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Re-imagining Religious Knowledge Systems: An Inquiry into the Integration of African Traditional Religion into Religious Education in Uganda's Lower Secondary Education

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ABSTRACT

The perspectives article explores the prospects of integrating African Traditional Religion (ATR) in Uganda's Religious Education (RE) curriculum for secondary schools. Uganda boasts of a rich cultural heritage that ranges from tangible religious sites to rituals, customs, traditions, taboos, wise sayings, proverbs, to traditional music and dances. ATR is not only an expression of African spirituality, but a representation of African philosophical epistemologies with the potential to shape young people into holistic, responsible adults. However, Uganda's educational framework marginalises and devalues ATR. Through qualitative theoretical research, the study investigated the prospects of integrating ATR in Religious Education. Qualitative research methods, including documentary review of curriculum documents, interviews and focus group discussions with selected teachers and religious leaders, were used to collect data. RE is an essential subject in Uganda's curriculum; only Islam and Christianity are considered as religions in the secondary school curriculum. The rest of the religions are considered minor, insignificant and therefore, marginalised in Uganda's education system. The study found that today, Ugandans perceive ATR with a rejuvenated passion and confidence about the status of traditional beliefs and practices in their lives. Data indicates that ATR is scantily incorporated in a few learning outcomes of the curriculum but not in a way that would benefit learners' academic growth. Yet, education is *a sine qua non* for illuminating the plight of African philosophy in academic discourses, spirituality and moral values. Subsequently, both literature and interaction with participants agree on the need to integrate ATR as a foundational component of Uganda's education framework.

Keywords: African Traditional Religion, curriculum, integration, prospects, religious education, secondary school.



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INTRODUCTION

While African Traditional Religion is an expression of the African worldview, African countries do not take African Traditional Religious education (ATRE) seriously in their education systems. The study aimed at understanding teachers' perceptions and attitudes towards the integration of African Traditional Religion in the Religious Education curriculum for secondary schools. The study is premised on the need to balance religious knowledge systems in the growing pluralistic society and in an era of developing decolonisation knowledge systems in African contexts. Today, African scholarship is awash with theorising decolonisation philosophies and methodologies to determine the intersection and departure of Eurocentric and Afrocentric worldviews. Scholars continue to debate pathways to re-essentialise African knowledge to create avenues for inclusion of African epistemologies into socio-economic development, policy and education in African countries. Consequently, as part of the decolonisation discourses, the article investigated the prospects of integrating African Traditional Religion (ATR) into the teaching of Religious Education in the lower secondary schools' curriculum in Uganda.

Uganda is rich in cultural and religious heritage, and Ugandans continue to believe in traditional religious beliefs as well as to participate in its practices. However, while the Ministry of Education values RE as a subject that instils values among the young generations, the RE curriculum mainly focuses on Christianity (CRE) and Islam (IRE). Yet, there is evidence that Ugandans continue to cherish traditional religious beliefs and practices. Through the review of curriculum documents and interactions with participants, the study examined the current integration status of ATR in the RE syllabus. It explored the perceptions and attitudes of teachers and religious leaders towards the inclusion of ATR in the RE syllabus and the challenges of integrating ATR into RE frameworks. The article argues that the marginalisation and, or exclusion of ATR perpetuates a narrow understanding of the phenomena of religion in scholarship and practice, undermines Uganda's rich cultural heritage, and denies young people an opportunity to develop and appreciate their African identity and may lead to an automatic extinction of African cultural values. Against this backdrop, the article found that Ugandans have renewed sentiments and passion about '*Africanness*'. Ugandans also believe that

the reason for the current inadequacies in education and socio-economic development is a result of marginalising African Religion and knowledge in the educational framework. ATR has the potential to provide a foundation of an education that instils competencies and skills which are a central focus of the competency-based curriculum (CBC) in lower secondary schools.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Re-imagining Religious Knowledge Systems

African cultures and traditions were for a long time branded as primitive, evil, satanic and devilish. Therefore, Africans had to be civilised by colonialists. Africans were convinced to abandon their African traditional beliefs and practices. However, as Garvey Marcus, the grandfather of Pan-Africanism, stated, 'a people without the knowledge of their past history, origin, and culture is like a tree without roots' (Mandelbaum, 2014). Arguably, Africans soon realised that colonial philosophies were Eurocentric and not in tandem with African worldviews. Subsequently, while colonialists spread derogatory propaganda about African Traditional religious beliefs and practices, Africans continued to practice them secretly. As Igboin (2025) contended, '*there is a connection between Africans and their traditions that foreign religions cannot break.*'

