

The dynamics of religion in public spheres: religious education and religious diversity in Ghana's public schools

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Abstract

Ghana's religious diversity and the role of religion in public spheres have given rise to unique approaches in Religious and Moral Education (RME) within public schools. This study investigates how RME is taught and the extent to which it addresses religious diversity, drawing on ethnographic data from eight public schools in Accra. Ethnographic methods, including interviews, observations, and focus groups with teachers and students, are employed to understand the challenges and opportunities in teaching religion in a pluralistic context. Findings reveal an imbalance in the representation of various religions, with dominant faiths often overshadowing minority beliefs, particularly Indigenous Religions. Teachers' religious affiliations sometimes influence classroom discourse, leading to an inaccurate portrayal of "religious others" and a simplified understanding of diversity. This research highlights the need for a more inclusive approach in Ghana's RME curriculum to foster equitable, multicultural knowledge among students. This study contributes to discussions on education and religion by advocating curriculum reforms that embrace Ghana's full religious spectrum and encourage critical reflection on diversity in public education settings.

Keragaman agama di Ghana serta peran agama dalam ruang publik telah melahirkan pendekatan unik dalam Pendidikan Agama dan Moral (RME) di sekolah-sekolah negeri. Artikel ini meneliti bagaimana RME diajarkan dan

sejauh mana kurikulum ini menyikapi keragaman agama, dengan menggunakan data etnografis dari delapan sekolah negeri di Accra. Metode etnografi, termasuk wawancara, observasi, dan diskusi kelompok terarah dengan guru dan siswa, dilakukan untuk memahami tantangan dan peluang dalam mengajarkan agama dalam konteks pluralistik. Temuan penelitian ini mengungkapkan ketidakseimbangan dalam representasi berbagai agama, dimana agama mayoritas sering kali mendominasi keyakinan minoritas, terutama Agama Adat. Agama yang dianut guru terkadang mempengaruhi diskusi di kelas, yang menyebabkan penggambaran yang tidak akurat tentang "agama lain" dan pemahaman yang disederhanakan tentang keragaman. Penelitian ini menekankan kebutuhan akan pendekatan yang lebih inklusif dalam kurikulum RME di Ghana untuk memupuk pemahaman multikultural yang adil di kalangan siswa. Penelitian ini memberikan kontribusi pada diskusi tentang pendidikan dan agama, dengan menganjurkan reformasi kurikulum yang merangkul seluruh spektrum agama di Ghana dan mendorong refleksi kritis tentang keragaman dalam pengelolaan pendidikan publik.

Keywords: *Public sphere, Religious education, Religious diversity, Religious and moral education, African religions.*

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Introduction

The public sphere is a space where individuals can engage in discussions and deliberations about societal issues. Habermas (1984, 1991, 2006, 2017) posits that the public sphere is a neutral platform that emerges from the interaction between civil society and public life. It is a place where citizens are free to express their opinions, engage in rational debates, and deliberate on matters of public interest without any coercion or interference from the state or other powerful entities. The public sphere, therefore, serves as a critical site for democratic participation and the formation of public opinion.

However, the 'proper' role of religion in the public sphere is a topic that is frequently debated by both academics and the mass media. Often, these

discussions are prompted by practical considerations within democratic societies or theoretical quandaries. At a practical level, religious actors in the public sphere make significant contributions to critical democratic functions. They foster civil society engagement, provide input into discussions that influence political decision-making, and advocate for underrepresented communities. Moreover, they often take a leading role in advocating critical issues such as biomedical research, peace and war, poverty and social justice, and end-of-life and abortion decisions (Boettcher & Harmon, 2009; Marshall et al., 2021). The influence of religion, a concept that encompasses various actors, organisations, beliefs, and situations, on conflicts within democratic societies is also noteworthy. Some conflicts, which have persisted for a long time, have led to criticism and a call for a deeper separation between religion and the state. In certain cases, state actors have faced increased scepticism (Silvestri & Mayall, 2015; Hanachor & Echezu, 2021).

