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Educational development in Africa: The prospects and challenges of Catholic religious sisters

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Abstract

The Catholic Church has made significant efforts to lead and provide services that have led to educational development in “Africa and the global South”. The Church accomplishes this through provision of pastoral, educational, social and health services to the people. On the one hand, the key drivers of these services are Catholic Religious Sisters who through their commitment and generous service have facilitated massive development of education in Africa through the exercise of running of schools at all levels. The sisters expend their energy in this regard and keep the Church in the forefront as expert providers of educational services to the people. Against this background, however, certain questions come to mind, namely: Are the Religious Sisters themselves adequately provided with educational resources to enable them keep abreast of current demands of educational development in the 21st century? Dwelling on educational competence and performance theory, this paper addresses the issue of what more does the Church need to do to ensure that the Sisters are appropriately prepared for the services they render? What are the opinions of Religious Sisters regarding their need(s) so as to be able to bring about improved performance that will go a long way to enhance the Church’s mission in education and development in Africa and the wider world? Based on these questions, this paper wishes to explore the current practice within the Church in terms of training for the sisters. The data for this article is drawn from a doctoral thesis which explored identity construction of Catholic religious sisters in the Church in Nigeria. Appropriate recommendations are then offered in the light of the findings.

Keywords: Catholic Church; Religious Sisters; Mission-service; Education & Development

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1. Introduction

Indeed the Catholic Church has made tremendous contributions towards educational development in “Africa and the global South” which has been laudably acclaimed as facilitating personal and cooperate development of the people. In this way, the Church is a popular stakeholder in the quest for educational development (Baur, 2001; Churu and Mwaura, 2012; Mwangangi, 2012) not only in Africa but the world at large. Virtually in most parts of Africa, schools at all levels are run by the Church. One of the key actors in this practice of running schools is the religious sisters, who toil endlessly to keep the Church at the forefront as an indispensable agent of development. Arguably, a good number of the religious sisters are appropriately educated but generally there are still many who either lack the appropriate education or their educational skills are inappropriately engaged with when sending them on mission (Eze, 2013). Against this background, the Catholic Church faces some challenges based on *de facto* lack of appropriate education or misuse of skills for the sisters who are challenged to be competent in discharging their duties. In accordance with the achievement of Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), panel 1 (Wikipedia, 2013), a certain amount of pressure is levelled on the sisters who need to be effective and efficient facilitators of education as a tool for personal and social change. In order to address this problem, this paper focuses on competence and performance theory to interrogate the current educational training of the sisters as well as explores what educational development is needed by the sisters towards improving their capability in responding to the demands of mission and service, particularly in terms of school management and everyday teaching/learning. In this regard, data for this paper is drawn from a doctoral research thesis which interrogated 18 (from Nigeria) religious sisters’ identity construction based on their lived experience of religious life within their religious institutes, the Church and the wider Nigerian society (Eze, 2012). Segments of the doctoral thesis interview narrative data are used as basis for surfacing what are the current prospects and challenges of the sisters’ teaching experiences, and also what they need in order to improve their performance. Based on the results of the findings, the paper makes recommendations for educational improvement for the sisters so as to enable the Church to continue to provide effective educational services that promotes human development in Africa and the global world.

2. Research question

The key research question is: What kind of educational qualification and personal resources do African Catholic religious sisters need in order to be proficient school administrators and teachers? Based on this broad question, the prospects and challenges of educational development of the sisters are addressed in this paper.

3. The provision of quality education in Africa: the role of the Catholic Church

The Roman Catholic Church is the largest non-governmental provider of educational services in the world (Agnew, 2010) and particularly in Africa where missionary activities notably went hand in hand with

education in terms of establishment of schools, ranging from kindergarten to University (Corey-Boulet, 2013; Katunga, 2008; Nduku, 2011). As far back as 1874, Pope Leo XIII describes the Church as mistress of the world's educational enterprise. In this light, the Catholic Church from the beginning of her existence saw her evangelizing mission as having both a spiritual and educational agenda (Osei-Bonsu, 2010). In line with the promotion of the educational dimension, the Church through the ages has put a high premium on education (including health care and other pastoral services), resulting in laudable achievements which have facilitated personal and corporate human development. Since its inception in Africa, the Church at great cost and sacrifice established schools which appear alongside religious houses, cathedrals and parishes. In all the colonies, be they British, French, Portuguese and German to mention but a few, religious missions were instrumental in introducing western type of education (Osei-Bonsu, 2010). Significantly, the Catholic religious sisters across Africa nations and elsewhere have been in the forefront of providing educational services in the name of the Church.

