

Teaching of Islam in Zambia's two Senior Secondary School Religious Education Syllabuses of 2013: Stakeholders' Educational Perspective

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Abstract

Many studies conducted on Religious Education (RE) in Zambia have repeatedly reported that the two senior secondary school R.E. syllabuses (2044 and 2046) are exclusively Christian in content and approach. The studies have also indicated that Islam and other non-Christian religions have continued to be marginalised in the two R.E. syllabuses despite many educationists advocating for a pluralistic and equal coverage of all the religions in R.E. Further, the studies have revealed many deficiencies of the Zambian R.E. in meeting the educational principles as espoused in the national policy document on education of 1996. However, what seems to be lacking are the views of various stakeholder on how the teaching of R.E. particularly the Islamic dimension in both R.E. 2044 and 2046 could be reformed in terms of the content coverage, teaching methods and the context. In this light, a qualitative sample of four teachers of R.E. drawn from four selected secondary schools in Lusaka district, two Muslim sheikhs at Makeni Islamic Society Trust (MIST) and a Curriculum Specialist at CDC was purposively and randomly selected. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data which were then analysed qualitatively. The study revealed the need to include a religious perspective on how Islam responds to current issues on corruption, gender and HIV and AIDS. The study also revealed that some Islamic concepts and teachings should be fully supported by the Quranic quotations and or teachings from the Hadith in order to improve the Islamic content. Educational trips, research projects and guest speakers were suggested as viable ways of teaching the Islamic component in the RE syllabuses.

Key words: Teaching; Islam; Religious Education; Religious pluralism

1.0 Background and Context

As a modern, pluralistic and democratic society, Zambia has continued to experience massive growth in cultural and religious pluralism as evidenced by the influx of various faith communities among them; Islam, Baha'i faith, Hinduism and Buddhism. With this growth, it is expected that R.E. will help young Zambians gain some understanding of the major religious traditions which also form part of Zambia's social, political, cultural and spiritual life. As Simuchimba (2000: 18) rightly observes: "What is needed is education in religion (in its plural sense) so that the beliefs and values of existing religious traditions are explored and the pupils freely and autonomously choose which values to live by."

Despite the continued pluralistic outlook of the Zambian society, the status quo of R.E. in secondary schools has remained exclusively Christian with the syllabuses emphasising Christian beliefs and values (Kamanga, 2013). The two senior secondary school R.E. syllabuses are heavily Christian in content and approach. This scenario has undoubtedly led to the marginalisation and poor representation of non-Christian religions in RE. One such religion that has suffered neglect in Zambian R.E. is Islam. From the analysis done by Tembo (2015) on the content coverage of Religions in 2044 R.E. syllabus, Christianity is largely covered with 72 per cent content followed by African (Zambian) Traditional Beliefs with 14 per cent then Islam and Hinduism stands at 7 per cent each. In 2046, Islam and Hinduism are exclusively covered in a comparative manner and not in their own right.

It is incontestable that Islam has imposed a significant change on the religious landscape of the country and constitutes a real alternative to traditional religions and

indeed to the long established Christian churches (Phiri, 2008). Islam brags to be one of the fastest growing religions and the second largest faith community in Zambia after Christianity (Cheyeka, 2007). According to the 2010 census of population and housing, Islam accounted for 0.5 per cent of the Zambian total population (CSO, 2010). Certainly, eight years after the national census, one expects the current percentage to be higher than the one obtained in 2010.

Like any other school subject, the teaching of R.E. should fulfill the educational principles espoused in the educational policy document. The subject should play a critical role in the spiritual, moral and intellectual formation of learners, thereby contributing to their holistic education and help them attain a full and well-rounded development of the physical, intellectual, social, affective, moral and spiritual qualities (MoE, 1996).

