

# EXISTENTIAL EDUCATION: A PEDAGOGICAL STRATEGY IN TEACHING RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

ROCHESTER WISDOM TSIGBESON

Catholic University of Ghana Faculty of Education  
Fiapre-Sunyani, Ghana

---

**Abstract:** This study investigated how teachers teach Religious Education (RE) at Basic Schools within the context of existential approach. The study was a descriptive sample with its target population being Religious and Moral Education (RME) teachers, in Duayaw Nkwanta of Tano North Municipal. A sample size of seventy RME teachers was chosen, from both Primary and Junior High Schools, who responded to a five-point Likert scale questionnaire. The data collected from the various instruments (questionnaire and observation) were treated statistically using both descriptive and inferential statistics appropriate for each research question. The outcome of the study confirmed existential approach is intensified through the process of pedagogical strategy in teaching RME, and this to some extent is bridging the gap between the learners' experiences, and religious and moral experiences. The study recommended a periodic in-service training for the teachers, and the teachers' extensive engagement of their learners for role play, simulation, group work, brainstorming, questioning, and discussion.

**Keywords:** Teachers; Pedagogical Strategy; Life Themes Pedagogy; Confessional Religious Education; Existential (Secular) Education; Religion; Religious Education (RE); Religious and Moral Education (RME).

---

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Largely, religion has been perceived as a powerful tool for fanaticism due to Karl Marx's famous biting aphorism about religion being 'the opium of the people', as he wrote: "Religion is the sigh of the oppressed creature, the feeling of a heartless world, and the soul of soulless circumstances" in his work, entitled *A contribution to the Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* (1844).

It's in the light of above that in the classroom practice of RE theorists, philosophers, psychologists, educationists and some theologians such as Tillich (systematic theology; 3 vols., 1951), Goldman (readiness for religion, 1965), Smart (secular education and the logic of religion, 1968), Grimmit (pedagogies of religious education, 2000), Teece (Religion as human transformation, 2009), Asare-Danso (values clarification, 2010) stressed on neutrality and secularity to teaching of this subject matter RE. For instance, Flensner (2015) asserted that in the classroom practice of Religious Education, both students and teachers meet and dwell on questions of pluralism, religions and worldviews, of prejudice and tolerance, and of how they themselves and other people perceive the world.

Many approaches were developed to redefine and reconceptualize the studying, teaching and learning of religions and religious education. Some of these approaches that attempted to lay emphases on didactical techniques of teaching religious education to distinctively reflect a religious character but not purely a confessional disposition included existential approach (Tillich, 1969); non-confessional approach (Goldman, 1965); neo-confessional approach (Cox, 1966); phenomenological approach (Smart, 1968); non-dogmatic approach or integrative RE (Alberts, 2007).

In Ghana, RE exists as a compulsory non-confessional school subject, christened RME, at the basic level of education and Christian Religious Education (CRS) at Second Cycle Institution. Albeit, the current RME curriculum attempts to address the former confessional approach by introducing many new approaches particularly existential approach and experiential

learning to inculcate moral values in the learners, including both religious and non-religious concepts; in order to be plural, to achieve the expected value-oriented and multi-faith objectives through its learners; yet, the plural approach to the teaching of the RME seems to be minimal due to the age, religious proclivity, and many other factors affecting the teachers. Therefore, this paper primarily is geared to focus on existential approach of phenomenological study and experiential learning of the learners to explore how teachers of RME didactically conceptualize the teaching of RME at the Basic Schools, to reflect a plural and secular context.

### Statement of the problem

Several educational reforms Ghana had had in the past were also geared making religious education more open, secular, plural and multi-faith subject thereby including both religious and non-religious concepts at the basic level of education to achieve experiential learning. Diverse models and approaches were introduced to make this concept viable but still far from be realised. These failures subsequently caused learners to lose interest in this world, and genuine trust of the society (government) and confidence in themselves since their teachers were not able to use life themes pedagogy to relate experiential issues of life concerning them. These could be attributed to: the age of the teachers (as some belonged to the old tradition and still continued to do things their ways without recourse to fullness of the application of the syllabus); religious affiliation (the individual's religious background influenced what each of them taught and thus intensified as faith, belief, interest, and way of life); non-professionalism (lack of training in teacher education, or nonexistence of periodical in-service training, denied these affected teachers the ability to use appropriate instructional methods, multi-media concepts, prerequisite instructional materials, fitting teaching techniques and their related strategies, and teaching maxims to relate and achieve the set objective lessons); and misapplication (lack of understanding of the various models of RME and pedagogical approaches to teaching of RME).

### Research Questions

The following research questions were posed to guide the study:

1. Is RME being taught in a manner to ensure understanding that fosters the ability of the learners' independent thought?
2. Do teachers relate the teaching of RME to the existential experiences of their learners?
3. What extent do teachers use instructional methods that conform to the life themes pedagogy in their teaching of RME?
4. Does RME'S syllabus contain themes necessary for a person's understanding of God and environment, and self and human life?