4. Contributions of African Catholic religious sisters towards providing quality education

There has been an overwhelming affirmation acknowledging the contributions made by the religious sisters towards providing essential human services ranging from running of hospitals, schools, orphanages and pastoral care such as teaching catechism, visiting the sick etc (Fox, 2012; Mangion, 2005, 2008; Olisah, 2006; Okure, 1988, 1993; Ryan, 2012). Largely, these contributions in the area of providing educational services in Africa have greatly affected human development as education is one of the major catalysts (UN, September 2010). The schools that religious sisters run range from kindergarten, nursery to primary, secondary and tertiary institutions. In most cases, these schools belong to the Church and sometimes to the religious congregations of the Church or to other non-governmental organizations. In all the various categories of schools, they have been generous in providing the needed personnel that staff the school. Most of these schools have been outstanding in their performance such as is the case of Queen of the Holy Rosary Schools in Nigeria where the sisters since 1928 have managed and staffed 224 primary schools, 11 secondary/high schools, 13 teacher training colleges, and one commercial school (Holy Rosary Sisters-Education, 2009-2013). Similarly, the Holy Rosary Sisters had expanded their educational services to South Africa in 1940, Sierra Leone in 1948, Kenya and Cameroon in 1956, and Ethiopia in 1975. In these countries, they have opened and managed an additional 17 primary schools, 11 high schools and four teacher training colleges including six vocational schools (HRS-Education, 2009-2013). Like the Holy Rosary Sisters, many other Catholic women's religious institutes in Africa have opened and managed schools, for instance; Holy Child Sisters run schools both in Nigeria and Ghana. As well, the Missionary Sisters of Our Lady of Africa run schools in Algeria, Tunisia and Mauritania in the Maghreb; Mali, Burkina-Faso and Ghana in West Africa; Congo, Rwanda, Burundi, Kenya, Uganda, Malawi, Mozambique, and Tanzania in Eastern Africa (Pelletier, 2003). Apart from these international religious institutes of women, there are a good number of indigenous women religious institutes that run schools including the Daughters of Divine Love, Eucharist Heart Sisters and Nativity Sisters in Nigeria, and in South Africa, we have the Montebello Sisters and Daughters of St. Francis. The list is endless regarding the number of schools that religious sisters run and staff across African

nations but one of the major concerns for this paper is that some of the sisters themselves do not possess the appropriate skills needed in order to discharge their duties effectively. Although many of the sisters have expended their energy to make these schools produce brilliant results, they do so straining themselves to give the best they could. The challenge is that in some situations, the sisters are not appropriately equipped with the necessary educational skills needed. This is evident in the type of qualifications with which many of them start off their mission as religious. In addition, the type of formation (education) they receive from their religious training programme is merely doctrinal; hence it does not prepare them adequately well for educational services they render. Briefly, we would examine what the content of these training programmes that the sisters receive are.

5. Educational formation: The prospects and challenges of African religious sisters

Presently, the formation and training (including educational qualification) available for Catholic religious sisters in Africa is in line with the stipulations of the Church documents such as in the documents of Vatican II, the Code of Canon Law (1983), and the Constitutions and renewal documents of these religious congregations which are grounded in the spirituality of their founders. The constitutions of virtually all religious congregations both in Africa and throughout the Catholic Church draw heavily on the Decree on Up-to-date Renewal of Religious Life of the Second Vatican Council (1962-65). The educational training programme for any young woman who wants to become a Catholic religious sister starts with initial formation which is spread out in three phases: namely postulancy, novitiate and the scholasticate (*Renovationis causam*, 1969). For almost all religious congregations, the entry requirement for a candidate into religious life varies: generally in Africa, the minimum requirement is a high school certificate and also in the modern era, many have been admitted with post-high school qualifications such as diplomas, honours and master's degrees and in rare cases, a PhD degree. Hence candidates who enter into the religious life do not often possess the same level of education and certification although most candidates entering religious life in Africa are young women with only high school certificates. Briefly, we shall explore the type of training the candidates receive at the different stages of postulancy, novitiate and scholasticate.

