

The Relationship between Students' Attitude and Performance in C.R.E in Secondary School Examinations.

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Abstract

There is a general believe that C.R.E. is an easy subject for students and offers minimal job prospects such as preaching or becoming C.R.E. teachers. Such attitudes end up affecting students' performance in secondary school examinations. In responding to this situation, this paper examines the relationship between students' attitude and performance in C.R.E in secondary schools in Kenya. The study uses questionnaires which consisted of both close and open-ended items. The close ended items had statements each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. It is notable that an individual's particular pattern of attitude sometimes depends on previous learning experiences and that positive or negative feelings have an influence on learning and behaviour of an individual. The study therefore affirms the main hypothesis that positive feelings enhance learning while negative feelings retard learning.

Keywords: Students' Attitudes, Performance, Christian Religious Education, Examinations

1. Introduction

The teaching and learning of Christian Religious Education (Henceforth C.R.E.) in secondary schools in Kenya reveals that the subject has continued to be less prominent among students in Secondary schools. Many students are opting for science subjects. There is a general believe that C.R.E. is an easy subject which can be passed with minimal effort and offers no job prospects for students except for them becoming preachers or C.R.E. teachers (*Groenewegen, n.d*). This negative feeling towards the subject has also affected C.R.E. teachers in that some shy away from the subject while others feel it is a subject for women (*The Christian Educator, December 1993*). Such attitudes end up affecting students' performance in secondary school examinations hence the need for a re-examination of the subject in order to establish what has tainted its image. As a response to this need, this paper assesses the relationship between students' attitudes and performance in secondary school examinations, and establishes that there is a positive correlation; positive attitudes yield better performance.

1.1 Understanding Attitudes

According to *Hovland and Rosenberg (1960)*, attitudes follow the ABC model which suggests that an attitude has three components: affect, behaviour and cognition. The affect component encompasses how one feels about the object of one's attitude. The behaviour component consists of a predisposition to act in a way that is relevant to one's attitude while the cognitive component refers to the beliefs and thoughts held about the object of one's attitude. This is further supported by *Camille (1981)* who holds that attitudes are likes and dislikes of a person. They determine the response of a person or people towards something or somebody. *Camille* is of the view that attitudes, to some extent, influence a person's behaviour. This is quite relevant to the study in that if a student has a positive attitude towards C.R.E, it will be reflected by having interest in the learning of the subject and striving to achieve good marks and grades in the subject.

Classical conditioning processes explain how attitudes are acquired. People develop associations between various objects and the emotional reactions that accompany them (*Feldman, 1994*). Attitudes that are reinforced either verbally or non-verbally tend to be maintained. This implies that if a learner is performing well in a given subject, one requires a positive reinforcement so that one's performance and attitude towards the subject is maintained. Attitudes are specific to certain objects and situations. Therefore an individual's particular pattern of attitude will depend on previous learning experiences. Social factors are major determinants of the content of attitudes. What other people say and do, how they feel, what they value, their inclinations and preferences tend to become accepted as the correct and proper way to act and feel (*Igaga, 1990*). The implication is that if the society advocates for science subjects and considers the humanities as less important, then the learners will also be inclined to opt for science subjects rather than humanities, C.R.E. inclusive.

Attitudes can be learned through imitation. Children imitate adults as their models in a school situation; a child can be negative towards a certain school subject from what they see and hear from parents, siblings and even teachers. Therefore those in positions of authority should be role models to the children.

Festinger (1957) cited by Igaga (1990) proposed the dissonance principle. The principle states that a person's beliefs and attitudes could conflict with the information he might receive. This puts him in a state of thought discomfort or disequilibrium i.e. cognitive dissonance. A person in that state tries to remove this discomfort by both sticking to his belief and attitudes and looking for reasons to defend them or by dropping the beliefs and attitudes and still giving reasons for doing so. A student may choose a certain optional subject because he/she is being pressurized by the parents to take up that subject. The fact that one accepts to take up that subject as an option may not necessarily mean that he/she likes the subject but one might justify that he/she can get good grades in that given subject. It is therefore important for the teacher to detect where and when these conflicts occur in class and help the learners to make worthwhile decisions. The youth also need parental guidance in order to make the right decisions. This principle is supported by *Eiser (1994)* who expresses the idea of subjective norm where one chooses to do something he/she would not personally 'want' to do because he/she wishes to please or obey someone else.

