THE CHALLENGES FACING THE EFFECTIVE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF RELIGIOUS/MORAL EDUCATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN ONITSHA URBAN

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Abstract
The aim of this study is to investigate the challenges facing the effective teaching and learning of religious education in contemporary secondary schools in Anambra State with reference to Onitsha urban. It is believed that generally education in Nigeria has lost its salt. The standard seems to have fallen and continues to fall. Besides, students in secondary schools are behaving as if they have no focus. Morality seems to have taken flight in schools, such that students commit all sorts of crimes without qualms, and these students are looked upon as leaders of tomorrow. There seems to be moral decadence in schools and society at large. The questions that beg for answer are, why? What is the cause of this problem? These questions explain the reason for this study. This study looked into the challenges being encountered by teachers and students in the course of teaching and learning of religious education in secondary schools in Onitsha urban. In doing this, survey method was adopted to get acquainted with the fact being investigated and data collected were analyzed using four Likert method of interpretation.

Introduction
As human beings continue to live in groups, social problems become inevitable. When the problems become too pronounced they constitute a threat to social existence of the group. One of the major educational problems facing Nigeria today especially

Onitsha urban is the problem of teaching and learning of effective religious education in secondary schools. Among the subjects taught in secondary schools, it is a common knowledge that religious education is one of those which are poorly handled by teachers. Unfortunately, most teachers in secondary schools adhere to verbal symbolism and traditional methods as a way of teaching the subject. For example, some teachers teach catechism to children instead of using the Bible stories as the main source of religious education.

Most often, teachers tend to present the facts of the subject to their students as something more or less sacred to be memorized without questioning. As a result, students fear the subject not because it is difficult but because it is not well taught. Most of these problems are as a result of lack of adequate orientation for teachers of religion. The use of instructional materials to teach the subject by the teachers has not received the attention it deserves, thereby making the subject boring. The fact remains that teachers stick to traditional method of teaching whereby the students are made passive listeners than active participants.

As an important and most vital instrument for socio-cultural development of the youths in Onitsha, and even beyond, the researchers find it expedient to embark on this study because the survival of the youths and enhancement of the common good of the society depend largely on the sound moral and religious education they received.

Definition of Concept
It is pertinent to define the important key words in this study. The words to define include: moral, religious, education, and religious education.

Moral: the term *moral* is associated with behavior or character development, hence Schofield (1972) regards moral as "behavior and adjective. Moral and immoral imply behavior acceptable and

unacceptable respectively" (p. 21). Hornby, (1989) defines moral as "being able to understand the difference between right and wrong, principle of right and wrong" (p. 557). Okeke (2006) stated that "moral laws are considered to be divine commands; knowledge of them is often attributed to a divine revelation" (p. 195).

According to Nzomiwu (1991), "Morality is the yardstick with which true religion is distinguished from false religion and true religious actions from false religious action. If anybody claims that God commanded him to perform an action that is immoral, he reveals himself to be under an illusion, for God can never command or demand anything that is immoral" (p. 44). Furthermore, Okeke (2006) maintains that ethics and moral are two different words but are synonymous, and for this reason, the two words are substantially interchanged. Therefore, the word *moral* concerns what is good and what is bad.

Okwueze (2003) confirms this when he says, "Morality involves a more or less clearly articulated set of beliefs about the nature of man, ideals about what is good or merely desirable or worthy of pursuit for the sake of orderly coexistence" (p. 67). Sequel to this definition, morality is only relevant and has meaning within the society no matter the way it is conceived.

It is pertinent to note that morality acts as a standard for determining what is right or wrong, appropriate or inappropriate, just or unjust, good or bad in social relations. Moral values constitute a wide range of virtues such as honesty, integrity, chastity, modesty, truthfulness, humility, patience, among others.

Religion: The word *religion* is theoretical and practical acknowledgment of God as Supreme Being, the creator. It concerns what one believes in, code of conduct according to which we live our moral life. So religion and moral are connected, hence both are about practical living. Durkheim (1976) defines religion as "a unified system of belief and practices relative to sacred things, that

is, things set apart and forbidden, which unite into one single moral community (p. 29).

Religion is a virtue; hence, by means of it due honour is paid to God who is the object of worship and the first principle and government of all things (Okeke, 2012). Asalu (2007) sees religion as "an encounter between man and a transcendent deity conceived as a personal being capable of communication with man" (p. 7).
Okeke (2012) stated that "religion is a rapport with a being that transcends man and the world of experience and contains the acts in which such a rapport is translated as belief, prayer, sacrifice, love or fear, etc" (p. 5).

Education: Ukeje (1980) defines education as "a process, a product and a discipline". Viewed as a process, education is the means by which men acquire the civilization of the past and are able both to take part in the civilization of the present and to make the civilization of the culture" (p. 372). This definition by Ukeje implies that education is not only a process of transmitting the cultural heritage, but also, a means of developing the entire person to enable him live effectively and efficiently in the society so that he may advance it. Thus, education is a process of transmitting, preserving, developing and advancing the culture.