6. Postulancy formation (education)

Renovationis causam describes the postulancy as a "probationary period" (1969:564). The purpose of this period is meant to provide a gradual and psychological adjustment of the candidate (postulant) in developing the human and emotional maturity needed for a truly free and responsible decision to enter the novitiate (the next stage of formation) (*Renovationis causam*, 1969). In addition, this period provides the candidate and the congregation (religious institute) an opportunity to appraise her aptitude for membership. Usually, the candidates are under the direction of a mistress (a senior sister) appointed by the leadership of the congregation. Ordinarily, this period does not extend beyond two years and in some cases can last for only

six months to a year depending on the need of the candidate. Often times, there is no serious educational activity going on during this period in terms of academics/studies.

7. Novitiate formation (education)

Religious life begins with the novitiate (Code of Canon Law, 1983; *Renovationis causam*, 1969). The key purpose of the novitiate is to initiate the novice into the essential and primary requirements of religious life and also to prepare the candidate for the vows (evangelical counsels) of chastity, poverty and obedience which she will undertake later (*Lumen Gentium*, 1964; *Renovationis causam*, 1969). The novitiate should not extend beyond two years and is exclusively set aside for the work of formation (Code of Canon Law, 1983). As a result, the novices are not to be engaged in studies which do not directly serve this formation. Consequently, the novitiate programme includes study and meditation on the scriptures, instruction on the gospel ideal of charity, the evangelical counsels, the principles of prayer, Christian asceticism and spirituality, and the relationship of apostolic action to contemplation and religious commitment (Code of Canon Law, 1983; *Renovationis causam*, 1969). It shall also include the “doctrinal formation indispensable for the development of a supernatural life of union with God, an understanding of the religious state and initiation into the liturgical life of the Church” (DDL const. Art 4). In addition, the candidates at this stage are duly instructed into the particular spirituality (charism) of their various congregations (Romano, 1989) and the cultural circumstances of mission territory, and of their country-of-origin (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965).

During this period too, the apostolic religious congregation whose members are dedicated both to contemplation (prayer) and active work (ministry/service), pay great attention to preparing the novices (potential sisters) from the very beginning for their future life (*Renovationis causam*, 1969). That means, they are taught in progressive stages to realize the importance of establishing unity between contemplation and apostolic activity. The congregation appoints a mistress (novice mistress) to teach the novices, sometimes with the help of other sisters in the community. Where the need is felt, there could be two officially designated mistresses.

On completion of the novitiate, successful candidates are permitted to take the vows which admit them as temporary members of the congregation, and from that time onwards, they start the next stage known as the scholasticate. From all indications, there is not much attention paid to academic dimension of the candidates in terms of educational development that is intellectual either during postulancy or novitiate. Much of the candidates’ academic development is scheduled to take place in the next stage of scholasticate, which will be examined briefly in order to appreciate what goes on at that stage.

8. The scholasticate

This period is dedicated to on-going formation (training) in which the sister is expected to spend her time in developing her spiritual and temporal skills that will equip her for mission (work). To this effect, Vatican II states:

The up-to-date renewal of institutes (religious congregations) depends very much on the training of the members. For this reason, non-clerical religious men and religious women should not be assigned to apostolic task immediately after the novitiate. Their religious, apostolic, doctrinal and technical training should, rather, be continued, as is deemed appropriate, in suitable establishments. They should also acquire whatever degrees they need.

(Perfectae Caritatis, 1965: 553)

Plainly this quote explains that the sisters are meant to be duly equipped through education, be it doctrinal or technical, in order to complete the process of formation before they embark on apostolic tasks (mission). Thus, the onus is on their religious congregations, particularly on the leadership, to ensure that the sisters are highly equipped with appropriate skills (expert knowledge) needed for mission. Access to expert knowledge includes education in all fields of life and should be tailored to suit the ability of each individual sister. In this view, further education in all fields of studies should be a prerequisite towards preparing the sisters for mission (work).