2. Attitudes and Behaviour

The relationship between attitudes and behaviour is complementary in that behaviour will affect and partly determine attitudes. A person's action in a relevant situation will tend to be consistent with his attitudes (*Igaga, 1990*). For instance a student who performs well in a given subject is likely to develop a positive attitude towards that subject and vice versa. Positive or negative feelings have an influence on learning and behaviour of an individual (*Mosler, 1979*). Positive feelings enhance learning while negative feelings retard learning.

Osgood and Tannenbaum (1958) cited by Igaga (1990) proposed the congruity principle to explain cognitive consistence theory. The principle states that when a change in attitude occurs, it always occurs in the direction of increased congruity with the prevailing attitudes. In a case where the church is the sponsor of a given school, there is a possibility that the church's policy towards a subject like C.R.E will affect the attitude of the head teacher, subject teachers and the students as a whole. Students rely on their teachers to get correct information related to their subjects.

According to Breckler (1983, 1984, in Camille et.al. (1992), the three components -affect, behaviour and cognition are not always consistent. For instance although more than 90 % of Americans know that smoking causes lung cancer and heart disease (cognitive component) about 30% of Americans still smoke (behavioral component). Some of them even smoke despite negative feelings towards cigarette use (emotional component). Knowing what one thinks and feels about an issue does not enable one to predict very accurately how that person will act (*Wicker, 1969 in Camille et.al 1992*).

This study established that a student who has a positive attitude towards C.R.E may not necessarily perform well in the subject. Although attitudes can exert a strong influence on behaviour, so can many other powerful forces. These forces include social norms and values as well as specific circumstances that pressure people to act in particular ways. This study did not put into consideration the other forces that influence academic performance.

Knowledge about an issue helps to promote behaviours consistent with beliefs and feelings. The more knowledgeable one is about a topic the clearer one's opinions tend to be and also the stronger one's feelings are. This makes one to likely act in ways that match one's views (*Camille, et.al 1992*). In relation to the study, it implies that once a student understands the importance of C.R.E, that student will strive to work hard in the subject and this will be reflected in good performance.

Camille's study (1992) concurs with *Klausmeier and Ripple* that cited the limitation of cognitive consistence theory. They established that it was possible to have attitudes that at times lead to contradicting actions and conflicts. Two or more individuals who have favourable attitudes towards a given object do not necessarily behave identically towards related attitude object. This study established that whereas students had a favourable attitude toward C.R.E, their performance in C.R.E varied.

Note that attitudes are said to be positive when they are favourably directed towards the target. When unfavourably directed towards the target, they are said to be negative. This implies that in relation to the study, if a student has a positive perception towards C.R.E. the attitude is most likely to be positive. This student is also likely to put a lot of effort in studying C.R.E. and hence is expected to produce better results.

3. The Role of C.R.E in Secondary Schools in Kenya

Religious education was introduced by the missionaries mainly for evangelical purposes. In the mission schools, the local people were taught how to read and write using the Bible as the main resource material (*Kerre & Gichaga, 1999*). The schools were used as focal centres for winning converts as the teaching of the Bible was emphasized. Religious education was more important than anything else in these schools. This propelled missionaries to impose their own culture on Africans. The missionaries did this under the pretext that African culture was primitive. This sometimes led to widespread resistance to religious teachings. It is for example notable that between 1910 and 1919 many pupils at Nyabururu Roman Catholic mission in Kisii quit because they abhorred religious education. The Abagusii and Abakuria did not want religion except as a stepping stone to getting to know how to read and write (*Bogonko, 1992*). This kind of negative attitude towards Christian Religious Education is still there among some learners today since they do not consider C.R.E as being important for their future career.