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

### a. *Existentialism as a Philosophical Study*

Existentialism began formerly as a school of thought. It became a philosophical movement or tendency and then influenced many diverse writers as far back as the first half of the nineteenth century and in the early part of the twentieth century. It is a philosophy developed from the teachings of Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), a Danish philosopher and Protestant theologian, who is generally considered as the founder of the concept of existentialism.

Existentialism as a distinct philosophical and literary movement accentuates, by giving credence to, individual existence, freedom, responsibility, and subjective choice of the being.

### b. *The Concept of the Being – 'To Be'*

Existentialism, a philosophical concept, comes from the word *existence*, which according to Essuman (1989) means *to be*, *to be there* or *to live*. The concept of existence or 'to exist' which is philosophically translated as 'to be', or 'to be there', or 'to live' is the ability to discover whom you are; what you are made of; what you want to be; what you can do and what you cannot do (Tsigbeson, 2006).

Therefore, to exist is to be aware of who one is, or how one perceives oneself in the world. This is about the *Self* which deals with a person's psychological nature and behaviour or the *being* which is simply 'the fact of existing'. This means that a person should not remain static but rather to emerge, to develop, to evolve, to become. For the encounter to be effective, it implies the being must actualise him/herself, fulfil his/her inner capabilities through dialogue with other people and through participation in worldly events. But the being has to do with his subjective world.

**c. The definition of the Concept Existentialism**

Now, what is existentialism? Can it be defined in a concrete term? Precisely, there is no unilateral definition of existentialism like most challenging terms – this is as a result of the diversity of positions associated with it, because:

- i. Existentialism is a school of thought that influences areas of study like theology, psychiatry, psychology, philosophy, education enterprise, psychotherapy and counselling,
- ii. Owing to myriad of its integral Life Themes like being, freedom, responsibility, time, choice, anonymity, death, anxiety, fate, dread, moral individualism, commitment, and many such central themes on existence, sub-defining and lending credence to existentialism,
- iii. Substantial differences among professional conceptual models, and
- iv. Varied operational definitions based on their perceived mode of operations.

For example, Victor Frankl founded existential therapy called logotherapy which basically centres on *meaning*, thus meaning of life. According to him logo means ‘meaning’. Because he believes that all human striving is rooted in the search for meaning in life (Essuman, 1989). Such an existentialist would base his working definition of existentialism on *meaning of life*.

However, for existentialism to be understood and possibly to be well-cut in definition then we need;

- to understand the thoughts of Jean Paul Sartre (1905-1980) who became a leading modern existentialist philosopher in the 1940s and
- the major four themes of existentialism, which are human existence, individual freedom, subjectivity in making choices and individual responsibility.

Existentialism assumes that people are entirely free and thus responsible for what they make of themselves because the world is chaotic and has little or no meaning. Freedom is inherent in human and inalienable right of human beings. Men are born to exist, to be free, and to make a free choice. Subjectivity may be a problem in existential thinking but it is one of the crucial guiding principles of existentialism for latitude to be initiated. Existentialists believe there must be freedom from normal restraints in conduct for the individuals to have considerable latitude to be as he/she thinks, wants. According to Kierkegaard, it is imperative for the individual, by his/her own convictions, to decide on both questions of morality and truth. Therefore, subjectivity allows a person to try thinking about facts and not to be influenced by other’s feelings or opinions. It is a judgment to be based on individual personal impressions and feelings and opinions rather than external facts. To be or to be there or to live, there’s always an element of subjectivity in decision-making. This is what existentialists seek to find in a person.

With freedom comes responsibility. The freedom to make a choice of anything goes with commitment and responsibility as attached stringent conditionality. Since everybody is free to do as he/she wants; the existentialists basically warned that these individuals must accept the likely associated risk factors and responsibility of following their commitment wherever it leads them to.

From above extrapolation any likely unilateral definition must be bordered on these aforementioned four major themes, of which the working operational definition for this paper is stated: ‘Existentialism is a philosophy to be; as a being, who should be entirely free to exist within time and space, subjectivity in making choices and must accept the risk and responsibility for what he makes of himself’.

**d. Existentialism as a Theological Study**

Existentialists believe every other person has that personal proclivity to be above nature and everything else in search of the truth, God. Paul Tillich perceived existentialism as an approach to actual crises in life (Essuman, 1989). In his numerous books, he developed his ideas regarding the religious basis of life, by redefining the traditional concept of God, that existence is rooted in God as the ground of all being (Tillich, 2000).

Rudolf Karl Bultmann (1884-1976), a Lutheran theologian who was greatly influenced by the writings of the existentialist philosopher Martin Heidegger wrote that the gospels must undergo demythologization (Cross, 2005). According to him, there must be an approach to restatement of the gospel message or reinterpretation of those mythical elements in the New

Testament existentially. He was of the view that our society is not static but a dynamic one and for the Bible to meet the needs of our contemporary era those traditional stories lacking factual basis or historical validity are not necessary.