Unfortunately, there is a dissonance between theory and practice. In most Africa nations, particularly in the West of Africa, and specifically in Nigeria, based on *de facto* observations; many religious sisters are often sent on mission immediately after the novitiate with little attention paid to their further education. Particularly for teachers in the Nigeria context, it is demanding because the minimum basic starting requirement is National Certificate of Education (NCE). In this regard, some of the religious sisters often face the challenge of setting out for mission with little or no skill for the assignment given to them. Truly, they have the doctrinal formation which promotes spirituality but they equally need the educational to facilitate the critical ethical orientation they need for service. This is particularly demanding for sisters who entered religious life with only a high school certificate and it is not any easier for those who may have entered with diplomas or first degrees in non-educational fields yet are sent to teach in schools that their congregations run.

This kind of situation has resulted in lack of up-date knowledge which the sisters no doubt need in order to meet the wants of competence in performing the demands of teaching and learning. The perspective discourse is that 'knowledge is power' (Biko, 2004; Foucault, 1990; Popkewitz, 1991). Therefore, it is important to note that unless the African religious sisters are appropriately equipped educationally, they cannot afford to continue to produce excellent performances or be accurate in what they teach. They need adequate education themselves in order to be effective and efficient teachers who promote human development particularly in the 21st century in which issues of modernism and post-modernism will definitely make the sisters irrelevant and redundant. By all accounts, this kind of handicap will be counter-productive for individual and corporate development of the people of Africa to whom the sisters' services are essential. Hence the question is: What kind of education do the African religious sisters need for service, specifically as teachers and school administrators, who are responsible for the provision of this educational development? The theoretical framework of religious life and educational competence/performance will keep us informed about the kind of educational attainment the sisters need and the interview narrative data

sampled (based on the doctoral thesis on Catholic sisters' identity construction in the Church in Nigeria) from Catholic religious sisters, confirm the challenges the sisters face.

9. Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework for this paper draws on an interdisciplinary perspective including the theology of religious life which provides epistemological information regarding who Catholic religious sisters are. Educational competence and performance theory serves as the conceptual framework through which the sisters' need for proficiency is examined.

9.1. Theology of religious life

The consecrated life of the Catholic Church is lived by men and women who feel called by the Spirit to devote their entire life totally to God and to the service of others (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965). In doing so, the sisters live in community and are bonded to God through the evangelical counsels (vows) of consecrated celibacy (chastity), poverty and obedience (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965). The primary identity of every religious is modelled on the example of Christ as presented in the Gospels. In this way, the religious replicate the life of Christ in terms of developing an intimate relationship with God whereby prayer and service are integral parts of their personal and religious identity (CICLSAL, 2007, 2008). As a consequence, the essence of religious life which the sisters live is focused on identity of prayer and service, in which they are positioned as living lives of closer union with God (*Ecclesiae sanctae*, 1966; *Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965; *Lumen Gentium*, 1964). Consequently, service is an integral aspect of identity of the religious which should be accompanied by a twist of professional competence (CICLSAL, 2002; *Vita Consecrata*, 1996).

9.2. Educational competence and performance theory

As there are multiple meanings to competence and performance theory, this paper dwells on the meaning and significance of competence and performance concept from the perspective of Noam Chomsky which Tudor (2013) describes as having three characteristics including the judicial perspective, the professional development perspective, and also the psycho-socio-pedagogical perspective. Accordingly, the judicial perspective of competence rates the individual as responsible for his/her professional development in which case "an individual or organizations has the right to make decisions in certain areas and at certain levels of the organization's configuration/structure" (Tudor, 2013, p 102). Essentially, it is important to note that the judicial perspective could be linked to self-efficacy (feeling of personal competence), which Bandura (1994) describes as the belief in one's ability to succeed in a particular task. This belief in one's skill stems from many factors including mastery experiences, social modelling and persuasion, and psychological response. On this basis, the professional perspective describes competence as belonging to the knowledge and ability the individual needs to fulfil assignments/work commitments. In this regard, competence is seen on the same par as qualifications. As a result, religious sisters need to possess substantial technical skills required in