Theoretical discussions on the role of religion in the public sphere also continue to be a subject of intense debate. On the one hand, some scholars, like Berger (1963), predicted a decline in the significance of religious beliefs and practices in the public sphere. However, the growth and persistence of religions and religiosity in places like Ghana and the US have challenged this secularisation theory. On the other hand, Habermas' (2006, p.1) proposal on the public sphere engenders a more inclusive approach to the role of religion that acknowledges the newfound political importance of religious traditions and communities, especially considering events like the fall of the Soviet Union and the September 11 attacks. Habermas argues that such events necessitate a renewed consideration of the role of religious voices in public discourse.

While Habermas acknowledges the significance of granting religious actors equal rights in public discourse, he falls short of advocating for their inclusion in the legislature. This raises important questions about the concept of toleration in liberal democracies. Habermas emphasises the need for secular

individuals to accept the reality of a "post-secular" world where religion remains a relevant and prevalent force in public life (Habermas, 2006, p. 15). However, he also expands the boundaries of public discourse by encouraging non-religious citizens to recognise the "profane truth content" of religious statements (Habermas, 2006, p. 17). According to Habermas (2006), both religious and secular citizens of the state share a common responsibility when it comes to political decision-making. His position suggests that religious individuals should be able to participate in such discourse without appearing overtly political. This approach creates a level playing field for political discussions, ensuring equal opportunities for all. In essence, Habermas advocates for a framework that involves religious actors in the political public sphere to promote rational communication.

Ghana exemplifies a democratic state where religious voices actively participate in political discussions following Habermas' concept of the public sphere. Despite the 4th Republican Constitution of Ghana affirming the separation of State and religion, the country is widely regarded as one of Africa's most religiously diverse societies. Its citizens practice a broad range of religions, including Christianity, Islam, African Indigenous Religions, Judaism, Buddhism, Baha'i faith, Hinduism, Shintoism, Rastafarianism, Church of Scientology, Eckankar, and Zetaheal.¹ Unsurprisingly, it is becoming more common for people to identify with their religion, which significantly shapes their social, cultural, political, and economic identity. The multiplicity and vitality of religion have engendered an increased awareness of religion in the public sphere.

¹ The Religious demography in Ghana, according to the 2020 Population and Housing Census, indicates that Ghana is overwhelmingly Christian (71.2% made up of Catholic, Methodist, Anglican, Presbyterian, Mennonites, Lutherans, Seventh-Day Adventist, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints, Baptist, Society of Friends, Pentecostal and AICs); Islam (17.6% including Ahlussuna, Tijanis, Ahmadi, Shi'a, Zetaheal); African Indigenous Religions (3.2%); 4.5% Other Religions (Judaism, Hinduism, Rastafarianism, Shintoism, Eckankar, Buddhism, Baha'i faith, Hare Krishna, Divine Light Mission, Sat Sang, Sri Sathya Sai Baba Sera) and No Religion (1.1%). Source: Ghana Statistical Service, Population and Housing Census 2021.

In fact, religion permeates every aspect of public life, including education. Religion plays a significant role in various aspects of public life, including education. Unlike countries like Germany and the US, religious education is a compulsory part of the public school curriculum from primary to high school. This serves as a means for both secular and religious citizens to gain a deeper understanding of the vital role of religion in the public sphere, addressing religious illiteracy among the population. Additionally, religious education in schools helps to respond to the growing religious diversity and its attendant complications in the country.² Accordingly, this paper focuses on teaching religious education in Ghanaian public schools, as well as how teachers handle the subject of religious diversity within the classroom. The research is based on ethnographic data gathered from teachers and pupils in five selected public schools in Accra. The paper is divided into three sections: an introduction to religious education in Ghana, a presentation of the research findings, and concluding remarks.

The study employs a qualitative research approach to examine the teaching of Religious and Moral Education (RME) and its engagement with religious diversity in Ghanaian public schools. Ethnographic methods were conducted over six months, including classroom observations, interviews, and focus group discussions. Eight schools in Accra were purposively selected to represent a range of perspectives: four local assembly-run schools (Darkoman JHS, Abossey Okai Cluster of Schools, Dansoman B Cluster of Schools, and Kanda Cluster of Schools), two Christian mission-run schools (Osu Saint Barnabas Catholic School and Osu Salem Presbyterian School), and two Islamic mission-run schools (Hijaz Basic School in Chorkor and Madina Islamic School). The primary data set includes 16 RME teachers and 40 Junior High

² Religious diversity is here considered a concept with several dimensions, especially when applied in particular settings. In the Ghanaian context, it has evolved to include the number of religions and various religious groups, as well as an array of divergences between and within these groups themselves. Thus, it is rather a complex concept than is often considered.

