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**PROBLEMS AND PROSPECTS OF TEACHING RELIGION  
AND NATIONAL VALUES IN THE NIGERIA UPPER BASIC  
SCHOOL**

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**Abstract**

The paper examines the problems and prospects of teaching religion and national values (RNV) in the Nigeria upper basic school (junior secondary school). The paper reveals that related subjects like Religious Studies, Civic Education, Social Studies and Security Education have been harmonized to form a new school subject referred to as religion and national values. The paper points out that the reason for the harmonization is to emphasise national values in the upper basic curriculum. This is to ensure that secondary school students acquire and demonstrate national values like tolerance, obedience, honesty, diligence, patience, loyalty and cooperation. Although the newly harmonized subject has the prospect of promoting national values in the country, however, the implementation and teaching of the subject is faced with a number of problems. These include: a wide gap between curriculum designers, school administrators and teachers; inadequate teaching materials and lack of competent teachers. The paper recommends that the training of teachers must urgently be undertaken to be able to achieve the goals of the subject.

**Key Words:** Religion and national values, National values and skills, Upper Basic School, Teachers, Learners, Nigerian youths.

### Introduction

In this 21<sup>st</sup> century, moral decadence and value problems have become major setbacks to national progress, unity and integration in Nigeria and some other nations of the world. The reality in Nigeria today is that our nation is morally sick. From West to the East, and North to South, what we witness paints a sorry situation of how our customs, traditions and culture are fast eroding away (Oladejo, 2013). According to Adeola (2013), moral decadence in Nigeria has become so pervasive that all sectors of our society have been affected, thereby, resulting in the slow pace of development. Unpatriotic and immoral acts in the society have generated low level of civic responsibility, fear, unpatriotic feelings, disunity, distrust towards leaders, and declining economic and educational standards.

Education is the machinery for inculcating right attitudes and moral values in the citizens. The responsibility of inculcating and developing civic values and skills in the youths rests on the nation's schools. Education is a key to human development and progress as it brings about changes in attitudes, values and behaviour (Amadi, 2012). Hence, Ajibade (2013) argues that educationists need to expand the horizon of their responsibilities to cater for not only the academic growth of our youth but also the moral aspects. This is because education has a vital role to play in equipping the youths with qualities like honesty, diligence, integrity, loyalty, patriotism, humility, patience, love and selfless service to the nation. In view of this, Iyamu and Otote (2003) opine that the school curriculum is expected to articulate learning experiences that can promote moral and civic values in the students.

Consequently, values and moral education have become important aspects of the school programme in different parts of the world. The Nigerian government has adopted varied formal and informal means of inculcating moral and civic values in the Nigerian citizens. Recently, the Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme

was restructured in a way that related school subjects were merged and named as Religion and National Values. This was purposely to remove duplications in the Universal Basic Curriculum (UBC) and to inculcate national values in the learners. The objective of this paper is to examine the problems and prospects of the recently harmonized school subject, Religion and National Values.

### Emergence of Religion and National Values in the Nigeria Upper Basic School

The teaching of religion and civic values is not new in Nigerian. Religious education was introduced into the Nigerian school programme through the activities of missionaries in the 19th century. Both Christian and Islamic religious studies were part of the school curriculum. For instance in 1876, the first Christian Missionary secondary school (C.M.S Grammar School) was established in Lagos. Since then, Christian Religious Knowledge (CRK) has been one of the school subjects in Nigeria. Today, CRK is a compulsory subject for students in primary and junior secondary schools (Falade, 2015). Among other things, the teaching of religious study is to develop in the students values such as humility, respect, love, kindness, justice, fair-play, obedience, devotion to duty, spirit of forgiveness, orderly behaviour and selfless service to God and humanity (Adeyinka, Okeke & Orebanjo, 1991).

The need and emphasis on the development of the right values in the citizens led to the introduction of other subjects in the Nigerian school curriculum. During the colonial era and shortly after the Nigeria independence in 1960, civics was taught as a single subject in the Nigerian elementary schools (Falade & Adeyemi, 2015). Civics was meant to train learners for equity, justice, responsibility, freedom, patriotism, honesty and obedience. By the mid 1960s, the teaching of social studies started in some parts of Nigeria. In 1971, civics was no longer taught as a school subject because it had become an integral part of social studies curriculum.

The contemporary Nigeria society is characterized by civic, social, political and economic problems. Globalization further created challenges that pose additional problems. The need for morality in the society has assumed a wider dimension especially in its relationship

with the religious, social, political and economic-related issues (Ajibade, 2013). As a result of this, new subjects were introduced into the school programme as means of developing relevant skills and values in the learners. For instance, the Nigerian government introduced a 9-Year Universal Basic Education (UBE) programme in 2005.

Falade and Adeyemi (2015) pointed out that the Universal Basic Education programme aimed at implementing the objectives of the National Economic Empowerment Development Strategies (NEEDS) which focused on value-reorientation, poverty eradication and empowerment of the citizens. In view of this, the school curriculum was re-structured into a 9-year Basic Education Programme in 2005. Then a universal basic education programme was designed and new school subjects were incorporated into the curriculum. For instance, civic education was introduced as a separate subject at the lower, middle and upper basic levels.

