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Retrospective and Prospective Approaches to Christian Education in Church of Christ Schools in Zimbabwe

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Abstract: This article explores the past, present, and future of Christian education (CE) in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ) schools under the Dadaya, Mashoko, and Chidamoyo clusters. It highlights the retrospective and prospective aspects of CE within the church by emphasizing the adaptability, collaboration, and utilization of contemporary tools and resources to effectively carry out the mission of CE in Zimbabwean schools. It acknowledges the strong historical foundation of COCZ schools in providing biblical teachings, moral formation, and faith integration. However, it also highlights the challenges faced by the COCZ in maintaining this foundation posed by church politics and oppressive family ministries. This study assesses the patterns, dynamics, and consequences of intentional CE influenced by the COCZ's ethical and moral principles, commonly known as the Restoration Movement principles or the Stone–Campbell theories of “restoring the church to its first century forms”. It recognizes the impact of COCZ school education on the development of church leaders as well as civil and secular leaders from COCZ-mission school graduates. However, it acknowledges that the historical foundation has been gradually fading in the post-missionary era. Looking ahead, this article emphasizes the need for a comprehensive and holistic approach to CE that addresses all aspects of individuals' well-being in that church. This includes adapting to societal changes, developing CE-conscious leaders, engaging in community outreach, embracing digital tools and resources, and fostering collaborative networks with other CE-conscious church schools and institutions. This article suggests that by embracing these prospects, the COCZ can enhance its commitment to CE and positively impact the lives of its members and the wider community at its mission stations. Using WhatsApp interviews for data collection, it discusses these prospects by focusing on transformative leadership, embracing diversity, effective communication, and addressing power dynamics to facilitate the church's mission and vision in Zimbabwe.

Keywords: Church of Christ; Zimbabwean education; Christian education; mission schools



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1. Introduction and Background to the Study

The study of Christian education (CE) in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (COCZ) schools is essential as it addresses the challenges faced by church schools in the post-missionary era. Many graduates from mission schools run by former white missionaries do not propagate the faith principles of these institutions in the world. This lack of transformative and intentional CE has hindered the growth and unity of the COCZ, as this vision lacks relevance and impact in the lives of its members, and broader society graduates do not actively embody the church's principles in their career lives (Mushayamunda 2022).

The COCZ has a distinct theological process and CE structure based on its Restoration faith and church governance. The Restoration faith believes that all churches have erred by creating denominations and the restoration of the first century church corrects all the errors that have been created by denominationalism. This calls the church to use autonomy as its form of church governance to reduce corruption from the top to the bottom. However, the autonomy given to each congregation and mission station has led to a lack of uniformity

and cohesion in their theological inquiry, resulting in a localized and fragmented approach to CE (Whitmer 2005).

Studying CE in the COCZ demands a multiplicity of approaches, namely, historical, exegetical, anthropological, and theological (Whitmer 2005). CE structured and shaped the COCZ's mission work and characteristics, especially the historical development of missions and the political theory thereto (Kurtz 2001; Lewellen 2003). This study combines anthropology and theology (Whitmer 2005) to understand how the COCZ promoted or hindered CE.

The failure to effectively integrate church culture with the local context has further weakened CE in the COCZ. The lack of responsiveness to specific local contexts has undermined the past, present, and future of CE within the church (Whitmer 2005).

This article emphasizes the importance of understanding the church's history and present realities as crucial contexts for adopting an intentional CE vision. CE should go beyond mere indoctrination in church schools and focus on the discipleship of members and leadership transformation across the structure of the church. It should equip members to engage with secular national agendas and contribute to social transformation in line with the mission of the church (Masengwe and Dube 2023a).