According to the principles of Christian education (*Whither & How, (1982)*), the declaration on Christian education states that, among other things, Christian education moulds the student into a mature person who will positively contribute towards the good of his/her nation and the world at large. This means that the Kenya National goals of Education formulated by the Ominde Education Commission in 1963 are achieved through the teachings and learning of C.R.E. The goals of education include national unity. This is achieved through the teaching of C.R.E. in that Christianity teaches that all of us are brothers and sisters under one father, God. This can enable us to do away with forms of discrimination in the society such as tribalism and racism. The teaching of C.R.E. enables us to achieve national development. The C.R.E. syllabus incorporates contemporary Christian living, which has a topic on importance of work. Work is part of God's plan for man. By work, man not only satisfies his own needs but also provides for others in the society. Laziness is also discouraged through the study of C.R.E.

Another national goal of education, which is fulfilled through the teaching of C.R.E., is individual development and self-fulfilment. C.R.E. contributes in individual development by forming mature and responsible persons who will be able to fulfil their role in the church and society. C.R.E. provides a spiritual context where the maturing person finds roots for his past, hopes for his future and a rich present in terms of a world-view. Social equality, which is an educational goal, is promoted through learning C.R.E. Students are able to realize that being brothers and sisters in Christ they are all equal in God's eyes. This realization enables them to develop the virtues of justice, love, unity and peace. C.R.E. fosters respect and development of cultural heritage. The teaching of C.R.E. entails the African Religious Heritage. This enables the students to appreciate

other people's culture. Christianity accepts that which is good in the African culture and rejects what contradicts biblical teachings. C.R.E. enables the learner to realize that there are certain aspects of the African culture which have been incorporated into Christianity such as use of musical instruments and dance in Christian Worship. International consciousness is one of the goals of education. The learners get to know that the human race is one since we all originated from Adam and Eve. This knowledge is important since it brings about Universal brotherhood. During times of calamities such as famine, war or diseases, Countries can assist one another to solve the problems at hand.

African culture is essentially religious. In traditional African society, Africans are notoriously religious and religion permeates in all the departments of life so fully that it is not easy to isolate it (*Mbiti, 1969*). In Kenya there is evidence of religion everywhere: like whenever parliament is opened there are prayers, in courts, lawyers administer oaths or swear affidavits, witnesses take oaths to tell the truth. Since religion is part and parcel of our national public life, it follows that it must also be an important element in the school curriculum (*Whither & How, 1982*). Similar views are expressed by *Van (1992)* who says that education without religion is incomplete because man has spiritual and moral tendencies. In response to the *Gachathi Report (1976)* where churches were challenged on their ability through Religious Education to give a sound moral and ethical education to the youth, the Catholic bishops were in agreement that Religious teaching in schools is one of most powerful ways of inculcating ethical norms. This is not only to the children of the present but in the parents of the future as well. School and home are not two totally independent sources of ethical formation, there is continuing interplay between them (*Whither & How, 1982*). This emphasizes the crucial role of C.R.E in moulding the students' behaviour for a bright future.

C.R.E enables students to acquire knowledge and skills to enable them make appropriate moral choices and decisions when facing challenges in their Christian life. For instance when faced with the issue of unemployment or abortion, they should make proper moral choices (*Gichaga, et al, 2005*). Religious education involves the development of the right attitudes and transforms the life of the individual into Christian living that is manifested in Christian character and conduct (*Van, 1992*). Students should not only view C.R.E as a subject meant to enable them get good grades in exams but also consider the role it plays in making moral choices in their day to day activities.

