

An Appraisal of Instructional Practice of Religious and Moral Education Teachers in Ghana: Teacher-Curriculum Related Factors

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Abstract:

The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that influence the instructional practices of Religious and Moral Education (RME) teachers in Junior High Schools level in the Bole District of Ghana. Quantitatively, descriptive survey design was employed to investigate the factors influencing the instructional practices of RME teachers. The population included all Junior High School Religious and Moral Education teachers in the Bole District. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select all the seventy-two (72) RME teachers. The main research instrument used for data collection was questionnaire. The data employed descriptive statistical tools in analysing the data into frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviation. The study indicated that the content and pedagogical competence, initial training and the belief of the teachers influence the instructional practices of R.M.E teachers. The study also concluded that RME teachers in the study area highly depends on the curriculum materials such as textbooks to determine their instructional practices in the teaching of the subject. It is recommended that, Since the teacher plays a major role in the teaching and learning process, Ghana Education Service, Head of schools and Curriculum planners should invest in the professional development of the teacher. It is also recommended that, Headmasters and School Improvement Support Officers (SISOs) should strengthen their supervisory roles to ensure that teachers look at the said critical issues as contained in the curriculum.

Keywords:

Instructional, Practice, Religious and Moral Education, Teachers

1. Introduction

Religious and Moral Education is an integration of 'Religion', 'Morality' and 'Education' [1]. It seeks to reinforce the type of religious and moral training that pupils acquire from home. In addition, it deals with both religious and non-religious or secular issues. Religious and Moral Education is a course in the Ghanaian basic school curriculum. It involves the teaching of religious values to students at the basic school level [1]. This is because religion has played and will continue to play a vital role in the upbringing of young people and behavioural control in society. Education of young people must not ignore moral training in its quest to train students intellectually. The Anfom Commission of 1986 sought to ensure that Ghanaian schools teach students what is basic in our culture, which is a repository of the intellectual, political, ethical and creative development. This commission believed that it will enable the educational system to produce citizens imbued with a culture which is Ghanaian and can stand the test of time [2].

Furthermore, Religious and Moral Education (RME) is a subject that is taught based on educational principles [3]. Its evolution as a discipline in Ghana could be traced to the pre-colonial era when Religion became an integral part of traditional African education [1]. The government of Ghana in 1962 decided to separate the teaching of Religious Education from Moral Education. Consequently, he proposed to introduce "Moral teaching" in place of Religious education in the Basic School curriculum [4]. Upon the recommendation of the commission, the Provisional National Defense Council (PNDC) in 1987 introduced and implemented a new Educational Reform Programme. Cultural Studies was then introduced as a subject at the Basic level of education. In it religious studies were taught. Then in 1998, the Cultural Studies Programme was changed to Religious and Moral Education at the Basic and Senior High School Levels of Education [4]. The belief of the Ministry of Education was that the educational system should be integrated with religious and moral beliefs and ideals, and good human values. This would ensure a holistic personality development, and good moral character (MOE, 2000). This led to the raising of serious concern and objections by Religious bodies like the Christian Council of Ghana, Catholic Bishops' Conferences and the Ghana Pentecostal Council as well as other stakeholders. Following the concerns raised by the public, a National Education Review Committee was set up in 1994. Based on its recommendations, Religious Education was reintroduced, with the name Religious and Moral Education [4]. Again, the 2007 Education Reform Review removed Religious and Moral Education from the school curriculum but it was reinstated in the following academic year in 2008 following the objections raised by the general public and civil society groups. Professor Stephen Adei, former rector of GIMPA, Ghana, on Wednesday, 5th March, 2014, on a GTV programme named "This is Life" said that secularization broke down the moral fibre of the schools when government took over the missionary schools. His argument was that without moral values our schools will be training academic monsters. Indeed, the moral integrity of our society is breaking down now more than ever largely due to the vanishing of moral ideals from the hearts of people. The only way to remedy the situation is to infuse our educational system with good religious and moral education and ensure that students get to learn and practice what is taught them in the schools.

However, general aim of the curriculum is aimed at developing individuals who are literate, good problem solvers, have the ability to think creatively and have both the confidence and competence to participate fully in the Ghanaian society as responsible

local and global citizens [5]. The aims of teaching and learning Religious and Moral Education are to encourage and enable learners to:

- develop an awareness of their Creator and the purpose of their very existence.
- develop an understanding and tolerance of other people's faiths and cultures.
- draw the difference between acceptable and unacceptable behaviours so that they can make the right decisions in any situation and thus become responsible citizens.
- acquire the socio-cultural values inherent in the three major religions in Ghana (i.e. Christianity, Islam and African Traditional religion) which will help them cope with the variety of moral choices they have to make in today's rapidly changing world.
- develop the spirit of team work, collaboration and togetherness in nation-building
- increasingly develop the ability to respond to religious beliefs and practices in an informed, rational and responsible way [5].