This article also highlights, without overstating, the historical reliance on missionaries for theological and financial support, which has limited the development of independent African leaders in the COCZ. Missionaries developed African leaders to only support missionary objectives around mission centers (Whitmer 2005). This is why the COCZ ignored the bandwagon of contextualization and transformation in the 1970s because it did not augur well with their ownership and control of mission stations (Jirrie 1972). The COCZ is called to adopt transitional models of self-sufficiency and empowerment toward African leaders to think independently and take financial responsibility if CE ministries are to be revitalized. The leadership vacuum and demands for transformation in the COCZ reflect the need for a re-evaluation of CE in the post-missionary era (Whitmer 2005), where a leadership vacuum led to a crisis in leadership and decision-making concerning the construction of the Constitution and the conference center (COCZ 2015). This was in contradistinction to the COCZ's mission history, where CE was taught in its mission centers only.

Furthermore, the COCZ sought to preserve its doctrines through CE until the introduction of multi-faith religious education (RE), and especially the Family, Religious, and Moral Education (FAREME) that incorporated various religious traditions (i.e., Judaism, Islam, African Traditional Religion, Hinduism, and Buddhism, among others) (MOPSE 2015a, 2015b; Brueggemann 2015). The COCZ, through its RE at its mission stations at Dadaya, Mashoko, Devure, and Chidamoyo, sought to teach Bible knowledge through its expatriate teachers from the United States of America, especially soon after independence. This was abandoned when the government emphasized the replacement of expatriate teachers with indigenous teachers in the face of a multi-faith RE. FAREME has become inclusive that emphasis on the Bible has become impossible; hence, there has been a development in that church where religious leaders are calling for the church to seek better methods of translating FAREME in the context of their doctrines. There has been a call for an improved methodology, contextualization, and historicity of the RE content (Masengwe 2020). This calls for a creative and developmental CE curriculum that addresses the needs of a secular Zimbabwean society and promotes transformative education.

In all, the COCZ must recognize the importance of CE in its mission and address the challenges posed by the post-missionary era. By embracing a transformative vision and revisiting its educational strategies, the COCZ can strengthen its commitment to Christian education and effectively equip its members for leadership, transformation, and ministry in Zimbabwe.

2. The History of Christian Education in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

The historical foundations of CE in the COCZ are captured in the Church's emphasis on restoring the original teachings and practices of the New Testament church (Milner 1840; Hughes 1996; Mudzanire 2019). This theological disposition, rooted in the Restoration movement, shapes the content, context, and concept of CE in the COCZ (Palmer 2018). The autonomy of congregations within the COCZ highlights the personal relationship of individuals with God in their study of the Scriptures, emphasizing the transformative potential of CE for individuals, Christian communities, wider society, and creation itself. In this context, CE must "seek to heal and liberate persons, Christian communities, wider society and all of creation" (Moore 1998, p. 64).

It is important to acknowledge that the COCZ faced challenges in contextualizing its approach to CE in the 1970s. The influence of American teachings from the 19th century, without considering the African context, hindered the COCZ's ability to fully engage in contextualization (Moore 1987, 1991). However, there has been a growing recognition of the need for a constructivist approach to CE in the COCZ, which actively engages with the public in a transformational manner (Whitmer 2005). Individuals would personally engage with the Bible for spiritual and cognitive growth. In this way, the early leaders of the movement encouraged believers to gather for communal worship and study (Allen et al. 2023). This typically took place within the context of local congregations where Sunday schools and Bible classes were conducted to learn Christian principles and doctrines (Whitmer 2005). Attendees deepened their faith as their lives became solidly founded upon the teachings of the church. This equipped them to serve and share their faith with others.

Historically, the COCZ has developed institutions such as publishing houses, Bible colleges, Christian schools, and mission stations,¹ all of which have contributed to the formal instruction and training of church ministers, leaders, and individuals seeking a deeper understanding of their faith (Mudzanire 2019). These institutions have emphasized the study and interpretation of the Bible as a source of guidance, instruction, and equipment for active Christian living and service in all spheres of life. This would encourage the use of alternative sets of principles in building its economic, political, legal, and educational structures to be fit for a post-modern society (Hope et al. 1995).

