

## Teachers' Use of Life Themes Pedagogy and Its Influence on Performance in CRE in Bungoma County, Kenya

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### Abstract

The aim of the current study was to examine the teachers' preparedness in the use of the life themes pedagogy in selected public secondary schools in Bungoma County. The theoretical framework that guided the study was Situated Cognition, which is also referred to as the Situated Learning Theory (SLT) by Lave and Wenger (1991). The participants in the study included teachers of CRE in selected public secondary schools in Bungoma County as well as form 3 students taking CRE subject. The sample constituted of 425 students, 241(56.71%) were male respondents, 184(43.29%) were female respondents and 29 teachers. Instruments for data collection were self-administered questionnaire and document analysis. Sampling techniques used were simple random sampling and stratified sampling. Construct validity was checked by teaching faculty who proposed some adjustments. Reliability was checked using Cronbach's alpha coefficient which was 0.78 and above for the key constructs of the study, and thus was reliable enough. A Pilot study was conducted in secondary schools in the neighbouring Trans Nzoia County. The study adopted descriptive research design. The results indicated that indeed a good number of students agreed that their teachers were well prepared to teach the course with 408(96%) saying "yes" while 17(4%) said "no". The views of the students were in line with responses given by teachers who, by a majority of 62.07%, agreed that they were prepared in the use of life themes pedagogy. Among the steps taken to ensure preparedness were attending workshops, seminars as well as in-service training.

**Keywords:** *Preparedness, Life themes pedagogy, Performance of CRE*

## **1.0 Introduction**

### **1.1 Historical development of the life themes pedagogy**

Life themes pedagogy has been used for a long period of time. The idea behind the approach is to ensure that learners are actively involved in classroom learning. Tracing a bit of historical development of life themes pedagogy, the approach is widely believed to have been developed by the Roman Catholic Church in 1950s and 1960s. The development of the life themes approach, according to Onsongo (2002), was developed through catechetical congress in Bangkok, Thailand (1962), Katigondo, Uganda (1964) and Manila, Philippines (1967) as well as Medellin, Colombia (1968).

Locally, since Kenyan independence, infusion of life themes approach in teaching CRE has made tremendous progress following a series of recommendations from various commissions in the education sector. Perhaps among the first such commissions was the Ominde Commission of the year 1964 that sought to bring relevance of education to the needs of the community (Wambui & Amukowa, 2013). A few years later, while focusing on the teaching of CRE, a joint Church panel was set up in the year 1968 for the purpose of coming up with a syllabus that best fits the Kenyan situation which was made up of Catholics and Protestants from Kenya, Malawi, Tanzania, Uganda, and Zambia under the title “Rubaga Workshop” and the syllabus prepared was to enable students to grow towards responsible maturity (Wambui & Amukowa, 2013). A follow-up report was made in the year 1980 with the aim of shifting the Bible view in the syllabus to the life themes. The events led to commissioning of the so called Syllabus Review Report (1980) that emphasized more on learner centred approach to teaching CRE (Wambui & Amukowa, 2013).

### **1.2 Use of life themes approach in teaching CRE**

Christian Religious Education being a subject that can shape the morals in the society as agreed to by Gichaga *et al.* (2005) who contend that CRE enables students to acquire

knowledge and skills to help in making moral choices in life. It is therefore important to use the method of instruction that would ensure the content is well delivered to the learners. Content delivery greatly depends on the teachers' level of preparedness. Some scholars such as Grimmit (2000) strongly recommend the use of life themes pedagogy in teaching CRE, and no wonder following such recommendations, the approach has been made compulsory in most Kenyan secondary schools as Nasibi (2006) notes.

Some of the advantages of using life themes approach include better performance. Some scholars such as Kibera and Kimokoti (2007) note that there is a positive association between use of life themes and academic achievement of the students. Others contend that when students get engaged in classroom they are most likely going to perform better in terms of academic achievement (Klem & Connell, 2004; Marks, 2000; Shulman, 2002, Teese & Polsel, 2003; Zyngier, 2007).

