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# **The Multi-Faith Approach Gap in Light of the Zimbabwe Junior Secondary and 'O' Level Religious Studies Syllabi**

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## **Abstract**

*There have been debates in regard to the teaching and learning of religious education (R.E.) in Zimbabwe where the approach has exclusively favoured Christianity at the expense of other religions. The major problem arises from mistaking religious education for Christian education; religious education teachers for pastors; religious education pupils for Christians, hence the dominance of the confessional approach in the teaching and learning of religious education. Advocacy calls from different religious groupings have been heard lobbying for a change of the religious education syllabus so as to broadly incorporate other religions hence the Zimbabwean religio-cultural diversity. What is paradoxically interesting is that, the aims of the religious education syllabi are multi-faith in orientation but with exclusivist content. It is then not surprising that most religious education teachers and stakeholders erroneously take the subject as meant to evangelistically extend the territories of Christianity against other religions. Learners have not been spared from that confessional understanding of religious education. The confessional attitude has hampered the academic and cross-cultural nature of religious education. This paper is a research that was carried out in the whole of 2013 to establish the attitude of teachers, heads of schools, pupils, parents and Curriculum Development Unit subject managers on the*

*se of the multi-faith approach in teaching and learning of religious education. As a result, 5 Manicaland schools were randomly sampled, 150 pupils were given questionnaires, 5 heads of schools, and the Curriculum Development Unit Religious Studies manager were interviewed. As a result of the research, the article calls for the adoption of the multi-faith approach so as to close the gap between the aims and the content of the 'O' level religious education syllabi.*

## **Introduction**

The multi-faith approach is one of the approaches used in the study of religion(s) as well as teaching of religious education (R.E.). The method is regarded as having developed from the phenomenological approach. Woodward (1982) argues that, the multi-faith approach to religious education takes various names like phenomenology of religion or science of religion depending on the country.

In any given society there is bound to be more than one form of religion practised such that it becomes noble to promote the multi-faith approach so as to equip children with knowledge on the different or selected religions which make up the world. Proponents of the multi-faith approach realised the importance of the teachings of various religions like Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, Judaism, Baha'i faith and African traditional religion can enrich the teaching and learning of religious education. The world can best be described as a multi-faith of nations or egalitarian society because of the different nations that subscribe to different religions.

It is generally in Africa, particularly in Zimbabwe, where the colonial education system popularised Christianity in the school curriculum

because many schools had been built by Christian missionaries who condemned other religions in promotion of their own religion. In order to address the challenges that were created, a number of approaches in the teaching and learning of religious education are needed in order to produce a multi-cultural and tolerant people by adopting the multi-faith approach from primary to secondary education level. Religious education should help learners in their quest for the meaning of life and the life of others. This can only be possible when religions are treated as equal by helping the learning children to know about other religions as they are likely to encounter them. The multi-faith approach or phenomenological approach offers that religious platform. For Singh (1986).

The broader phenomenological approach to Religious Education is the best means of enhancing the understanding of all pupils, from whatever religious backgrounds, of the plurality of faiths in society, and of bringing them to an understanding of the nature of belief and the religious dimension of human existence. This approach seems to be the best means of helping pupils to appreciate the diverse and sometimes conflicting life stances which exist and thus enabling them to determine and to justify their own religious position .

Museka (2012) argues that the introduction of the multi-faith approach to the teaching of religious education in African countries like Botswana, Malawi and Zimbabwe among others is a milestone attempt by African governments to unite African learners with their cultural heritage. From 1989 the Zimbabwean government advocated for a multi-faith approach to religious education teaching (Curriculum

Development Unit, 1999). However, the Zimbabwe Junior Certificate (ZJC) secondary school syllabus unfortunately still differs from the 'O' level syllabus though serving the same Zimbabwean audience.

### **The ZJC syllabus and the multi-faith approach**

The ZJC religious and moral education syllabus of 2010 was drafted as an effort to move from colonial oriented syllabus to a locally relevant syllabus. Haar (1990) argues that the proposed transformation of the educational system suited the developmental needs of Zimbabweans where it was felt that the teaching of religious and moral education should recognise the fact that Zimbabwe is a multi-cultural society. The ZJC religious and moral education syllabus exposes pupils to the different religions. The teacher, as a vehicle of instruction, is supposed to make pupils become aware of the different religious trends in Zimbabwe.