The historical foundations of CE in the COCZ, rooted in the Restoration movement and the commitment to the Bible, have laid a strong foundation for spiritual growth, biblical literacy, and the nurturing of believers. While recognizing challenges and limitations in the history of the missionaries Zimbabwe received from New Zealand and the USA (Masengwe and Dube 2023a), as well as the post-independence pursuit for localizing the church (Masengwe 2020), it needs to be noted that contextualization, failure to engage with the public, and a transformative approach to CE within the COCZ have led to the CE problems the church has today (Jirrie 1972; Whitmer 2005; Masengwe and Chimhanda 2019). There are both exogenous and endogenous factors related to the problems of CE in the COCZ, especially issues of missionary ideology, church sponsorship, and Africanization of the church in the post-missionary era. The challenges became much more explicit with the public life difficulties of the post-millennial period due to the politics and economics in Zimbabwe.

3. The Church of Christ in Schools of Zimbabwe

The COCZ has several mission stations and schools throughout Zimbabwe. Mission stations serve as centers for various ministry activities, including evangelism, discipleship, community outreach, education, health, and social services. In this non-exhaustive list, the COCZ has two major groups of missionaries from the United States of America and New Zealand (and the Australian group) with mission stations in Midlands (New Zealand) and Masvingo (American). The presence of New Zealand and American missionaries contributed to the growth and development of the COCZ in various regions of Zimbabwe. These groups created clusters organized as schools, hospitals, and clinics. In the following paragraphs, some of the mission stations are mentioned.

The New Zealand mission stations, centered on Dadaya in Zvishavane, played a significant role in establishing churches, schools, and clinics in areas such as Gweru, Kwekwe, and Bulawayo. This group is organized around the Associated Churches of Christ in Zimbabwe (ACCZ), which has strong connections with the Associated Churches of Christ in New Zealand (ACCNZ). Dadaya heads the cluster with several schools and clinics in both urban and rural areas. New Zealanders' leadership style is consultative and contextual in approach, which helped lay the foundation for the COCZ's presence in Zimbabwe (Hobby 1945; Boyd 1989; West 1992). Notably, the regional divisions and the location of the Somabhula Conference center in lower Gweru led to tensions and divisions within the COCZ (Mushayamunda 2022). The American cluster felt that having Somabhula as the national conference center meant that the Americans had lost influence in the COCZ to the New Zealanders.

The American group of missionaries, initially part of Dadaya, expanded their mission interests to Mashoko in Masvingo and other areas. They established mission stations such as Hippo Valley Christian Mission in Chiredzi, Devure in Gutu, Chidamoyo Mission, Mashonaland West, and Zambezi Mission in Binga (Rotberg 2015; Mudzanire 2017; Masengwe and Dube 2021). These mission stations focused on evangelism, education, healthcare, and community development. The American mission stations operated autonomously but closely under the Central Africa Mission (CAM) constitution (Masengwe and Dube 2023b), which allowed them to expand into some parts of Zambia. It is also interesting to note the emergence of another group of COCZ mission stations that held more conservative views, particularly regarding the use of musical instruments. These "non-instrumental" mission stations were established in Mashonaland East and expanded into Manicaland (Chimhungwe 2012). They worked alongside the United Church of Christ in Zimbabwe (UCCZ), which was another American Board of Churches of Christ (Hlatywayo 2017).

Overall, we consulted up-to-date information on specific mission stations and their activities during this study, and we discovered that different missionary groups had different perspectives of CE, which played a significant role in spreading the gospel and serving the differing communities in Zimbabwe.

4. Maintaining Principles of Christian Education in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

4.1. Principles of Christian Education in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

In a centralized education system, where other religions are also emphasized and promoted to the level of Christianity, maintaining the principles of CE in the COCZ in its teaching and learning of the faith can be a challenge. The COCZ faces pressures to conform to a more pluralistic and inclusive approach to education, which could potentially dilute or compromise its distinct Christian identity and principles on biblical interpretation, moral formation, and faith integration.