There arose a paradigm shift when African scholars started theorising and debating about teaching ATR in schools in the 19th Century. Scholars such as Walter Rodney (1942-1980), Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o (1938-2025), Mudimbe Valentin-Yves (1941-2025) and Ifi Amadiume, among others, have, over time, advanced African philosophical and epistemological perspectives into academic debates. In the same way, John S. Mbiti (1931-2019), Bolaji Idowu (1913-1993), Kwame Gyekye (1939-2019), ABT Byaruhanga-Akiiki, Lugira Aloysius and others publicly advocated for ATR in academia. They argued for the preservation of African cultural heritage and spirituality. ATR scholars investigated, philosophised, theorised, interpreted and published ATR beliefs and practices. The scholars argued that Europeans derogated African beliefs and practices; yet, such beliefs defined the purpose, meaning of life and answered basic questions about life and the afterlife to the African people. Today, contemporary African scholars advance de-colonial philosophies and practices in different sectors in education, socio-economic development and politics. Through the umbrella of the

Pan-Africanism movement, scholars have continued to engage international support to enhance strategies for inclusion of African heritage into the political, economic and cultural ideologies (Schramm, 2016). African academicians such as Ali Mazrui (Mazrui, 2003), Abdi (2012) and Adjei (2008), among others, have championed debates about decolonising education and transformation of African epistemologies with a goal of promoting African identity.

African Traditional Religion

African Traditional Religion is a broad term, but can be defined as the religious life experiences of the African people, referring to how life is lived, interpreted and transmitted to young generations. It is the spirituality of the African people, the way of life, an integral part of the African culture and heritage that *embodies a whole worldview of the African people* (Mbiti, 1975). ATR is unique when compared to other world religions in the sense that it has no written Holy or Sacred Scriptures, cannot be preached in sermons, membership is automatic, no conversion, no *missionarisation* and evangelisation required. Okeke (2019) noted that ATR is non-proselytising; it does not go out in search of converts. Africans believe that ATR is a true world religion; it is part and parcel of the wider religious pluralism in Africa, and it is a true world religion.

The belief in God is the foundation of ATR. African belief in the Almighty God, who is all-knowing and reflected in the different attributes of deities, is deeply ingrained in ATR (Manganyi & Buitendag, 2013). The belief in the omniscient, omnipotent and omnipresent God was founded by the African forefathers, the ancestors who transmit beliefs and practices to all generations. Africans believe in life after death, and the ancestors live close to God. Therefore, ancestors are respected and believed to keep watch over the living. Like other world religions, ATR has established institutions of religious leadership with priests, priestesses, mediums, seers and diviners among others (Mbiti, 2015). These mediate between God, the living, the dead and the future. In addition, Africans believe in a divine, unwritten moral ethic that is authored by God and handed over to people. The African moral ethic is embedded in the communitarian values of *Ubuntu* (*humanness*). ATR possesses a wide range of religious sites and objects, most of which are natural, the shrines, sacred stones and trees which are believed to inhibit

spirits (Ezenweke, 2008). African people encounter mythical experiences through dreams and visions that are translated into traditions and customs that are cherished. ATR has designated rituals and ceremonies that include worship and prayer.

Indeed, ATR is one of the existing religious traditions in Uganda, although it has not gained equal recognition compared to foreign religions, notably, Islam and Christianity.

African Traditional Religious Education (ATRE)

Literature reveals a quest for consideration of African Traditional Religion and for a distinctive African Education framework that illuminates the African identity. Okeke (2019) identified reasons for the integration of ATR in secondary schools, arguing that it enables young people to reconstruct the African past, link it with the present and the future. He also contends that the teaching of ATR in schools popularises African worldviews and cultural heritage worldwide; projects, protects and promotes African identity. In addition, the integration of ATRE in the curriculum supports comparative study of religion, rectifies the colonial derogatory impression of ATR, leads to an appreciation of African spirituality and contributes towards shaping the character of young generations.

