist teachers suggested that teaching using video and field trips would go a long way to help the learners internalize the concepts. The video method could be done by creating a storyline that focuses on the themes of catechism and would hence allow the learners to visualize the teachings. In the area of field trips, this could be organized where learners would be taken out of their normal environment where learners would be encouraged to share their insights after the outing.

The learners cited that memorizing the questions was a big challenge. This was because the school work affected them as they carried a lot of work home from school, even on weekends. On the other hand, they stated that the school teachers do not always allow them to attend the catechism classes when they are asked to attend during weekdays. Majority of the learners also have tuition classes on Saturday which leaves them with Sunday as the only day they could work on Catechism classes.

5.0 Conclusion

Farrant asserts that “a good teacher will always use the activity as a means to an end and select with care activities he uses so that they serve best the process of teaching” (1989,133). It is important to note that curriculum materials can be developed using local resources. The community could be useful in providing the materials which in turn can provide many lessons. The members could be called upon to share their skills and knowledge which can be done by visiting them at home or work, hence offering young people a chance to master a skill or simply to absorb some of the skills from the older, more experienced person. Lefever posits that “participation in the learning process stimulates learning and encourages growth” (2004, 9). It would therefore be necessary to include all the members by engaging them in many learning activities. This would take care of the different learners since learners have to learn through different learning methods. On the other hand, it will help the learners to own the process which will help them to assimilate the contents hence bringing transformation.

6.0 Recommendations

- i. Constant review of the curriculum materials preferably reviews after every five years as required by the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development.
- ii. Design evaluation tools that would be used to help learners and teachers have periodic assessments including written examinations.

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