Firstly, the COCZ places a strong emphasis on the authority of Scripture and the importance of interpreting it accurately. It considers the historical and literary contexts of the Bible, including the original audience, the author's intent, and the genre of the text (Grudem 2014). The COCZ interprets the Bible in its plain meaning before considering symbolic or metaphorical interpretations. The teachings and messages of the Bible are systematically aligned with broader biblical themes to maintain consistency and coherence (Ferguson 1996). Practical application of biblical teachings in daily Christian living is also emphasized, guiding individuals to live out the values and principles of the Bible in their conduct, relationships, and service to others. This has implications for methods of CE; hence, De Gruchy says "there must be congruence between our theological vision for development, and the way we teach" (De Gruchy 2003, p. 462).

Secondly, the COCZ recognizes the need for moral character development and spiritual growth in CE. It aims to help individuals live a life of integrity, righteousness, and obedience to God's commands, especially with regard to the "distressing disguise" of the poor (Evans et al. 2000). The moral formation is based on the foundation of biblical principles and values (Hughes 2001). Mentoring and discipleship play a crucial role, with more mature believers

guiding and supporting others in their moral and spiritual growth. Worship, prayer, and small group fellowship are encouraged for mutual encouragement and accountability (Sibanda et al. 2011). Moral principles are applied to real-life situations, promoting ethical behavior, justice, kindness, compassion, and stewardship of resources. The goal is for individuals to integrate their faith into all areas of life and live with integrity and character (Musoni 2018).

Thirdly, faith integration is a fundamental aspect of CE in the COCZ. It encompasses spiritual, intellectual, emotional, and social growth rooted in the teachings of Jesus Christ (Hughes 2001). The COCZ believes in studying the primary sources of truth, such as the Bible, to provide principles, values, and teachings that inform its school's educational process. The Christian worldview of God as almighty and creator extends to all aspects of life, allowing for the integration of faith and learning (Vaillant 2008). School subjects, such as science, math, arts, history, and languages, are integrated with biblical classes to promote values acquisition. The goal is to develop Christian character and virtue, reflecting the character, attitudes, and behaviors consistent with one's relationship to Christ (Myers 2011). CE in the COCZ aims to equip learners with biblical truth, critical thinking skills, and a Christ-centered worldview so that they can make a positive impact in society.

4.2. Maintaining Church of Christ Principles in the Face of FAREME

The COCZ can maintain its character and uphold its principles of CE if it retains a strong commitment to its identity, focus on teaching the Bible well, emphasizes moral character development, integrates faith in its RE teachings, engages the broader society, advocates for religious freedom, and strengthens parental involvement in the process. In other words, the COCZ leadership and educational institutions need to maintain a firm commitment to their Christian identity and mission despite the promotion of other religions. They can make a difference if they emphasize their theological distinctiveness and core values, and the centrality of Scripture in their educational curriculum as a foundation of faith and practice, even in the face of a more diverse educational landscape (Chowdhury 2018).

The COCZ can continue prioritizing moral formation and character development in its educational institutions. This may also involve faith integration in various school subjects and disciplines to reinforce a Christ-centered worldview. This can be achieved through mentoring, discipleship programs, and creating a school culture that promotes ethical behavior, compassion, and stewardship (Mitchell 2015; Chowdhury 2018).

Further, the COCZ can actively engage with the broader society to promote religious freedom, respect for other beliefs and practices as well as dialogue with other religious and cultural groups in its educational context. This engagement can also present opportunities for the church to share its own beliefs and values with others. This includes ensuring that its students and educators have the freedom to express and practice their faith within the parameters of the law. The church can also work closely with parents to reinforce its CE principles in the home environment. Involving parents in their children's education and faith development can create a strong support system that aligns with the church's values (Mitchell 2015).

Maintaining CE principles in a centralized education system requires the COCZ to be proactive, steadfast, and creative in preserving its Christian identity and mission. It may involve navigating complex educational landscapes while remaining true to its core beliefs and values.