As a process, education is an activity rather than an idea or a concept. Viewed as a product, education means change in behavior. As a discipline, education is a body of organized knowledge. In the words of Arinze (1972) education means "the process by which man becomes a mature and useful citizen of the earthly city – the state and of heavenly city – the Church" (p. 43).

Religious Education: particularly within the Christian context means the realization of the supremacy of God as our creator, our preserver and our final end. It means understanding our Christian dogma and set of belief, our mode of prayer and conduct. Religious education, therefore, entails how we must behave and what we must

do in order to be good citizens.

On the Effective Teaching of Religious Education
Religious education has been a school subject since colonial era yet there is still general indiscipline in most of our schools, which spills into the society, manifesting itself as moral laxity. As a result the question of effective, religious education in schools has dominated our newspapers, magazines, symposiums, televisions, radios, among others. The challenges facing religious education depends largely on three factors. The first and second factors are the teacher who teaches, and the student who is the recipient. The third factor is the method used in delivering the teaching. Ekpunobi (1982) has this to say, "Now that we have found the need to effective moral and religious education in schools, there is problem on how it should be taught" (p. 30). Ekpunobi (1982) says that there are some people who have the opinion that moral and religious education should not be taught as a separate subject in schools. Their reason is that through imitation and peer influence the school children can acquire socially desirable behaviors. They contend that a conducive school atmosphere where there is healthy relationship and communication between children and adults, friendship and wide open up should help the pupils acquire more lasting morals than subjecting them to specific instructions on morality and religion. They argue that moral and religious education is not a clearly defined subject that can be learned in the class like other academic subjects and that moral and religious education does not lend itself to formal teaching and also that moral and religious education is part of every subject in school time table. To separate and present it as a single subject will rob it of this property and this will divorce it from other subjects.

On the other hand, Green (1969) categorically stated that "the acquisition of the principle of sound moral and religious education at school will help the students to differentiate between morally acceptable behaviors from non acceptable ones. Even if any of them engage in immoral behavior in his late life, he will be able to know clearly whether what he is doing is good or bad. However, it is

baseless to leave out moral and religious education in the school time table because of possible mishandling by insufficiently informed teachers since these very teachers are also handling other subjects in which they are not experts and so may not do well in teaching them" (p. 18).

In his opinion, Chijioke (1982) says that "Moral and religious education are clearly defined areas of study where many psychologists and researchers have devoted most of their time to find stages of moral and religious development. There is every reason to expect that more accurate results from these studies and researchers and their application by teachers of moral and religious education will help children to develop sound moral and religious judgment" (p. 3).

Teaching and learning processes demand the direct involvement of both teachers and students. Thus students should not depend on knowledge taught by chance from other subjects in the school for their moral and religious up-bringing, and teachers should not assess the effectiveness of their work by mere assumption that moral and religious education actually mean to transmit, to caught and apply without definite efforts.

In the light of the above, Ekpunobi ((1982) suggested how moral and religious education should be taught in Nigerian schools. He suggested possible contents, materials and activities that can be used in a moral and religious class. He finally says that children should be guided not only to understand moral and religious principles but also their implications in different aspects of their daily lives and activities whether at work, rest, leisure or play (p. 30).

In the same vein, Cox (1971) advocates that effective moral religious conduct demands three processes:
1.   Telling the pupils under what circumstance it is wrong,
2.   Explaining to them why this distinction is made between the

two types of conduct and convincing them that it is a valid one,

3   Persuading them to choose the right conduct and abstain from the wrong.

For Cox, the first procedure is for primary schools where the class does not generally question the content of a lesson since they cannot reason in a matured way, but accept facts as given.

The second procedure should involve adolescents because they are undecided on moral and religious issues through which they are to make a choice. They are inquisitive and exploratory by nature.

The third procedure is suitable for both young and old people. The task of the teacher is to provide the motivation for students to make proper moral and religious judgment. Like many others, Cox rejects the humanistic approach to moral and religious education. A person trying to decide what conduct is right for him must have sincere religious sensitivity.

The Challenges
In dealing with the challenges facing the effective teaching and learning of moral/religious education in Onitsha urban random sampling technique was adopted to ascertain the fact from those who are really in the field of teaching the students under investigation. The instrument used was structured questionnaire, 180 copies were distributed and 100% were returned due to the fact that the researchers employed the help of teachers, and so, on-the-spot collection method was applied. Six schools were selected for sampling. They are three schools in Onitsha North and Three in Onitsha South. Two were co-educational, two were boys' schools, and two were girls' schools. The names, number of schools, students and teachers sampled are presented in the table below.