Some challenges with regard to use of life themes pedagogy according to some local scholars such as Mwashigadi (2012) include lack of adequate preparation. In her empirical study carried out in primary schools in Voi, Kenya, Mwashigadi (2012) noted that there were challenges in terms of fully utilizing the five approaches to teaching CRE. Other scholars such as Kimosop (2008) corroborated her findings by noting that most teachers do not use the methodology of life themes approach adequately.

And as pointed out by some scholars who seemingly agree with the above local studies Kyndt, Dochy, Struyven and Cascallar (2011) approach the subject of life themes from the perspective of workload of the teachers that may in one way or the other hamper smooth implementation of the approach.

### ***1.3 Importance of preparedness in teaching CRE***

In view of the fact that CRE helps students develop morally, researchers such as Ndarwa (2006) and Musya (1996) agree with this notion and further adds that the subject helps the students to become responsible citizens. Wepukhulu (2001) also agrees with the above observations and contends that formation of character of the student can significantly be modelled with acquisition of knowledge of Christian Religious Education.

No doubt that Christian religious education as a subject plays an important role in shaping the morals of the learners, but at the same time, the preparation of the instructor or teacher is crucial in ensuring that the aim and the objective of the subject is realized. Some of the early scholars who contributed to the issue of preparedness in teaching include Kocchar (1991) who felt that efficiency in teaching especially in the area of humanities requires competence and professional advancement of the teacher.

In their book titled *The Meaning of Educational Change*, Fullan and Stiegelbauer (1991) agreed with the above findings by noting that both individual and collegial factors impact strongly on curriculum implementation. Locally, a study carried out locally by Ngala (1997) in Eldoret municipality observed that professional training enables teachers to impart knowledge in an efficient manner. Recently, researchers such as Neiss (2005), McDonald (2008), and Njoku (2012), emphasize the need for proper preparation and understanding of the content, which enhances better delivery of content to the learners.

### ***1.4 Review of related studies***

#### **1.4.1 Theoretical review**

##### ***Situation Learning Theory***

The theory that guided this study was Situation Learning Theory by Lave and Wenger (1991). This theory which was also earlier conceptualized by researchers such as Brown, Collins and Duguid (1989) who insisted on the notion of cognitive apprenticeship by noting

that “Cognitive apprenticeship supports learning in a domain by enabling students to acquire, develop and use cognitive tools in authentic domain activity. Learning both outside and inside school, advances through collaborative social interaction and the social construction of knowledge”

Collins (1988) further adds that Situation Learning Theory (SLT) is “the notion of learning knowledge and skills in contexts that reflect the way they will be used in real life. That is, situated learning can incorporate situations from everyday life to the most theoretical endeavours” (p. 2). This theory is crucial in the current study due to the fact that the development of student's cognitive skills can be well developed when they engage in learning especially through social interaction whether inside or outside the school environment. This calls for teacher preparedness.

#### **1.4.2 Empirical review**

In every learning institution and especially secondary schools, performance of students is always a priority. This means that teachers and instructors need to come up with means of ensuring good performance. A number of researchers, no wonder tried to study methods of instruction that would inspire students to perform better in examinations. Astin (1993) for instance was able to find out that by having interactive learning environment students are most likely inspired to perform better. Similarly, these findings were supported by scholars such as Armbruster, Patel, Johnson and Weiss (2007) who argued that active learning environment plays a key role improving student's attitudes towards a particular subject.

In places like UK, Grimmit (2000), after carrying out an extensive survey on pedagogies of religious education came up with a conclusion that there has been little evidence of the approach of life themes pedagogy in places such as Africa. This study though fell short of taking into account how teacher preparedness influences performance of CRE especially in the context of East Africa and more specifically Kenya. This study therefore

sought to address the issue of teacher preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in CRE in selected secondary schools in Bungoma County.

For all the benefits of using life themes pedagogy, it is no doubt that it also seems to have a fair share of challenges in its use. Some researchers such as Wambui and Amukowa (2013) who carried out a study in Nairobi East district noted that the approach has a number of challenges such as teachers' argument that the approach is irrelevant having 42.90% and inadequacy of resources which had 14.30%. From their study other challenges raised were "time wastage" and "inadequate time" each had 7.1%. All these challenges are related to teacher preparedness and it is from this background that the researcher sought to establish the teachers' preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in CRE in selected secondary schools in Bungoma County.