5. Challenges of Contextualization in the Missionary Church

The theology and theologizing within the COCZ have faced challenges due to conflict and division arising from different interpretations of CE in the COCZ with significant implications on mission effectiveness in terms of embracing the local context. The missionaries, particularly the American missionaries, used a fragmented approach to church governance, irrespective of the context, by creating parallel church structures within the COCZ that led to disunity and a divided vision. Most tended to believe that Christian principles and

teachings were unchangeable and universally valid for all contexts (Whitmer 2005). This led to conflict due to different interpretations of CE as American missionaries differed from New Zealand missionaries theologically and with other keener views. This led the COCZ to ignore the contextualization and adaptation of the gospel to different cultural groups.

On the contextualization theory, Van Engen (1991) proposes and emphasizes the mapping of God's mission in a specific context. It recognizes the importance of interpreting the Bible in the context of the mission in Africa and engaging with local churches, cultures, and contexts (Schreiter 1985). However, the COCZ missionaries often suppressed the contextualization theory and promoted a fixed and universal Western gospel without adaptation (Whitmer 2005; Ukpong 1987). This led to theological disputes that hindered productive discussions on key theological issues as well as creating tensions that hindered collaboration among church leaders, educators, and members concerning CE principles. If different factions within the COCZ promote diverse and sometimes contradictory interpretations of Christian education, the church's overall mission and identity can become diluted. It may become challenging to articulate a clear and unified mission statement for the church's educational endeavors, which could affect the church's impact and witness in society.

The concept of contextual theology, as presented by Bosch (2011) and Bevans (1992), highlights the importance of considering the spirit and message of the gospel, the traditions of the people, the culture in which theologizing takes place, and the social change within that culture. It is seen as a theological imperative and an inherent part of theology. Contextual theology involves expressing the relationship with God in terms of the local expression system of the people, recognizing the validity of the present human experience. Schreiter's (1985) concept of "local theology" emphasizes the importance of dialogue within the community of faith, reflecting the ideological perception of God held by the people within that context. It aims to engage with the world where God reveals Himself to His people in their home context.

This article emphasizes that division has led to a big challenge with regard to CE in educational institutions. Divisions and conflicts between missionaries and mission stations have confused learners concerning the COCZ's beliefs and values undermining the formation of a strong and coherent Christian worldview. Resource competition and attention between different factions in the COCZ with regards to the quality and scope of CE, led to division that broke the church into two groups. The COCZ also became less influential due to fragmentation as conflicting practices in its midst meant that it could not collaborate as an organization, and its institutions could not address the broader CE initiatives in the COCZ (Masengwe and Dube 2023b).

In all, the COCZ has grappled with the challenges of embracing the local context in its theologizing (i.e., contextual theology). This has led to conflict and division in the COCZ on CE as parties could not dialogue about CE and theological perspectives to reach a consensus in this conversation. It is in emphasizing contextual theology that the COCZ can become more inclusive and unified in its approach to CE. While missionaries initially promoted universal and inadaptable forms of the gospel, there is a growing recognition of the importance of contextual theology and engaging with the local expressions of faith (Masengwe and Chimhanda 2020). In all, the COCZ needs to prioritise unity, collaboration, and a clear mission that can help the COCZ navigate potential conflicts and divisions, ensuring a more effective and impactful Christian education ministry.

6. The Future of Christian Education in the Church of Christ in Zimbabwe

6.1. *The Contemporary Context of Christian Education in Church of Christ Schools*

In the 21st century, the COCZ in Zimbabwe is facing challenges related to the multiplicity of faiths and diversities of spiritualities. The use of schools to advance CE is becoming less appealing due to the introduction of a multi-faith regime in the curriculum like FAREME (Dube 2020). The secularization of the school curriculum poses difficulties for COCZ schools to maintain their emphasis on CE teaching without pedagogical and epistemological innovation in engaging learners with their faith narratives. This calls for

the COCZ to adapt to the context of CE through strategic approaches that address the challenges posed by the changing social and religious landscape necessitating the introduction of a multi-faith curriculum.