Goldsen (1960) in *Magee (1967)* carried out a study on student attitude towards religion in 11 American Universities. It was established that (80%) of the students affirmed that they believed in some sort of religious faith. Only one student claimed to be an atheist. The research further revealed that the same students showed over and over again that they thought of religion mainly as a means of personal adjustment or private happiness. They had little concern for applying religious standards and beliefs to social, economic or political matter or to the reform or up building of religious institution. The poll showed that students take an individual approach to religious beliefs. This implies that C.R.E. students may have a positive attitude towards the subject but may not necessarily apply the Christian teachings in their lives.

Education is incomplete without the study of religion (Magee, 1967). Religion belongs in an educational program for the same reason that any other humanistic study does. It is a human interest as profound and enduring as science, art or literature. Nearly all the universities and colleges in Africa include at least some courses in which religion is a major topic of concern and the number and range of such courses has increased over the years (Ibid).

President Nathan Pusey of Harvard University said;

‘It is still uncertain what formal education can do to help us toward a religious life. Yet despite many difficulties, there is a growing recognition that an education that ignores this large, central, perennial and life giving area of human experience (religion) is a kind of play education, and finally a shallow thing’ (Magee, 1967).

The above statement expresses the importance attached to religion in educational institutions. Being a human being involves a sense of fundamental values as a guide to responsible decision.

4. Students’ Attitude towards C.R.E.

In order to capture the students’ attitude towards C.R.E, the study used questionnaires which consisted of both close and open-ended items. The close ended items had statements each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. The responses to various statements representing attitude variables such as whether or not C.R.E is easy, interesting, moulds ones behaviour, and opens job prospects were scored in such a way that the most favourable attitude was given the highest score of 5 and that with the most unfavourable attitude was given the lowest score of 1. It is notable that an individual’s particular pattern of attitude sometimes depends on previous learning experiences and that positive or negative feelings have an influence on learning and behaviour of an individual, with the main hypothesis being that positive feelings enhance learning while negative feelings retard learning. The table below shows the mean scores of students’ attitude towards C.R.E.

Table 1 Mean scores of the Students’ Attitude towards C.R.E

Statement	N	Mean	S.D
CRE is Interesting	238	4.66	.5425
Not easy to secure job	238	4.19	1.2147
CRE is moulds behaviour	238	4.62	.8762
C.R.E is easy	238	3.30	1.4321

It was established that students have a favourable attitude towards C.R.E. with a mean score of 4.1429. This shows that students consider C.R.E. to be an important subject and that is why they have a positive attitude towards it. This concurs with Kiniale’s findings (2000) who established that there was a positive attitude by teachers, head teachers and students towards C.R.E. Similar conclusions were made by Ndarwa (2006).

3.1 Students' Attitude and Performance in C.R.E.

Research has established that there is a correlation between attitude and performance. Attitudes can influence what students see as significant in tasks, which, depending on their gender and the image of the subject, can focus them to the task at hand or lead them to perceive an alternative task or no task at all. The effects of the different attitudes can therefore enhance or depress performance on a task (Gipps et al, 1994). This study sought to establish the students' responses to the following variables which help to establish the attitude of students towards C.R.E, and how each of them interacts with performance in the subject.

- a) C.R.E is interesting
- b) C.R.E is easy
- c) C.R.E builds one spiritually
- d) C.R.E moulds behavior
- e) C.R.E is meant for career pastors
- f) C.R.E depends on Christian family background
- g) With C.R.E it is not easy to secure a job
- h) C.R.E can be studied up to institutions of higher learning

For each of these, a correlation was established with performance and generalizations made based on the results as shown below.

a) CRE is interesting

From the responses, it was established that all students who performed highly either agreed (23) or strongly agreed (46) that C.R.E was interesting. Those whose performance was average were also in agreement with the statement except one. The low performers on the other hand had the majority in agreement (103), but most significantly there were three students who either disagreed or were undecided that C.R.E was interesting. More notable from such data is however the fact that most students (98.2%) were in agreement that C.R.E. is interesting irrespective of their performance in the subject. Those who were either undecided or disagreed constituted a small percentage (0.9%). This shows that C.R.E. remains popular with students in spite of their disparities in performance. This popularity is likely to spur performance and should hence be encouraged.