The 2010 ZJC syllabus includes other religions such as: Baha'i faith, Hinduism, Islam, African traditional religion and Christianity. The ZJC syllabus, through the multi-faith approach, takes no single belief system as the source of value in a society but introduces learners to many diverse views about religion and multiplicity of life-stances. Phillips-Bell (1983) and Meakin (1979) regard the demand for personal autonomy as logically justifying a multi-faith approach to religious education. According to Phillips-Bell (1983):

If education is to do with the development of a child's autonomy and consequently, if the child is to have genuine religious choice, then the child must be exposed to a multi-faith approach.

By including selected religions in the syllabi, a number of aims are fulfilled rather than having Christianity as the only religion that is used

as the source of reference. The ZJC syllabus' aims provide an opportunity for learners to respect the various religious beliefs thereby promoting tolerance and co-operation among various religious groups. The syllabus seeks harmony and co-existence among people of various religions. Unity and tolerance are cultivated as opposed to the situation where societies are divided on religious grounds (Larsson, 2004; Falola, 1998; Kastfelt, 2005).

Cox (in Dembetembe, 1999) commends that pupils can be exposed to various religions through the multi-faith approach. In the multi-faith approach, the teacher is expected to provide information on different religions and does not seek to confessionally promote any particular religious point of view. Ngwenya (1986) asserts that, if religious education is to be educative, the teacher should attempt to extend the child's awareness in many religious traditions that exist in Zimbabwe to make the subject relevant and incorporative of the learners' experiences. This is shown by the ZJC secondary syllabus that has one compulsory section which allows the learners to explore from different religions such as: African tradition religion (ATR), Baha'i faith, Islamic and Christianity. The second section has an option of A to D where Option A has bible knowledge; Option B has African tradition religion (ATR); Option C focuses on Islam and D focuses on the Baha'i Faith (Zimbabwe Junior Certificate syllabus, 2010). Is this the same with the 'O' level syllabus?

### **The 'O' level syllabus and the multi-faith approach**

If the ZJC syllabus incorporated the multi-faith approach; the same is expected with the 'O' level syllabus. Yet the 'O' level syllabus content has remained Christocentric with only one aim that relates to African

studying world religions, and by exploring those elements in human experience which raise questions about life's ultimate meaning and value. This involves informing pupils in a descriptive, critical and experiential manner about what religion is, and increasing their sensitivity to the areas of experience from which a religious view of life may arise. It should stimulate within pupils, and assist them in the search for, a personal view of meaning in life, whilst enabling them to understand the beliefs and commitments of others.

In this case, the curricula must incorporate the religious world view of the Zimbabwean audience. Jackson (1982) argues that contemporary issues engage people in their day to day lives. Thompson (1988) states that, "religions influence peoples' attitudes towards politics, society, human rights, government, economy, natural environment, marriage and education". It is through the teaching and learning of the subject that creates a platform for the development of pupils. Singh (1986) further argues that religious education shares with the other subjects the task of helping children to acquire the skills, knowledge and social competence necessary for their personal development and life in society. Nyamakura (2001) explained that in 1999 there was a call to infuse human rights education in the school system. The current ZJC (secondary school) religious education syllabus addresses topical issues like human rights, democracy and gender sensitivity through the multi-faith approach. However, the religious education curriculum can still be further modified to include other issues like HIV and AIDS, inclusive education and preservation of natural resources.



**traditional religion. The 'O' level syllabus (2005 to 2008) only gives options for learners that are all derived from Christianity. There are biblical options between (a) and (b) as shown below:**

- a) Paper 1 focuses on the life and teaching of Christ as contained in the Synoptic Gospels;
- b) Paper 2 and Paper 3 which are both studied as one course. Paper 2 focusing on the life and teaching of Christ as contained in the gospel of Luke whilst Paper 3 focusing on the Acts of the Apostles.