Teaching Philosophy of RME posits that, the subject should be learner-centred rather than teacher-centred [5]. There is a Chinese proverb that states "I hear, I forget; I see and I remember; and I do and I understand." This is interpreted to mean that when learners are fully involved in teaching and learning processes, they tend to develop great interest and subsequently contribute actively to lessons. In the same vein, it is expected that the teaching and learning of Religious and Moral Education would be participatory, and lessons not be turned into preaching sessions. Learners would become passive learners when Religious and Moral Education teachers attempt to impart every information solely by themselves, and this may not encourage effective teaching and learning. Teaching resources play key roles in teaching and learning processes. Without them, learners are likely to find it difficult to understand various themes and concepts (topics) they study. Teaching resources such as charts, real objects and drawings help to make lessons interesting and practical. The R.M.E. teacher should therefore be resourceful and be able to find the relevant teaching materials that may be needed for the lessons. It will be highly essential for teachers to use audio-visual resources such as films and videos in their lessons for learners to acquire the right knowledge, values, attitudes and skills needed. They will also acquire some language skills and other core competencies from the topics they study and this will facilitate their learning of Religious and Moral Education and other subjects on the school timetable. In addition, the teacher is expected to relate the various topics to the practical situations in their daily lives [5].

Learning Philosophy in the RME curriculum has stated that, the best way of learning the subject is through practical activities like demonstrations, role plays, recitals, games, group work and visiting important religious and historic sites. There should be more demonstrations throughout the lessons. Children can get a clearer picture of lessons and store the facts in memory and practice when they are encouraged to take active part in the lessons that involve demonstrations and other practical activities. In educational principles, the child's *generic skills* are fully developed only when enough demonstrations and activities are undertaken. Some of them have the ability to dance, sing, draw, dramatize or make models, and all these potentials are to be developed through the teacher's assistance and resourcefulness. Games arouse the interest of children to take active part in lessons. They may include chain games whereby a child may ask another child a question and continue in the same order throughout the class. The teacher is at liberty to introduce appropriate games in the lesson. Learners are to be encouraged to work in groups, carry out some

of the functions of the teacher and act as a leader of the group. The teacher should guide learners working in groups so that there is a balance between teacher-centred lessons and the lesson which gets out of hand because of lack of control. The rationale of this philosophy is to inculcate the spirit of team work, consensus building and tolerance in order to ensure peace and unity [5].

This shows that, for effective Religious and Moral Education teaching and learning interaction to take place, the methods employed play significant role in it. In addition, teaching methods is designed to establish interactions among the teacher, the student and the subject matter to influence directly or indirectly the learning process [6]. For teacher to possess a special body of knowledge, skills and characteristics, the teacher needs to understand the materials he/she teaches, how to teach it and why he should teach it, that is, he should have adequate subject matter, pedagogic and curriculum knowledge [7]. This implies that the pedagogical knowledge and strategies to teach R M E is essential in order to achieved effective and efficient teaching and learning process. Hence effective R M E teacher should have adequate knowledge in the subject area, should employ varied teaching methods and resources in his teaching as well as developing positive attitudes towards the teaching of RME to ensure effective and efficient teaching and learning process. It is against this background that the researcher seeks to examine the factors that influence the instructional practices of Junior High School Religious and Moral Education teachers in the Bole District.

Whichever instructional practice the teacher adopts can either be learner-centred or teacher-centred. Since its introduction into Ghana's basic school curriculum, RME has been taught as a theoretical subject, and the moral values that the subject aims to impart to the learners, which are abstract in nature, have been taught literally. While students listen to their teachers explain these values to them, they have the extra burden of having to conceptualize and remember values like peace, love, honesty, and forgiveness, among others. A study mentions that some people learn best by demonstrations and graphical representation of whatever is being taught them, the theoretical teaching situation of RME in schools poses a problem for students who are visual learners [8]. This problem is alluded by researchers that "teachers who rely solely on the oral presentation find that their pupils are frequently unable to relate effectively to the new learning in any well founded basic experience" [9]. In fact, they recommend that to ensure effective teaching and learning, the teacher of RME must make use of teaching and learning materials like pictures, drawings and paintings. This, they say, will excite the senses of the children in order to facilitate fuller involvement in the lessons [9]. This recommendation is justified by the RME syllabus which lists illustrations and drawings as examples of Teaching and Learning Materials (TLMs) for teaching the RME subject.