Existential theologians do not make any attempt to present different gospel or religion. Their argument is that there must be latitude for personal decision making in the absence of conclusive evidence. The individuals' religious beliefs are not existentialists concern in each religion but their grave concern is basically an interest in an individual religious experience as a lifestyle to be led. This is because by existential thoughts human choice is subjective since the individuals must finally make their own choices without recourse to external standards such as laws, ethical principles, or traditions that could restrict them.

#### **e. *The Concept of Existential Education***

##### **i. *The Concept of Existentialism as an Education Enterprise***

Broadly phenomenology can be seen as a subdivision of dimensional approach (Smart, 1971) and existential approach (Tillich, 1969; Grimmitt, 1973). Phenomenology is a philosophical doctrine proposed by Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) based on the study of human feelings, thoughts, and experiences in which considerations of objective reality are not taken into account.

According to existential thoughts the human being lives in three types of worlds (Essuman, 1989). These worlds which are the *umwelt* (the physical world with objects and animals – the world without self-awareness), the *mitwelt* (the world of interpersonal relationship – the world of social interaction between humans) and the *eigenwelt* (the personal world of the individual – the distinctive self of the person) are conceptualised and partly based on the phenomenological assumption that the individual and the world are not separated from each other. This is why Essuman (1989) argued that, the belief in logical positivism that the truth is absolute and can be discovered explicitly by every individual does not hold in phenomenological thought. This is the claim in Cartesian thought but not in phenomenology. However, existentialism moves further from phenomenological thinking by anchoring its form on Binswanger's idea of 'dasein analysis' which is the 'being who is there'. This is what makes existential thinking not to rest only on experience, awareness, perceptions and consciousness but the total life style, meaning of life and how one relates to life.

These three worlds of the individual have direct telling on existential education. Existential education leads to the discovery of the *umwelt* of the person. Every person is born into an environment as the first agency of socialisation (Tsigbeson, 2006). It is within this organisation that all existence takes place (Essuman, 1989). In this world, as Buber has emphasised, the individuals' relationship with objects and animals is impersonal which is 'I-It relationship'.

*Mitwelt* affords the social environment for the instructors to encounter and communicate with the learners. The respect of other people's dignity, importance, tolerance and existence is the forefront of the *mitwelt*. No one is repository of knowledge or can do away with others. According to John Locke every child was a *tabula rasa* who was rightly taught with the fundamentals before being affected by his/her own experience. A being needs others for meaningful, rich existence. We progress well with life if proper integration is encouraged.

Existential education thrives especially on *eigenwelt* of the individuals. This is central to existential thoughts. The instructors create ambience of environmental excitement, non-threatening social atmosphere for teaching and learning to thrive. It enables the learners to be aware of other people's existence. The instructor assists the learner to discover his being and what he the learner is capable of doing and the processes to adopt to be what to be in the future. This is where the individual's strength, weakness, world view, and past and current lifestyle are fully unearthed, discussed for helping the learner for individual progress to be encouraged.

Both the behaviourists and Freudian psychoanalysts thinking are at variance with the position of existentialists. The behaviourists believe it's the environment which determines how human beings behave and Freudian psychoanalysts also state that it's our inner unconscious forces which determine our personality. These deterministic ways of thinking is quite different from that of the existentialists' thoughts. The existentialists emphasise that it's not the environment or inner unconscious forces that determine what a being or his existence would be; rather, this is consciously determined by the person (Essuman, 1989). Existential education is an attempt by any teacher whether he be confessional or non-confessional, or professional or non-professional, to teach this subject matter by laying emphases on human existence, individual freedom, subjectivity of making choices and individual responsibility.

## ii. Pedagogy of Education

The etymology of the word Pedagogy is derived from a single Greek word *paidagogo*. In a literal sense, this means *to lead the child*. Therefore, Pedagogy simply means a teacher leading his learners. Generally, the word Pedagogy has come to be associated with teaching and learning in a classroom setting. It deals with procedures, techniques or strategies as methodology for teaching and learning. It's a style of instruction.

According to Grimmit, Pedagogy is the science and art of teaching (as cited in Asare-Danso, 2010). These are the lay down principles (or content) and methods of instruction for the teacher to follow in order to impart knowledge, attitude, aptitude and skill to a learner.

*Pedagogical strategy* is the sequencing or ordering of teaching techniques a teacher selects to teach a lesson to achieve the objectives of the lesson. It simply means using two or more techniques of teaching during a lesson to achieve the stated objectives of the lesson. The activity a teacher asks his learners to perform in the classroom to help to achieve the method it's what is referred to as the *technique of teaching*. Examples of teaching techniques are lecture method, debate, teacher-led demonstration, panel discussion, role-play technique. In line with existentialist thought, for teaching to be effective, both the teacher and the learner must be involved. But with the learners playing major roles in the class to make teaching and learning practical and meaningful, through aiding techniques of teaching: as the teacher only facilitates the processes and equally creating a conducive atmosphere for co-operation and tolerance; and therefore developing the learners' confidence and their high level of participation; and promoting critical thinking, unearthing and developing their potentials and values; and sustaining their enthusiasm and motivation towards choices made and to be led throughout life; and accepting or enhancing divergent opinions and views; and nurturing their individuals ideas, interests and abilities. In line with existentialist curriculum, learners are provided with array of alternatives from which to choose. The existentialists hold the view that the learner is more important than content to teach.

