

Religious education in Zambia: Towards religious literacy, religious pluralism and liberalism

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Abstract

This paper stems from a study conducted to ascertain whether or not the current Zambian senior secondary school RE syllabuses could lead to the attainment of religious literacy and the promotion of religious pluralism and liberalism which are integral parts of modern RE. The methods of data collection included in-depth semi-structured interviews, lesson observations and document analysis, using semi-structured interview guides, focus group discussion guide, lesson observation checklist and document analysis checklist, respectively. The study found that Zambian RE is poorly handled, and that the current syllabuses are deficient in attaining religious literacy. It recommends that RE teachers should go beyond teaching for examinations if the subject is to contribute to the promotion of religious literacy, religious pluralism and liberalism.

Introduction

Religious Education (RE) as a curriculum subject has undergone numerous changes from being confessional and indoctrinating in nature, in the past, to being educational in the present day. These changes have not been peculiar to Zambia and are reflected the world over, especially in the British Commonwealth countries with whom Zambia shares a colonial past.

With particular emphasis to Zambia, RE has since independence developed from being confessional and denominational in the 1960s, through being ecumenical and interdenominational in the 1970s, to being educational and multi-faith from the 1980s. Despite these changes, Zambian RE scholars have argued that the subject should become more transformative in nature (Mujdrlica, 2004) and that it should adopt a critical understanding approach (Simuchimba, 2005). However, another crucial requirement of modern RE is the promotion of religious literacy and the values of pluralism and liberalism (Wright, 1996). A number of studies have been conducted in the country on RE, although scholars still do not agree on whether the subject is able to promote religious literacy, religious pluralism and liberalism. As such, it is this knowledge gap that the study's contribution to this debate sought to fill.

Theoretical and historical reflection

Religious Education and Religious Literacy

Due to the growing pluralism and diversity in modern societies, scholars, such as Erricker (2010), Jackson (2004), Wright (1993, 2001), Grimmitt (1987, 2000), Mujdrica (2004) and Simuchimba (2001, 2006) have debated the nature of RE in such societies. Among the many issues raised is the need to make the subject more educational and pluralistic.

As perhaps well known, RE is a school subject with both religious and educational aims. In many cases, people have emphasised one aim over the other. While traditionalists focus on the religious aims of the subject, which include character formation and initiation into the beliefs and values of a particular religion, liberals focus on educational aims which include critical thinking and skills development. In the recent times though, there have been calls to the effect that if the subject is to remain relevant and respond to the challenges of modern societies, focus should be placed on the promotion of more relevant issues such as learners' experiences, pluralism, religious literacy and citizenship education.

Literacy is traditionally seen as the ability to read and write. However, modern usage goes beyond the traditional notion to encompass knowledge of or competence in a particular subject or area such as finance, computers and religion. As such, the study conceived of religious literacy as a critical and reflective understanding of religious beliefs and values, leading to an ability to discuss religion intelligently. Accordingly, Wright (1996) notes that the mark of the religiously educated child would be the ability to think, act and to communicate with insight and intelligence in the light of that diversity of religious truth claims that are the mark of our contemporary culture.

Religious literacy, like other forms of literacy, is rooted in knowledge. In this respect, the religious literacy approach holds that learners should be exposed to different religions if they are to become religiously literate. A learner who is religiously literate should be able to intelligently deliberate on matters of religion. Unlike the confessional approaches which seek to develop learners into good followers and the phenomenological approach which seems to treasure

empathy only, this approach invites pupils to be open minded and critical so that they make well informed decisions.

Grimmitt (1987) undertook a major study of the contribution RE can make to pupils' learning and development in which he argued that RE should be in the service of education rather than religion. Having observed that the study of religions has a very important contribution to make to pupils' personal, social and moral development, he contended that the subject matter should be chosen because of its potentiality to provide an opportunity for reflection on, re-evaluation and re-interpretation of the self.