Scholars argue that colonial-founded education failed to develop Africa. For instance, Fayemi and Macaulay-Adeyelu (2009) reported that the Yoruba people of Nigeria believe in an education that focuses on the pursuit of African-tailored educational goals and drives the multi-dimensional wheel of development in Africa. The Yoruba people, therefore, blame the current philosophy of education, which is colonial-oriented, for leading Nigeria into a deplorable state of affairs. Arguably, an education with the potential to lead Africa to sustainable development must divert from Western philosophy. The implication of such an expression is that an education for African development must be based on an African philosophy.

Ngubane and Makua (2021) termed education about ATR as *Ubuntu* pedagogy and argued that such an education is transformative, de-colonial and with 'potential not only for reconnecting students with their indigenous values, heritage and cultures. Arguably, the Ubuntu pedagogy respects and promotes cooperation

among students. Literature reveals that the moral degeneration among the African young people is a result of an education that fails to instil African moral values among young people (Waghid et al., 2022).

METHODOLOGY

In Uganda's education system, the subject of RE is earmarked as a moral values subject that is aimed at shaping character and a positive attitude towards life. However, while ATR has the potential to instil moral values built on African philosophy of *Ubuntu* and communitarianism, instead the subject of RE is based on Abrahamic faiths, Christianity and Islam. Exclusion of ATR from the RE curriculum disregards African religious beliefs and practices, neglects moral values, may lead to the extinction of ATR and devaluation of the African identity and, generally limits learners' understanding of the phenomenon of religion. Using a qualitative theoretical interpretive research methodology, the study investigated the prospects of integrating ATR into the RE curriculum for secondary schools in Uganda. The study employed documentary analysis to examine the current representation of ATR in the lower secondary school curriculum and analysed the causes of the exclusion of ATR from Uganda's educational framework. Further, using interviews, the study explored teachers' and religious leaders' perceptions towards the integration of ATR in the RE curriculum. The participants included eight religious leaders (4 Muslims and 4 Christians) and ten RE secondary school teachers who were randomly selected to participate in the study. The interpretive research paradigm enabled the study to unveil the diversions and intersections of both Western and African epistemological philosophies based on the different worldviews of RE (Held, 2019; Thambinathan & Kinsella, 2021).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The Status of ATR in the Lower Secondary School RE Syllabus

Since 2020, Uganda has followed a Competency Based Curriculum (CBC), which focuses on competencies and skills. Bweyale (2018) observed that the subject of RE is structured in a separatist way; thus, Christians are taught alone (Christian Religious Education –CRE), and so are Muslims (Islamic Religious Education-IRE). A review of the curriculum documents reveals that ATR is scantily incorporated in the RE curriculum of schools in Uganda. However, ATR is not rated equal to Christianity and Islam; it is undermined and not taken as an autonomous religion. The integration is not aimed at educational goals of instilling moral values, but as an example of primitive religious beliefs and practices of the African people before the coming of Christianity and Islam. The marginalisation of ATR is a result of the prejudices instigated by colonialists and missionaries who believed that Africans had no idea about God. In ignorance, colonialists labelled ATR derogatorily as ancestor worship, superstition, magic, sorcery, witchcraft, idolatry, paganism, heathen and *Kafir*. Such a perception has been proven unrealistic and an irrational analysis of not only African culture but also ATR. Besides, followers of ATR have rejuvenated the traditional beliefs and practices and are currently demanding state recognition and protection of the constitutional freedom to the right to religion, belief and worship just like the followers of other religions.

The RE Teaching Syllabus

The Competence Based Curriculum (CBC) focuses on competencies and skills as opposed to the Knowledge Based Curriculum (KBC). Analysis of the table below shows that, there are no direct competences and learning outcomes that focus on ATR. All competencies and learning outcomes focus on Islam and Christianity.

Table 1: Themes, Topics and Learning Outcomes in the RE Syllabi

S/N	THEMES	TOPICS/ TERMS	COMPETENCY
S.1	Man's Relationship with God	Term 1: Worship	Learner understands worship and how it is derived from the Holy books, and can relate the different forms of worship to daily life.
		Term 2: Christian/ Islamic Rituals and Celebrations	The learner understands religious rituals and celebrations as a means of promoting unity, love and commitment to God (Allah).
		Term 3: Values in	The learner appreciates the beliefs and moral practices in other