School (JHS) pupils, with each school contributing two teachers and five students for individual interviews. Additionally, three focus group discussions were conducted at selected schools to gain deeper insights into students' perspectives on religious education and diversity. Classroom observations were held twice weekly, with each session lasting approximately 40 minutes, to observe interactions and instructional methods in real time. The study also analyzed primary documents, such as the official RME curriculum and textbooks used at the primary and junior high levels, to assess the curriculum's approach to religious diversity. This comprehensive methodological framework provided a robust view of RME teaching practices, the representation of diverse religions, and the overall handling of religious diversity within Ghanaian public school classrooms

An overview of religious education in Ghana

The educational system in Ghana consists of six years of Primary School, followed by three years of Junior High School (JHS), three years of Senior High School (SHS), and four years of University Bachelor's degree. It is mandatory for all children to complete basic education, which includes primary and JHS. In addition, religious education (RE) is compulsory for all basic school pupils. General-trained teachers in primary schools teach RE, while subject-specific teachers handle it in Junior High Schools.

Religious education (RE) has undergone significant transformations, as has the entire school curriculum throughout the history of education in the country. In particular, the subject has a fascinating origin story in public schools, where it was initially known as Bible Knowledge (BK). During the pre-independence period, BK was taught from a devotional perspective and was often used to reinforce Bible teachings children received in church. This was partly due to the fact that by 1950, almost all children enrolled in schools had received their basic education in Christian missionary schools. Following

independence in 1957, many of the mission schools were incorporated into the new educational system, but BK continued to be taught in schools. Over time, the subject has evolved to embrace a more inclusive approach that respects and acknowledges the diversity of religious beliefs and practices in the country (Olivier & Wodon, 2014; Fuentes et al., 2021).

In a concerted effort to embrace inclusivity, the subject was expanded to encompass Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Religions. This led to the replacement of BK with the more comprehensive subject of Religious Knowledge (RK). Despite the content of instruction remaining largely similar, this change was followed by two additional curriculum reforms and two more name changes to the subject in 1987 and 1994, respectively, reflecting the evolving nature of the educational system.

Following opposition from groups such as Afrikania Mission, who advocated for removing religion from the curriculum due to their belief that African Indigenous Religions were misrepresented, the subject initially transitioned from RK to Cultural Studies (CS) with an emphasis on traditional culture. However, Christian parents in the country ultimately protested this change, leading to the subject's rebranding as Religious and Moral Education (RME). Following opposition from groups such as Afrikania Mission,³ who advocated for the removal of religion from the curriculum due to their belief that African Indigenous Religions were misrepresented, the subject initially transitioned from RK to Cultural Studies (CS) with an emphasis on traditional culture. However, Christian parents in the country ultimately protested this change, leading to the subject's rebranding as Religious and Moral Education (RME) (Thomas, 2012). The decision to rebrand the subject was made in an

³ Afrikania is a religious group that advocates for the abandonment of what they term foreign religions, mainly Christianity and Islam, and the promotion of African Indigenous Religions. For more on Afrikania Mission, see De Witte, Marleen. 2012. "Neo-traditional Religions" in Elias K. Bongmba (ed.) *The Wiley-Blackwell Companion to African Religions*. (Malden et al.: Wiley-Blackwell): 178.

effort to balance the representation of different religions and to provide pupils with a comprehensive education on the subject of religion and morality. It was also designed to give pupils an opportunity to learn about different religions, cultures, and traditions and to develop a better understanding and appreciation of the beliefs and values of others.

Following educational reforms in 2002, Religious and Moral Education (RME) was removed from the school curriculum due to concerns about curriculum overload. However, this decision was met with resistance from religious groups who advocated for the reintroduction of RME in schools. Despite the initial removal, the protests led by these groups successfully persuaded the Christian President, John Agyekum Kufuor, to issue an executive fiat in 2008 to reintroduce RME into the school curriculum. It is worth noting that many of these changes, including the four name changes, have taken place within the last three decades (Kudadjie 1996; Addai-Mununkum, 2014; Adoho, Tsimpo & Wodon 2014; Matemba & Addai-Mununkum, 2017).