In his year 2000 study, Grimmitt focussed on the practical aspects of teaching RE and noted that pedagogical knowledge and skill provide the foundation upon which successful RE teaching depends. He contended that a genuinely child-centred RE must take into account the child's pre-understanding and must encourage children to explore and develop emergent religious viewpoints by actively challenging them to consider other options. Through the encounter with other horizons, pupils' perspectives become progressively refined and clarified, enabling a greater competence in their articulation of their own religious beliefs, greater awareness of the nature of their continuity and divergence from the beliefs of others. He concluded by emphasising that the ability of RE to meet the changing needs of children and contribute to their full development depends on teachers exploring new possibilities for the subject, however challenging they may be.

Although Grimmitt's works above were based on the British RE scenario, his conclusions and recommendations are applicable to the Zambian RE scenario in the sense that the development of RE as a curriculum subject in Zambia mirrors that in Britain due to the two countries' past colonial relationship. Thus Grimmitt's discussion of the pedagogies of the subject provided fertile theoretical background for our study.

In a study entitled, *Rethinking Religious Education and Plurality*, Robert Jackson (2004) raised important issues with regard to RE in the face of increasing plurality in British society. He stated that up until the late 1950s, RE in Britain was a form of Christian instruction with spiritual, moral and civic goals aimed at serving a predominantly Christian Britain. With the passage of

time, however, Britain had become more secular, and religiously and culturally diverse, like other western democracies. Jackson explains that with the emergence of pedagogies which acknowledged plurality as the context for RE, RE in Britain has responded positively to religious diversity. He also noted that the responses leading to current pedagogies were diverse with some people seeking to insulate the young from plurality and religious diversity by advocating for the teaching of Christianity as the religion of British national culture. Others intended to separate children on denominational lines by arguing for the removal of RE from state funded schools. These responses could be considered a nostalgic attempt to return to Christian indoctrination as an educationally valid approach to RE. Jackson further examined one of the current pedagogies developed by Andrew Wright, which recognises plurality, seeks to promote religious literacy and is aimed at producing young people who are able to handle religious language and truth claims with intelligence.

Jackson concluded the study by admitting that the on-going changes in religious, moral and citizenship education could be seen against the backdrop of increasing secularisation of society and religious plurality. He suggested that the most appropriate pedagogical responses to plurality in the school were those which provide a framework for promoting democratic values and respect for diversity within the law. This called for agreement about the scope of the subject and the processes of producing syllabuses that give close attention to pedagogical issues.

The foregoing study by Jackson is important in that it highlights the role of RE in a democratic and pluralistic society like Zambia. It also explains the responses of the subject to questions of citizenship education and the inclusion of non-religious views. The need for religious literacy and the emphasis on appropriate pedagogy are what our study advocates for Zambian RE as well.

The Zambian Scenario

As earlier alluded to, RE in Zambia has undergone a number of curriculum reviews from the onset of Western education to date. From a humble background of exclusive Christian sources, the subject now has three other religious sources of material which include Islam, Hinduism and Zambian Traditional Religion (ZTR). Up to 1991, these sources even included the non-religious

philosophy of Zambian Humanism. The aforementioned reviews were a result of attempts to make the subject more inclusive and educationally acceptable to the majority of Zambians.

With the subject constantly changing, it is clear that RE has over the years been influenced by both socio-political and educational factors. In the colonial period, the subject was a preserve of the missionaries who took the RE lesson as an opportunity to proselytise and nurture the faith of their adherents. As a result, the subject was taught by catechists whose methodological approaches were purely confessional in nature. This practice continued in the immediate years after independence as the government considered the subject to be under the control of the church and granted the different Christian denominations the right of entry into schools to teach RE. Although the country at that time was predominantly Christian, in practice, this policy created problems because RE classes had to be divided on Christian denominational lines.