whatever area of service they are assigned to provide. They are required to be well informed and critical so as to be accurate in what they teach. Achebe (2009) posits that education is an indispensable element for professionalism. To this effect, Child (2013) describes teachers without professional skills as clueless and she maintains that such teachers are not able to teach their pupil how to think, solve problems or read independently. From the psycho-socio-pedagogical viewpoint, competence can be identified with habits, knowledge, skills, abilities and performance. In all, the emphasis is that competence could be viewed as an individual responsibility or qualifications or through psycho-socio-pedagogical terms where concepts such as habits, knowledge, skills, abilities and performance underlines and confirms the range of meaning given to competence (Tudor, 2013). Subsequently, this paper apprehends competence as ability/range of abilities that are demonstrated through performance, and this performance being dependant on contextual factors (be it subjective or objective). Distinctively, competence as addressed by this paper is linked to the practical side of teaching and learning which targets the social and professional performance aimed at bringing about human development through education. In this view, one of the major concerns is focused on assessing how Catholic religious sisters' professional competences afford them the opportunity of impacting positively on other people's life. In a nut shell, the issue is: are the sisters who lead others by providing educational services well equipped for the services they render.

10. Methodology

This paper draws from a doctoral thesis based on a qualitative empirical research study which aimed at examining Nigerian Catholic religious sisters' identity construction based on their in-depth wealth of lived experiences of religious life (Riessman, 2008; Ulin et al., 2002). The sampling was drawn from two religious congregations: Daughters of Divine Love (DDL) and Society of the Holy Child Jesus (SHCJ). The data was collected across 18 sisters (including temporary professed, final professed and leaders) through an in-depth, open-ended (semi-structured) narrative interview (Riessman, 2008; Silverman, 2005).

11. Data analysis

The 18 participants' interview narratives constituted the data set used for this paper. The analysis method used was thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006) with the aim of capturing what the sisters presented as prospects and challenges of their educational qualifications, and how these impacts on their performance as teachers.

Reflexivity: The researcher is a religious sister, a researcher with both an insider's and outsider's voice (Pillow, 2003). This has both merit and demerit. From the merit point of view, it allowed for easy access with the gatekeepers and also facilitated the position of co-construction as she could easily identify with some of the issues the participants presented (Riessman, 2008). On the demerit side, the subjective positioning could influence the data collected but this was addressed by keeping a research journal to record issues

arising from the researcher's subjective point of view (Heron, 2005). These issues were discussed the study's supervisors to eliminate any biases.

12. Findings and discussion

For the purpose of this paper, four themes regarding prospects and challenges of educational qualification for sisters are used to examine their position of competence. The themes are as follows: Lack of educational qualification skills, teachers without skills, misuse of skills and qualified teachers. Three of the themes reflect the challenges the sisters encounter while carrying out their ministry as teachers and based on these, recommendations are made.

13. Lack of educational qualification skills

A good number of the participants in the interview narrative identified lack of appropriate educational qualification skills as one of the basic difficulties the religious sisters encounter in religious life. They indicated that this difficulty impacts on the level of performance they exhibit while discharging their services, particularly in the area of teaching of which many of the sisters engage in. In this light, one participant says:

...unfortunately some religious are not educated-you see they are not well grounded, particularly women religious, some just entered religious life with high school certificate and they (leaders/superiors) profess them and afterwards... they send these people to go ... and work, including teaching in schools. What educations have you (leaders/superiors) given the person? - Nothing! So the person will teach from her levels or say what she knows ... for me I will encourage the religious women ... the superiors to look into the life of their sisters and see how they can up-grade everybody.