## iii. The Three-Pedagogy of Existential Religious Education

In an educational debate Grimmit (1987) used three prepositional words to delineate the teaching and learning of religion. These are teaching and learning *in* religion, *about* religion and *from* religion. Confessional (denominational) teaching is considered purely as teaching in religion, while non-confessional teaching is perceived as Teaching about religion. Teaching in religion is aimed to equip the learner with his/her own religious and moral development. On the other hand, teaching about religion is purely based on the academic discipline of religious studies; whereby beliefs and religious expression in different religions are treated as one among many forms of human activity. Lastly, learning from religions, according to (Berglund, 2009; Grimmit, 1987; Teece, 2010) highlights the potential for personal development through RE touching upon life issues of an existential character and provides opportunities for learners to reflect on their own views in relation to the various religions' answers to these questions (as cited in Flensner, 2015). Ghana's curriculum for RME was purposely designed to be a subject for teaching and learning about religions as well as teaching and learning from religions, but certainly not in religions. This is what made it to have a sound non-confessional foundation, to be based only on academic exercise of Religious Studies.

In line with existentialists, in a classroom setting, the students should be considered more important than the contents to be taught. The teacher's role is to primarily assist students to locate their own interest or chart their own course by directing them to various ways and opportunities, as well as creating an enabling environment for them to decide on their own without restriction. By this, pedagogy strategy is to ensure that biblical teachings, religious messages (Islamic teachings, Buddhist principles, Hindus ideas, etc.,) and other relevant stories and socio-cultural beliefs, practices and values, and other life themes pedagogy would be related to human or existential experiences of the learners.

## 3. METHODOLOGY

### Research Design

The research is a philosophical study in the field of education, which was a descriptive sample. According to Guba (1983), descriptive sample survey is a research method whereby phenomena under study are looked into at a particular moment and precisely described. Basically, the study employed the qualitative research method with questionnaire administration, and observation. These were used to collect data on the existential education or approach as a pedagogical strategy of teaching and learning RME by teachers in ten (10) selected public, mission and private schools, both Primary and Junior High Schools, in the Duayaw Nkwanta of Tano North Municipal.

### Population

Kuranchie (2014) refers to population as the target group that the researcher is interested in obtaining information from to draw conclusions. In this context, the target population for the study was both professional and non-professional teachers of the Government assisted Public, Mission and Private Schools in the Duayaw Nkwanta. It has 12 Basic schools out of which 10 were selected for this study. The accessible population was seventy teachers out of ninety-one RME teachers, out of the ten Primary and Junior High Schools. These teachers were purposively chosen because they were expected to be making students' real life experiences the basis for teaching and learning of RME.

### Sample and Sampling Procedure

A sample size of seventy (70) respondents was chosen. It was composed of forty-five (45) teachers (or 75% of teachers) out of the total population of 60 teachers from Primary Schools and twenty-five (25) teachers (or 81% of teachers) out of the total population of 31 teachers from Junior High Schools which were  $(\frac{45}{60} \times 100) = 75\%$  and  $(\frac{25}{31} \times 100) = 81\%$  respectively of the individual total population (60 and 31) of 91 RME teachers. The sample was drawn from ten (10) out of twelve (12) Primary and Junior High Schools. However, probability sampling techniques was adopted to compose respondents from the 9 Basic Levels: Basic One (BS or Class 1), Basic Two (Class 2), Basic Three (Class 3), Basic Four (Class 4), Basic Five (Class 5), Basic Six (Class 6), Basic Seven (BS 7 or JHS 1), Basic Eight (JHS 2), and Basic Nine (JHS 3). In choosing the sample size; simple random technique, stratified random sampling, and purposive sampling procedure were employed.

Simple random technique was used to select the required number of schools which are ten out of twelve. This sampling method gives all the schools an equal chance of being selected. The stratified random sampling was used to group the target schools into levels and respondents into male and female (Kuranchie, 2014). This technique was employed since the target population was not homogenous and there was the need to represent all sub-groups in the sample. Purposive sampling was then used to select RME teachers if they were two in a class or more than three in a case of JHS or six in a case of a Primary School. This method was adopted also in order to select a special teacher such as RME teacher to deliberately participate in the study on the basis of his/her knowledge on the issues under investigation.

### Research Instrument

The instruments used for the study were both structured questionnaire and participant observation. These were used to collect the primary data from the respondents in order to undertake this study successfully. A 32-item questionnaire was used to elicit information from respondents which were both open-ended and closed-ended questions. These items were divided into five broad sections, and to a large extent based on five point Likert scale items except section A, socio-demographic background checks of the respondents. Visits to these schools, sitting in classrooms and observation techniques were used to observe lessons, both teaching and learning. These instruments were used to ensure a thorough examination and understanding of the phenomena and dynamics of pedagogical strategic teaching of RME and its existential effects on the learners' experiential learning.