From the brief options of these two syllabi one can easily notice that there is a gap between ZJC and 'O' level syllabi aims, methods and content which this article seeks to address by coming up with possible recommendations. The 'O' level religious studies syllabi 2042 and 2043 are basically Christocentric and therefore alienate other faiths. However, the Curriculum Development Unit personnel realised the need for the multi-faith approach in the 'O' level syllabus and gave aims that are multi-faith in orientation. For example, one of the interesting aims in the 'O' level syllabus (2008) states that, *it seeks to help pupils develop respect for people whose beliefs differ from their own*. Unfortunately, this aim cannot be fully realised when the resources and syllabus options deliberately refer to Christianity as the only religion and the Bible as the only resource book used in the teaching of religious studies.

If the 'O' level syllabus aim is to be achieved, the inclusion of other religions should be considered. Shorter (1975) called for a dialogue

between Christianity and theologies of other faiths so as to build deeper relationships among pupils coming from different religious affiliations. The fact that the policy makers and other stakeholders have taken a multi-faith approach on the ZJC syllabus, we expect the same to be done with the 'O' level syllabus. The Bible-centred approach in the present 'O' level syllabus discriminates against pupils who are not Christians, yet every pupil should be equally accommodated in the classroom regardless of one's religious affiliation given the spiral nature of our curriculum.

Jackson (1982) argues that the multi-faith approach is neither too close nor too far removed from its subject matter but helps pupils from mistaking a single narrow view point for the whole truth. It is an ideal approach in the teaching and learning of religious education. It empowers the modern teacher and pupils to easily relate to the world community and the different religious dynamics as in the case of Africans in general and Zimbabweans in particular.

### **The multi-faith approach as vital to African contemporary challenges**

In the case of African pupils, the subject matter and methods in the religious studies curricula must address their African world view as all curricula must address the contemporary world view of their audience. For Singh (1986):

It is widely accepted in this society that education should seek to encourage children to question, to criticise, to investigate, to challenge, to debate, to evaluate and to be able to make decisions and choices about their future adult lives. The multi-faith approach to religious education and syllabus should be used to enlarge and deepen the pupils' understanding of religion by

## **Religious education, the multi-faith approach and citizenship education**

Cox (1983) commends that religious education is not to be understood as giving pupils religious certainties but teaching pupils to act responsibly as part of *unhu* or *ubuntu*. Various religions promote peace, unity, justice and citizenship education. In that light, citizenship education relates to the political, social, religious, cultural and interpersonal levels of people as they morally develop and live together. Moral development as emphasized in religious education and citizenship development are linked when it comes to how young people are socialized in life (Sears & Hughes, 2006; Veugelers, 2011). The Nziramasanga Presidential Commission on Education and Training Report (1999) emphasised that:

The goals of the Citizenship Education curriculum would be: 'to enable children to grow into good citizens who conform to certain accepted practice; train them to hold beliefs; to ensure the reception and acceptance of African values, ethics and civic processes by all the youth; and to enlighten children of their civic rights, obligations and responsibilities'.

The above emphasis reinforces the idea that citizenship education, through religious education, plays a crucial role in nation building (Mapetere, Chinembiri & Makaye, 2012). Davies (1979) argues that, with citizenship education, people would enjoy political, civil, religious and economic rights. As a result, citizenship education would develop patriotism, obedience to legitimate authority, human rights and democracy and respect for other citizens' views on various social, economic, religious and political issues" (*The Sunday Mail*, 05 October 2013).

Citizenship education can be found in the various religions and helps promote civil rights awareness. It is in this light that citizenship education, through the multi-faith approach, promotes freedom of religious diversity without fear of being labelled or ostracised. It is more than merely learning about citizenship and democracy but making pupils become responsible citizens inside and outside school (Sliwka, Diedrich & Hofer, 2006; Arthur, 2008; Scott, Lawson, 2002; McCowan, 2009). The multi-faith approach, therefore, helps prepare pupils to be responsible, tolerant and democratic hence addressing contemporary issues.