However, literature has shown that despite undergoing many reviews, the Zambian RE syllabuses are outdated and educationally weak to meet the needs of learners. For instance, Simuchimba has (2012) contended that the R.E. syllabuses are old and not in line with the current national educational policy requirements. With the coming of the new RE syllabuses in 2013 it was hoped that the new syllabuses would help to ameliorate this scenario. Unfortunately, a careful analysis of the syllabuses indicates that nothing has changed, especially with regard to the religious teachings and values of non- Christian religions. It is in this light that the views of stakeholders were sought particularly on how the teaching of Islam in both RE 2044 and 2046 should be reformed in terms of the content coverage, teaching methods and the context. This is for the purposes of making Zambian R.E. more educational and pluralistic by embracing all the religions in the syllabus in a fair and equal manner. 159

2.0 Literature on Reforms in R.E. as a School Subject

Globally, many studies conducted on R.E. have documented various changes the subject has undergone and the role it plays in helping learners acquire relevant life skills. In Britain for example, Wright (1993) surveyed the development and the state of affairs of RE in secondary schools in the context of the 1988 Education Reform Act. He addressed among other major concerns; the role of R.E. in public schools which was to bring about an understanding of a variety of belief systems rather than commitment to one as well as to promote mutual respect and tolerance. He also highlighted the contribution R.E. makes to individual and societal development, and the role of R.E. teachers as educators. This work by Wright is significant as it raises pertinent issues especially on the aim of RE in schools and how teachers should uphold professionalism and integrity as educators. These are critical issues the current work is espousing with regard to R.E. in Zambia.

In another work done by Grimmitt (2000) and writing from the British perspective, the author explained the importance of pedagogical knowledge and skills as the basis for a successful teaching of R.E. He was of the view that R.E. should respond to the changing needs of children and contribute to their full development depending on the teacher's ability to explore new possibilities for the subject regardless of how challenging they may be.

Grimmitt identified and discussed eight types of pedagogical models which reflect a multi-faith and non-confessional approach to R.E. However, for the purposes of this study, particular attention was given to two models namely; Human Development, Instrumental learning About, Learning from model and Constructivist model of learning and Teaching in R.E. In the former model, 160

Grimmitt emphasised the importance of presenting the beliefs and practices of religions to learners in a more accurate and empathetic manner to enable them understand the subjective religious consciousness of others through the phenomenological approach. In the latter model, emphasis is put on the life-knowledge of pupils that is gained from experience and communicated and refined through selective conversation. This work by Grimmit informs the current study in terms of pedagogical approaches in RE which forms the basis for the envisioned reforms in Zambia's R.E.

In Nigeria, Lemu (2002) explored the place of Religious Education in schools, paying particular attention to Islamic Studies in the North. She found out that the contents in the Islamic education were extremely narrow and needed improvements. She also observed that the methods used to teach the subject were weak and more suitable for training parrots. The author underscored the importance of consultation with all the stakeholders when reviewing the education system. According to Lemu, children must be encouraged to think and be able to ask questions about what they did not understand and be given reasonable answers. She indicated that a child who has been taught to reason grows up equipped to discuss religious and moral issues with people of all faiths and philosophies.

Although Lemu does not give a critical examination of the confessional nature of Islamic Religious Knowledge, her work is nonetheless important because it underscores the importance of consultation when making changes to the education system. This is what the current study is advancing with regard to R.E. in Zambia.

In South Africa, Jeenah (2005) justified the need for a national policy on religion and education to guide

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the teaching and learning of religions in public schools. He contended that the question of teaching religions in schools is a very sensitive one and many people become very passionate when discussing the matter. He explained that the South African government adopted a co-operative model which identifies separate areas of influence for religion and the state but the one which would promote co-operation between the two. Under this model, he contended, citizens are protected from all forms of religious discrimination. Jeenah cogently argues that the work of educators of R.E. is to teach learners certain aspects of many religions and not to convince learners that a particular religion is better than others or that all religions are good or that all religions are bad.

Jeenah's study is critical as it provides an insight on the role of R.E. in public schools. His views on how various policy documents have guided the teaching of religions in schools are in line with what this work envisages for R.E. in Zambia.

Coming to the Zambian scenario, many studies conducted on R.E. have documented the historical and current issues in R.E. The studies have also explored the teaching and status of R.E. in schools and the pluralistic aspects of the subject among other themes. For example, Simuchimba (2005) conducted a study on 'Religion and Education in Zambia, from 1890-2000 and Beyond.' In this study, Simuchimba gave a comprehensive historical development of R.E. in Zambia from the missionary period to post-independence by looking at different models of RE and testing the opinions of various stakeholders in Zambia on R.E. syllabuses. The study revealed that the two senior secondary school R.E. syllabuses were predominantly Christian in content and covers the Islamic material in a 162

distorted manner which tends to dilute Islam as a religion. Simuchimba's work provides a good background upon which the current work builds.