The changing social and religious landscape in Zimbabwe has led to the incorporation of RE into secular subjects to strategically integrate the Christian worldview into the public-school curriculum. Teachers have been trained to become critical thinkers, ethical decision-makers and compassion Christian professionals. The onset of new generations of post-independence professionals did not maintain the Christian perspective of the colonial era. This made reaching younger generations challenging, requiring adoption of new pedagogical and epistemological approaches in terms of technology, interactive learning, storytelling, and experiential learning using young people's faith narratives. This calls Christian schools to strategically position themselves during learners' formative years demanding that learners are engaged in authentic faith experiences (Munikwa and Hendriks 2013). Learners can be engaged through mission trips, service projects, and community outreaches under the leadership of various Christian and specialist educators such as chaplains, counselors, social workers, and teachers to inculcate Christian principles into the secular curriculum and encourage learners to live their faith in practical ways. Service learning can potentially enable students to live biblical priorities and show care and compassion for people and the environment.

Like the Apostle Paul contending for faith in the marketplace, schools need to infuse educational and philosophical ideas into their class experiences. This calls for an interdisciplinary approach that integrates faith and subject areas or RE teachers and teachers from other disciplines such as literature, science, the arts and history. However, the COCZ, along with other denominations, complain about the little Christian attention to the curriculum design (Smith 2018). Traditional approaches that emphasize liturgies and catechisms are unlikely to resonate with deep learning among contemporary youths (Harkness 2002). RE needs to emphasise critical thinking in defending the Christian faith to respond to questions and doubts being encountered in the multi-faith and secular environment (Smith 2018). The creation of a vibrant Christian community within the school, prayer meetings, regular fellowship and Christian events including Christian games strengthen a sense of identity and faith in Jesus Christ.

The COCZ, and other churches in Zimbabwe, may need the collaboration of parents and local churches to reinforce CE as an extracurricular activity with the involvement of parents when discussing Christian faith and values if young people can benefit from the faith. This is best when the Christian faith also resonates with the social, cultural, and spiritual needs of the learners to address real-life issues in their everyday lives. Teachers who undergo continuous professional development, depending on the kind of professional development approach, may have the knowledge and skills to effectively teach CE in a changing (i.e., challenging) RE context.

In all, CE needs to be contextualized and adapted to the strategic approaches of the COCZ on CE to be effective and relevant in maintaining Christian values and identity in the complexities of a multi-faith and secular society.

6.2. Strategies for Christian Education in Church of Christ Schools

Strategies to maximize the impact of CE in the COCZ schools demand that churches introduce strategic thinking and strategic planning other than merely having Christian teachers in schools. In a rare case of an unknown college, strategic thinking and planning was used to propel a college into one of the most well-known centres in North Carolina (Keller 2014). The college had chaplains who ensured the school goals were implemented and assisted the principals in leading and modeling their Christian faith as the primacy within the school's ethos rather than reducing the expression of faith to tokenistic gestures. In Zimbabwe today, youths cannot be satisfied by mere attendance at chapel services as these reduce the spiritual dimensions of Christianity to become merely conventional sentiments of a civic religion (Turner 2011). The teaching and administrative staff, therefore,

are obliged to influence and shape the worldviews of learners in the boarding area and the school as most learners are now generations away from Christianity.

Furthermore, learners need to be confronted by a practical faith as action through quality pastoral care programs and community service are persuasive and visible signs of Christian love (Trustee and McKeever 2011). This can deeply influence a holistic approach to the Christian truth among learners to appreciate a culture and paradigm that mainstreams the faith in the school (Cooling 1994; Myers 2011). This helps in countering cultural perceptions that adhere to the Christian faith.