### Validation of Instruments

To ensure that the primary and secondary sources of information are directly related to the topic under investigation, and most especially the designing of questionnaire and participant observation techniques were free from errors, the researcher personally checked and vetted them, which were then followed by a colleague researcher and later an expert before they were administered. The validity and reliability testing of the research instrument is to avoid possible errors, ambiguity that could undermine the success of the study. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was used to calculate the reliability co-efficient of the instrument. The reliability was found to be 0.85 which was very high.

### Data Analysis

The collected data were treated statistically using both descriptive and inferential statistics appropriate for each research question. Summaries of the observational data was prepared immediately after transcribing the field notes and then coded and treated statistically by means of Statistical Package for Social Scientist (SPSS). Every other primary data that was coded and processed using SPSS format were presented in a form of tables, with frequencies and percentages, to give an easy pictorial view of the analysed data.

## Presentation and Discussion of Findings

### Analysis of Respondents' Data

*Gender, age, marital status, type of school, and religious distribution of respondents*

Out of the 70 respondents who successfully returned the questionnaire, 39.1% were male and 60.9% were female. This suggests that there were more female teachers teaching RME than their male counterpart. Question 6 of section A underpinned this fact as many of these females were teachers from the primary schools. There is a strong correlation between sex and religious affiliation. This is evidenced by 71.2% female from Evangelical, Charismatic, and Pentecostal Christian faith as compared to the 20% Catholic, Methodist and Anglican Christians. Respectively, only 6% and 2.8% revealed that they held Islamic faith and other beliefs. In terms of age of respondents 20% ranged from 21-30 years, 43.4% between 31-40 years, 24% falling within 31-50 years and only 12.6% were above 50 years. This means that more of the respondents were contemporary breed of teachers, and likely to hold the existential view that the learner is more important than the content to teach. Concerning marital status sampled, more RME teachers are married couples, 80%. The single couples were 10%, with 1.5% being windowed/divorced, and the rest thus 8.5% cohabitating. It is revealed that majority of respondent (76.6%) were teaching in Government school, and the rest in descending order were 15%, 6%, and 2.4% in Mission School, Islamic School and Private School respectively.

**Table 1: Respondents' Professional Training**

Awards	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Degree	12	17.1	17.1	17.1
Diploma	41	58.6	58.6	75.7
Certificate	10	14.3	14.3	90
None	7	10	10	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The data above shows that majority of the teachers have the required credentials to teach in the basic level of education. Fifty-eight point six had a Teacher's diploma, 17.1% had degree, 14.3% certificate and the non-professional and pupil teachers are only 10%. The respondents without required qualification may be a priest/pastor or pupil's teacher/national service personnel who were volunteering to teach as there may be no qualified teacher for the RME subject.

**Table 2: Respondents' Teaching Experience**

Years	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1-5	10	14.3	14.3	14.3
6-10	25	35.7	35.7	50
11-15	25	35.7	35.7	85.7
15+	10	14.3	14.3	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

The table above shows that majority of the respondents (71.4%) have been teaching RME for 6 to 15 years. Only ten (14.3%) of them teach for at most five years or same per cent teaching for more than 15 years.

### Analysis of Research Questions

#### Research Question 1: Teachers' opinion on the ability of the learners' independent thought

Table 3 below shows responses of the teachers when asked, whether their pupils/students think critically, ask independent questions, act differently and try to take full responsibility of their actions, of choices made in life.

**Table 3: Teachers' Opinion on "Existential" Questions**

Statements	Mean	S. D.
The pupils/students are able to make reasoned and informed judgments about religious, cultural, social and moral issues.	1.12	0.12
The content of RME incites pupils/students to develop critical thinking in their learning.	2.02	1.00
The pupils/students develop skills for independent thinking.	2.00	0.95
The pupils/students acquire the ability to make their own choices.	1.38	0.74
The pupils/students are aware that every choice makes by them they must take full responsibility of it either success or failure.	1.00	0.83
The pupils/students manifest innovativeness, problem-solving skills, and ability for self-motivation, and self-sustenance in their lives through the RME lesson.	2.98	1.11
<b>Mean of means/Mean of S. D.</b>	<b>1.75</b>	<b>0.79</b>

The above table indicates that RME is being taught in a manner to ensure understanding that fosters the ability of the learners' independent thought. This assertion is underpinned with evidence of mean of means of 1.75 and mean of Standard Deviation (SD) of 0.75. Rounding off the decimal point of the mean of means it then gives us the scale of 2 which according to Likert is 'Agree', indicating learners express their own thought without control, standard, fear, threat or external influence, so as to make a choice or to be.

It could be asserted that RME teachers are helping their learners chart their own course by directing them to various ways as well as creating conducive environment to decide on their own. This is emphatic by 'Strongly Agree' in that 1.38 mean and 0.74 SD were attained for the statement, learners acquired the ability to make their own choices.

Again when asked to vote on yes or no basis; 82% said yes to the statement, 'RME offers acquisition of knowledge because learners search for information on the topic to apply in their daily lives' and only 18% of the respondents said no. On the perception that 'RME enhances tolerance, co-operation among learners that learners are prepared to accept divergent religious, social, cultural or personal views', 100% of the respondents agreed but there was a split decision on the statement 'RME helps learners to develop confidence in themselves to be what they want to be in life'.