		Christianity, Islam and ATR	religions to develop tolerance for other faiths in order to live in harmony with them in a diverse world.
S.2	Man's Social Relations	Term 1: Respect for human life	Learner understands how religions promote respect for human life by fostering the values of tolerance, respect, fairness, harmony and peaceful co-existence.
		Term 2: Marriage	The learner appreciates the importance of marriage and how it fosters the values of love, honesty, respect, harmony and generosity.
		Term 3: Family	The learner understands how the family promotes the values of responsibility, unity, loyalty, generosity and harmony as derived from Christianity (Islam) and African traditional society.
S.3	Man's Dominion over the World	Term 1: Work	The learner understands the religious teachings on the value of work, appreciating its importance and developing a positive attitude towards work.
		Term 2: Wealth and Development	The learner explores the ways through which wealth can be acquired and the Christian (Islamic) perspective of wealth development.
		Term 3: Leisure	The learner understands the importance of leisure to an individual and society so that they choose the right leisure activities.
S.4	Man's Harmonious Existence	Term 1: Peace	The learner understands peaceful methods of resolving conflict and maintaining harmony in society.
		Term 2: Justice	The learner understands the value of a just society and the value of fairness in society.
		Term 3: Conflict Resolution	The learner understands the value of resolving conflicts in order to maintain peace in society and values tolerance as a way of avoiding conflicts.

Extracted from *NCDC CRE and IRE curriculum documents (NCDC, 2020)*

According to the table above, the first theme, 'Man's relationship with God', is constituted of topics of 'Worship', 'Christian Rituals and Celebrations', and 'Values in Christianity, Islam and ATR'. An analysis reveals no teaching and learning about how man relates to God in ATR. For instance, the competence for the topic 'Worship' indicates that learners are enabled to understand the meaning and forms of worship as based on the holy books. Learners are not given the opportunity to appreciate the forms of worship in African traditional religion. Yet, ATR has a developed system of worship at a personal, family, clan and society level. Africans worship God in shrines, in homes, around sacred bodies such as water bodies (rivers, lakes or wells), mountains, huge trees or any other thing that is considered to be inhabited by spirits. Africans worship for different reasons, such as praying for rain, the

elimination of diseases, a good harvest, good health and general success in life.

The topic of 'Christian or Islamic Rituals and Celebrations' indicates that the rituals and celebrations taught must be Christian or Islamic. Whereas, Africans are referred to as religiously ritualistic, the African religious rituals and ceremonies are not considered in the topic. Africans celebrate the journey of life to mark all stages of life from the time of conception to the last funeral rites.

The theme, 'Man's Social Relations', is constituted of the topics 'Respect for human life', 'Marriage' and 'Family'. The competency enables learners to understand how religions promote respect for human life by fostering the values of peaceful co-existence.

However, an examination of the stated learning outcomes indicates that it aims at enabling learners to appreciate the Christian and Islamic teachings about human dignity. It does not consider the traditional African perspective of respect for life, yet ATR has a wide philosophy about respect for life that is rooted in the Ubuntu philosophy. The topic of 'Marriage' facilitates learners to 'appreciate the importance of marriage in Christianity and Islam. Only one learning outcome concerns ATR: 'learners appreciate traditional African marriage and the values therein'. The RE syllabus fails to give a clear African worldview and philosophy about marriage.

One topic of 'Family' incorporates aspects of African Traditional society, and it discusses the nature and family set-up in African society without explaining the rationale for such family structures to learners. The topic allows learners to understand the types of families in traditional African societies, the nature of the traditional families and the ways in which modernity has influenced the African families. In ATR, family is both vertical and horizontal, originating from ancestors and extending to the ancestral spirits, to God and the future. Children are important because they carry the family lineage forward. Therefore, family relationships such as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT) that do not lead to the birth of children are not acceptable.

The third theme is 'Man's Dominion over the World', it is comprised of topics of 'Work', 'Wealth and Development' and 'Leisure'. The topic is taught based on the Holy Scriptures, especially the Biblical creation story in Genesis. The creation story gives man authority and power to dominate over *'the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth'* (Gen 1:26–28). It aims at enabling learners to understand the religious teachings about the value of work and to develop a positive attitude towards work. ATR is not given attention, yet it demonstrates a developed work ethic, which ensures that one must work depending on one's age and physical ability. There is no easy money, no corruption, no laziness and no shortcut to wealth.