### **Religious education, multi-faith approach and the environment**

Environmental issues are so critical that they are enshrined in the United Nations Millennium Development Goals which seek to promote environmental stability and development in the global partnership. Religious studies, through the multi-faith approach, can be a fertile ground in addressing modern challenges like environmental degradation and climate change which tend to arrest the development of most African nations. As a result, religion has a place in the educational curricula as it enriches pupils' experiences which are coloured by their environment.

Environmental management is another topical issue which can be addressed through the multi-faith approach in the teaching of religious education as religious beliefs can either contribute to environmental preservation or degradation. There is growing attention and concern in Zimbabwe that education doesn't lead to responsible change of behaviour amongst pupils towards their environment (Johnson and Mappin, 2005; Pandey, 2006; Sundar and Samuel, 2007). Unfortunately

as it stands, religious studies at ZJC and 'O' level syllabi are silent about the environment; yet religions have a role to play on how the environment should be preserved.

### **The multi-faith approach in light of HIV and AIDS, human rights and democracy**

Besides focusing on the environment, the teaching and learning of religious education through the multi-faith approach can also be used to raise awareness on HIV and AIDS, promote human rights, tolerance and democracy. An attempt was done around 1998 to introduce HIV and AIDS education but it was short lived due to a number of reasons. Some critics felt that such teaching would go against the religious beliefs of most religions. Critics further felt that HIV and AIDS education especially sexuality issues and awareness on the use of prophylactics encouraged young people to be promiscuous (Nyamaropa 2001; *The Standard*, 29 July 2012; *The Herald*, 21 September 2011; *The Chronicle*, 26 July 2012). For Museka, Manyarara, Phiri and Kaguda (2013), distributing prophylactics to school children masked the real problem behind the spread of HIV and AIDS especially when analysed in light of poverty, promiscuity, peer pressure, pornography and social media. They argue further that the 'O' religious education curriculum lacks relevance by not including the African philosophy of *hunhu/ ubuntu* as found in the African culture and religion. Anchored by African values, *hunhu/ ubuntu* promotes morality. Traditional chiefs and headmen have expressed their reservations especially over the use of prophylactics which they believe encourage prostitution among the youth (*The Standard*, 29 July 2012; *The Herald*, 21 September 2011; *The Chronicle*, 26 July 2012).

Besides promoting moral values, the teaching of religious education also help promote democracy and human rights ideals. A democratic society must allow the free exchange of ideas and of the rights of individuals to choose their own modes of religious practice that the principles of democracy warrant. But this freedom and the rights of individuals must be constantly judged against the freedom and rights of others as enunciated in the teaching and learning of religious education. Religious and moral practices must be judged by their consequences on the lives of others. According to Singh (1986):

The moral principles we come to share may depend upon our view about human nature, and this view may differ from person to person. Thus, although we ought to encourage people to think for themselves what is right and proper to follow, not everything that people think for themselves is right and proper would be right and proper. The individual must be encouraged to put over his own views as rationally and reasonably as he can, but must be made to understand that despite the fact that he is being as rational as he can be, he must realise that there are other views which are also reasonable.

In the case of Africa, in general and Zimbabwe in particular, any curriculum innovation needs the support of the community and its stakeholders for it to be successfully implemented. There is need to make the religious education curriculum relevant to its audience by "Africanising or Zimbabweanising it". Mavhunga (2008) argues that Africanising the school curriculum simply means making the curriculum meet the needs, interests and aspirations of African people as determined by Africans themselves as the stakeholders. The stakeholders' perspective can be helpful in multi-faith approach.

## **Methodology**

The research was based on a survey conducted in the Manicaland province in eastern Zimbabwe. The survey method is the most appropriate way for obtaining factual or attitudinal information about self-reported beliefs. Gallin and Ognibene (2012), and Mackey and Grass (2012) argue that, if surveys are done correctly, sound information can be collected from a small sample that can be generalised to a large population. The results are generally used to gauge the stakeholders' attitude as we did in this case on the use of the multi-faith approach as a method in the teaching of religious education.

### **Population and sample**

Five schools were sampled in Manicaland in Mutasa District. From these schools, questionnaires were given to pupils and teachers. Interviews were also done targeting heads of schools and the Curriculum Development Unit subject managers. The questions focused on the attitude of the sampled population on the multi-faith approach and its adoption in the teaching of religious education at both ZJC and 'O' levels.

