THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN YOUTH EMPOWERMENT

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Abstract
It is a well known fact that the youths are the leaders of tomorrow in any nation. Every good government carries out innovations and transformation in teaching and learning which demonstrates its efforts in seeing that the youths of today will have a better tomorrow. Christian Religious Education is not backward in ensuring youth’s empowerment through workable innovations being put into practice in order to transform teaching and learning. In the light of this, the aim of this paper is to examine the impact of Christian Religious Education in youth empowerment towards enhancement of teaching and learning. In view of this, the paper examines the concepts of education, religion, religious education and importance of home in youth empowerment. The paper concludes that the only way to enhance teaching and learning is to inculcate in the youths the fear of God through teaching of various religious education. Hence, it is recommended among others that the teaching of Christian Religious Education should be made compulsory at all levels of educational pursuit. If this is done, it will bring about innovations and transformation in teaching and learning.

Today belongs to the older generation but tomorrow belongs to the youths because the youths are the leaders of tomorrow. The youths of today determine the kind of elders of tomorrow. Christianity is not just about going to Church, but also helping to make youths understand their stand in God and their place in the future. Considering the dynamic of our educational system, which tends to tilt more to the dark side, preaching salvation is no longer enough. Youths are likely to lose their faith in Christ if they are not taught and empowered to be innovative thereby bringing about transformation in teaching and learning processes.

The Christian Religious Education has gone further by trying to empower the youths on how to live a spiritually and financially secured life in...
Christ which tends towards new ideas. This paper therefore seeks to explore Christian Religious Education as an avenue of empowering Nigerian youths through education, training, and skill acquisition programs which is capable of transforming teaching and learning processes. The question is: What help can Christian Religious Education render to enhance youth empowerment? How can Christian Religious Education help to build confidence in the minds of every citizen in general and youths in particular?

Education is the best legacy a country can give to her citizens. However, in this paper, the writer sees the effectiveness of religious education as a powerful instrument for youth empowerment. It is on the above background that the paper intends to examine the role of Christian Religious Education in youth empowerment.

Therefore, before any meaningful discourse can be embarked upon on this work, it is profoundly necessary to examine separately some operational conceptual terms involved vis-à-vis:

Youth: Youth, according to the Oxford Illustrated Dictionary (2003) symbolizes “a state of being young; the period between childhood and adulthood”. It entails the vigor, enthusiasm, inexperience and other characteristics of this period. The period of youth and relevance of young ones to the society is best illustrated in the words of Kennedy as follows:

“This world demands the qualities of youth: not a time of life but a state of mind, a temper of the will, a quality of imagination, a predominance for adventure over the life of ease.” – Robert Kennedy (cited in Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia).

Empowerment: To empower is to authorize, license, give power to or make one able to undertake certain tasks (Oxford Dictionary). Page and Czuba (1999) generally defined empowerment as a “multi-dimensional social process that helps people gain control over their own lives. It is a process that fosters power (that is, the capacity to implement) in people for use in their own lives, their communities, and in their society, by acting on issues that they define as important.

Youth Empowerment: Youth empowerment is an attitudinal, structural, and cultural process whereby young people get the ability, authority, and agency to make decisions and implement changes in their own lives and the lives of other people including youths and adults (Wikipedia, the free encyclopedia). This definition implies that youths need to be equipped with necessary skills, knowledge and attitudes needed for self-reliance and a purposeful employment to earn a living and become productive members of the society given the enabling environment.
Furthermore, according to Omotere (2011), within the African context, youth empowerment is a means of encouraging young people to gain skills and knowledge that will allow them to overcome obstacles in life. In this sense, youth empowerment helps the youths to:

1. Make decisions about personal/collective circumstances.
2. Access information and resources for decision making.
3. Consider a range of options from which to choose.
4. Think positively about the ability to make change.
5. Learn and access skills for improving personal/collective circumstances.
6. Get involved in the growth process and changes that are never ending and self-initiated.
7. Increase their positive self-image and overcome stigma.
8. Increase their ability in discreet thinking to sort out right and wrong.