In conclusion, the data to a large extent suggest that majority of the respondents believe that independent thinking takes place in the life of a learner.

#### Research Question 2: Teachers' opinion on how the RME content is taught

Table 4 below seeks to ask the question, do the teachers think what they teach in the classroom is in consonant with how their pupils/students lead their lives.



Table 4: Teachers' opinion on the RME content

Statements	Mean	S.D.
The RME content based on the syllabus that you teach reflects a multi-religious, socio-cultural and moral context.	1.11	0.23
The RME content has direct relation to real-life-situation of the learner.	2.00	1.12
The RME content, does it meet the needs of every religion in Ghana.	2.23	1.40
The teacher motivates the learner to show interest and openness to other religious beliefs and values.	1.98	0.32
The RME content is Bible-centred and oriented in its approach	2.36	0.98
The content of RME includes the beliefs, practices and values of all religions that help to develop the existential experiences of the learners.	1.24	0.90
The teacher religious faith influences the teaching of RME.	2.12	1.34
The teacher's role is to help students chart their own course by directing them to various ways as well as creating enabling environment to decide on their own	1.42	0.56
The teacher encourages the learners to discover their own religious beliefs and values while at the same time show tolerance and respect for other people's religious faith.	1.19	0.77
Do you facilitate in RME classroom situations?	1.17	0.20
Do you give freedom of learning to your learners over religious issues in the classrooms?	1.23	0.43
<b>Mean of means/Mean of SD</b>	<b>1.64</b>	<b>0.75</b>

Every syllabus tries to achieve specific purpose of education; RME curriculum is no exception. It is only an excellent teacher who could use his worth of practical knowledge, experience and the contents of the subject matter in relation to the curriculum to meet the needs, practices, interests, and aspirations of his individual learners. The existentialists believe the learners must be the priority of the teacher more than the content to be taught and the subject driven in that order to be, by the numerous ways and opportunities to be availed by their teachers.

In the light of this, table 4 seeks to find out if the contents of RME are about the beliefs and practices, values and ways of life, and aspirations of the learners that could help to develop and direct the existential experiences of them. Out of the 11 questions posed 6 of them (thus statements 1, 6, 8, 9, 10, & 11) suggest that the respondents 'Strongly Agree' to the statement that what they teach in the classroom is in consonant with how their learners lead their lives. This is as a result of their various means' values ranging below 1.43. However, the overall values of mean of means and mean of standard deviation are 1.64 and 0.75 indicating a strong support for this assertion. The mean of means  $1.64 \approx 2.00$  suggests Likert scale of point 2, which means 'Agree'. The implication of this is that majority of the respondents agreed to the view that 'teachers relate the teaching of RME to the existential experiences of their learners'.

**Table 5: Teachers' opinion on who should teach RME**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Pastors	6	9	9	9
Teachers	36	51	51	60
Non-Teachers	12	17	17	77
B & C	16	23	23	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Furthermore, on who should teach RME in the Basic Schools, the table above shows that 51% preferred professional teachers, 23% preferred both professional and non-professional teachers to 9% that opted for Pastors/Priests or people with strong religious affiliation. The data shows that the majority of respondents would prefer professional teachers to teach RME at the Basic Level.

### Research Question 3: Teachers' opinion on RME teaching methods

The respondents were asked to state their opinions on pedagogical strategy that they think are appropriate for the teaching of RME to meet the needs of the existential experiences of the learners.

**Table 6: Teachers' opinion on RME methodology**

Instructional practices	Not at all		Somehow		Much		Very Much	
	F	%	F	%	F	%	F	%
Questioning	0	0	3	4.3	15	21.4	52	74.3
Discussion	1	1.4	5	7.1	20	28.6	44	62.9
Debate	70	100	0	0	0	0	0	0
Role play	65	92.9	4	5.7	1	1.4	0	0
Brainstorming	50	71.4	2	2.9	8	11.4	10	14.3
Group work	69	98.6	1	1.4	0	0	0	0

Table 6 tabulates the responses to the question, 'how often do you use any of these instructional practices in your teaching of RME'. It could be inferred that teachers used a kind of appropriate instructional methods that conformed to the life themes pedagogy in their teaching of RME. Among the instructional practices, it was Questioning (74.3) that was mostly used by the teachers. The implication of this is that it allows a free transfer of Relevant Previous Knowledge (RPK) into the new knowledge. The degree of conformity to the life themes pedagogy in the teachers' teaching of RME for 'Very Much' use of the Discussion method was 62.9%, 'Much' usage was 28.6%, 'Somehow' usage was 7.1%, and 'Not at all', 1.4%. It could be deduced that teachers do not use debate in their instructional lessons. This may be due to time constraint – since organisation of debate consumes a lot of time or the level of the learners, inability of the learners to express themselves, inability of the learners to embark upon further research or poor library research are some of the factors that discourage the use of debate in classroom setting.