A number of empirical studies have been carried out by several scholars to underscore the need for preparedness in the use of life themes approach in teaching CRE. Clotfelter, Ladd and Vigdor (2009) carried out a survey in the US state of North Carolina to examine the relationship between teacher credentials and student achievement in high school. The findings of the study revealed that teachers' credentials played a crucial role in delivery of the content and hence better student achievement. The current study focused on the context of Kenyan schools and especially those ones found in Bungoma County.

In the 90s, some scholars such as Shiundu and Omulando (1992) all emphasized the need for adequate preparedness that would ensure proper curriculum implementation, as well as stimulation of interest and inspiration among the students. In line with these arguments, it is important to note that failure to have adequate preparation would most likely trigger poor performance.

Some scholars such as Kafu (2010) looked at the issue of preparedness both in terms of pre service and in service models, where the pre service model look at training for the teachers without teaching experience, while on the other hand, in service training is meant for teachers with some experience. As Kafu (2010) notes, such training is instrumental in ensuring that proper teaching of the CRE curriculum is achieved. The current study will also focus on the same discourse of teacher preparedness in using life themes approach and more specifically focus on the contexts of secondary schools in Bungoma County.

Some researchers note that teacher preparedness in the fields such as ICT; play an important role in ensuring proper implementation of curriculum especially practical use of equipment during delivery of content to the students (Granger, Morbey, Owston & Wideman, 2002). Again, some researchers such as Wang (2002) believe that preparedness by considering pre-service training play a critical role in ensuring proper implementation of curriculum. In addition to this position, Wozney, Venkatesh, and Abrami (2006) hold the opinion that indeed pre-service training plays a critical role in ensuring proper implementation of curriculum. And therefore in line with this, the current study was motivated to find out the level of preparedness of the teachers of CRE in the use of life themes approach in teaching CRE in selected schools in Bungoma County.

Proper professional development of the teachers is believed to have an influence on performance and more importantly this is believed to have an influence on the attitude of the student and hence the performance. This notion is held by researchers such as Steinert (2006). Furthermore teaching approaches as well as enhancement in the motivation to teach comes as a result of proper professional development (Donnelly, 2008; Ho, Watkins, & Kelly, 2001; Postareff & Nevgi, 2007; Lycke, Hoftvedt, & Holm, 1998).

A well trained teacher, as some scholars observe, experiences some psychological change that would in turn influence the way the content of a given subject is delivered to the students or indeed change the development of the teacher (Weulander & Stenfors-Hayes, 2008). The researcher notes that, there will be a gradual shift of attitudes from negative to positive. Perhaps as affirmation of this position, some scholars such as Postareff (2007) after conducting a survey on 200 university lecturers was able to establish that indeed those who had received more of pedagogical training had good knowledge base that was able inspire and help students acquire and restructure their knowledge. The current study therefore will focus on how well the teachers were prepared to use life themes approach in teaching CRE in secondary schools in Bungoma County.

Literature reveals that preparedness of the teacher plays a very crucial role in ensuring that students perform well in the subject. In agreement with this position are researchers such as (McAllister & Irvine, 2002) who believe that ability of the teacher to have good mastery of knowledge in a certain area is always crucial in teaching and indeed implementation of the curriculum. Related studies show that teachers who are well trained and prepared to take on a given lesson end up even inspiring the students to perform well in that particular subject. This observation was made by scholars such as Lepage, Darling-Hammond and Akar (2005) who observed that success of the students in a given subject was more evident for the case of well trained teachers as opposed to the ones that were not well trained.

Brouwers and Tomic (2000) observe that teachers who lack confidence in class in terms of poor knowledge background in a particular course will be confronted by their ignorance every day and this has the impact even on the performance of the students. Earlier, Pikarski (1994) had observed that instruction should take place under the environment of adequate preparation from the side of the teachers which will even embolden the classroom management of the teacher. The current study focused on the issue of preparedness of the



teachers in the use of life themes approach in teaching CRE in secondary schools in Bungoma County.