Research has however shown that learner-centered teaching is an effective means to effective learning. Countries in the sub-Saharan Africa, including Ghana, have made effort to introduce these methods of teaching in schools. Though the educational agencies have advocated for the use of these in basic schools, teachers in public Junior High Schools in Bole continue to use teacher-centered methods of teaching in classroom instruction. It is evident that most teachers at the basic level in the Bole District still do not appreciate the varied methods of teaching Religious and Moral Education [10]. Little is known about the factors that influence these instructional practices of teachers in the Bole District. This study therefore sought to unravel the factors that influence the instructional practices of RME teachers in the Bole District. The purpose of the study was to examine the factors that influence the instructional

practices of RME teachers at the Junior High Schools level in the Bole District of Ghana (1) What are teacher-related factors that influence the instructional practices of RME teachers in the Bole district? (2) What are the curriculum factors informing the instructional practices of RME teachers in the Bole District?

1.1. Conceptual Framework of the Study

The model presents a framework that describes the instructional practices of RME teachers which is informed by intertwining factors. Whichever instructional practice that the teacher adopts results in a certain performance of pupils.

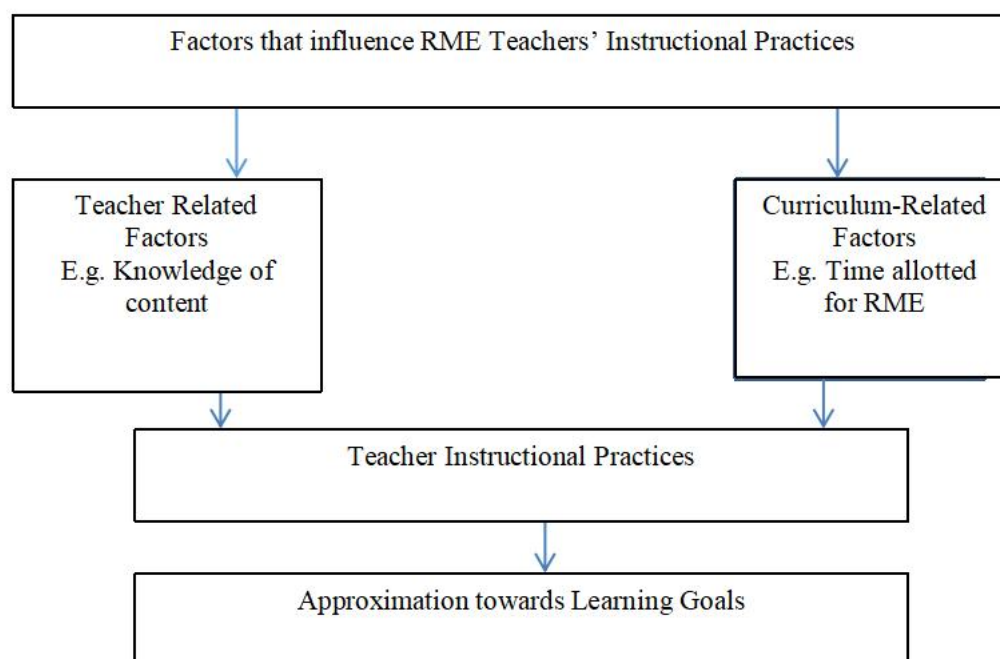


Figure 1. Conceptual Framework of Teachers Instructional Practices.

Source: Researchers' construction

From the model, the instructional practices of RME teachers is influenced by one or more of the factors relating to the teacher, environment and the curriculum. The whole concept is developed based on the premise that, to understand and appreciate the instructional practices of RME teachers, the background variables that trigger these instructional practices needs to be investigated. Also, whichever instructional practice that a teacher adopts can facilitate or impede the performance of pupils [11,12,13,14]. The performance of pupils connotes how they have approximated the learning goals set. Here, the factors influencing the instructional practices of teachers in RME classrooms is investigated as the input variable with the instructional practices adopted as the process variable and the resultant performance of pupils as the output variable.

The teacher-related factors are those factors relating to the capacity and dispositions of the teacher which remain personal. These are the factors that teachers have control over. These factors include the perception that teachers have about teaching, the content knowledge of teachers, the attitudes, beliefs and conception of teachers about the subject. Environmental pressures also account for the instructional practices adopted by teachers in the classrooms. These environmental forces include, class size, classroom conditions, examination bodies like the West Africa Examination Council,

parents and other stakeholders like the Ghana Education Service and Non-State Actors. The performance of individual teachers and by extension the whole school is determined mostly by the performance of the pupils in external examination. Teachers therefore tend to teach children in order to pass the external examination. To achieve this, teachers try as much as possible to cover the entire syllabus slated for the examination. This will likely have an impact on the instructional practices of the teachers as teachers will pay little attention attending to the unique needs of the child. Such teachers are likely to adopt lecture method and standardized testing which does not promote proper understanding.

The instructional practice adopted by the teacher also stems from curriculum factors. These are factors that are dictated by the prevailing circumstance of which the teacher has little or no control over. These include the volume of the content, the practicality of the content to the students, the time allotted for the subject in the teaching time table and other intervening co-curricular activities. Difficulties and challenges associated with time are more pronounced in developing countries, such as Ghana where class size is large and learning materials inadequate. Time has been identified as one of the major factors influencing teachers' instructional practices. The instructional practices adopted by each teacher have the tendency to produce an outcome in students' performance. The performance of the students can be measured through his/her performance in external examinations and pattern of behavior in society.