The situation is a little bit different for role play. The degrees of conformity differ. As much as 92.9% showed no conformity, 5.7% confirmed 'Somehow', while 1.4% for 'Much'. By the researcher's observation of classroom interactions there wasn't any application of brainstorming method. Perhaps, it was not used often, as being indicated by

the respondents that only 14.3% applied it 'Very Much', with 'Much' being 11.4%, 'Somehow' 2.8%, and 'Not at all', 71.4%. Concerning respondents 'Group work' sampled, hardly do the teachers group the students in the course of instructional lesson. It is the indication of 98.6% of 'Not at all' and 'Somehow' of 1.4%.

#### Research Question 4: Teachers' opinion on the use of Life Themes Pedagogy

Under this section, the researcher found it prudent to collapsed Likert's scales one and two into one as 'Agree' and scale four and five into 'Disagree'. However, the scale 'Uncertain' was not found necessary to be reported.

In this section, RME teachers were asked to express their opinions on the current aims of RME syllabus that guide them.

**Table 7: Teachers' opinion on the worldview of their learners**

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	50	71.4	72.5	72.5
Disagree	19	27.1	27.5	100.0
Total	69	98.5	100.0	
Missing NA	1	1.4		
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

The statement, 'does RME give meaning to life by providing answers to "existential" questions such as: *Whose world is this? Where do I come from? Why am I here? How do I cope with the hardships of life? Does my life have any meaning? What will happen to me when I die?*'. These statements as outcome of the corresponding table 7 above shows that 72.5% agreed and 27.5% disagreed. Nearly three-quarters of respondents agreed that RME as a subject gives meaning to life by providing answers to existential questions.

**Table 8: Teachers' opinion on whether they encourage learners to use real-life-experiences in setting example in RME**

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	65	92.9	92.9	92.9
Disagree	5	7.1	7.1	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Overwhelmingly, 92.9% agreed that students are encouraged to use real-life-experiences in setting example in RME. Only 7.1% disagreed to this assertion.

**Table 9: Teachers' opinion on whether present situation of learners are considered in asking questions in class**

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	15	21.4	21.4	21.4
Disagree	55	78.6	78.6	100.0
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>100.0</b>	

Twenty-one per cent of the respondents agreed, 78.6% disagreed. The data shows that majority of the respondents disagreed that RME teachers considered concrete, real and present situation of learners in asking questions in class.

Table 10: Teachers' opinion on the RME's syllabus

Scale	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Agree	60	85.7	88.2	88.2
Disagree	8	11.4	11.8	100.0
Total	68	97.1	100.0	
Missing NA	2	2.9		
<b>Total</b>	<b>70</b>	<b>100.0</b>		

This table shows that most of the respondents (88.2%) agreed, and 11.8% disagreed on this assertion. Therefore, in line with RME syllabus, learners are provided with array of alternatives from which to choose.

#### 4. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

##### Summary

Research question one made an attempt to find out whether Religious and Moral Education is being taught in a manner to ensure understanding that fosters the ability of the learners' independent thought. This statement was supported by sub-questions as many as seven of them in order to elicit all the needed information necessary to form a comprehensive decision on this research question. Quite substantial respondents asserted to this view that RME is being taught to ensure independent mind of the learners. The implication of this is that the learners exercise the agility of their minds to the fullest without recourse to any restriction but within the remit of the law. This is to say that, to some extent, the learners could manifest personal or unique innovativeness, problem-solving skills, and ability for self-motivation, and self-sustenance in their lives through the RME lesson.

Research question two also tried to delineate the question, 'do teachers relate the teaching of RME to the existential experiences of their learners'.

To find out if the experiences of the learners are the bases for their learning twelve sub-questions were posed as the respondents gave divergence views. Out of the first eleven sub-questions, more than half of the respondents' responses with mean of means of 1.23 within the bracket of Likert scale point 1 as 'Strongly Agree' suggesting that their teachings were based on the syllabus which was designed with the practices, activities, problems, needs and aspiration of the society. The implication of this is that teachers are beginning to use their worth of experiential knowledge, understanding of the subject matter, and experiences of the learners to forge a common ground for teaching and learning in order to ensure full participation, or all-inclusiveness. If teaching becomes student-centred it would be student driven, as masters of their own affairs, and the teacher becoming the facilitator, the referee. This is when the teacher starts to direct, and create enabling and thriving environment, and avails many ways and opportunities for individual learners to make a choice on their own with a fixed idea (or mind) or an opinion formed beforehand with adequate evidence of where it leads them to. Furthermore, the respondents had seen wisdom in the existential concept in teaching of the RME that majority of them opted for professional teachers handling the subject to be devoid of personal influence, religious bigotry.

Research question three confirmed that teachers used instructional methods that conformed to the life themes pedagogy in their teaching of RME. Since teachings were student-centred and to some extent interactive in nature there were more engagement and student approach to issues as observed. Even though more of the instructional methods were not used but questioning and discussion were the two that were 'Very Much' used. The implication of usage of questioning is that it enables the teacher to know how much is already known about a specific content of the subject matter since no one enters a class as a tabula rasa. Though John Locke, the proponent of tabula rasa, differed on this issue but the fact is that we build on previous knowledge and thus transfer it into the next new knowledge. Every young mind is affected by a kind of living experience.