The Ministry of Education could not allow this chaotic situation to continue and requested the churches to consider coming up with ecumenical RE syllabuses. With commendable willingness and spirit of cooperation, the churches worked with the government to achieve agreed primary and junior secondary school RE syllabuses by 1972 and 1973, respectively. Cambridge Bible Knowledge syllabuses were accepted by both the churches and government as suitable for senior secondary school.

With cultural and religious pluralism on the rise in the country, the educational reforms of the late 1970s and early 1980s were aimed at breaking away from the colonial past and coming up with an education system which had objectives and strategies for an independent, plural, and secular society (Henze, 1994: 19), and which fully met changed aspirations of Zambians (MOE, 1977). This led to the introduction of new multi-faith syllabuses in the mid-1980s, with the inclusion of aspects of Hinduism, Islam, and Indigenous Zambian Religious Beliefs. In line with the secularisation of the education system, aspects of the then Zambian philosophy of Humanism and Socialism were also included in the new syllabuses.

In 1995, as part of his Master of Education degree, Mujdrlica evaluated the Zambian RE syllabuses using a set of characteristics of modern RE. He concluded that the syllabuses were mediocre as they were not critical but encouraged mere appreciation and respect for religion. He recommended that the junior secondary RE syllabus, which was more educational than

confessional, be extended to the senior secondary school level so that secondary school RE would become more balanced and critical. Our study supports his recommendation for a more balanced and critical RE and will, therefore, build on it by recommending genuine dialogue among religions, especially at curriculum design stage.

The post-1977 Educational Reform RE syllabuses referred to above have been in use in schools since 1985. Therefore, our study supports Mujdrica's findings and recommendations for a more balanced and critical RE. We will, therefore, build on these findings by recommending for genuine RE syllabuses that meet some international criteria such as inclusiveness, promotion of critical thinking, religious literacy and liberalism.

Starting with Mujdrica (1995) himself, later including more recent studies on Zambian RE also generally endeavoured to further explain the historical development of the subject the country and attempted to suggest how could develop beyond its current stage. In his 2005 doctoral study, Simuchimba critically discussed the development of RE in the country in the First, Second and Third Republics, paying special attention to the roles played by Church and State. He saw the State as the more active of the two main players in the development of RE as it set the agenda for curriculum reforms and syllabus reviews through its education policy directions. These policy guidelines included the pluralisation of the subject through the inclusion of aspects of other religions, including the non-religious aspects of Zambian Humanism and Socialism. After analysing his own research findings and different approaches to RE in modern democratic countries, Simuchimba concluded that though multi-faith, Zambian RE was still at neo-confessional stage of educational development and therefore needed to develop further. He recommended that the subject should adopt a critical understanding model which would aim at promoting open and critical understanding of religion in the country.

Simuchimba's work above was comprehensive and went beyond earlier studies by suggesting that a multi-faith country like Zambia requires a liberal, plural, and critical form of RE which also promotes religious literacy. His study, however, did not involve evaluating classroom RE teaching practices. Therefore, our study goes beyond his by using both pluralism and religious literacy to assess and evaluate current senior secondary school RE.

Cheyeka's (2006) study discussed the nature of Zambian Humanism and saw it as a catalyst for a pluralist approach to RE in Zambia. In elaborating on pluralism, he referred to Kaunda as a relativist who promoted religious equality and neutrality, guided by his understanding and conviction that in a democratic society cultures and religions needed to be accorded equal value. In his conclusion, Cheyeka observed that following Kaunda's defeat in 1991, pluralism was dealt a fatal blow and RE in the country was at the crossroads. The foregoing study by Cheyeka is important in that it highlights an alternative thought on Zambian Humanism which happened to be the only non-religious source of material for RE. The study therefore provided useful background information to our study, particularly with regard to pluralism.