b) CRE is easy

It was observed that all those students who performed highly also thought that C.R.E was easy. The average performers also thought so except for three who were either undecided or disagreed with the statement. Interestingly, those in the low bracket in performance also thought that C.R.E was easy except seven who ranged from disagreeing to undecided. Such observations show that most students, (95%) consider C.R.E to be easy. This implies that there is no relationship between C.R.E being easy and students' performance in general. It is worth noting that the high performing students (98.5%) were in agreement with the above statement. This probably explains why they perform well in the subject. Similar conclusions were made by Groenewegen (n.d) and Asiachi (1985). Asiachi discovered that some students took C.R.E for granted as an easy subject and did not spend time studying it. This is reflected in this study since the data provided shows that even low

performing students consider C.R.E to be easy but are not performing well in the subject. Ndarwa (2006) expressed similar sentiments that students chose C.R.E. because they considered the subject to be easy. This contradicts Camilles' (1981) idea that one's attitudes determine the person's response towards something or somebody.

c) C.RE. builds one spiritually

Although the majority of students (93.4%), regardless of the performance abilities, agree that C.R.E builds one spiritually, there is a small number who either disagree (3.1%) or are undecided (3.5 %) and these are also distributed evenly across the varied performance abilities. This trend generally shows that C.R.E has a spiritual role to play in the life of a student. It is however notable that such positive feelings do not always translate to good performance since the findings show that even the weak students acknowledge the positive role played by C.R.E. in building them spiritually but this is not reflected by good performance in the subject. This implies that it does not always follow that if a student has a positive attitude towards the subject, one will also perform well academically in the same subject.

d) CRE moulds behaviour

Results for this variable show that majority of students (92.8%) who were high achievers agreed that C.R.E moulds their behaviour. This is almost similar to the low performing students whose response was equally high (92.4%). 88.7% of the average performers also felt that C.R.E moulds ones behaviour. This implies that the feeling that C.R.E has a role to play in moulding one's behaviour has nothing to do with the students' performance in C.R.E. This is in line with Walaba (1998) who established that C.R.E contributes to moulding the students' behaviour and that those who adopted religious teachings rarely had problems with the teachers in relation to their behaviour. Ndarwa (2006) and Musya (1996) also have similar sentiments. Ndarwa (2006) established that C.R.E helps students to develop morally and mould behaviour. It also prepares them to become responsible citizens. It is also perhaps significant to note that close to 10% of the students, irrespective of performance abilities, either disagreed or were undecided that C.R.E moulds one's behaviour. This is a pointer to the fact that sometimes what the students feel does not always correlate with performance.

e) C.R.E is dependent on Christian family background

For this variable, there is a slight difference in percentages between students who agreed (46.7%) and disagreed (47.2%) with the statement that they like C.R.E. because of their Christian background. The responses further show that 62.3% of the high performing students disagreed with the statement compared to about 40% of the average and low performing students who also disagreed. This shows that one does not have to come from a Christian family in order to perform well in C.R.E. However, it is noticeable that opinion is almost equally divided on this statement and therefore any conclusions made may not be incontestable.

f) CRE is meant for career pastors

Many students (92.5%) irrespective of their performance disagreed with the statement that C.R.E is meant for career pastors. It is worth noting that the low performing students (98.1%) disagreed with the above statement. This implies that their low performance does not necessarily imply that they have a low opinion of the C.R.E subject career wise. Such responses point to the fact that students have an open mind regarding the types of careers C.R.E graduates are likely to pursue. It is therefore likely that this in turn motivates more students to view the subject more positively and hence improve their performance.