Chizelu (2006) investigated the teaching of R.E. in Zambian multireligious secondary schools. The study findings were that the content of R.E. does not provide equal coverage of all major religions. The study also revealed that most of the questions in R.E. are of a closed-ended type which either prepares the pupils' minds to receive the teacher's content or to prove to the teacher that the content transmitted is correct and final. He cited co-operative learning, role-play, inquiry and discovery learning, research project, music and dance, proverbs and folktales, drama and story-telling as crucial methods and techniques in teaching multireligious R.E. Other teaching methods are the case study, question and answer, discussion method, problem-solving and field or educational trips. Chizelu concluded that the teaching of RE should be firmly placed in an educational context by making no assumptions or preconditions from the personal commitment of R.E. teachers.

Ziwa (2007) presented the teaching methods that have been used in R.E. in the past, present and what the future holds for the subject. She argued that although R.E. teachers were trained to handle the subject properly and to use appropriate methods and techniques, they might still fail to apply what they had learnt, probably because of their cultural and indeed religious affiliation. She was of the view that pupils needed more capacity to face social ills like HIV and AIDS, poverty, unemployment, corruption and sexual abuse rather than limiting them to religion only. 163

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Chizelu's study gives useful insights on the teaching and learning methods used in Multi-religious R.E. Equally, the work by Ziwa is relevant as it informs the current work on the nature of reforms concerning teaching methods and techniques in R.E. Her emphasis on the need to build learners' capacity to face various social ills is crucial in improving the content in R.E.

In another study, Simuchimba (2012) discussed the relationship between RE and the national education policy document, *Educating Our Future*, where he highlighted and explained important policy document provisions that affect R.E. as a school curriculum subject in terms of goals, aims, cross-curricular skills and abilities. Simuchimba called for a radical change in the R.E. teachers' attitudes and approach to the teaching of the subject in the classroom. He argued that R.E. teachers should treat senior secondary school learners as young adults who bring to school a lot of educationally useful experiences. The author further indicated that the R.E. syllabuses were too old and not in line with the national educational policy requirements. He recommended that the syllabuses should be revised so that they are relevant to the needs of learners in the modern Zambian society. He also recommended that teachers of R.E. should put professional commitment before faith commitment in teaching R.E.

Generally, the literature has shown various educational changes that R.E. as a school subject has undergone. With regard to the Zambian scenario, literature has highlighted strides that have been made by various scholars and researchers to ground the subject within the educational and pluralistic contexts. However, their approach and focus has been on R.E. as a whole subject. 164

Admittedly, the limited coverage of non-Christian religions (including Islam) has been explored by different studies and the need to improve on the coverage has been clearly elucidated. Nonetheless, what is not known clearly is the stakeholders' perspective on how the teaching of Islam in the two senior secondary school R.E. syllabuses should reform in terms of the content coverage, teaching methods and context. Therefore, the current study makes a unique contribution to the body of knowledge on R.E. in Zambia.

The theoretical foundation underpinning this study was the constructivist theory of teaching and learning. According to this theory, learning is an active and participatory activity through which learners are helped to construct knowledge rather than to reproduce a series of facts. A teacher acts as a facilitator and not the initiator and indoctrinator of knowledge. The focus, therefore, is how information is presented and how learners are supported in the process of constructing knowledge. This means that even knowledge about religion is not something that can simply be passed on from teacher to pupil without attaching any value and purpose. The constructivist theory was used in this study to relate the views of stakeholders on their envisioned reforms needed in the teaching and learning of Islam in R.E. This theory was adopted because it is in line with the pedagogical approaches recommended for the teaching of R.E. as elucidated below:

Learner-centred teaching focuses on learners, who play a centre role in teaching and learning activities. It gives them an opportunity to participate actively and independently in their learning. With the help of the teacher, they are encouraged to seek an understanding of art, spiritual and moral issues. A teacher acts as a facilitator to build on the learner's existing 165

knowledge, skills, values, attitudes and experiences. These experiences should be stimulating for effective learning (CDC, 2013).