In 2011, Carmody published an article entitled, 'Multi-faith Religious Education in Zambia' in which he noted that as countries became more religiously diverse, there was need to review the RE syllabus to reflect the changes in society. In addition to an account of the religious setting of the country and a historical background to RE, he agreed with the need for a multi-faith approach to RE. For the elements that would make an educational multi-faith RE successful, Carmody proposed that the Ministry of Education needed to set up an all inclusive task force to look at the syllabuses and that the final approval of textbooks would need agreement than arbitrary Ministry of Education approval. He concluded by stressing the need to look ahead to a more inclusive RE syllabus at all levels. The relevance of Carmody's study to our study lies in its support for an inclusive, multi-faith RE, which we consider to be the basic requirement for successful RE in a plural and democratic country like Zambia.

In an article entitled, 'Pedagogy for Inter-Religious Education,' Carmody (2013) explored religious diversity and plurality which have increased with globalisation. He proposed an approach to inter-religious education for public schools which would allow non-confessional RE in the curriculum. According to Carmody, his proposed approach is anchored on Bernard Lonergan's self-transcendence which falls under critical realism and attempts to solve the problem of subjectivity. The seriousness with which Lonergan's self-transcendence treats a learner's viewpoint leads to an understanding that the pedagogy needed for inter-religious education ought to be learner-centred in order to engage the learners actively and to stimulate genuine interest. Carmody asserts that in this way, a teacher is challenged to present traditions in terms of the learner's present situation and not as static and doctrinally frozen concepts. Thus,

the teacher is further challenged to enter the horizons of the learner which is increasingly being made difficult by among other things, increasing class size and performance-based criteria for success. Carmody argued that the concern of his proposed pedagogy was to enable the learner to reach a level of freedom whereby he can be critical of his worldview while appreciating the distinctive perspective of the other as different. This should leave the learner religiously literate, ready to step forward into an increasingly diverse multi-faith and multicultural community, and to choose his worldview responsibly and wisely.

Although Carmody does not mention Zambia directly, the scenario he presents is clearly Zambian. Carmody's study is therefore useful in that it informs our study in terms of his proposed pedagogy which falls under critical realism which underpins the religious literacy approach we are envisaging for Zambia.

Methodology

Research Design

In order to adequately deal with the theoretical issues of religious literacy, pluralism and liberalism in Zambian RE, the study was anchored in the qualitative framework. Additionally, since it was not possible to involve many schools, teachers and pupils across the country, a case study design was adopted. The case study design was appropriate for this study because its overall purpose was to achieve understanding of how people make sense of their lives by allowing for the researcher to undertake an intensive and in-depth study (Cohen *et al*, 2007).

This qualitative approach employed a tripartite data collection mechanism involving in-depth semi-structured interviews, lesson observation and document analysis.

Population, Sample Size and Sampling Techniques

A population is a universe of units from which a sample is selected or chosen (Bryman, 2004). In the study, the population comprised all RE teachers, pupils and stake holders interested in RE. The target population included all teachers and pupils of RE in the selected schools in Ndola district and the RE Curriculum Specialist at CDC.

Since not all pupils and teachers of RE could be involved in the study, the sample comprised eleven pupils from School A which offers RE 2046 only, eleven pupils from School B which offers both RE 2044 and RE 2046, and eleven pupils from School C which offers RE 2044 only, four teachers of the observed classes, and the RE Curriculum Specialist from CDC. Thus, the total number of respondents was thirty-eight.

The study employed both purposive sampling and simple random sampling. Purposive sampling ensured that only rich information was gathered for the research as opposed to having a large number of participants. With this in mind, three schools in Ndola were purposively selected because of their disposition to RE. School A offers only RE 2046, School B offers both RE 2044 and RE 2046, and School C offers RE 2044 only. In the stated schools, simple random sampling was then used to select a class that was to be observed and the teacher responsible, interviewed. The pupils who participated in the focus group discussion at each school were then randomly selected from the observed class in order to provide an equal opportunity to all the pupils in that particular class. The RE Curriculum Specialist was purposively selected because he possessed the experience and knowledge needed to answer the research questions.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

The semi structured interview guide was the main data collection instrument designed to allow the researchers to probe the interviewee further in an event that clarification of issues was needed. The open ended nature of the questions allowed for flexibility on the part of the researchers who altered the questions depending on the participants' responses. The semi structured interview guide was used for teachers and the Curriculum Specialist. It should be noted that the interview guides were standardised among the teachers so as to increase the comparability of responses while reducing on the interviewer bias.