This participant describes the lack of appropriate educational skills that the religious sisters encounter. She deliberates on the fact that a lot of them enter religious life with only a high school certificate and in most cases, they are not given the opportunity to further their education but rather they are sent to work with this little acquired skill which is challenging. In this way, she argues that the sisters do lack the professional competence needed for the services they provide (CICLSAL, 2002; Tudor, 2013). In other words, she posits that some religious sisters lack the personal mastery skills which are requisite of competence (Bandura, 1994). To improve on this lack of professional qualification, she suggests that superiors (leaders) create more opportunities for further education for the sisters. This point to the fact that education is an indispensable tool needed to improve performance (Achebe, 2009). Another participant still furthers this argument of lack of appropriate educational skills by comparing the kind of education given to religious sisters with that of the priests. In this regard, she argues that the priests get far more educational training which equips them for service in comparison to the religious sisters. Here she says:

...if you look at the priest during their training they are well exposed-they are given adequate training. They (Church) expose them to a lot of things-they are appropriately trained for the mission ahead of them...they get degrees in Philosophy, Theology and sometimes many of them further their education beyond to different fields of education be it in Arts, Humanities, or Sciences and all these help them ... but as for religious sisters, during our training, we are just enclosed-we are not exposed, most of our training is based on doctrinal teachings of the Church and the congregation and even after training, there are not much opportunity given to us to further our education... I must say that this kind of situation impacts on the life of many religious sisters; in one way or the other, we fail to be effective as we ought to be. If you ask me I would say that we need to be given more opportunity in order to meet up with the demands of mission and also be able to balance our... spirituality; to make sure that you are a balanced person who has both spiritual life and knowledgeable about secular world, thus we can make positive impact on others...

This participant accounts for the need of more educational training for the religious sisters as a way of equipping them for the services they render to humanity of which include being effective and efficient teachers. Directly or indirectly, her argument lays emphasis on the need to make practical the scholastic formation programme which ought to enable sisters to engage in secular education and intellectual development as a way of promoting their professional competence and performance (*Perfectae Caritatis*, 1965). One participant clearly articulates how lack of appropriate educational skills has impacted on the quality of services she renders as she says:

I am a teacher but I only have WASEC (West African School Examination Certificate) and I feel much challenged standing in front of those children teaching them. You see, I would always say that if I had known ... that at least if I have had the opportunity ... I would have at least finished everything I want to study, at least hold an NCE (National Certificate of Education) or basic degree-first degree before coming into religious life because there are a lot of challenges-okay. You see the children I teach are smart, take for instance they have more computer science knowledge than I do, so I keep struggling to catch up with them...

For this participant, it is a struggle to teach children who have far greater educational skills than their teacher; such skills as computer knowledge etc. In this regard, she sees herself as inexperienced (Child, 2013) and lacking the expert knowledge needed for brilliant performance (Bandura, 1994). Thus, for her as a teacher meeting the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), panel 1 (Wikipedia, 2013) of impacting significantly on her students is far-fetched. She regrets that she did not have the opportunity to obtain the basic starting teaching qualification (NCE) in Nigeria before entering religious life and it could be argued that obtaining a higher educational degree would facilitate her teaching skills and effectiveness. Closely related are those instances whereby some of the participants in the interview narrative maintained that they are teachers without skill which is reflected in the next section.

14. Teachers without skills

There are some participants who describe themselves as teachers without skills. In this regard, these participants maintained that they teach with little or no expert knowledge based on the fact that they are not trained teachers. They emphasize that they teach based on whatever knowledge they have gained from life and from religious formation which may not have qualified them as educational teachers. In this view, one participant says:

My first time of teaching in secondary school was tough. I had not taught before and neither was I a trained teacher but I was asked to take over from a sister who was going on studies. I managed but I tell you it was really difficult for me although the sisters in the community were supportive...

In this text, the participant pointed out that she was not a trained teacher, thus lacks the professional competence to be a teacher (Tudor, 2013). Although her starting point as a teacher was in secondary school (high school) she presents her experiences as “tough” whereby she used the word “managed” to depict her experiences within that teaching space. Another participant describes how she was being asked to teach Mathematics with no potential or ability. Here she says:

I think it was four days to my profession- the provincial (superior) called me and said, “Z I think there is a ... slight change; however don't talk about this till it is made official...she said to me, “I think you are very good in mathematics”. I said sister, “mathem – what? hm don't even go there I don't know 1+1”, but she said, “yeah because they were having a problem in this...community- they need a mathematics teacher”. I said, “Sister, don't even go there-English, yeah I can manage but Mathematics I can't cope”. She said, “no ... you could read that up and all of that ...” Anyway I didn't want to argue too much over the phone I said, “fine ... whatever it is; if you people think I could do it, then I will try...”