Research question four attempted to find out if RME'S syllabus contains themes necessary for a person's understanding of God and environment, and self and human life. The respondents answered extra four sub-questions out of which only one registered a huge percentage of 'Disagree', thus 55 (78.6%). The implication of this is that since 'teachers' opinion on whether present situation of learners are considered in asking questions in class' is in negative, it suggests that some of the contents of the subject matter are abstract and not relatable.

In hindsight, extrapolating the general aims of the RME's syllabus there are life themes like creator, existence, faith, behaviours, citizens, values, choices. According to Summers (1996:20, 22), whatever is the most prized aspect of someone's life can be called that person's religion (as cited in Chizelu, 2006). Chizelu (2006) further asserted that in this way religion gives meaning to life providing answers to "existential" questions; whereby humans are committed to make sense of this world and that there is a purpose in the universe regardless of their particular religious tradition.

### Conclusions

The results out of the study show that the Pedagogical Strategy in teaching RME at the Basic Level of Education is fairly balanced and on course. Even though quite substantial number of the respondents did not either hear before or understand the concept of existentialism but its elements are being unconsciously or consciously applied. Teachers are beginning to balance the syllabus by bringing on board their experiences, knowledge and understanding of the needs, problems, practices, values, customs, norms, and aspirations of the individual learners. These, they blend to teach with in order to create enabling conditions for all learners so as to thrive in the school environment to give out their best.

The concept of existentialism is the bedrock of RME that its learners are increasingly becoming the centre of attraction and concern. The purpose of this study is to unearth the various pedagogical strategies being adopted by teachers to carry out the teaching of RME which should not be devoid of secularism and pluralism. In line with this, and to a large extent;

- a. The teaching of RME ensures understanding that fosters the ability of the learners' independent thought.
- b. RME teachers relate their teaching to the existential experiences of their learners.
- c. RME teachers use instructional methods that conform to the life themes pedagogy in their teaching of RME.
- d. RME'S syllabus contains themes necessary for a person's understanding of God and environment, and self and human life.

### Recommendations

In light of the results and findings of the study the following suggestions are made.

- a. Every teacher must be given a personal subject curriculum, or syllabus.
- b. Teachers can be provided with occupational training on preparing lesson notes for every stated objective to be achieved.
- c. Teachers must be provided with periodic in-service training to be abreast with existential experiences of their learners, current condition of the worldviews, new mode of approaching learners' issues – so that they can be treated as independent human with the ability to think for themselves in the classroom setting and elsewhere.
- d. Teachers elsewhere in the Municipality must adopt frequent application of questioning and discussions in their instructional lessons for better results.

### REFERENCES

- [1] Alberts, W. (2007). *Integrative religious education in Europe*. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- [2] Asare-Danso, S. (2010). *Values Clarification: An individualistic approach to values education*. African Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies. 3, 53-60
- [3] Chizelu, J. M. (2006). *Teaching Religious Education in Zambian Multi-religious Secondary Schools*. Doctoral Thesis. University of South Africa, Pretoria.
- [4] Cox, E. (1966). *Changing aims in religious education*. London: Routledge And Kegan Paul.
- [5] Cross, F. L. (2005). *The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church*. New York: Oxford University Press.

- [6] Essuman, J. K. (1989). *Theories of counselling* in Nweke et.al (1989) *Guidance and Counselling: Principles and Practice*; Clabar, Paico Publishers.
- [7] Flensner, K. K. (2015). *Religious Education in Contemporary Pluralistic Sweden*. Doctoral Thesis. University of Gothenburg. Gothenburg.
- [8] Goldman, R. (1965). *Readiness for religion*. London: Routledge.
- [9] Grimmitt, M. (2000). *Pedagogies of religious education*. Essex: McCrimmons.
- [10] Grimmitt, M. (1987). *Religious education and human development: the relationship between studying religions and personal, social and moral education*. Great Wakering Essex: McCrimmon.
- [11] Grimmitt, M. (1973). *What Can I Do In R. E?* Great Wakering: Mayhew-McCrimmon.
- [12] Guba, E. (1983). *Guide for writing of proposal in educational research, new perspective*. New York. Interstate Printers and Publishers.
- [13] Kuranchie, A. (2014). *Research made easy*. Kumasi: Bookworm Publications.
- [14] Smart, N. (1968). *Secular education and the logic of religion*. London: Faber and Faber
- [15] Smart, N. (1971). *The Religious Experience of Mankind*. London: Collins Fontana.
- [16] Teece, G. (2009). *Religion as human transformation*. Resource 31 (3): 4-7
- [17] Tillich, P. (1951). *Systematic Theology*. Vol 3. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- [18] Tillich, P. (1969). 'The Depth of Existence'. In *the Shaking of the Foundations*. New York: Charles and Scribner's Sons.
- [19] Tsigbeson, R. W. (2006). *Social Studies for Senior High School*. Unpublished Text Book.