Therefore, in order to effectively accomplish the objectives of this inquiry, the study adopted Lebow's (1993) seven constructivist values since they are in line with what the study espouses with regard to the teaching of RE in Zambian secondary schools. The seven values are:

1. **Collaboration:** This value supports and encourages interactive learning amongst learners as a key ingredient in the generating of knowledge.
2. **Personal autonomy:** This value supports learners' self-exploration of knowledge and their ability to think independently.
3. **Generativity:** This value posits that learners have capable of generating and constructing knowledge which a teacher is supposed to build on.
4. **Reflectivity:** This value posits that learners should be able to reflect individually and independently on the value of what they are learning so as to enable them test and contrast their own philosophical worldviews against other ideas.
5. **Active engagement:** This values sees learners as active participants in the learning process. It opposes the traditional and authoritative role of teachers as originators of knowledge.
6. **Personal relevance:** This values emphasises the importance of learners' needs and aspirations in the learning process.
7. **Pluralism:** This value supports the holistic and unified way of presenting the content in order to help learners form a whole structure of knowledge.166

Below is the diagrammatic representation of the seven constructivist values.

Lebow's seven constructivist values

Figure 1: Lebow's seven constructivist values (Source diagram: own construction)

3.0 Methodology

This article employed a narrative research design. According to Creswell (2012), a narrative design is a literary form of qualitative research which seeks to describe personal experiences of individuals in a particular setting and offers practical, specific insights into the phenomenon of study. Therefore, this design was used to explore and capture the subjective, inner experiences of 167

the respondents on the matter at hand. It is worth noting that there are various forms of narrative designs which can be combined and used in a single study to provide a comprehensive understanding of the research problem. For the purposes of this article, three forms of narrative designs were utilised namely; narrative interviews, personal experiences and a theoretical lens.

In social researches, the methodological approach usually depends on the existing epistemological position of the researcher. According to Bryman (2008), there are two epistemological positions namely; positivism and interpretivism which are also referred to as quantitative and qualitative paradigms, respectively. In this study, an interpretivism approach was employed in order to capture in-depth the descriptive information from the respondents. This philosophical orientation allows social scientists to grasp the subjective meaning of a social reality. Interpretivism is subjective in nature and enables researchers to interact with the social phenomenon. Therefore, this research approach provided a unique feature of understanding the social reality from the participant's experiences and interpretations (Bryman, 2004).

The targeted population in this paper comprised of three categories namely; teachers of RE from the selected secondary schools in Lusaka district, the Subject Curriculum Specialists at CDC and the Muslim representatives at Makeni Islamic Society Trust (MIST). The study was conducted in four secondary schools in Lusaka district of Zambia. The schools were categorised as follows: two mission schools offering R.E. 2044 and two government schools offering R.E. 2046. The choice of the schools was based on the researcher's envisioned

accessibility to people with rich data. The sample size consisted was four teachers of R.E.; one from each of the four schools, one Curriculum Specialist at CDC, and two Muslim representatives (sheikhs). Therefore, the total sample size was seven.

Purposive sampling, particularly a *typical case sampling* was used to select one Curriculum Specialist and two Muslim sheikhs. These respondents were deemed reliable for the study because they possess relevant knowledge and understanding of the problem under study. Teachers were sampled using a simple random technique. It is worth mentioning that the R.E. specialist was out of the country for studies at the time of data collection. Therefore, the researcher decided to interview the Senior Curriculum Specialist, Editorial and Educational Materials who was acting on his behalf. This choice was based on her understanding and experience of many years as a teacher of R.E. On the other hand, the choice of the two Zambian Muslim sheikhs was based on their understanding and experience with R.E. syllabuses.

Data was collected using semi-structured Interview Guides in order to get free expressed opinions, experiences, attitudes and understanding of the research problem from R.E. teachers, the Curriculum Specialist and the Muslim sheikhs. The researchers first sought permission from relevant authorities and ensured that the objectives of the study were thoroughly explained to all the respondents before they could take part in the study. Data was analysed qualitatively through categorising of themes that respond to the objectives of the study. 169

4.0 Findings and Discussion

This article sought to solicit the views of stakeholders on the nature of reforms needed in the teaching of Islam in terms of the content coverage, teaching methods and the context under which it is taught in the two R.E. syllabuses. The findings showed that stakeholders were of the view that the teaching of Islam should be adequate, balanced and educational. They also indicated the need to include a religious perspective on how Islam (and other religions) responds to current issues on corruption, gender and HIV and AIDS. For instance, one teacher said: “I would like to see future changes in R.E. that are going to cover all the religions equally and seek to address societal challenges faced by pupils.” This finding is in line with Ziwa’s (2007) observation that pupils need more capacity to face social ills like HIV and AIDS, poverty, unemployment, corruption and sexual abuse rather than limiting them to religion only.