Kimosop (2014) while citing Afe (2001) observed that teacher preparedness in teaching plays a key role in ensuring sound implementation of the curriculum. She further notes that teachers being the key implementers of the policy, should be in a situation in which they are adequately prepared to implement the curriculum. Furthermore, Kimosop (2014) while citing Uchefuna (2001) contends that indeed an effective teacher is one who produces desired results in the course of his or her duty, and as Kimosop (2014) observes, this can only be realized if the teacher is adequately prepared to meet the teaching objectives.

Kimosop (2014), insists that a teacher must always be prepared to handle any given subject. While quoting Brown *et al.* (1994) notes that success of a teacher is almost impossible if he or she is not well prepared. Kimosop (2014) adds that teaching does not happen in a vacuum but as a result of proper planning and execution. She notes that proper planning and preparation entails well laid out lesson plans, schemes of work, teaching aids, assessment tools among other instruments.

### ***1.5 Statement of the Problem***

The aspect of teacher preparedness and its implication on student performance is quite complicated (Kane *et al.*, 2007). The above issue has attracted the attention of many scholars who have finally concluded that teacher certification is a significant predictor of student achievement (Peterson and Nadler 2009, Darling-Hammond 2010)

A number of researchers have observed that the negative attitude developed by some students taking Christian religious education is as a result of the use of lecture method in teaching. The use of traditional methods of teaching can be attributed to the lack of preparedness among the teachers. This indeed impacts negatively on the implementation of CRE

curriculum (Ombuna, 1998 & Ngunju, 2008). Some scholars such as Onsongo (2002) identify a number of steps in the use of life themes pedagogy namely human experience, Biblical experience, Explanation as well as application and response. These steps can only be adhered to if the teacher is well prepared through pre-service and in-service training.

There has been a relatively unsteady performance of CRE in the country as reflected in the K.N.E.C reports of the years 2006-2013. This is also evident in the performance at the County level where the trends have kept down streaming. Basing on the KNEC reports of 2006 and 2007, performance in ATR contributed to the drop in performance in CRE paper one from 61.59% to 57.57% in 2006. Other KNEC reports of 2009-2013 on CRE performance have an indication of unsteady and inconsistent performance in the subject. The KNEC Reports of 2012 and 2013 show that the overall assessment of the candidates was fair as some candidates performed very well while others performed poorly. This was attributed to poor syllabus coverage, poor approaches to teaching, lack of objectivity on the side of the teachers and inability of the candidates to apply their academic knowledge to real life situations. This was in agreement with the KNEC Report of 2007 which revealed that the performance was between 20% and 30% a rather disturbing trend. On the same note, previous researches have revealed that the subject's performance has been threatened by the belief that it is a booster subject pursued by average students academically so as to boost their grades hence lacks the seriousness it deserves from both teachers and students, where they assume that it can be passed even with less input Kimosop (2008).

Although the life themes pedagogy is effective in teaching CRE (Onsongo, 2002), little is known about teachers' preparedness in the use of this pedagogy in secondary schools in Bungoma County. This, therefore, necessitated a research study on the teachers' preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in the implementation of CRE.

### ***1.6 Research objective***

The objective of the current study was to find out teachers' preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in the implementation of CRE curriculum.

### ***1.7 Research question***

To what extent are the teachers prepared to use life themes pedagogy in the implementation of CRE curriculum in Secondary schools within Bungoma County?

### ***1.8 Significance of the Study***

The findings of the current study will benefit various stakeholders both at individual and institutional level. Stakeholders who stand to benefit from the current study include the people in academia, the government, as well as education stakeholders.

#### **1.8.1 Academia**

The recommendations of the current study aim at benefiting scholars especially those involved in teaching and research on religious studies. This will add literature to what already exists as well as create gaps for further research.

#### **1.8.2 The Government**

The study findings from the current study aim at making recommendations that would benefit the government in terms of coming up with proper plans that would go a long way in ensuring that CRE teachers are adequately prepared so as embrace life themes approach in secondary schools.