1.2. Teacher-Related Factors that influence the instructional practice of teachers

Teacher beliefs: Teachers' beliefs have been described as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught [15,16]. Teachers' beliefs are related to their classroom practice [15,16]. Researchers emphasised that there is a "strong relationship between teachers' educational beliefs and their planning, instructional decisions, and classroom practices" and that educational beliefs of teachers especially pre-service ones play a pivotal role in their acquisition and interpretation of knowledge and subsequent teaching behaviour [13, 17]. Teachers' beliefs are likely to influence their future behaviour [15,18]. Studies argued that what teachers do in their classroom practices is shaped by what they think, and that teachers' perceptions and beliefs serve as filters through which instructional judgments and decisions are made [13,19,20]. Given the assumption that teacher beliefs influence instructional practice, and process of instruction [13,15-21]. studies have stated that in order to understand teachers' rationales for instructional decisions, researchers need to interview teachers and observe their daily lessons, classroom practice, and interactions with students [15, 22-23]. Subjects such as Social Studies and Religion, which have experienced widespread curriculum revision, development and innovation in the past, are especially in need of such research [13, 24-25]. In many cases, teachers' decisions appear to be primarily influenced by their beliefs about instruction and how students learn best. Teachers report incorporating real-world examples to foster the engagement of students with concepts that otherwise might not interest them or would be too abstract for students to understand. They use examples both to provide a hook to engage students and to provide a bridge between what students already know and the more abstract concepts.

The concept of personal epistemology partially dictates the instructional practice as well as learning preferences of students [26]. Teachers with advanced epistemological beliefs create opportunity for students to construct meaning within the learning

environment, whereas those with naïve epistemology see truth as “absolute and categorical,” thereby transmitting knowledge to their students [20,26]. Educators have concluded that epistemological beliefs have influence on learning approaches, mode of thinking, and acquisition of information [27]. They intimated that findings in the field support the assertion that constructivist-inclined students tend to use more cognitive resources to attain higher-order learning goals than those who possess simple epistemological beliefs. Other studies also observed that students with constructivist epistemologies tend to use prior experiences, have better collaboration skills and higher-order task performance [20,28].

Earlier studies inferred that student-teachers, with the epistemological beliefs that knowledge was ever-changing and interrelated, were more constructivists, and were likely to make their instructional practice student-centered [29,30]. The belief that knowledge is changing is a reasonable basis for teachers to allow their students to actively participate in the classroom activities. This finding is consistent with the previous literature that the more advanced in epistemological beliefs, the likelihood teachers use constructivist learning pedagogies [17,20,26]. Studies found evidence that teachers, who believed in knowledge transmission, made students passive recipients of information in their respective classrooms [31,32]. Thus, their epistemological beliefs impacted their instructional practice. Therefore, student-teachers showing negative insignificant relationships between the source, justification and attainability dimensions against instructional practice should have demonstrated more teacher-centered practices.

Teachers’ Favoured Topics: Favourite topics and subjects of teachers influenced their choice of instructional practice. when a teacher teaches his favourite subjects or topic, he/she is more enthusiastic. An enthusiastic teacher tends to use all means possible to help his/her learners to understand what he/she understood. These strategies do not exclude hands-on-activities where the child experiences and create knowledge for himself or herself [13,33]. This is more common to topics or subjects that provide opportunities for students to see and touch. These topics facilitate students understanding. RME as a discipline in the Junior High School curriculum has different sections including religion, social issues and morality. This suggests that, the instructional practice adopted by a teacher will depend to a greater extent how the teacher favours such topics or aspects.

Teacher Personal Life Experiences: Personal life experiences also influence teachers teaching behaviour in the classroom. These include their family situation, day-to-day mood, and their second and third jobs. What goes on at home puts teachers in a frame of mind for what they will be doing that day at school. These happenings among others include the loss of loved ones and ailments in the house. Basically, teachers who experience these did not have the energy both emotionally or physically. The daily mood of a teacher also contributed to what he/she was going to do in class from day to day. A teacher may adjust his/her activities in the classroom to suit his/her mood. Teachers would wait to do certain things when they feel better. Teachers often flip-flop activities, especially if they are tired or depressed [33,34].