Indeed, pupils need this exposure to various social issues affecting them in order to be more pragmatic in their approach to life. R.E. should respond to the changing needs of children and contribute to their full development (Grimmitt, 2000). This outlook of R.E. confirms the constructivist value of personal relevance. This value fully supports the importance of learners’ educational needs and aspirations. It calls for a total shift from adherence to the prescribed factual and domesticating information to more relevant, responsive and exploratory knowledge.

The findings also reveal that the Muslim representatives envisioned the teaching of Islam in R.E. that will integrate all matters of beliefs and essential activities found in Islam. One of the sheikhs who did R.E. 2046 during his school days before his conversion 170

to Islam indicated that issues on prayer, worship, belief in God, the Prophets, Angels and the last day should be taught in order to bring about spiritual change in learners. He also expressed the need to have supporting evidence from the Quran and Hadith when teaching the Islamic content in R.E.

While appreciating the spiritual aspect that can ensue from the teaching and learning of these issues, it must be observed that most of these aspects suggested by the sheikh hinges on doctrinal matters which are absolutely outside the scope of R.E. as an educational subject. However, this does not mean that the suggested Quranic quotations (verses) or some sayings and teachings of prophet Muhammad found in the Hadith may not be used when teaching the Islamic values and concepts in R.E. On the contrary, this may help to improve the Islamic content as well as improving learners' religious literacy levels. In this respect, it is important to note that any such changes or inclusions to the syllabus should be subjected to educational scrutiny to avoid faith formation and promotion of doctrinal matters in R.E. It is for this reason that some respondents who included teachers urged CDC to ensure that they extensively consult with all the stakeholders in order to harmoniously agree on what should be contained in the RE syllabuses. It was clear from the Muslim Sheikhs that they were not engaged by CDC when reviewing the 2013 R.E. syllabuses. This is exactly what Lemu (2002) meant when she talked about the importance of consulting with various stakeholders when making changes to the education system (syllabuses).

With regard to the teaching methods, the stakeholders (R.E. teachers and the Curriculum Specialist) were of the view that in future reforms, emphasis should be put on methods and approaches which stimulates learners' 171

interests. For instance, one respondent explained that the teaching of Islam and other religions in R.E. should interest and excite the learners who are the principle beneficiaries of any educational enterprise. In view of this, it was suggested that educational trips, research projects and guest speakers to be used when teaching the Islamic beliefs and values (and those of other religions) in R.E. It must be indicated that these methods and techniques are important as they help in exposing learners to experiential and exploratory knowledge especially that the Islamic component proves to be difficult to teach partly because of the limited literature. These methods and techniques also counteract the authoritative and rigid ways of teaching R.E. where pupils' minds are prepared to receive the teacher's content or to prove to the teacher that the content transmitted is correct and final (Chizelu, 2006).

Additionally, the teaching methods envisaged by the stakeholders (6 out of 7) are educationally grounded since they encourage pupils' active participation in the learning process as opposed to being passive recipients of information. They also enable pupils to intelligently and independently reflect on various Islamic values and teachings in R.E. and help them to produce their own religious insights. For instance, an educational visit to a Mosque or any Islamic institution does not only help in changing the learners' perception about Islam but also equips them with knowledge and understanding of Islam as a religion. This view is in line with the constructivist values of active engagement and generativity. The foregoing views also agrees with Simuchimba (2012) who argued that R.E. teachers should treat senior secondary school learners as young adults who bring to school a lot of educationally useful experiences. It is for this reason 172

that Simuchimba (2012) proposed the use of andragogy which he described as the art and science of teaching adults rather than using pedagogy only. While pedagogy is teacher-centred, andragogy is learner-centred and self-directed.