The last theme concerns 'Man's Harmonious Coexistence' and it constitutes the topics of 'peace', 'justice' and 'conflict resolution'. The theme has several learning outcomes that focus on African Traditional

Society (ATS), including 'understanding of the nature of traditional African peace-building mechanisms'. ATR has strong teachings about peace-building, justice, and conflict resolution. However, the related learning outcomes do not imply that learners are learning about ATS practice of peace, justice and conflict resolution in order to implement them in their lives.

The analysis of the RE curriculum indicates the following: firstly, the RE curriculum mentions African Traditional 'Society', not 'African Traditional Religion'. Secondly, the ATS practices are NOT mentioned in the present continuous tense, but in the past tense. The implication is that such beliefs and practices are considered archaic, extinct, no longer required, and not applicable today. Thirdly, ATR aspects are discussed with no aim of enabling learners to commit to implementing the teachings into today's contexts. Instead, they are included for the purposes of comparing the Christian/ Islamic and ATR beliefs and practices. A few cases where ATR perspectives are integrated are brief, give inadequate illustrations and do not mention ATR. Instead, it is mentioned as African Traditional Society or heritage. In all, RE employs confessional approaches and methods that are aimed at deepening learners' commitment to either Christianity or Islam.

Perspectives on the Integration of ATR in Religious Education Curriculum

Interaction with participants reveals that Ugandans acknowledge and appreciate the presence and influence of ATR in the lives of Africans. However, people have different thoughts about the inclusion of ATR in the curriculum. Out of the 20 people interviewed, 17 think that ATR must be incorporated into RE. Three participants disagreed with the idea of integrating ATR in the curriculum. A Sheikh explained that,

'I know people practice ATR, even my relatives, but I have never engaged practically in ATR, I know some of the things, people still practice it strongly, they worship spirits and ancestors. But it should not be taught to our children', (MRL-1).

'People who worship spirits and ancestors don't know God ... our good behaviors of Africans are just cultural norms and customs, it is not because of ancestors and spirits', (TRL-1).

'Muslims are divided; I know I have an African name, but following tradition and culture is optional. I think teaching things of our culture to children helps them learn moral values; I respect those who follow culture, like rituals of twins' (MRL-3).

Some converted Africans believe that there is nothing to be taught to young people about ATR; they continue to view ATR as witchcraft, paganism, primitive and uncivilised. However, ATR is a revealed religion that developed through mythical experiences. As Okeke (2019) and Dzata (2022) observed, some Muslim and Christian Africans, out of sheer ignorance, misinformation, or naivety, still subscribe to colonial falsehoods and perceive ATR as satanic and pagan. Some Africans still believe that ATR is primitive, and they cherish foreign religions over their own. Participants expressed that young people need to learn about the African moral values framework that was handed over to generations through African ancestors. The African religious values bound the society together through kinship cobweb models (a cob-web of relationships), where each person depends on others, and the relationship extended to ancestors. This concept is well grounded in Mbiti's philosophy of 'I am because we are, and because we are, therefore, I am', (Mbiti, 2015). A teacher stated,

'instead of recognising our ancestors, whites abuse our beliefs because they think we worship ancestors, they have made all Christians and Muslims believe that ATR is about worshipping ancestors who are bad and evil because they cause poverty, you hear in the church, 'wekutule ku ba jjajja bo', break chains with your ancestors because they are responsible for poverty, diseases, bad luck, barrenness and madness', (RET-2)

'Young generations especially the Born Agains believe that our ancestors hate us and wish us evil, but the white ancestors are 'saints', this makes young people devalue the African identity, to the extent of neglecting African names', (CRL-5).

The doctrine and belief in 'saints' versus 'ancestors' as interpreted in modern-day African Christianity is misleading. The concept of ancestors can only be

rectified through teaching ATR to young generations. The traumatic representation of the African ancestry by some Christian churches may torment young generations. The difference between saints and ancestors is that saints are committed to Christianity, and ancestors were committed to traditional doctrine. The ancestors equally played recognisable roles in African contexts. As Madukasi (2021) argued, saints and ancestors are the living dead; they intermediate between man and God; they were human beings and know the needs of the living. However, Africans are referred to as primitive because they respect their ancestors. Just as saints are critical in the Christian church, ancestors are fundamental in ATR. We are what we are because of our ancestors (Isidienu & Onyekelu, 2021).

'Ancestors gave us life and everything that we possess we need to teach our children not to demonise our ancestors, because we are also soon to be ancestors and we shall want our children and grand children to remember us positively', (RET-1).