Teachers’ Background and Experience: In some cases, teachers’ backgrounds influence their selection of strategies for lessons. pre-service preparation may contribute to teachers’ comfort with various pedagogical practices [35,36,37]. Similarly, the extent of teachers’ experience, or lack of experience, may lead them toward the use of particular strategies. Finally, the teachers’ own experience as a learner sometimes proves an influential factor in instructional decisions. Previous

studies noted that, a number of teachers reported that their pre-service preparation has led to their perceptions of how students learn best and their comfort with the pedagogical strategies they use. Teachers described a number of different pedagogies that were addressed in their pre-service experiences, indicating that they use these both in the observed lessons and more generally: hands-on approaches, lecture, questioning to guide learning, and the use of multiple strategies [35,36]. While some teachers report that their teaching experiences contribute to their use of various instructional strategies, other teachers report that their lack of experience influences how they choose to teach a lesson [33, 34-38]. Specifically, teachers note that lacking the skills to implement other approaches, they choose more structured pedagogical strategies, and follow the textbook more closely. Teachers' personal experience with learning mathematics and science also has some influence on instruction. Some teachers described how they themselves learned mathematics or science, indicating that they select instructional approaches that they hope will help their students learn as well.

Professional Development: Professional development for teachers often focuses on the development of pedagogical skills, and an estimated 31 percent of the teachers nationally attribute their selection of instructional strategies, at least in part, to their professional development activities [36,39]. Teachers report that courses they have taken or professional development sessions they have attended introduced them to a particular pedagogy, or reinforced strategies that they were already using in their lessons, including the use of manipulative/hands on activities, cooperative learning, small group work, cognitive coaching and other strategies aligned with brain theory research. Studies revealed that, teachers nationally are directly influenced in the instructional strategies and materials they select by their work with colleagues at their school [20, 30-40]. Teachers explain that they routinely plan with one or more teachers at their school, usually teachers at the same grade level. Some teachers describe the meetings as formal planning sessions; others characterize them as informal idea exchanges. In either case, these collaborations result in the sharing of strategies and materials used in lessons.

1.3. Curriculum Related Factors that Influence Teacher Instructional Practices

Curriculum Materials: Textbooks are second only to teachers' knowledge, experiences, and beliefs in the frequency of influence on instruction. The majority of teachers rely to some extent on the textbook/curriculum program in their school or district in making decisions on how to teach. [20,25]. However, the extent to which instructional materials impact instruction varies widely. Many teachers describe these materials as the basis of their lessons, using them exactly as they are laid out. Others report that they design the structure of their lessons, picking and choosing activities from the designated materials and supplementing them with materials from other sources, or making some modifications to the design of the materials provided. Still others describe using the designated materials only as a resource in their development of what students' experience in their lessons [37,41].

Following the Textbook Plan: Teachers who report closely following the textbook/curriculum material describe various reasons for doing so. Researchers provides some reasons that teacher postulated to defend their decisions to follow the plan as described in the curriculum. According to them, many of these teachers believe that the materials include all of the experiences students need to learn the content effectively. Others "trust" the textbook developers, and/or believe that the

people who selected these materials did so because they are aligned to curriculum standards and district tests, so no modifications are needed [33,37]. Findings of studies indicated that teachers do not use their textbook/materials as designed. Instead these teachers modify the materials, picking and choosing lessons and portions of the lessons, and supplementing them with resources from other sources. Teachers describe a variety of reasons for these decisions, including the need to make the material more interesting and accessible to students [20,33-37]. Although many teachers report some use of the textbook materials in their lessons, a handful of teachers' report using the designated text only as a resource, rarely using it directly in lessons. Regarding why teachers rely only minimally on the text or curriculum program for their instructional decision-making, it was realized that, some teachers see the textbook as outdated, difficult wording and errors inherent in textbooks. It should be noted that instruction in about 30 percent of lessons nationally is not at all influenced by the textbook/program materials designated for the class. In these instances, it appears that teachers are utilizing other resources they have at their disposal to design lessons.

Instructional resources available to a teacher influence not only the nature of instruction but also the learning outcomes that can be sought [14,42,43]. The quality of teaching of RME in junior high schools in Ghana is thus partly determined by the instructional resources available. Time is a resource that greatly influences planning of instruction. Because there is never enough time to instruct pupils on all important concepts and skills in a subject area, teachers must carefully match their instructional time against the instructional objectives. Teacher's decision about what content to stress or omit is based upon instructional time available as well as their personal preferences regarding topics and methods of instruction [44]. A study revealed that all the materials of instruction, the textbook has had the most influence on teaching content and method. For many teachers it has been the 'be all and end all' of their instructional life. This is unfortunate because the textbook is just one of the teaching tools. It is not supposed to be revered as the ultimate word. Recently, educational technology has expanded to include teaching machines and computers [45].