Sampled Schools	No. of students	No. of students sampled	No. of teachers sampled
Ado Girls Sec. Sch.	670	30	4
Christ the King College	1300	30	5
Comprehensive Sec. Sch.	350	30	2
Metuh Mem Sec. Sch.	450	30	3
Urban Girls Sec. Sch.	520	30	4
Urban Boys Sec. Sch.	370	30	2
Total	3560	180	20

Five research questions were formulated to guide the research study and they are:

1   What are the major challenges facing teaching and learning of religious/moral education in your school?
2.   What are the possible causes of these challenges?
3.   What is the attitude of students and teachers towards the subject?
4.   Do you have qualified teachers handling the subject?
5.   Is your school library equipped with sufficient materials on religious/moral education?

Findings
The findings show that majority of the respondents in all the schools sampled held almost the same opinion. For example, 80% of the

respondents strongly agreed that in their various schools the challenges they are facing include lack of interest in the subject by the students, lack of adequate teaching materials such as charts, visual, audio materials, among others, and teachers do not even encourage the students to provide local materials as teachers themselves could not do this.

On possible causes of these challenges, 105 respondents agreed that both the government and school authorities do not help matters. Some students abscond from class while lessons are going on. These students become a threat to the society since they do not imbibe the moral rectitude required of them. Moreover, school authorities pay non-challant attitude despite that they are aware of the truancy being committed by students. Either that they are afraid of disciplining these students or that they feel it does not matter. Government on the other hand does not monitor the attitude of both teachers and students in schools, and so, everybody behaves as he or she likes.

On whether qualified teachers are employed to teach the subject, the researchers took time to conduct oral interview with some teachers in the six sampled schools. In each of these schools, one teacher spoke on behalf of other colleagues. The responses of the teachers were at times similar to those of the students, but at times varied. At Ado Girls secondary school, one respondent, a teacher submitted that there was total lack of qualified teachers in the subjects. According to her, she was not trained for the subject but was drafted from English language to teach religious education. She complained of her inability to teach the subject as she was not trained in the methodology of the subject.

At Urban Boys secondary school, Fegge-Onitsha, a respondent confirmed that there was only one teacher for religious education for the entire school, and she was the one. She regretted that she has commenced her retirement leave, and meanwhile no replacement has been made by the Ministry of Education.

At Comprehensive secondary school, the teachers spoken with complained of over-work load. According to them, three teachers are teaching the subject but one was not an expert. They also complained of lack of adequate text books and instructional materials and their library was not adequately equipped with corresponding text books for the use of the staff and students. Their views were collaborated by about 80% of other respondents in other schools sampled.

The Way Forward
Having found out the challenges facing the effective teaching and learning of religious/moral education in Onitsha urban the question now is, what is the way forward? Here some recommendations are made to enable the stake-holders in this field of study tackle the challenges:
Instructional materials are very strong tools for teaching and learning. It is not exaggeration to say that what a person sees or visualizes remains evergreen in his or her memory. Therefore, instructional materials such as projector, maps, portraits, sculptures, and chats among others which are vital in the study of religious studies should be provided for easy and efficient teaching and learning.

Computers connected to the internet should be provided in the libraries and libraries should be equipped with modern books and other materials for the staff and students to access.

Experts religious/moral studies should be employed to handle the subject. Religious education should not be handled by quacks because as the popular saying goes, "no one gives what one does not have".

Teachers should assume the responsibility of helping children acquire the virtues of truthfulness, honesty, friendliness, helping one another, appreciating the common good of the society, respectfulness, obedience, industriousness, and other virtues that

enhance the quality of life and property. This will help to reduce or eliminate social evils both in school and in society at large. Religion provides the basis for ethics. It enters into everything the individual does, every judgment he makes, every point of view he develops. This is the reason why it is the duty of religious education to uphold these values (Okeke, 2007).

Truancy on the part of the students should be checked by school authorities and government should stop paying lip-service in matters of religious/moral education of children. School authorities should be courageous in disciplining the student who is truant, knowing that these students are leaders of tomorrow, if they are not caught young the society will be in danger. In other words, if they fail to imbibe moral character, they will eventually turn into something else and become a threat and nuisance to the society.

It is arguably good that government should make religious/moral education compulsory in every schools and that West African Examination Council should endeavour to award certificate on the subject, but it is more important to inculcate moral discipline in our children and youths in schools. An appeal is made to government and organizations to check indiscipline and ensure adequate provision of facilities and personnel in the school for effective religious/moral education.

Finally, the religious teacher is described as the Christian pedagogy or the religious curricular implementer, because of the recognition that if he ceases to function as the school expects the religious, culture and knowledge which the ages have so painfully assembled would suffer serious set back.

Conclusion
This study on the challenges facing the effective teaching and learning of religious/moral education in Onitsha urban is apt. We should not forget that religion guides the youth in their academic aspirations to face the future task and responsibilities with hope and

confidence in God. It is taught to give an outward expression of every day relationship (Okeke, 2007).

The study also shows that religious/moral education is an indispensable element in promoting a healthy society. This implies that it must be mandatory for a child who will serve the best interest of this nation to learn the precepts of religious implementations of life and abide by them. If the youths of Onitsha urban embrace ideal religious practices there would be change in the society and crime will reduce to its barest minimum.

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