The focus group discussion guide was employed for the pupils. A tape recorder, notepads, and pens were also used to record the interviews for play back in cases where the interviewers were unable to write down all the responses from the interviewee. These tools were very useful as they were used in making corrections and modifications when need arose (Bryman, 2004).

The researchers started with the designing of the research instruments which included the semi-structured interview guides, focus group discussion guide, and document analysis checklist. The RE syllabuses were analysed followed by non participant observation of actual RE lessons in the selected schools. After observing the lessons, focus group discussions were held with the learners. Data from the teachers was collected through in-depth interviews using a semi structured interview guide. The study employed triangulation of methods which is recommended by many scholars to reduce on the flaws that are inherent in the use a single method (Patton, 1990).

Data Analysis and Variables

Since the study was qualitative, the data gathered from the interviews, observations and document analysis were categorised and arranged according to key concepts which corresponded with research questions, and were presented in a narrative manner. The process of data analysis was informed by the conceptual framework. It was done manually and the variables that were engaged included religious literacy, religious liberalism and religious pluralism. The analysis involved comparing the interviewee responses with observations and the information gathered from related literature. Designation analysis, which is essentially a counting exercise focussing on frequency of mentioned concepts was also utilised (Kombo and Tromp, 2006). Much of the data was analysed as soon as it was gathered so as to reduce on misplacement owing to the large volumes of data that was gathered.

Findings

The first objective of the study was to explore the teaching and learning of RE in selected secondary schools in Ndola district. The data shows that in schools with large class sizes, there is generally little engagement of pupils who are taken to be passive receptors of information by the teachers and although the teachers said that they varied their teaching and learning methods, the methods employed in these schools were mostly teacher-centred among them, the lecture method, teacher exposition, dictation, and question and answer. In the 2044 RE syllabus, the approach taken by teachers was selective and guided by the teacher's interest in that they

choose certain sub-themes to be covered in the entire course while in RE 2046, the approach was linear meaning that the teachers followed the syllabus topic after topic with a view to teaching all topics covered by the examination. It was also observed that apart from the traditional teaching aids, such as the chalkboard, all the teachers did not use any teaching aids in their lessons.

The data on the attainment of religious literacy through the current Zambian senior secondary school RE syllabuses indicate that pupils were exposed to Christianity and to some extent, Islam, Hinduism and ZTR. This exposure enabled pupils to question, interpret, and appreciate religious language and symbolism. However, the Curriculum Specialist's view was that the current syllabuses were too foreign and needed to be revised to encourage meaningful religious literacy.

The final objective of the study sought to establish the values promoted by RE in the light of increasing religious pluralism and liberalism in the country. The data reveals that the pupils, teachers and the Curriculum Specialist were open to the inclusion of other religions in RE and it was evident that despite the bias towards Christianity, the two senior secondary school RE syllabuses included material on Islam, Hinduism and Zambian Traditional Religion. Data further shows that many of the values promoted by the two syllabuses were in conformity to the promotion of religious pluralism and liberalism. They include tolerance, respect, sharing, and self control.