These machines present teaching-learning programmes to pupils. Computer Assisted Instruction (CAI) is the most popular term used to describe the use of computers for instructional purposes. CAI can be purchased in form of diskettes, cassettes tapes or cartridges and used for teaching and learning. Like any other subject, RME should be taught by use of CAI to make it achieve its objectives [45]. Findings of a study indicated that one of the reasons RME lessons tend to be boring is that teachers make almost exclusive uses of one communication channel, namely the auditory channel or speech and hearing. Nevertheless, the strength of audio-visual resources lies in the fact that they can present the closest thing to a real life experience [45]. Therefore, the use of audio-visual aids in teaching can help make concepts more real to students and more applicable in their lives. Even though teachers may have the competence and positive attitudes, without sufficient resources, their efforts will come to naught [46]. This assertion is in line with the views of the German agency for technical cooperation (GTZ) report in 1979 that it is essential for teachers to be provided with the required materials early enough to facilitate effective instruction [47]. This is because the achievement of instructional objectives partly relies on the availability of the teaching and learning resources. Schools and educational stakeholder should, therefore, provide make these resources accessible to all teachers by establishing resource centres, providing audio-visual facilities and equipment and

work materials.

The importance of instructional resources in teaching and learning has also been emphasized by many authorities, among them. These scholars generally agree that if resources are properly selected and used, the following benefits can be realized:

- Knowledge obtained through instructional materials is retained longer than that obtained by purely verbal teaching.
- Greater benefits can be obtained from the use of multimedia that enhances students' participation.
- Learning becomes easy, more interesting, effective and meaningful.

The unavailability of facilities and materials is one of the major constraints to effective instruction in most schools in Kenya. Every new programme requires relevant and adequate facilities. Prior to implementation, physical facilities must be prepared and materials purchased to ensure the successive activation of the programme [49]. It is, therefore, important for schools to make instructional media resources available for successful curriculum implementation. Notably, development and acquisition of materials constitute one major set of barriers that militate against successful implementation [50]. This view is supported by a similar study that without some basic inputs particularly textbooks and instructional materials, almost no learning can be expected to occur. Ensuring the availability of essential inputs is prerequisite for both quality and for expansion. The study revealed that the effectiveness of teaching methods is a product of availability and use of relevant resources and facilities by teachers [51]. These resources include maps, resource persons, films and photographs while facilities refer to classrooms, tables, desks and chairs. All these constitute the necessary conditions for learning. A research on Social Education and Ethics (SEE) in secondary schools in Vihiga County in Western Kenya, indicates that there is evidence of use of instructional resources but most teachers mainly use the chalkboard and textbooks. Mutsotso further observes that relevant SEE instructional resources materials such as audio-visuals are inadequate or lacking in many schools [52].

2. Materials and Methods

Quantitatively, descriptive survey design was employed to investigate the factors influencing the instructional practices of RME teachers. The population included all Junior High School Religious and Moral Education teachers in the Bole District. Purposive and convenient sampling techniques were used to select all the seventy-two (72) RME teachers. Most statisticians agree that in descriptive survey the minimum sample size to get any kind of meaningful result is 100. If your population is less than 100 then you really need to survey all of them [53]. The main research instrument that was used in the study was five point Likert scale items questionnaire. The questionnaire items used were grouped into two parts with the first part focused on the teacher factors that inform the instructional decisions of teachers. The second part of the questionnaire looked at the curriculum related factors that influence the instructional practices of RME teachers. The data or scores of the various items were then fed into a computer programed known as Statistical Product and Service Solution (SPSS) version 22 which is a software for research analysis. The analysis of the data was guided by the research questions that guided the study. The descriptive nature of the research made the researcher employ descriptive statistical tools in analysing the

data into frequencies and percentages, means and standard deviation. Each category of factors was scored individually and a regression analysis model generated to tell the relative contributions of each category to the instructional practices of the teachers.

3. Results and Discussion

3.1. Teacher-related factors influencing teachers' instructional practices

This section presents results and discussions on the research question- *What are the teacher-related factors influencing teachers' instructional practices?*. To find out the teacher-related factors that informs the instructional practices of RME teachers in the Bole District, the questionnaire contains items that help identify the teacher-related factors that influence the instructional practices of teachers. The items were generally written in positive form with the responses on a five-point Likert scale measure with Strongly Disagree (SD) taking "1", Disagree (D) takes code 2; Undecided (U) takes 2; Agree (A) takes code 4 and Strongly Agree (SA) taking code 5. The individual items relating to the research question were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The group means and standard deviations were also used to describe the extent to which each factor influences the instructional practices of RME. A mean score range of between 1.0 and 1.50 is indicative of strongly disagree, 1.51 to 2.50 is indicative of disagree, 2.51 to 3.5 represents undecided, 3.51 to 4.5 is agree and 4.51 to 5.0. Table 1 presents the teacher-related factors that influence teachers' instructional practices.

Table 1. Teacher-Related Factors Influencing Teachers' Instructional Practice.