In all, these strategies are only possible in a school where the principal and the chaplain provide guidance and leadership (i.e., are models of this in action) to the school in practical and integrative ways. The school culture can be used to develop a holistic and transformative understating of the Christian faith in the school curriculum.

6.3. Curriculum for Christian Education in Church of Christ Schools

The principles of effective education and pedagogy as well as the unique context of the COCZ schools, demand the building of a thoughtful and comprehensive CE curriculum in Christian schools. This demands that robust approaches are adapted. It is important to move beyond a piecemeal approach of sharing isolated Bible stories and instead focus on building a robust theological framework that is relevant to the current context (Benson 2018). The suggestions for developing a thoughtful and comprehensive Christian Education (CE) curriculum in COCZ schools are based on the principles of effective education and pedagogy, and in-depth understanding of biblical principles and priorities, as well as the unique context of COCZ schools.

COCZ schools (i.e., various mission station clusters) should carefully consider the components of their CE curriculum for different age groups, including juniors, seniors, and staff. This approach has been successful in highly organised churches such as the Seventh Day Adventist and the Jehovah's Witnesses. The idea of moving away from isolated Bible stories to a comprehensive theological framework that produce best practices in CE for a well-rounded product has been practiced in medical trainings (Cooke et al. 2010), legal studies (Walsh et al. 2014), and in Islamic studies (Musharraf 2015) among others. This approach involves planning a logical progression of learning and understanding that integrates both in-class teachings and chapel services to produce learners who can deeply understand their faith (Afzal and Hussain 2020). There are many examples of how regular academic programs were blended with chapel services to foster spiritual growth and interconnections (Maddix and Estep 2010; Lowe and Lowe 2010; Rieger 2011; Fuller and Johnson 2014).

Considering that many students in COCZ schools come from non-Christian backgrounds, the concept of "concept cracking" becomes crucial (Cooling 1994). There are many examples of how faith-based institutions among African Americans have created strategies for spiritual growth and meaning-making among their learners using concept-cracking (Singh 2011; Ukpokodu 2011; Hill 2012). This approach involves bridging new conceptual ideas with what students already know and understand. By connecting Christian teachings to their existing knowledge and experiences, the CE curriculum can resonate more deeply with students, facilitating a meaningful understanding and application of the faith in their own lives (Cooling 1994; Marschall 2019).

The sequencing of teachings and approaches is essential in COCZ schools to ensure that a gradual and systematic progression of learning is done using some accredited Christian schools age-appropriate lessons (Hunkins and Ornstein 2016). The COCZ can adopt good examples in its regular reflection, evaluation and adaptation. It can keep these in its CE curriculum in order to ensure learners in its schools can effectively connect with the church's faith foundations. By providing a well-structured curriculum, that is contextualized, the COCZ to the needs and backgrounds of the students, COCZ schools can create a solid foundation for spiritual growth, holistic development, and meaningful engagement with the Christian faith.

It is important for COCZ schools (individually and corporally) to engage in ongoing reflection, evaluation, and adaptation of their CE curriculum to ensure its relevance and effectiveness in meeting the evolving needs of their students and the wider community.

6.4. Christian Education Pedagogy in Church of Christ Schools

The pedagogical approach proposed for CE in COCZ schools emphasizes interactive and critical thinking models that align well with the aim of FAREME in promoting a holistic and inclusive education that respects and embraces diverse religious and cultural beliefs. FAREME aims to foster an understanding and appreciation of various religious and cultural traditions in Zimbabwe, recognizing their value and contribution to the nation's cultural heritage and religious identity. It encourages dialogue and engagement with different faiths, promoting the richness of religious diversity through tolerance and coexistence.

The proposed pedagogical approach in COCZ schools, which goes beyond traditional transmission models and embraces interactive discussions and critical thinking, complements the aims of FAREME (Collier and Dowson 2008). By encouraging students to explore and wrestle with complex social issues from multiple perspectives, COCZ schools can create an inclusive and intellectually stimulating environment that respects the diversity of beliefs within their student body (Collier 2013).