g) It is not easy to secure a job with CRE

The responses show that a significant number of students (79.3%) disagreed with the idea that it was not easy to secure a job if a student chooses C.R.E. The highest percentage of those who agreed with the above statement were the average performing students (23.6%) compared to the high performing students (8.6%) and low performing (9.5%). There is therefore a relationship between performance in C.R.E and Job prospects. This is further supported by a chi-square test which indicated that there is a relationship between performance and the perception that it is not easy to secure a job with C.R.E. Ndarwa (2006) observed that whereas students took C.R.E. for career development, others dropped the subject because they felt that C.R.E. had no job opportunities. Sciences were given a preference in terms of employment. This study shows that students still feel that C.R.E. has job prospects.

h) C.R.E can be studied up to institutions of higher learning

It is interesting to note, from the responses, that the low performing students (64.8%) would like to study Religion at institutions of higher learning compared to the high performing students (59.4%) and the average performing students (68%). This to some extent shows that in spite of their performance, the low performing students have a favourable attitude towards C.R.E. Their willingness to pursue Religion at institutions of higher learning can be linked to the fact that they consider C.R.E. to be an easy subject but do not spare enough time studying the subject. This has contributed to their poor performance in C.R.E. It is also notable that a significant number of the high performing students feel they cannot pursue C.R.E at a higher level. This may be because of the general feeling that if C.R.E is less prestigious as a career subject compared to other subjects. This calls for a re assessment of the situation in order to add more premium to the subject. As a whole the students (63.9%) agreed with the above statement while others either disagreed (17.6%) or were undecided (18.5%).

5. Chi-Square test on Attitude and Performance in C.R.E.

In this section, the study seeks to establish whether the relationship between each of the variables with performance is significant. This is done through a chi-square test whose results are represented in table 2 below.

Table 2 Chi-Square test

Variables	Value	df	Asymp.sig.(2-sided)
C.R.E. is interesting	5.474	6	.485
C.R.E. is easy	8.135	8	.420
C.R.E. builds one spiritually	2.460	6	.873
C.R.E. moulds behaviour	3.594	8	.892
Christian family background	12.199	8	.143
C.R.E. is meant for career pastors	19.434	8	.013
It is not easy to secure a job	18.098	8	.021
Studying religion at higher level	8.811	8	.358

From the results of the test, it is established that there is a significant relationship between C.R.E. meant for career pastors and performance with the level of significance being .013 which was less than (0.05) level of significance. The null hypothesis which stated that there was no significant relationship between students' attitude and performance in C.R.E. was rejected. A significant relationship was also noted between the job prospects with C.R.E. and performance with the level of significance being .021 which was less than (0.05) level of significance. No significant relationship was found between performance and variables such as C.R.E. is interesting, C.R.E. is easy, C.R.E. builds one spiritually, C.R.E. moulds behaviour, having a Christian background and studying Religion at institutions of higher learning. These statements produced levels of significance that were greater than (0.05) level of significance. The findings are a pointer to the fact that the prospects of a subject in relation to career choices play a crucial role in determining performance. This therefore raises the need to highlight the benefits of C.R.E to students which will in turn improve the value of the subject and change the students' attitude towards the subject and hope that this will translate to better performance in the subject.

6. Conclusion

The results of the study indicate that there is a general need to improve the image of the subject in order to enhance a positive feeling among students and hence improve performance. Such a necessity arises from the fact that out of the three categories of students based on performance, it is only the high achievers who recorded a 100% percent agreement with the question of whether or not C.R.E is interesting and easy. The other two categories had a few students disagree with the statements. The major learnt lesson from such responses is the need to make the subject interesting

and easy to understand in order to spur performance. On the question of behaviour change and spiritual impact, there was no major variation between the groups with the greater majority feeling that C.R.E had an impact on their behaviour hence the need to make the subject more functional. On the role of one's Christian background, the responses for and against were almost equally divided suggesting that one's background is probably the least of the factors that influence performance. The main implication of these statistics therefore is the fact that attitude correlates with performance and that all effort should be geared towards improving learner attitudes for better performance.

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