Statement	Mean	SD
Teaching RME needs adequate preparation	4.19	1.18
My teaching is teacher-centred because I believe the teacher is the sole repository of knowledge	2.0	1.26
I use expository method in teaching because my students minds need to be trained	3.51	1.06
My knowledge about what teaching entails influences my teaching	3.97	.90
What I know about I am to teach determines how I teach	3.79	1.16
My competence in using some teaching aids determines how I use them	4.24	.78
My competence in producing or improvising teaching and learning materials influences my instructional practices in class	4.21	.81
The method that I use in teaching depends on how competent I am in using such a method	4.07	1.01
I use my past experiences as a student to teach my students	3.40	1.23
My initial training in teaching RME has an influence on my day to day activities in the classroom	3.75	.96
Group mean and standard deviation	3.71	0.45

Source: Field survey

Teachers' beliefs have been described as tacit, often unconsciously held assumptions about students, classrooms, and the academic material to be taught [15,16]. Results from Table 2 indicate that 53.7% of the teachers strongly agreed that the teaching RME needs adequate preparation with another 31.3% agreeing to this assertion. It recorded a mean score of 4.19 and a standard deviation of 1.18 indicating that, on the average the teachers agreed that teacher preparation before lessons really influence the method of teaching they use in the classroom. This represents a positive

belief and attitude about classroom activities. Studies argued that what teachers do in their classroom practices is shaped by what they think, and that teachers' perceptions and beliefs serve as filters through which instructional judgments and decisions are made [13,19,20]. The result shows that, 55.2% and 37.3% agreed and strongly agreed respectively to the claim that teachers' competence in using some teaching aids determines how they use them during the teaching and learning process. This recorded the highest mean score of 4.24 with a standard deviation of 0.78. Similarly, 51 teachers representing 76.2% asserted that what they know about they are to teach determines how they teach. This bothers on the subject matter competence of the teachers.

The teachers also agreed that their competence in producing or improvising teaching and learning materials (Mean= 4.21, SD = 0.81) and their methodology competence (Mean = 4.07 SD = 1.07) influence their instructional practices. In effect, the content and pedagogical competence of the teacher plays a crucial role in their choice of instructional practice. Similar studies suggest that teachers nationally attribute their selection of instructional strategies pedagogical and content knowledge as understatement [36,39]. Previous studies support the current study that teachers who lack the skills to implement other approaches choose more structured pedagogical strategies, and follow the textbook more closely [13,33-37]. Teachers report that courses they have taken or professional development sessions they have attended introduced them to a particular pedagogy, or reinforced strategies that they were already using in their lessons, including the use of manipulative/hands on activities, cooperative learning, small group work, cognitive coaching and other strategies aligned with brain theory research [33,34]. Earlier studies claimed that pre-service preparation may contribute to teachers' comfort with various pedagogical practices. Studies further revealed that pre-service preparation has led to perceptions of how students learn best and their comfort with the pedagogical strategies they use. Teachers described a number of different pedagogies that were addressed in their pre-service experiences, indicating that they use these both in the observed lessons and more generally [35,36,37].

However, the teachers rejected the claim that the teacher is the sole repository of knowledge with a mean score of 2.0 and a standard deviation of 1.26. This suggests that, teachers generally would resort to child-centred methods in their classrooms. From Table 3, the teachers were indifferent to the fact that their past experiences as student influence how they teach their students (Mean = 3.4; standard deviation 1.28. While some teachers report that their teaching experiences contribute to their use of various instructional strategies, other teachers report that their lack of experience influences how they choose to teach a lesson [33,34,35,36,37,38]. A group means scores of 3.71 with a standard deviation of 0.43 shows that, the teachers agreed that teacher-related factors influence their choice of instructional practice in the classroom and their overall responses did not differ from one another. These factors that influence the instructional practices of teachers included their content and pedagogical competence, their belief that effective teaching requires effective planning and their initial training.

3.2. Curriculum Factors Informing the Instructional Practices of RME Teachers in the Bole District

This sub-section presents results and discussion on the research question- *What are the curriculum factors informing the instructional practices of RME teachers in the Bole District?* The questionnaire contains items that help identify the curriculum

factors that influence the instructional practices of teachers. The items were generally written in positive form with the responses on a five-point Likert scale measure with Strongly Disagree (SD) taking “1”, Disagree (D) takes code 2; Undecided (U) takes 3; Agree (A) takes code 4 and Strongly Agree (SA) taking code 5. The individual items relating to the research question were analysed using frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations. The group means and standard deviations were also used to describe the extent to which each factor influences the instructional practices of RME. A mean score range of between 1.0 and 1.50 is indicative of strongly disagree, 1.51 to 2.50 is indicative of disagree, 2.51 to 3.5 represents undecided, 3.51 to 4.5 is agree and 4.51 to 5.0. Table 2 presents the curriculum factors that influence teachers’ instructional practices

Table 2. Curriculum Factors Influencing Teachers’ Instructional Practice.