One of the major problems of the new Upper Basic School programme in Nigeria was that the curriculum had as many as twenty subjects. This made the school time-table to be filled with too many subjects as students were overburdened with many subjects. Hence, in October 2010, the President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria convened a National Stakeholders Forum to deliberate on the State of Education in Nigeria. Delegates at the summit called for immediate action to revise the curriculum and reduce the number of subjects offered so that the Nigerian Basic Educational programme will be in line with contemporary global educational practice. Obioma (2012) argues that in other parts of the world, the maximum subjects for primary and junior secondary schools are not more than ten. In United States of America for instance, the number of subject is six; in Kenya, it is seven; in Tanzania, it is six; in Ghana, it is six; in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore and India, it is nine.

Consequently, NERDC was directed to review the 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum in line with the recommendations of the Summit (NERDC, 2012). Then, related Universal Basic school subjects were merged to form new subjects. As a result of this, Islamic Studies, Christian Religious Studies, Social Studies, Civic Education and Security Education were merged to form a new school subject called Religion and National Values.

According to NERDC (2012), in the context of the current reduction, selection and harmonization of the UBE Curriculum title, Religion and National Values is the umbrella embracing the previously autonomous subjects of Religious Studies ( Christian Religion and/ Islamic Studies), Civic Education, Social Studies and a new addition, Security Education. The rationale for the new title is the need to emphasize the importance of values across the educational spectrum. In this new arrangement, each of the subjects that were merged becomes a theme under the umbrella subject title.

### Problems of Teaching Religion and National Values in the Upper Basic School

The newly harmonized subject, Religion and National Values, is faced with a number of problems which may hinder the attainment of the goals of the subject. Some of these problems are discussed below.

In the first place, there is a wide gap between the curriculum designers, school administrators and the teachers who are to implement the curriculum. Teachers of the harmonized school subjects were not adequately involved in the harmonization and restructuring process. Many teachers of the subject and school administrators are confused because they lack sufficient information about the take-off and strategies for the implementation of the new subject. According to Dolapo (2015) lack of effective synergy and proper communication is affecting the implementation of the revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum.

Another problem is the non-availability of teaching/learning resources as well as instructional aids in schools. For instance, many teachers of the subject have no access to the curriculum content. Dolapo (2015) investigated the implementation of the revised 9-Year Basic Education Curriculum and discovered that copies of the new curriculum were not available in most schools. Hence, some schools and teachers depend on textbooks which may not be in line with the revised Universal Basic Curriculum.

Lack of competent teachers constitutes a serious problem to the attainment of the goals of the newly harmonized subject. Falade and Adeyemi (2015) express that despite the recent emphasis on the teaching of values and civic skills in our schools, teachers are not trained to be able to teach effectively. Most secondary school teachers

are not competent on value-related teaching methods and evaluation strategies. They make use of conventional methods, which are not effective in enabling learners to development and manifest national values and skills.

#### Prospects of Religion and National Values in Nigeria

Religion and National Values as a harmonized school subject has the following prospects:

- i. Religion and National Values provide a purposeful and robust value education programme. The curriculum content of RNV is a deliberate and goal-oriented approach to value education in Nigeria. It provides for a well structured and designed values education content that is appropriate in the present reality of the Nigerian society. This is in support of the view of Ajibade (2013) that there is a need for purposeful ethical regeneration and value orientation programme for the citizens.
- ii. Development of national values in learners. The subject emphasises national values like honesty, tolerance, love, justice, obedience, cooperation and diligence. This can help to inculcate national values in secondary school students and thereby change the negative behaviour of Nigerian youths. Ajere and Oyinloye (2011) express that negative attitude could be modified and changed to positive ones. Intellectual approach to change bad behaviour to positive ones is quite possible through the rebranding of Nigerians in the teaching of core values in Nigerian schools for assimilation and internalization.
- iii. Youth empowerment and re-orientation. Many Nigerian youths have imbibed negative behaviours like disobedience, intolerance, laziness, injustice, covetousness and fraudulent practices. Locke, cited in Ayorinde, Amali and Yusuf (2011) is of the opinion that at completion of stipulated educational programme, a well-groomed and schooled child is expected to have developed character that will make him law abiding and productive in the society. RNV is capable of achieving this goal by empowering Nigerian youths to become effective and responsible citizens. The subject can help to equip our youths with qualities like honesty, diligence, integrity, patriotism, patience and selfless service to the nation.

### Conclusion

The paper discovered that there was the need to revise the Universal Basic Curriculum and reduce the number of subjects. This is to make the Nigeria school programme to be in line with global educational practice. Consequently, Religious Studies, Civic Education, Social Studies and Security Education were harmonized to become a single subject called Religion and National Values. Religion and National Values, as a new Universal Basic subject, is meant to emphasize the inculcation and demonstration of national values like tolerance, obedience, honesty and cooperation.

The paper revealed that the teaching of Religion and National Values has a lot of prospects for learners and the Nigerian society as a whole. However, the newly harmonized subject is faced with certain problems which include, wide gap between the curriculum planners, school administrators and the teachers; non-availability of copies of the revised curriculum in most schools and the lack of competent teachers.

### Recommendations

The following recommendations are made for the purpose of achieving the objectives of Religion and National Values in the Nigeria Upper Basic/secondary school:

- i. Orientation for stakeholders. There should be immediate grass-root orientation and enlightenment for stakeholders like school administrators, proprietors of private schools and teachers. All stakeholders in the Upper Basic School programme should be well-acquainted with the rationale and effective strategies for implementing the revised curriculum.
- ii. Provision of material resources. Material resources like subject curriculum, textbooks, teaching and learning aids that are purposefully designed for the acquisition of national values and skills should be provided.
- iii. Teachers should be well trained and adequately equipped with relevant knowledge and skills that would enable them to adopt appropriate value-related strategies and evaluation techniques in the classroom.

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