#### **1.8.3 Education stakeholders**

Various stakeholders such as the Ministry of Education will be able to make use of the findings in the current study especially with regard to the preparation of teachers in terms of in-service and seminars to enhance the use of life themes in teaching of Christian religious education.

## **2.0 Methodology**

### **2.1 Research design**

A descriptive research design was used to find out how well the teachers were prepared to use life themes approach in teaching CRE.

### **2.2 Research philosophy**

The guiding philosophy for the current study was Pragmatism which insists on the notion that truth in any given investigation can be obtained through a scientific method. Pragmatism, as a philosophy tries to look at analytical way of answering questions in the research problem (Creswell, 2003, p. 11). This approach considers the issue of research question and how it needs to be answered by way of data collection, analysis and interpretations (Creswell, 2003).

### **2.3 Study Area**

The study was carried out in Bungoma County. Bungoma County is located in Western Kenya and runs along the Kenya Uganda border with a population of 1,375,063. It borders Busia, Kakamega and Trans Nzoia Counties and borders Uganda. It has a total area 3,032 square kilometers and a population of 1.8 million. Two main roads traverse the county; Webuye- Bungoma- Malaba highway and the Webuye-Kitale road. This area was selected because of the varied performance among schools and inconsistent performance in the subject. More over the area is characterized by multi ethnicity which has a direct impact on this study.

### **2.4 Target Population**

Bungoma County is one of the 47 counties in Kenya and it has 7 sub counties. For this study, the target population comprised of all teachers of CRE that is 580 and 20,000 form three students taking CRE in the secondary schools in Bungoma County. The CRE teachers were selected because they teach the subject, and by training, it is expected that they use the life

themes pedagogy in their instructional delivery. The form three classes was chosen because the class has the right picture on the life themes pedagogy given that they are expected to have covered most of the content required by the syllabus and the teaching learning process at this level is interactive.

### ***2.5 Sample size determination and sampling procedure***

A population sample consisted of 15 schools which were selected from the 288 Secondary schools in Bungoma County. 454 respondents were selected from a total of 20,580 CRE teachers and form three CRE students that is 580 teachers of CRE and 20,000 form three CRE students. The determination of the sample size was based on the Krejcie and Morgan (1970) table in Amin (2005:454). Basing on the Krejcie and Morgan table, the sample size was supposed to be about 380 respondents but the study used 454 respondents to be representative enough. It is generally agreed that the larger the sample size the greater the generalizability of the research findings (Amin, 2005; Best & Khan, 1993).

### ***2.6 Research instruments***

The current study used both questionnaire and document analysis to be able to elicit responses from the respondents. The questionnaires were especially preferred because of the fact that it can collect a lot of information within a short period of time and also from a large number of respondents.

### ***2.7 Validity of the instruments***

Validity of the instruments was verified by the teaching faculty at the, Department of Curriculum, Instruction and Educational Media, of Moi University. Thus, some adjustments were made accordingly to ensure both construct content and face validity of the instruments.

### ***2.8 Reliability of the instruments***

Instrument reliability was checked through running scale analysis in the SPSS program which yielded and Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.780 and above which was high enough to be

considered reliable. The key constructs focused on mostly were to do with teacher preparedness in the use of life themes approach in teaching CRE.

### ***2.9 Data collection***

The process of data collection was done by use of self-administered questionnaires as well as document analysis.

### ***2.10 Data analysis***

Data analysis for the current investigation was done mostly by use of descriptive data analysis especially arithmetic mean, percentage as well as frequencies. To answer the objective of the study which was to find out teacher preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in the implementation of CRE curriculum, descriptive analysis is crucial in “painting the picture” and as regards the actual process of learning using life themes.

### ***2.11 Ethical considerations***

The current study took all the necessary measures possible to ensure ethical conduct of the research process. The permit to conduct the study was issued to the researcher. The respondents were instructed not to fill in their personal details in the questionnaire in order to ensure anonymity. At the same time, the respondents were assured of privacy and confidentiality with regard to the information they provided.