Statement	Mean	SD
I use teacher-centred methods in teaching because the content of RME is broad	2.25	1.34
I use teacher centred method in teaching because the time allocated for RME in the teaching timetable is insufficient	2.63	1.35
The availability of time informs me how to assess and when to assess.	3.91	.90
Due to insufficient time allotted for RME, I ask fewer questions.	3.00	1.23
I follow the strategies as contained in the syllabus and textbooks to teach my students	4.01	.91
The content of RME requires that I use teacher-centred methods like lecture.	2.19	1.20
The rationale for teaching RME informs my teaching styles	3.63	.95
Co-curricular activities sometimes change my instructional strategies.	3.58	1.12
Group mean and standard deviation	3.15	0.52

Source: Field survey

Textbooks are second only to teachers’ knowledge, experiences, and beliefs in the frequency of influence on instruction. The majority of teachers rely to some extent on the textbook/curriculum program in their school or district in making decisions on how to teach [37,41]. The results reveal that 56.7% of the teachers agreed that they follow the strategies as contained in the syllabus and textbooks to teach their students. A further 28.4% strongly agreed to this assertion. However, 1.5% and 9.0% strongly disagreed and disagreed to this assertion respectively. A mean score of 4.01 with a standard deviation of 0.91 indicates that, averagely the teachers agreed that the proposed strategies as contained in curriculum materials and other textbooks determine the method of teaching they use in the classroom. This is in tandem with the findings of previous studies that teacher postulated to defend their decisions to follow the plan as described in the curriculum [33, 34-38].

The study revealed that teachers believe that the materials include all of the experiences students need to learn the content effectively. Others “trust” the textbook developers, and/or believe that the people who selected these materials did so because they are aligned to curriculum standards and district tests, so no modifications are needed. The results of this study revealed that, 44 teachers representing 65.7% of the teachers agreed that, the availability of time informs them how to assess and when to assess. Another 19.4% strongly agreed to this claim. However, 3.0 % and 7.5% strongly disagreed and disagreed to this assertion respectively. A mean score of 3.91 with a standard deviation of 0.90 indicates that, the teachers agreed that instructional time is a major factor that determines their instructional strategies. Another curriculum related factor that determines the instructional practices of teachers is co-

curricular activities. Thirty-eight teachers representing 56.7% agreed that co-curricular activities sometimes change my instructional strategies while 11 (16.4%) disagreed. A mean score of 3.58 shows that, averagely the teachers believed that co-curricular activities sometimes influence their instructional strategies. On the other hand, the teachers rejected the claim that they use teacher-centred methods in teaching because the content of RME is broad (Mean = 2.25, SD = 1.34) and the content of RME requires that I use teacher-centred methods like lecture (Mean = 2.19, SD = 1.20). They also remained indifferent to the claim that they use teacher-centred method in teaching because the time allocated for RME in the teaching timetable is insufficient (Mean = 2.63, SD = 1.35) and that due to insufficient time allotted for RME, they ask fewer questions (Mean = 3.0, SD = 1.23). A group means scores of 3.15 with a standard deviation of 0.52 shows that, the teachers were indifferent to curriculum factors that influence their choice of instructional practice in the classroom. They however agreed that the curriculum materials as well as co-curricular activities in some way influence their instructional practices. Earlier studies support the current study that, textbooks are second only to teachers' knowledge, experiences, and beliefs in the frequency of influence on instruction. The majority of teachers rely to some extent on the textbook/curriculum program in their school or district in making decisions on how to teach. [20,25]. However, the extent to which instructional materials impact instruction varies widely. Many teachers describe these materials as the basis of their lessons, using them exactly as they are laid out. Others report that they design the structure of their lessons, picking and choosing activities from the designated materials and supplementing them with materials from other sources, or making some modifications to the design of the materials provided. Still others describe using the designated materials only as a resource in their development of what students' experience in their lessons [37,41].

4. Conclusions and Recommendations

The study indicated that the content and pedagogical competence, initial training and the belief of the teachers influence the instructional practices of R.M.E teachers. Therefore, the researcher can infer that RME teacher in the study area select their instructional practices based on their pedagogical competencies and beliefs. The study also revealed that curriculum materials and co-curricular activities influence teachers' instructional practices. Hence, it can be concluded that RME teachers in the study area highly depends on the curriculum materials such as textbooks to determine their instructional practices in the teaching of the subject. This means innovativeness becomes a challenges to teachers since they rely much on the textbooks accompanied the curriculum programme. It is recommended that, Since the teacher plays a major role in the teaching and learning process, Ghana Education Service, Head of schools and Curriculum planners should invest in the professional development of the teacher. This could be done through workshops and seminars. Since teachers seem to be indifferent about the influence of the curriculum on their instructional practices, there is that tendency for teachers to teach with little or no attention to the rationale, objectives and profile dimensions as contained in the RME syllabus. It is also recommended that, Headmasters and Circuit Supervisors should strengthen their supervisory roles to ensure that teachers look at the said critical issues as contained in the syllabus.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

Data Availability Statement

Data is available on request from the corresponding author.

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