From the foregoing, it can be deduced that an empowered youth can bring about innovations and transformation in teaching and learning.

**Education as a Tool for Empowering Youths**

Fafunwa (1976) defined education as a process by which one acquires knowledge, information and skill in order to be useful to oneself, family and the society at large. This presupposes that, education empowers the youths for the future to be able to fulfill socio-economic and political obligations to oneself, family and the society at large.

In the words of Plato (Ibe, 2006) “it is better to be unborn than untaught; for ignorance is the root of misfortune.” Education is undoubtedly the foundation upon which the future of any society is built and the best investment any government can make for its citizenry which will basically result in innovations and transformation in teaching and learning.

According to Okafor (2010), education literally is an English word derived from the Latin word, “Educare” which means to train, lead out, to extract out or bring up. Aristotle sees education as the process of creating a sound mind in a sound body and believes further that it should develop the physical capacity of the youths and the mind which means intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual capacities. Education is indeed a tool for innovation and transformation in teaching and learning through which youths can be empowered.

This is equally illuminated in the Holy Bible as it says in the book of Proverbs 1:2-7 thus:

“That men may know wisdom and instruction, understand words of insight, receive instruction, in wise dealing, righteousness, justice and equity; that prudence may be given..."
to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth, the wise man also may hear and increase in learning, and the man of understanding acquire skill, to understand a proverb and a figure, the words of the wise and their riddles. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction”.

This is further explained in Proverbs 22:6 that:

“Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it”.

Saint Paul wrote to Timothy admonishing him that:

“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work”. (2 Timothy 3:16-17)

Concept of Religion

Religion cannot be said to have a universally acceptable definition as it means different things to different people. However, in line with King (2005) as cited by Isiramen (2010), religion is derived from three Latin words namely relegare (to unite or to link), ligara (to bind) and religio (relationship). This means that religion is an encounter or a relationship between the supernatural (God) and human beings. It is expressed in the form of absolute dependence of the human persons on the supernatural power that the human persons believe to be their Creator and to whom they absolutely depend on for their sustenance and fulfillment of their destiny. The term religion is looked upon from different perspectives as follows:

Hornby (2001) defined religion as “a belief in the existence of a supreme being that created the universe and gave human beings spiritual nature”. Supporting Hornby (2001), James (2004) defined religion as “a conciliation of powers superior to man which direct and control the whole multitude and human life”. From the above, religion is therefore described as an affair of the heart and not a reason and is perfectly borne of the living dead of the home spirit.

Concept of Religious Education

Religious education is described as a process of acquiring knowledge and disseminating it to the people. It also means the process or act of informing, directing and enlightening an individual on how to worship their Creator and to live a useful life in the world (Anastesia, 2013:321). Religious education can therefore be comprehensively described as that type of education that deals with the teaching of morals which makes an individual to fit properly into a given society.

Christian Religious Education

Christian Religious Education is the type aimed at molding the character
The Role Of Christian Religious Education In Youth Empowerment - Sunday Noah Onaolapo

of pupils for successful living and acceptability before God in worship. It is designed and incorporated into the school subject. Alongside the teaching in schools, it is equally taught at home as the home is the first school in human life.

Objectives of Christian Religious Education

Pratt (1980) defined objectives as “a statement of a specific change to be brought about in a learner. It is an intended learning outcome of education”. According to him, objectives must be clear and unambiguous, living no room for any doubt about what it means or what it implies. In the International Council of Religious Education (1988) the following are listed as part of the objectives of religious education:

a) Religious education seeks to develop understanding and appreciation of the personality, life and teaching of Jesus Christ as will lead to experience of Him as Saviour and Lord loyalty to Him and His cause and will manifest itself in daily life and conduct.

b) Religious education seeks to foster in growing persons a progressive and continuous development of Christ-like character.

c) To help persons establish and maintain, with their families, their Church and other individuals and groups taking responsible roles in society and seeing in every human being an object of the love of God.