However, it must be added that this way of teaching and learning R.E. calls for integration of phenomenological approaches where pupils and teachers can be truly sincere and explore the Islamic religious beliefs and ideologies with respect, sensitivity and openness without any prejudices. They should bracket all their biasness and preconceived ideas. The phenomenological approach can also help pupils to learn the art of making links between their own experiences, needs, interests, questions and beliefs and the content they are being exposed to. This approach to teaching and learning reflects the constructivist value of personal autonomy. This means that teachers should help in facilitating the learning process in order for learners to construct their own meanings and make their own conclusions about what they are learning without any imposition by the teacher. The value of reflectivity also comes into perspective here since learners are helped to independently reflect on the value and implication of whatever they are learning.

The study further revealed that the two Muslim sheikhs were of the view that the Islamic component in R.E. should be handled by someone who lives the Islamic faith. According to them, a Muslim is more knowledgeable and can handle the Islamic teachings and values in more objective manner than a non-Muslim. This view was also shared by one teacher when she indicated that Muslims should be allowed to teach the Islamic component in R.E.

From the foregoing, it can be contested, that allowing a Muslim (or any other person) who is not trained to 173

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teach R.E. leads to confessional approaches and attitudes toward R.E. This may also open up a pandemonium whereby every religious group would want to teach their own religion thereby diluting the educational value of the subject. This revelation sternly disagrees with Simuchimba's (2012) recommendation on the need to put professional commitment before faith commitment. R.E. should be taught by a professionally trained R.E. teacher, whether religiously committed or not. It is the work of R.E. educators to teach learners certain aspects of many religions and not to convince learners that a particular religion is better than others or that all religions are good or that all religions are bad (Jeenah, 2005).

With regard to the context under which Islam is covered, the findings revealed that Islam (and other religions) in the R.E. syllabuses should be taught in its own right and value. All the teachers and the curriculum specialist were of the view that all the religious traditions covered in the R.E. syllabuses should be taught from the educational point of view, devoid of any religious inclination by the teacher. This agrees with Chizelu's (2006) conclusion that the teaching of R.E. should be firmly placed in an educational context by making no assumptions or preconditions from the personal commitment of R.E. teachers.

Considering the pluralistic outlook of the Zambian society, it is important that pupils learn the various religions and belief systems through R.E. Learners need to appreciate the fact that there are various ways of understanding and looking at the world which are fundamentally different. In this way, they will be able to form a holistic understanding of all the religions covered in R.E. and in turn appreciate their moral, social, religious and spiritual values. This is exactly what the constructivist 174

value of pluralism espouses. This value firmly supports the holistic and unified ways of presenting and understanding the content and be able to inter-relate the various aspects of knowledge as a whole structure.

5.0 Conclusion

In conclusion, the article has generally discussed the views of stakeholders on the nature of reforms needed in R.E. syllabuses, with particular attention to the Islamic dimension. This dimension was considered because Islam is one of the religions in R.E. syllabuses that is not adequately covered compared to Christianity and African (Zambian) Traditional beliefs even after reviewing the syllabuses. Therefore, seeking some stakeholders' views on the matter necessary since any meaningful change in the education system requires wide and extensive consultation. The article has vehemently advocated for a genuine multi-faith approach to R.E. where all the religions are fairly and equally represented both in content and in teaching. The article has established a unique feature in which stakeholders envisages a religious perspective (from all the four religions in R.E. syllabuses) of dealing with social vices such as corruption and HIV and AIDS. In addition, having Islamic concepts and teachings supported by the Quranic verses or quotation and the Hadith when teaching the dimension is another unique contribution. This may also help in beefing up the Islamic content which is inadequate.

6.0 Recommendations

In view of the findings and the conclusions made, it was recommended that CDC should endeavor to bring all the stakeholders on board when reviewing the syllabuses. 175

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This may help to improve the content coverage of meagerly covered religions in the R.E. syllabuses and avoid distortions.

CDC should also ensure that learning-centred methods and approaches such as educational trips, inviting guest speakers, inquiry and discovery learning, role play and research projects among others are explicitly spelt out in the R.E. syllabuses. The integration of a phenomenological approach to the teaching and learning Islam (and other religions) should also be encouraged.

Teachers of R.E. should endeavour to teach Islam (and other religions) in its own right as a religion of equal value and importance in educational matters with other religions in R.E. CDC should also harmonise the splinter R.E. syllabuses and come up with one educationally and balanced syllabus which will be accepted and appreciated by all the stakeholders.

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