This participant describes how she took the risk of teaching Mathematics even when she has no expert knowledge of the subject. In her case, both professional and psycho-socio-pedagogical perspectives of competence are challenged (CICCSAL, 2002; Tudor, 2013; *Vita Consecrata*, 1996). Clearly, her capability is not considered; she has expressed that she has no qualifications or possible personal aptitude for mathematics but it was assumed that she could teach mathematics for the mere fact of being a religious sister. This is a bit ridiculous to ask someone to carry out a task that is obviously overwhelming and the question is: How relevant is she as a mathematics teacher? From all indications, her ability and interest is disrespected which is a typical example of misuse or abuse of educational teaching skills which is discussed next.

15. Misuse of educational teaching skills

Some of the participants reported that their educational teaching skills are not taken into consideration in assigning them teaching subjects. They expressed that they are given any subject to teach regardless of

whatever qualifications they have. For instance, this participant describes how a principal (sister superior) mandated her to teach Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in place of Music which she studied:

...both the community (religious) and the school work together... I was sent there to teach music ...and also to be an Assistant- the Vice Principal Admin= But when I came there ... it was a different thing all together I met. ...in the first place she (sister principal) refused that I should teach music. She said bluntly that she hates music ... and she wouldn't want her students to ... study music. ...in the first term I taught only the music ... So just after the very first term she cancelled music ... she said, she is no longer interested in music. She said she is ... not registering music as an examination subject for West Africa Examination Council (WAEC). She said ...the money for registering music is too much ... she said that I should teach CRS (Christian Religious studies) instead... I took it even though it is not my course ... that was the first time I'm teaching the course; a subject that I did not study...

This participant accounts for how her proficiency in music was made redundant and such a situation could impact on her maximum performance in relationship to aptitude and expertise knowledge (Bandura, 1994; Tudor, 2013). She was forced to teach a subject which probably was not within the tenet of her technical know-how and this is clearly expressed in her own words: "that was the first time I'm teaching ... a subject that I did not study..." The issue is, what kind of relevance does such labour serve in the field of teaching and learning? How much do the students and the teacher gain from such engagement? Above all, what will be the advantages or disadvantages of frustrating the teacher's competence and output? These concerns should be reviewed in line with the dictum that says 'knowledge is power' (Biko, 1946-77; Foucault, 1990; Popkewitz, 1991). How best could knowledge be gained through teaching and learning activity to boost the level of development in Africa? These are some of the issues that challenge the religious sisters' position as teachers who expend their energy to impart knowledge that is relevant for self-development and nation building particularly in Africa where the need is felt much. In this regard, the concern is what more could the Church do in order to improve its performance in view of providing quality education through provision of educational services, particularly for the religious sisters as tools for the services they render.

16. Qualified teachers

There are some participants who maintained that they are qualified teachers and they talk about how they have use their teaching space to improve the life of the students they encounter. In this regard, they often talk about their mastery of the subjects they teach as well as using their acquired doctrinal knowledge to help others find meaning in life. For instance this participant says:

I was in the school at the juniorate community--so it was good being with the students. I taught them physics which I enjoyed doing. I still miss-I still miss them because when you are with them sometimes it is not only... teaching them Physics, it is not only just at that Physics time that you

get to discuss with them. You get to discuss their life ... what-what is their future going to be like and what they want to make out of their lives ... and it was good.

This participant presents herself as someone who enjoyed teaching physics and the underlying reason could be because she is knowledgeable (Bandura, 1994; Tudor, 2013). She knows the subject well enough; hence she is able not only to impart knowledge but also enjoys what she is doing. In addition, she integrates doctrinal knowledge as part of her teaching experience with the student (CICLSAL, 2007; *Renovationis causam*, 1969). In this way, she is able to engage students with discussions regarding their future plans and it is anticipated that such discussions yielded fruitful results to student's future development (MDG, Panel 1).