## **Results**

### **Responses of teachers towards the multi-faith approach**

From the questionnaires, more than half of the teachers showed willingness to use the multi-faith approach in the teaching of religious studies at 'O' level arguing that the subject should be more academic than being a continuation of certain church doctrine.

**Table 1**

*Findings from Teachers' Responses through Questionnaires on the Use of the Multi-Faith Approach at 'O' Level*

Response	Number of Respondents
YES	6
NO	4
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>10</b>

The majority of the teachers (60%) from the five schools recommended that the 'O' syllabus should include other world religions like: African traditional religion, Hinduism, Islam and Buddhism. The teachers (40%), who recommended the Christocentric 'O' level syllabus, favoured the status quo because of their Christian background and personal assumption that religious education is Christian education.

However, from interviews (interviewed, 20 March 2013), Mrs J. and Mr D. (all pseudonyms for ethical reasons) felt that the syllabus should remain Christocentric with Christianity as a source of reference.

According to Mr D.,

*The present Religious Education curricula help pupils to move away from darkness to the light of Christianity.*

For Mrs J.,

*It is only through the Bible that people can experience the love of God and the need to move away from the powers of darkness. Religious Education can only make sense when pupils are exposed to the Bible and the teachings of Christianity. It is Christianity that can help build the morality of pupils.*



It is clear that, for Mr D. and Mrs J., religious education is an extension of Christianity with other religions being labeled as agents of the devil.

However, another interview, Mr N. differed and argued that,

*Why should the Bible be the only resource book as if religious education caters for Christians only? In a Church setting, the place of the Bible isn't questionable but not in a class environment where pupils subscribe to several religions like: Christianity, African Traditional Religion, Judaism and Islam. Some don't subscribe to any religion. Why then foist the Bible and Christianity down the throats of pupils?*

What is interesting is that, 40% of the teachers indicated their willingness to use the multi-faith approach with the Bible as the main resource book whereas the other 60% dismiss the use of the Bible as the main resource book in religious education.

### **Responses of pupils towards the multi-faith approach**

One hundred and fifty pupils were asked through questionnaires whether their parents were comfortable or not to have them learn religious studies which includes Christianity and other religions. The parents' responses as established from their children are as shown below:

Table 2

#### *Parental Responses*

Response	Number of Respondents	Percentages (%)
NO	95	64
YES	55	36
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>150</b>	<b>100</b>

From the 150 participants, 95 pupils indicated that their parents were not comfortable at all with the multi-faith approach in the 'O' level syllabus especially if Islam is one of the religions. Islam is associated with violence. Parents or guardians tolerated other religions other than Islam in the teaching and learning of religious education. Only 55 participants indicated that their parents were comfortable with the multi-faith approach syllabus if it included ATR only. However, the pupils' response was different from their parents as the majority expected religious studies at 'O' level to include major religions like: African traditional religion, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism and Islam. Pupils had no problem with the inclusion of Islam in the religious education syllabus. It is also interesting to note that their perspective of Islam was not swayed by their parents' perspective.

Table 3  
*Favoured Religions in the 'O' level Syllabus*

<b>Religions</b>	<b>Number of Respondents</b>
Hinduism	1
Buddhism	3
Islam	14
ATR	32
<b>Total Respondents</b>	<b>50</b>

The above information shows that the inclusion of African traditional religion in the 'O' level syllabus possibly found the highest support amongst pupils possibly because it is an indigenous religion. Other religions like Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam seem not favourable to most of the pupils possibly by virtue of being exogenous. African traditional religion is better accommodated since the pupils are exposed to it from birth to death just like Christianity.