Discussion

RE in Zambia continues to be poorly handled. This inference is drawn from the findings of the study which show that in schools with large class sizes, there was generally little engagement of pupils by teachers who took the learners as passive receptors of information and to a greater extent could be attributed to overcrowding which could not allow the teacher to have good access and contact with individual pupils. Even trying to divide the class into groups for the sake of group work or discussions was a real night mare. It is for this reason that one teacher said she always conducted group discussions outside the classroom. However, this practice has its weaknesses in that the outside environment has its own distractions. As observed by the

researchers, the teacher literally had no control of the class during the time the pupils were outside the classroom as they interacted with other learners in the school environment who were not members of their class. Although one might argue that this was one way of making the lesson learner centred, meaningful learning could not be said to have taken place. It is worth noting that the creation of a conducive and ideal learning environment has for a long time been cited by many scholars as a prerequisite for effective learning. Therefore, every teacher as well as any learning institution should endeavour to create an atmosphere that is supportive of the teaching and learning process if any meaningful education is to take place in Zambian schools.

Another area of concern is the way the material is actually handled, presented or taught. Although the material can be described as shallow or low level, the syllabuses are book tailored. The teachers are always tasked to ensure that in their responses, learners strictly adhere to what is in the text books. Citing the 2011 Chief Examiner's report on RE 2044:

Question 13, on African Traditional Religion was another popular question. However, the 'OR' part was poorly done compared to the 'Either' part. This is because candidates gave their own answers which are not in the syllabus. Teachers are once again reminded to ensure that answers come from the books (Muma, 2013).

Considering the foregoing report by the Chief Examiner, one would have questions that beg more answers. Why should the Examination Council of Zambia (ECZ) restrict learners to text books at the expense of their authentic experiences? What skills does the ECZ expect learners to develop through this approach? How does the ECZ expect the teachers to engage, for instance, resource persons to assist them in areas of the curriculum where they are uncomfortable when they are expected not to go beyond the shallow text books?

This text book approach, which we would rather call 'closed minded', completely throws away the teachers' as well as the learners' experiences and defeats the purpose of having resource persons in the learning process. To restrict the learners to the textbook is indeed a very sad undertaking following that the subject treasures the learners' experiences as rich resource for learning. It is clear that the curriculum developers and the teachers may not necessarily have the experiences which the pupils have despite coming from the same religious tradition.

Furthermore, the little criticism of religious material exhibited by the learners show that they just take what the teachers say without questioning. This can be attributed to the use mostly of the teacher-centred methodologies, thereby making the attainment of religious literacy through the current senior secondary school RE syllabuses extremely difficult. While the lecture method can be used in different approaches, it is rather inappropriate for the religious literacy approach to the subject in that neither does it take into account nor value the individual pupils' experiences. It is clear that instead of making a critical analysis of an idea, the pupils' responses are mere repetitions of their teachers' arguments which are themselves regurgitations from the text books. Similarly, where the learners show some appreciation, such an appreciation could be said to be ill informed and biased. Such a scenario is unacceptable.

Evidently, the attainment of religious literacy is dependent on the amount of information on different religions that a learner acquires. Thus, exposure to different religious material is essential for the attainment of religious literacy. In the words of Wright (1996), it is not experience that children need as a tool to understand religion but an immersion in the various public linguistic traditions that seek to account for the ultimate nature of reality. The current senior secondary school RE syllabuses are deficient in this aspect. They only qualify to be multi-faith in so far as they have components on the four main religions found in Zambia. This is because in practice, the information covered on the other religious traditions (apart from Christianity) is so meagre that the pupils can barely articulate anything and can subsequently not engage into dialogue with those religions. Actually, the majority of the learners acknowledge that material on other religious traditions is not enough and they lament the lack of depth in the syllabus content and what they learn. It is also clear that the pupils intelligently explain concepts in other religions, especially ZTR beliefs and practices which are actually supposed to inform their identity.

While religious literacy underscores the fact that experience only is not enough, current Zambian RE merely serves to perpetuate the learners' experiences of Christianity. In other words, the little information on other religious traditions is only looked at in comparison to Christianity with little or no much reflection at all. The syllabuses are tailored in such a way that interpretation of religious language and practices is largely focussed on the commonalities between Christianity and the other religions under discussion. As such, learners do not look at religious symbolism

and language critically because they neither have the time nor the material to reflect on. In order to encourage critical analysis of religious material which would lead to religious literacy, learners need to be exposed to a wealth of material.