Ancestors mediate between the living and the dead; they give Africans an identity, and they transmit African heritage. The ancestor sin is similar to the concept of original sin that is inherited from Adam and Eve (Anagwo, 2018). The original sin is biblical and resulted from the fall of man as reflected in the Holy Bible (Genesis, 3). It is cleansed by baptism. However, the effects of the biblical sins are not as traumatising as the sins of the African ancestors. Therefore, there is a need to re-educate the young generations about the concept of ancestors in African Traditional contexts. Ugandans agree that African Traditional customs and traditions should be included in the RE curriculum because of the humane values and morals that are exhibited. A Catholic priest stated,

'African Traditional Religion is a rich, meaningful spiritual system that reflects identity, moral values and worldview of African people, it is not just about personal belief, it is a way of life that connects people to their community, ancestors and the environment' (RET-9).

'Our children are in disciplined because of lack moral grounding in the traditional ways of parenting, even parents do not know what to do, there is need to bring our traditions into public set up and teach African moral traditions', (RET-3).

The growing moral degeneration and lack of values among young people are attributed to the failure of schools to value African Traditional Religious Education. Such an observation is similar to (Okeke, 2019), who stated that 'the socio-moral problems can be solved via education, re-education and re-direction of the youths, through introduction of African Traditional Religion in secondary schools'. The values of respect for elders and parents, responsibility and hard work are based on the African customs and traditions that are rooted in religious beliefs and practices.

'Teaching ATR is the way we can preserve the African heritage and promote our belonging and unity, I think ATR is a relevant system that deserves more recognition, study and consideration in modern education', (RET-6).

The fast-changing times affect family and social structures; therefore, the mode of transmitting African knowledge and traditions is disintegrating. The oral means of transmitting knowledge about traditional beliefs are not sustainable. With the daily life hustles that make parents too busy, they do not have time for grounding children in African traditions.

'At university, I was taught ATR as one of the world religions but I did not study it in secondary school, if it is not given priority, if not taught in schools, even primary schools, it cannot be practical. It needs to be taught from a young age, like we study Christianity and Islam', (RET-4)

The expression implies that the teaching of ATR at university makes it academic, philosophical, and not practical. Indeed, in Ugandan universities, in departments of Religious Studies, ATR is one of the courses with a developed course outline. Scholars have done research and authored academic books that provide a basis for the study and teaching of ATR. However, ATR ought to be taught in practical ways, and the focus should be on traditional values.

'ATR instils values of humility and responsibility among students; it binds people and creates a sense of communal living and solidarity, the philosophy of 'I am because we are' should be practical', (CRL-5).

'The value of 'Ubuntu' is reflected in the values of the community, such as cooperation and mutual support for each other that creates social harmony, these cannot be imported, they are in our nature as Africans', (CRL-3).

Ubuntu is described as humanness or being humane. In the African view, failing to behave and live up to society's expectations implies that one is immoral, irrational, antisocial, and has an unethical lifestyle. A person is considered a person when he/she display acceptable values by exhibiting compassion, love, kindness, sharing, and generally contributing towards the wellbeing of others in the family and the community. Acts of selfishness, failure in one's responsibility and disrespect for others are all expressions of none 'Ubuntu' or 'Ubuntuism', being inhumane and consequently not being regarded as a person. Being a person is different from being human; personhood implies that you fulfil society's expectations. Ewuoso and Hall (2019) stated that in the Ubuntu philosophy, one gains respect and remains a person by integrated into the community. Subsequently, Ngubane and Makua (2021) advanced the concept of Ubuntu pedagogy and argued that the teaching of ATR instils a culture of Ubuntu. They advanced that Ubuntu education is transformative, decolonial and with "potential for reconnecting students with their indigenous values, heritage and cultures. It also has a capacity to cultivate Ubuntu social values of solidarity, co-existence, respect and cooperation among students'.

Environment and African Spirituality

Participants expressed that ATR respects nature. Teaching ATR creates awareness and instils a sense of conserving nature and the environment, animals and water bodies.

A teacher explained that,

'Today, nature is devalued, yet ATR is based on nature; we respect certain types of plants because they have spiritual implications for the traditional beliefs' (CRL-4).

'Teaching about nature is important, our totems are spiritual, we need to teach young generations, to respect nature, dwellings for spirits or ancestors. Destroying nature may

cause curses of poverty, barrenness or general failure in life', (RET-8).