## ***3. 0 Results and Interpretations***

### ***3.1 Demographic information of the respondents***

From the study findings, the number of students were 425 out of which 241(56.71%) were male while 184(43.29%) were female. On the age distribution 245(57.65%) of the respondents were between the age of 17-18 years. From the findings it is clear that most of the respondents were either Roman Catholics or Anglican Church of Kenya that made a total of 195(45.88%) respondents. In the case of teachers, a large proportion of them were degree

holders 22(75.86%) with an overwhelming majority of 28(96.55%) with a teaching experience that spans 10 years and below.

### 3.2 Preparedness in the use of life themes

When students were asked whether their teachers prepared adequately before coming to class, most students felt that indeed they do prepare for lessons with a total of 408(96%) as opposed to only 17(4%) who did not agree. The teachers on their part very much agreed with the views of their students.

The table 1 below shows that indeed all teachers had regular preparations with regard to teaching by inculcating life themes approach. In line with preparedness, teachers were asked whether the assessments were carried out by the DQASO to check on curriculum delivery, in response, 26(89%) in total agreed that the assessments were carried out and also an overwhelming majority of respondents 27(93%) agreed that indeed the assessments do have an impact on the classroom practices of the teachers. Again, it can be noted that majority of the teachers 18(62%) agreed that they had attended some sort of workshops, seminars as well as in-service training. Table 1 below gives a summary of the findings.

**Table 1: Teacher preparedness**

Statements	Frequency	Percentage
<b>Did these assessments create an impact on your classroom practices?</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00 %</b>
No	2	7.00 %
Yes	27	93.00 %
<b>Have you attended any workshop, seminar or in-service for C.R.E?</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00 %</b>
No	11	38.00 %
Yes	18	62.00 %
<b>last assessment on curriculum delivery of CRE by DQASO</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00 %</b>
Between 1-3 years ago	10	34.00 %
Less than 1 year ago	16	55.00 %
No assessment done	3	11.00 %

<b>Regular preparation of lessons</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>100.00 %</b>
Yes	29	100.00 %

The results in the table above show that preparedness of the teacher is common practice, especially considering the fact that some teachers attend events such as seminars and conferences. The findings in the current study corroborate with similar findings by researchers such as Walaba (1998) who was able to note that indeed teachers attended seminars that helped them in terms of preparedness in content delivery.

The above results also seem to corroborate findings by scholars such as Kimosop (2014) who noted that, for there to be effective curriculum implementation it is always important to ensure that the teachers are adequately prepared either during pre-service or in-service. The findings also seem to agree with scholars such as Postareff (2007) who made observations that indeed proper training was important in ensuring proper implementation of curriculum. This was evident by the overwhelming number of students with a percentage of 96% who agreed that the teachers were well prepared to handle the curriculum that involves use of life themes approach.

It is without doubt that proper organization and management of classroom plays a key role in ensuring conducive learning environment, Kyriakides (2008) was able to note that on top of preparedness, teachers need to be effective enough especially by showing good managerial and organizational skills in planning and executing classes.

### ***3.3 Conclusion and Recommendations***

Conclusion is based on the research objective of the current study which was to find out teachers' preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in the implementation of CRE curriculum.



### **3.3.1 Conclusion**

The study made the following conclusions in line with the objective of the study.

1. The teachers who participated in the current study were adequately prepared to handle teaching of Christian Religious Education both in the stage of pre-service and in-service training.
2. Teachers use the life themes pedagogy in teaching and the students appreciate the fact that their teachers are properly trained and prepared to use life themes.
3. Regular assessments especially by bodies such as DQASO play a very instrumental role in ensuring that proper implementation of curriculum is realized.

### **3.3.2 Recommendations**

The following recommendations were made in line with the objective of the study which was to find out teachers' preparedness in the use of life themes pedagogy in the implementation of CRE curriculum.

1. The school management needs to provide all the necessary support to the teachers who are in need of getting training that would lead to better implementation of life themes approach in teaching CRE.
2. The Ministry of Education should organize for frequent assessment sessions because they enhance teacher preparedness as well as performance in the subject.

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