The constant renaming of RE can be better understood in the historical context of a tumultuous historical ebb and flow of engagement within the educational sector, an undulating relationship between the state and religious bodies since independence, and the dominance of Christianity in the religious landscape over the years. This is demonstrated by the ongoing discussion among stakeholders regarding teaching RE in publicly funded schools. However, recent times have witnessed a notable shift in the government's perspective, with a growing recognition of the instrumental role that religious institutions can play in advancing various socio-economic development agendas, particularly in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals (Haustein & Tomalin, 2019; Schliesser, 2024). This recognition is based on the understanding that religious institutions possess unique qualities, such as extensive networks, trust, and legitimacy among their followers, which can be harnessed to mobilise resources, foster community engagement, and drive

positive social change. Consequently, the government of Ghana is increasingly open to partnering with religious institutions, viewing them as valuable allies in the pursuit of shared development objectives.

The current Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum, which was introduced by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment in 2020, is a multi-religious religious education curriculum.⁴ The curriculum has a specific aim of helping learners to "develop self-awareness of their Creator and the purpose of their existence." It also aims to foster an understanding and tolerance of other people's faiths and cultures. Additionally, it introduces students to the beliefs and value systems of African Indigenous Religions, Islam, and Christianity. These values, they believe, will equip pupils to make informed moral decisions in the face of the diverse challenges presented by today's rapidly evolving world.⁵ The subject highlights the differences and similarities among these three religious traditions, with references to the Bible and the Qur'an (Matemba & Addai-Mununkum, 2017; Umar 2020; Maleklou & Nilsaz, 2024).

However, while there are multiple Indigenous Religions in Ghana, the RME curriculum adopts the perspective of a unified African Indigenous Religion,⁶ suggesting that Indigenous Religions have a shared fundamental belief system despite local contextual disparities. In Ghana, various ethnic groups, clans, and families celebrate their diverse religious beliefs and

⁴ The Religious and Moral Education programme under the Common Core Programme (CCP) has two parts: one for Primary Schools (Basic 1-6) and the other for Junior High Schools (Basic 7-10). The main strands covered in both strands are God, His Creation and Attributes, Religious Practices, The Family and the Community, Religious Leaders and Personalities, Ethics and Moral Life, and Religion and Economic Life.

⁵ Religious and Moral Education Common Core Programme Curriculum (Basic 7-10) by the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment of Ministry of Education (2020). Retrieved from <https://nacca.gov.gh/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/Religious-and-Moral-Education.pdf>.

⁶ I have chosen to use the term 'African Indigenous Religions' instead of the commonly used 'African Traditional Religions' (ATR). The reason is the latter term seems to imply that African religions have remained unchanged over time, while the former term is more neutral and avoids any implications of value judgment.

expressions through religious festivals, rites of passage, funerals, and more. Although there may be diversity in how different ethnic communities in Africa practice African Indigenous Religions, the fundamental beliefs remain consistent. These usually include the acknowledgement of a Supreme Being, the existence of major and minor deities and the veneration of ancestors. The approach adopted in the RME curriculum is what Olupona has aptly noted: "The varieties are more of those of expressions than basic belief" (1991, p. 26), and Asare Opoku has described it as a "common thread in indigenous values" among the various indigenous religions (Opoku, 1978, p. 8).

Classroom discourses and religious diversity

It is important at this stage to clarify these two terminologies in order to put the findings in the right perspective. First, in the context of this paper, the term "classroom discourse" refers to all types of communication that occur within the classroom, including both linguistic and non-linguistic communication. The linguistic elements include the language used by both the teacher and pupils, as well as teacher-pupil and pupil-pupil interactions. The non-linguistic communication includes gestures, silence, and facial expressions, which play a crucial role in teaching and learning (Tsui 2008; Grillo & Enesi, 2022; Fatima et al., 2024). Together, they form the observable aspects of classroom discourse that contribute to the teaching and learning process.