Having looked at what the participants presented as their possible prospects and challenges of educational qualifications as teachers who impact meaningful on people's life we then turn to discuss the recommendations and whose responsibility it is to ensure that these recommendations are put in place.

17. Recommendation

Going by the above submission, it is suitable to surface some proposal towards improving the educational proficiency and self-efficacy skills of the religious sisters which according to both their educational formation programme and narrative interviews is challenged. In making these recommendations, it is pertinent to point out that besides Church leadership, religious superiors (women religious leaders) within the various religious congregations should take the lead and responsibility to ensure that educational improvement strategies for their sisters are put into place.

Starting from the training programme of the religious sisters, it is anticipated that meaningful effort is made towards ensuring that the scholastic training programme be used accordingly to engage sisters to further educational development. Since this period is mapped out by the Church as space to further train religious before engaging them in the active mission (service) of serving humanity (be it in discharging pastoral, educational or health services). In this wise, this paper advocates that the leaderships of religious life make it mandatory for every religious sister to obtain a higher qualification other than the one she entered religious life with before assigning her to active service in the Church and to the people, particularly for sisters who came into religious life with only a high school certificate. In as much as this might be a daunting task given the extensive demand of having more hands on deck, authority figures must insist on further education for their sisters which goes a long way to enhance their performances. This further education should take into consideration sisters' aptitude and interest in the same way attention is paid to the demands of various apostolates (work) that need to be done. To ensure that this is achieved, it is important that area or zonal leadership of women religious within the different regions of Africa establish a statutory body to monitor and modulate sisters' teaching qualifications. A similar body was initiated by US women religious superior in the 50s and it has gone a long way to ensure that high quality skill is maintained among them, particularly for teachers (Mulderry, 2006). In this way, this body could make recommendations to religious congregational leaders regarding the need for further certification of their members. It is

anticipated that such action will strengthen the sisters' judiciary, professional and psycho-socio-pedagogical perspective of competence (CICLSAL, 2002; Bandura, 1994; Tudor, 2013; Vita Consecrata, 1996).

Secondly, effort should be made by leaders and policy makers of religious life to see that sisters are assigned to mission (work) in consideration to what they are capable of doing. There should be due consideration given to what each sister has competence to do which should involve equipping them with the competence to do what they are assigned to do (Bandura, 1994).

Thirdly, there should be constant in-training programme and refreshers' courses to facilitate sisters who may not have the opportunity to access full training programmes to update and polish their skills. This could be done through seminars and workshops but where the need is felt greatly, effort must be made to release a sister to go for full training programme.

Fourthly, every religious sister should also take personal responsibility in seeing that she is adequately equipped for service. In this way, the sister is fulfilling her judiciary demand of competence (Bandura, 1994; Tudor, 2013). Each sister is in a position to know what she needs as she encounters the daily challenges of mission; therefore she is in the position to dialogue with superiors regarding her personal needs in terms of competence for service. No doubt this entails that each sister take up her self-efficacy as her personal responsibility wherein she does whatever is within her power to boost her personal skills. In this way competence will emerge as result of mastery skill promoting efficiency of performance.

Fifthly, community collaboration is needed by the sisters in terms of social support (Bandura, 1994). This community support ought to emerge out of cordial and caring relationship within the religious community life facilitating the sisters' social dimension of affirmation. When these recommendations are paid attention to, the sisters will run with ardor at achieving the educational goals of development in Africa and also in many other fields of life that they serve.

18. Conclusion

Although the Catholic Church has been in the forefront of providing educational services that have brought about immeasurable human development within Africa, the Church on the other hand still faces the challenge of promoting the educational advancement for religious sisters. The religious sisters who have been one of the key drivers of the Church's educational projects obviously need to up-date their professional skills in order to remain relevant school administrators and teachers who use education as a tool for development. The gap between theory and practice with regards to the religious sisters' training programmes need to be bridged and efforts be made by women religious leaders to ensure that every member of their institute is appropriately equipped with the educational skills she needs for service. It is only in taking such action would the sisters in the name of the Church reassess themselves as valuable agents of educational services. Now is the time when religious sisters in Africa cannot afford to relegate their own personal and corporate competence as teachers to the background otherwise they face the risk of being superfluous.

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