## **Head of schools' perspectives on the 'O' level syllabus and the multi-faith approach**

Five heads, that is, Mr Do, Mr Nt, Mr Ch, Mr Ny and Mr Ma (all pseudonyms for ethical reasons), were interviewed on resources and methods used for teaching religious studies. The heads of schools had mixed feelings on the use of the multi-faith approach on the teaching and learning of religious studies. Mr Do (interview, 6 February 2013) indicated that,

*The history of religious education is known as the study of Christianity and there is nothing wrong with its current status. I am totally against the inclusion of other religions which I feel would dilute the importance of Christianity and confuse the learner who may not be able to handle beliefs from different religions.*

Mr Do confuses religious education with Christian education where for him religious education focuses on Christianity. This is generally the assumption taken by most people in Zimbabwe where religious education teachers are equated to pastors on a mission of conversion. Pupils are expected to become faithful Christians. This was also confirmed by Mr Nt (interview, 6 February 2013) who felt that,

*Religious education teachers especially those with a Christian background still continue to demonize other religions.*

As a result, Mr Ma (interview, 14 February 2013) argued that,

*I have no problem if the 'O' level syllabus incorporated the multi-faith approach as this was a good move as long as other religions are treated equally, though I would want the Bible to remain the only major resource book.*

The general feeling of many heads of schools is that, the 'O' level syllabus should remain Christocentric with the Bible as the main resource book of the subject. This is not surprising as most heads of schools are Christians who take religious education for Christian education.

Interestingly most of them have not been exposed to pedagogical issues in religious education. Mr Ny (interview, 14 February 2013) showed no interest in making the syllabus multi-faith in nature. This was supported by Mr Ch (interview, 15 February 2013) who added that:

*The old Christocentric ZJC religious education syllabus linked very well with 'O' level syllabus. The current ZJC syllabus is not good for our pupils because of the inclusion of these other religions like Islam. The old ZJC syllabus used Christianity and the Bible as the only source of reference. The two syllabi morally empowered pupils to become faithful Christians. I am not comfortable with the new ZJC syllabus which is multi-faith in nature.*

Not all heads of the selected schools were against the inclusion of the multi-faith approach. Mr Do (interview, 6 February 2013) was comfortable with the new ZJC syllabus which he regarded as a good move towards considering other religions. He argued that:

*In the case of African traditional religion, it enables pupils to appreciate their identity as Shona people rather than studying foreign religions like Christianity at the expense of our own indigenous religions. The current multi-faith oriented ZJC syllabus must be the guiding tool for the changes needed in the 'O' level syllabus.*

It is clear from the foregoing interviewees that most heads of schools and teachers are comfortable with the old ZJC syllabus and the current 'O' level religious studies which don't incorporate the multi-faith approach.

The impression given by most of the heads of schools is that religious education is equivalent to Christianity and they wrongly take religious education teachers as evangelists. For these heads of schools, religious education teachers are there to fulfil the great commission by Jesus in Matthew 28<sup>1st</sup> (Luke 24<sup>1st</sup>, Mark 16<sup>1st</sup>) that:

Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you; and lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age.

The thrust of religious education is erroneously taken as that of making sure that the whole world receives the good news. Mr Ch (interview, 15 February 2013) confessionally argued that,

*The multi-faith approach has never been successful in areas where it started in England and the United States of America. Why should we attempt to use an approach that has failed somewhere? Maybe its failure is because of God who is communicating something to the world that, it is only through Christianity that the world can get salvation. Why should we aim to impose religions of darkness on our pupils?*

Some heads of schools like Mr Ma (interview, 14 February 2013) justified their bias towards the current 'confessional' 'O' level syllabus by arguing that,

*The present syllabus only needs a few Bibles and commentaries hence not expensive. Donors usually donate Bibles and biblical commentaries making the teaching and learning of the subject less expensive. Pupils will be assured of passes whereas with the multi-faith approach, more resources on the different religions might possibly be needed.*

Mr Nt (interview, 6 February 2013) argued that,

*The multi-faith approach causes confusion to pupils who will be young to be exposed to these other religions and the multi-faith approach can be a source of ill-discipline when pupils fight to defend their faiths.*

The above sentiments by heads of schools clearly show the type of fears and challenges faced by teachers of religious education, pupils and Curriculum developers in making the subject relevant to the context of Zimbabweans. The current position and attitude exhibited by most religious education teachers and heads of schools makes Christianity a domineering religion that also patronizes learners in religious education as Christians.