Second, Smart's seven-fold analysis of the different dimensions of religious traditions is a good place to start a discussion on religious diversity. Smart argues that what usually distinguishes religious traditions revolves around "the ritual or practical, the doctrinal or philosophical, the mythic or narrative, the experiential or emotional, the ethical or legal, the organisational or social, and the material or artistic" dimensions (1996, pp. 10-11). By examining these dimensions, we can better understand the diversity that exists within and between different religious traditions. Arguably, the doctrinal or philosophical

aspects of a religion serve as the fulcrum for understanding the other dimensions. The reason is that religions generally offer a diagnosis of the fundamental problems facing humans and suggest a way to resolve them (Prothero, 2010; Yandell, 2013; Cornnelly, 2021; Gschwandtner, 2021).

The religious landscape of Ghana has experienced a surge in diversity in recent years, thanks to the resurgence of Christianity, Islam, and indigenous religions. This trend is reflective of a larger, global movement towards religious pluralism that has garnered much scholarly scrutiny and discussion. The concept of religious diversity takes on various meanings depending on the context in which it is applied. In Ghana, for instance, religious diversity encompasses not only the number of religions and various religious groups but also the many differences and nuances that exist both between and within these groups. It is more intricate than just the coexistence of diverse religious identities in contemporary society. Additionally, it intersects with other forms of diversity, such as ethnicity and language (Arthur, 2018, p. 269; Haynes, 2023; Sarfo, 2023).

Next, I would like to analyse the findings reported below under five main thematic headings: inaccurate representation of the religious 'other', marginalisation of indigenous religions, selective multireligious approach to RME, simplistic approach to religious diversity and believers perceived as 'experts'.

Inaccurate representation of the religious 'other'

One of the major issues in Religious and Moral Education (RME) is the inaccurate portrayal of the religious 'others'. It was observed that many religious traditions or expressions are often misrepresented by those outside or even within particular religious communities. This could be attributed to the prevalent dominance of Christianity in Ghana's religious landscape, resulting in a significant number of Christian RME educators in schools. In the group of

sixteen teachers that were interacted with, thirteen of them identified as Christian, while two identified as Muslim. The majority of students (33 out of 40) also identified as Christian. However, strong evidence suggested that these teachers inaccurately represented other religions. They made claims about the truth of their own religious traditions and denigrated the religious beliefs of others. Some teachers, RT1-13, appeared to believe they had the moral obligation to convert those with different religious beliefs. For example, one teacher asserted that:

The syllabus for [RME] is important, but it is also our responsibility to educate the minds and spirits of pupils, especially when you know a pupil will die in their sins. I believe that the Lord has brought us here for a purpose. [RT5]

This teacher, who comes from a Pentecostal-Charismatic background, appears to have a strong inclination towards sharing their religious beliefs with pupils despite the non-devotional nature of the RME curriculum. Although Christian teachers mainly carried out these actions, the Muslim teachers (RT14-16) also acknowledged that they emphasised the superiority of Islam over Christianity and Indigenous Religions during classroom discussions. It seems that many teachers either do not fully understand or simply ignore the distinction between Religious and Moral Education and the devotional practice of religions. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that RME is a non-devotional subject that serves a critical role in ensuring equal opportunities for all religions in the public sphere.

Marginalisation of indigenous religions in classroom discourses

Furthermore, it is evident that indigenous religions are often marginalized and demonized by Christian and Muslim RME teachers. This became apparent during my attempts to identify followers of indigenous religions in all eight schools and ten distinct RME lessons, which unfortunately proved

unsuccessful. In two particular local government-run schools, two teachers even went so far as to explain that:

Over here, we don't have any followers of traditional religions. Everyone you speak to will tell you that they are Catholic, Methodist, Anglican or Charismatic. [RT7]

Traditional religion is a thing of the past. It is very, very backwards, and the gods are only good at prescribing instant justice. I don't think anyone here doesn't go to church. [RT4]

One of the teachers from the Islamic educational-run schools added:

In this school, all the students identify as either Muslim or Christian. I have not observed any students who follow traditional religious practices and visit shrines. According to the students who identify as Muslim or Christian, engaging in such practices is considered "haram," which means forbidden, especially in Islam. It's idol worship. So, anyone who visits the shrines may be viewed as not following the teachings of their religion and may be considered bad Muslims or Christians by their peers. [RT16]

Despite 3.2% of the Ghanaian population identifying as adherents of Indigenous Religions, some teachers hold a perspective that overlooks this statistic. Some Christian and Muslim RME teachers tend to marginalise and demonise these religions. This is especially concerning as Indigenous Religions remain a significant part of the RME curriculum. Moreover, there is a trend among some teachers to refer to Indigenous Religions as idolatry. This contributes to a situation where students may feel uncomfortable discussing their religious beliefs openly. Although some pupils may not publicly express their faith, they feel comfortable in private conversations. This is a matter of the public perception of a certain religion, but more significantly, the denigration of indigenous religions in classroom discussions can lead to situations where pupils are forced to have a dual religious identity or double belonging. In

private, they are adherents of indigenous religions, but in public, they profess Christianity or Islam, which have a good public appeal.