Clearly, the current senior secondary school RE syllabuses in Zambia are still firmly grounded in the neo-confessional models with a small attempt at the phenomenological approach (Simuchimba, 2005) which, to a lesser extent, makes the subject to be educationally accepted. Unfortunately, the phenomenological approach has been said to be weak in that its main focus is empathy for the beliefs of the other. This does not foster the development of higher level thinking skills owing to the important concepts and abstract ideas which are either omitted or watered down (Wright, 1996: 174). It follows that phenomenology does not lead to religious literacy but to a heightened sensitivity. As such, the current RE syllabuses need to move towards the religious literacy approach which has many strengths including inclusiveness and the collapsing of the established distinction between *learning from* and *learning about* religion, thereby enabling religious understanding to become simultaneously academic and personal (Wright, 2003; Jackson, 2004). As they stand today, the two senior secondary school syllabuses can be said to contribute very little towards the attainment of religious literacy. In fact, their contribution does not go beyond the most basic level of religious literacy.

Conclusion and Recommendations

With regard to the teaching and learning of RE in secondary schools, it can be concluded that class size plays a very important role. In large classes, there is generally little engagement between teachers and pupils owing to teachers often using the lecture method, which due to its nature imposes religious knowledge on the pupils and puts them at risk of indoctrination. However, teachers defend their choice of the method under the guise of over enrolment in the schools. This method reduces pupils to passive recipients of information who depend on the teacher as the final authority thereby hindering the development of critical thinking skills which are cardinal in the attainment of religious literacy. Through this method, Christian teachings are presented without questioning while those of other traditions, especially ATR, are presented as outdated and without value to the modern society. This confirms Muma (2013)'s observation that

ATR in Syllabus 2044 is presented in the past tense in most of the themes and consequently taught like History which may not have direct relevance or impact on present day life.

Furthermore, the teaching of RE is examination oriented. This examination orientation and the desire to cover the huge content of the syllabuses for the sake of capturing all areas perpetuate the teacher centred methods of teaching. This has further created a situation where pupils are expected to memorize specific Bible passages without even thinking about what they have learned, thereby reducing learning to mere memory work as opposed to critical analysis. Henze (2007) observes that the examination system in the country has focused on memory work rather than skills and the format of examinations determines the level of learning in classroom. Like Freire (1994), we do not support the kind of education where knowledge is 'banked' in the pupils' heads so that it can be 'withdrawn' at the time of the examination.

On the possibility of attaining religious literacy, it is clear that the current senior RE syllabuses 2044 and 2046 are clearly Christian oriented and cannot adequately promote pluralism and religious literacy. Three quarters of the content is Christian and the treatment of other religious material is shallow as they just referred to in comparison to Christian values or teachings. As such, the learners are not exposed to enough material to enable them become religiously literate. Denominational rivalries, from missionary times, are still apparent in the two syllabuses with syllabus 2044 being considered Catholic while syllabus 2046 is taken to be Evangelical. Therefore, teachers seem to be influenced by these religious affiliations in their selection of the syllabus to teach. Given their content and the way the current Zambian senior secondary school RE syllabuses are presented, they cannot guarantee religious literacy.

In view of the findings of the study and the conclusions drawn, we recommend that MESVTEE should revise the RE syllabuses so that the subject is made more liberal, critical and educational with equal emphasis on the covered religious traditions so as to reflect the current multi-religious scenario in the country. Furthermore, RE teachers should maintain high levels of professionalism to avoid denominationalism and the urge to proselytise. This can be achieved through in-service training of teachers. In addition, RE teachers should go beyond teaching for examinations if the subject is to contribute to the promotion religious literacy.

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