This may be the reason why Duke in Banjo (1978) affirmed that “educate man without religion and you make him a clever evil”. This statement may appear to be an exaggeration but the truth of it is that human tendencies are always towards evil. It is the aim of religion to check this in man.

According to Adekunle (2004), Christian Religion is aimed at:
1. Developing children morally and spiritually;
2. Nurturing obedient and law abiding children that will become good citizens;
3. Having knowledge and understanding of God and obedience to His command;
4. Promoting understanding among different religious groups; and
5. Understanding the meaning of existence.

All these are incorporated into the Christian Religious Education curriculum which is imbibed through the teaching of Christian Religious Studies. In the course of this, the youths are better trained, behaved or educated so as to bring innovations in teaching and learning.
The Significance of Religious Education on Youth Empowerment

The goal of education is not only the acquisition of knowledge, skills and attitude including values but it includes the harmonious development of the physical and moral endowments of the youth to enable Him handle responsibly and with moral integrity all his future assignments in the society. Religious Education is a systematic way which will foster empowerment of a sense of belongingness and patriotism in the youths. It prepares the youth for consensus teamwork collaboration and cooperation in view of their contributions to the development of the society as responsible citizens of the country. It is a form of education that enhances the skills of the youths in creative thinking, decision making and problem solving in their daily life situations. (Sunday, 2006).

If youths are empowered, their behaviors and actions will tend to be in line with societal norms. When a nation succeeds in this, youth empowerment will be achieved (Abbah, 2011). Religion teaches morals among youths that form the populace.

Significance of the Home in the Teaching of Christian Religious Education

A major avenue where Christian Religious Education is taught apart from school is the home. In the achievement of the basic aim of Christian Religious Education, the home influence is very important. Harmana (2005) highlighted that the home is responsible for the early education of a child. Adekunle (2004) opined that Christian Religious Education starts as soon as a child is born. This may be in form of praying with the children, reading the words of God, singing gospel songs/choruses to them. A child being denied of these cannot become better leader tomorrow.

In the same vein, Ojo (2005) affirmed the home as foundation for the religious development of children. He explains the important role of Christian Religious Education in the development of children and says, “the religious development of children needs not and should not be isolated from the other kinds of development…” Harmana (2005) further commented that parents in the home have vital roles to play in the development of children. They provide both physical and emotional needs such as love. Through the teaching of religious education in the home, the parents have the social responsibility of shaping the child’s behavioural pattern and attitude formation and also prepare the child for his social interactions outside the family.

Conclusion

Youth empowerment is achievable through proper monitoring of their activities. The teaching and learning of religious education should be introduced early enough from the
Nursery level of education through Primary, Secondary and Tertiary levels because of the significant roles it plays in the life of Nigerian citizens as it concerns national development. Therefore, Nigerian youths who are the future leaders need to be well groomed in religious education for them to be effective leaders. This goes a long way in preparing them to be productive in the society for a positive turn around of the national economy. We may not be able to build the future for the youths but we can build the youths for the future.

In as much as youths are not properly trained in the fear of God, underdevelopment of a nation would continue to abound. However, a way by which all these could be checked is by inculcating in the youths, the fear of God through the teaching of various religious education. Christian Religious Education is a medium and has great role to play in youth empowerment.

**Recommendations**

In the light of all discussed and in order for religious education to take its proper place in youth empowerment, the following recommendations are proffered:

1. The inculcation of the teaching of religion should be done at the nursery and primary schools to build in the children, early in life, religious values.

2. There should be periodic review of the curriculum meant for the teaching of religious education in our schools.

3. There should be proper monitoring and evaluation of teachers of religious education in our schools to ensure that they are instilling proper morals into the youths.

4. School management should make it a point of duty to sponsor religious education teachers to attend seminars/workshops and conferences as a way of updating their knowledge with recent happenings.

5. The youths’ basic needs such as the social amenities and individual fundamental human rights should be met and protected by the leader.

**References**