Furthermore, it is evident that some RME teachers seem to consider Indigenous Religions as primitive and lacking the moral standards present in Christianity and Islam. This could be due to their perceived limited practice in Ghana, as well as ignorance and unfair judgement among those tasked to teach it. It is worth considering that the negative attitudes towards Indigenous Religions may not necessarily be driven by malice but rather by a lack of understanding and unfair judgment. It is evident that the curriculum cannot feasibly cover every minority religious tradition in the RME curriculum. Therefore, it seems reasonable that the criterion used by the curriculum designers, which is based on the number of adherents, is appropriate. However, while some may argue that learning about minority religious traditions is not as important as learning about the three dominant religions in the country, omitting them entirely from the curriculum limits the breadth of RME's multi-religious approach.

Selective multi-religious approach to RME

Although the current RME curriculum presents a commendable multi-religious perspective in its course content and classroom discussion, it is important to acknowledge that there remains room for improvement in terms of its inclusivity. The selective multi-religious approach to RME teaching, while an improvement over previous versions of Religious Education (Bible Knowledge and Religious Knowledge), still falls short in its efforts to foster equality among the religions practised in Ghana. The inclusion of Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Religions in the RME curriculum can be attributed to the country's current demographic distribution, as these three traditions boast the highest number of followers. However, it is worth noting that the syllabus does not extend the same recognition to other religious traditions and expressions

despite their equal endorsement by the state and protection under the 1992 constitution. The exclusion of religions beyond the 'big three' is evident in classroom discussions, where the majority of the sixteen teachers displayed either ignorance or discomfort when broaching the subject. A few of the teachers even dismissed these religions as legitimate religious traditions. The following are some comments from teachers and pupils during classroom interactions:

Rastafarianism is only a ganja [weed] smoking group who are not religious at all. [RP13]

If we get a Rastafarian teacher here, he will only teach us [about] ganja [weed] and reggae music. [RP34]

Hinduism is a "satanic religion full of demonic rituals. [RT6]

Eckankar is definitely foreign to us as Ghanaians and should not be entertained at all. [RT14]

As indicated by the comments above from both teachers and pupils alike, there is a common misconception about the so-called minority religious traditions and expressions among both teachers and students. For example, while Rastafarianism has a significant presence in Ghana, the religion is not included in the curriculum despite being recognised by the state. Similarly, there is a lack of adequate knowledge about religious traditions like Hinduism and Eckankar. This is mainly because the multi-religious RME curriculum does not cover these religions, so teachers and pupils are not exposed to them. It is evident that the RME curriculum cannot feasibly cover every minority religious tradition. Therefore, it seems reasonable that the criterion used by the curriculum designers based on the number of adherents is appropriate. However, while some may argue that learning about minority religious traditions is not as important as learning about the three dominant religions in the country, omitting them entirely from the curriculum limits the breadth of RME's multi-religious approach.

Simplistic approach to religious diversity

The Religious and Moral Education (RME) curriculum has a simplistic view of religious diversity. It assumes that all religious traditions and expressions are internally uniform rather than diverse and evolving. This one-dimensional approach focuses solely on the number of religions without considering the internal divergences within each religion. As a result, in classroom discussions, Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Religions are presented as homogenous entities. This constitutes a problem of oversimplification in the way Christianity, Islam, and Indigenous Religions are often presented in lessons. For example, even Indigenous Religions, which can be challenging to define due to their contextual distinctions and divergences, are often approached with a "common thread" mindset that emphasises shared values, perspectives, and experiences (Opoku 1978: 8). Although the syllabus may treat Islam and Christianity as uniform, students in these schools have shown a keen awareness of the denominational and sectarian differences that exist within these religions. Understanding these differences can lead to more informed discussions about the role of religions in the public sphere. Therefore, knowledge of the various doctrinal differences within the religious traditions is crucial for pupils to have a deeper understanding of religion. A teacher highlighted the following:

Teaching about more religions and even the different faces of these religions within the limited time available will be very challenging. It would be an uphill task to delve into the internal differences while ensuring we complete the syllabus. It is important to note that religions share more similarities than differences. Additionally, the main objective of the RME syllabus is to enlighten children on the fundamental beliefs and values of the three main religions in the country. [RT15]

While the teacher's assertion regarding the time constraints and primary objective of Religious and Moral Education (RME) is valid, presenting religious traditions and expressions in an oversimplified manner as a uniform entity and

defining religious diversity solely based on the number of religions is not entirely accurate. When defined within the context of the Ghanaian religious landscape, religious diversity is not only the multiplicity of religions and divergences within each religious tradition but is also intricately intertwined with other forms of diversity, such as ethnicity.

Believers perceived as 'experts'

Finally, during my classroom observation and interaction with teachers and pupils, I was impressed by their level of creativity and improvisation. In particular, I observed that two of the teachers, who were Christians, stood out to me as they invited two Islamic pupils to demonstrate any Islamic concepts that needed to be discussed in RME lessons. One of the teachers felt that he was not knowledgeable enough about Islam to explain it effectively, so he enlisted the help of his Muslim pupils [RT8, RT12]. This approach facilitated peer learning and exemplified the teachers' dedication to providing the best possible understanding of the subject matter.

Additionally, a Muslim teacher shared that when teaching the Christian component of RME to his predominantly Muslim students, he would usually invite his Christian colleague to elaborate on the key points. This approach highlights the belief that individuals who practice a particular religious tradition are regarded as both informal and formal authorities on their tradition. In this way, these teachers employ innovative methods to ensure that RME is taught effectively to their pupils. It is worth noting that while teachers employ innovative teaching methods, relying on practitioners of a particular religion as experts in that tradition can be problematic. This is because RME, in its current state, is not a devotional subject like Bible Knowledge (BK), one of its predecessor religious education subjects. Acquiring religious knowledge through devotion can be biased towards a specific strand of a religious tradition that the teacher or student belongs to. Therefore, it can be risky to assume that

adherence to a religious tradition qualifies one as an expert in teaching RME. Additionally, using pupils as experts because of the lack of expertise of a teacher is problematic because qualified RME teachers typically receive thorough and comprehensive training in all three major traditions. Therefore, they possess the requisite abilities and knowledge to teach each tradition effectively.

Conclusion

The role of religion as a driving force in the public sphere is crucial and cannot be overemphasised. The divergences within and between religious traditions in a contemporary democratic society are particularly significant. The significance of Religious and Moral Education (RME) in providing an open platform for both secular and religious citizens to engage in discussions regarding the nature of various religious traditions and their relationships cannot be overstated. Despite Ghana's reputation for democratic values, an open religious market, and acceptance of diverse religious traditions and expressions, often attributed in part to the teaching of RME in schools, it is important to acknowledge that the depiction of religious diversity in the classroom discussions is problematic.

Currently, the RME curriculum and classroom discourses fall short of providing equitable opportunities to all religious traditions and expressions - an integral aspect of the role of religion in the public sphere. Although the multi-religious approach of the RME curriculum incorporates three religions and demonstrates some level of inclusivity and diversity, it fails to mirror Ghana's present demographic distribution as it neglects minority religions outside the big three.

Moreover, the failure to differentiate between RME classroom discourses and devotional expressions of religion among teachers discourages meaningful discussions on religion in the public sphere. This not only leads to the vilification of the 'religious other' by major traditions such as Christianity and

Islam but also obstructs critical conversations on religion as a multifaceted social and cultural phenomenon and prevents interrogation of absolute truth claims.

Additionally, the simplistic representation of religious diversity by the RME curriculum and classroom discourses impedes both secular and religious citizens' ability to fully grasp the intricacies of religions and the diversity within individual religious traditions or expressions. This approach also needs to acknowledge the dynamic nature of religious traditions and expressions as continuously evolving instead of remaining uniform, static, and absolute.

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