Moreover, modeling one's faith by school leaders can play a significant role in resonating with students' beliefs and practices (Astill 1998). This approach can foster a sense of respect and understanding towards different religious perspectives and contribute to a more inclusive and tolerant school community (Andersen 1983).

6.5. Developing Christian Education Staff in Church of Christ Schools

CE educators in the COCZ used to be trained at Zimbabwe Christian College (ZCC), now renamed Central Africa Christian College (CACC), and usually young people undergoing theological training. Every pastor who graduated at ZCC was given a CE certificate, supported by Church leaders leading in some ministries at the time. The employability of holders of such a certificate remained in balance due to the lack of recognition by the Ministry of Education. The COCZ, however, preferred hiring staff from a pool of educators well-versed in COCZ's faith narratives and teachings to create a cohesive school environment although some of their staff members could not be employed in non-COCZ institutions (Davenport and Prusak 1998).

To enhance employability as in some studies, the COCZ could consider providing opportunities for their staff to pursue further (recognized and accredited) ministerial formation with external institutions (Tran 2016). This improves partnerships with such institutions to gain broader theological education. In fact, COCZ should encourage staff members to pursue recognized professional development and certification opportunities to enhance the academic credentials of their staff members in a more competitive job market beyond COCZ schools (Tran 2016). The possibility of colleges in Zimbabwe forming a joint body that would offer certification for theological training without affiliating with universities called Associated Colleges of Theological Education in Zimbabwe (ACTEZ) had the aim of offering diplomas and degrees that were competitive with religious studies in secular educational settings. The COCZ training institutions were going to be part of it, although the attempt hit a snag due to the different interests of sponsors to church institutions.

In all, the COCZ needs to ensure the competitive offerings in theological education align with their faith narratives so that, when necessary, qualifications and credentials are acquired, the staff become employable outside the church, and they can become effective educators within the broader needs of the church schools.

6.6. Opportunities for Christian Education in Church of Christ Schools

COCZ schools have unique opportunities to provide valuable Christian education to their learners. They need to leverage coordinated efforts at mission cluster levels to create a

formative and interactive curriculum that goes beyond merely transmitting information didactically. Such networks and links are important in learners' spiritual journeys.

This study has suggested that COCZ schools can create conducive spiritual formation and growth patterns for learners to develop deeper faith relationships with their God by integrating Christian values into the main school curriculum. This can be realized through community service where learners receive the opportunity to serve others and learn the values of justice, kindness, and compassion to the less fortunate. These community and social engagements can be undertaken in the context of worship, prayer, and fellowship to encourage learners in their faith journeys.

It has also been noted that learners need to be challenged to make ethical decisions as their moral foundations are strengthened; hence, integrity and ethical behavior become shaped. This calls for critical thinking, where learners explore faith-related issues to develop a deeper understanding of faith.

Lastly, this study has discussed the issues of networks and links to make connections and collaborations with other churches, institutions, and organizations for additional resources, support, and opportunities to further grow in the faith. This may result from leadership development in the direction of CE as learners are encouraged to become servant leaders and make a positive impact on society. It is in capitalizing on the opportunities the COCZ schools have that CE in that church can play a significant role in shaping the future lives of their learners. These approaches can produce graduates who are committed to their Christian faiths and social engagements.

7. Conclusions

COCZ schools have faced challenges in the post-missionary era that call for transformative models in the church schools. These call for the church to effectively integrate its culture into its schools by clarifying church goals, embracing the path of transformation, handling dissent and power dynamics creatively, implementing dialogical strategies, and focusing on self-sustenance. This must be undertaken in cognizance of the intrusion of secularization into both the church and the school system. By doing away with dependence on missionary support, COCZ schools can embrace strategic thinking and planning for the church and school of the future. This article calls for a creative and developmental CE curriculum that addresses the broader FAREME religious landscape in Zimbabwe in order to promote a transformative CE curriculum in the COCZ.

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