## **Responses of the personnel of the Zimbabwe Curriculum Development Unit towards the ZJC and 'O' level syllabuses**

The Curriculum Development Unit subject manager of religious studies, Mr Sm (interview, 28 January 2013) indicated that the new ZJC religious studies syllabus was not well accepted by some people. He pointed that,

*The option section where a variety of religions were given in ZJC new syllabus is still problematic in that some religions such as Hinduism, Judaism and Buddhism were left out. The major reason is that, when the syllabus was reviewed, no representatives from these other religions were present only to complain after the syllabus was designed. Yet when designing any syllabus the developmental level of the pupils should be considered. The new ZJC syllabus can be a basis from which the new 'O' level syllabus can be built.*

Mr Sm further indicated that the Curriculum Development Unit panel is facing some problems from other representatives of certain religions on what should be included in the new 'O' level religious studies syllabus in order to close the gap between ZJC and 'O' level in terms of aims, methods of teaching and the delivered content. According to Sm,

*Some of the stakeholders especially those with some Christian orientation are not comfortable with their learners being exposed to religious studies which is multi-faith in nature.*

Such a development, for some Christians, is tantamount to dumping of their children. As a result, the CDU can't move forward with any new innovations because of the attitude of some stakeholders like Christians who constitute the majority. Schools end up adopting the Christian oriented syllabus so as to maintain the usual support they get from some stakeholders.

## **Recommendations**

These are the recommendations that, we feel, will go a long way in addressing the challenges faced in the teaching and learning of religious education. From the findings of the research,

- The Curriculum Development Unit should consider the importance of involving all stakeholders when revising the secondary school syllabi of the 'O' level religious education.
- If aims and objectives of the religious education are to be achieved in all levels of secondary school then the multi-faith approach needs to be reflected in teacher education curriculum and institutions of higher learning.
- The Curriculum Development Unit should come up with a flowing curriculum from one level to another so as to accommodate spiral learning.
- The Ministry of Education Sport, Art and Culture should mobilise resources towards changing religious education syllabi. The Ministry should also consider in-service training of all religious studies teachers who are products of teachers' colleges.
- Curriculum Development Unit should clearly come out with a multi-faith policy that clearly states the aims of religious



studies and its objectives.

- There must also be an academic interaction between schools, colleges, universities and other stakeholders on the current religious education curriculum in a bid to consider the inclusion of the multi-faith approach as an important method of teaching religious education.
- Universities should encourage religious studies projects to be used as resource materials in secondary schools so that academic interaction can be created for the exchange of ideas.
- Heads of schools as gatekeepers should be staff developed on the pluralistic nature of the Zimbabwean society hence the teaching and learning of religious education. If heads of schools are not inducted, they would obviously remain rigid and not receptive to new approaches in the teaching of religious education like the use of multi-faith approach. This explains why some school heads who were interviewed still expect religious education teachers to use the old ZJC syllabus and apply the confessionally subjective Christian lenses when teaching religious education.

## Conclusion

This paper has clearly shown the challenges that are faced in the teaching and learning of religious education. It is clear that the attitude of teachers, parents, heads of schools and let alone pupils towards multi-faith approach militate against the national goals and aims in the teaching and learning of religious education syllabi. It is our assumption that, the multi-faith approach will go a long way in making religious education relevant to the learning environment of the learner. A lot of effort should be made by teachers and religious education developers to relate to the main aims and objectives of the course of religious studies. The content, illustrations, explanations, etc. of religious education studies will be relevant if drawn from a multi-faith and multi-cultural context that reflect different forms of thought, different systems of religious beliefs and values. After all, the content of the 'discipline' of religious education would, in part, be derived from and related to the many cultures, many religions and to the problems of a culturally diverse society. Above all, multi-faith approach is governed by the dual principles of 'respect for truth' and 'respect for persons'. Teachers can then engage pupils in a number of learning activities designed to accomplish sensitivity to inter-religious, inter-cultural understanding. Confessional rigid positions shown by Christians won't help in making the subject interesting and enjoyable to learn. It is the learner who does the learning and not the reverse. The present 'O' level religious education syllabus does not cultivate tolerance, innovation and independence in the learner's development; therefore, the multi-faith approach in the teaching and learning of religious education is the best foot forward.

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