In ATR, there is a belief that behind the visible objects, there lies the essences and powers that constitute the true nature of those objects (Oweyegha-Afunaduula, 2005). Uganda is endowed with an environment that accommodates plants, animals and birds and a landscape with water bodies, lakes and rivers. Some tribes in Uganda categorise themselves into clans and follow totemic systems that associate them with nature; plants, animals and birds. Totems are symbols that bind people of a shared ancestral origin, the clan. The totems are respected as sacred, and the totemic system guides clans in matters of marriage, naming children, food and general behaviour (Diawuo & Issifu, 2017). Through totemic systems, plants, animals, birds and reptiles are conserved and protected. For example, nature spirits such as the Nakayima tree in Mubende, the deep, roundshaped pits at Tanda that hold the myth of death in Buganda, Nalubaale (Lake Victoria), the royal tombs and many other sacred sites are respected and protected from destruction. They are believed to inhabit spirits. Failure to respect nature has caused the destruction of the environment and disrupted the climate. An example of the impact of African spirituality on the environment was the construction of Budhagaali dam at Busoga's sacred waters. The dam construction faced challenges. According to the Basoga of Jinja, it was a sacred site that was inhabited by different spirits under the leadership of Nabamba Budhagaali spirit. To avoid havoc from the spirits, the diviners and the people of Busoga decided that they could allow the electricity dam to be constructed. The mediums of Bugdhagaali, in agreement with the spirits, demanded compensation and a substantial budget for performing appeasement ceremonies and religious compensation (Oestigaard, 2015).

'There are special spaces, for example, Walumbe Ttanda, the big holes that no one can explain, these holes match with the story of Kayikuzi, it is hard to believe that such holes are not inhabited by spirits and the supernatural', (CRL-3).

'Nature is preserved through performing of ATR rites and ceremonies like initiation rites, burial, marriage among others', (RET-3).

African religion is ritualistic in nature; life is celebrated at every stage. The environment is an important aspect of rituals and celebrations, beginning with preparations, the herbs used, some rituals are performed along water bodies, others in forests, some use anthills, among others. There are many traditions and taboos that protect nature. Another such scenario happened at a highway construction site in Mpigi, where a spiritual tree stood in the middle of the proposed road construction. The tree belonged to the Baganda Lugave clan and was believed to harbour spirits, and people frequented it to worship and pay homage to the spirits. The diviner guided that the spiritual tree could only be removed after relocation of the spirits, which required securing another site, growing the tree and appeasing the spirits. A Ugandan court ruled that the diviner and the clan should be compensated in order to perform the required rituals to appease the spirits (Bwire, 2022). Such examples show the bond between African spirituality and the environment. African respect for nature extends beyond life, for instance, aspects of surrogate motherhood, homosexuality, lesbianism and transgender, which do not exist in our culture. A teacher explained that,

'we respect and love nature, our cultures do not accept homosexuality, transplanting children from womb to another, changing from woman to man and vice versa, even transforming our bodies, such as bleaching skins, adding extra hips and all that, we are supposed to remain the way God created us', (CRL-3).

'We do not respect a woman who has not conceived and delivered naturally, test tube babies are despised, men or women who change their sex are not respected' (RET-6).

In ATR beliefs and practices, marital relationships or marriages that recognise aspects of LGBTQI are unheard of. Children are highly valued. The dead resurrect through children. Marriage is for the continuity of family and lineage, clan and society through children. Childlessness is considered a curse. Women who cannot have babies are always mistreated for failure to continue the family lineage and humanity in general. A woman who failed to get children is looked at as a witch or a 'man'. Marriage is for a man and a woman; same sex marriages kill family continuity. To date, Uganda criminalises same sex relationships, *"ebisiyaga"*. Surrogacy is a new practice; a woman who acquires a

baby through surrogacy is not respected, and indeed, it is done in secrecy.

Methods of Teaching ATRE

To enable learners to understand ATR, teachers suggested approaches and methods of teaching. It should be taught not as a matter of referring to it, but to ground young people in ATRE. The suggested approaches include: ATR to be integrated and taught in mother languages; to be taught through research and project-based learning; and lastly, ATR should be a foundational subject of the African educational framework.

'ATR should be taught using research and project method more than any other methods; young people need to carry out research to document culture, traditions, customs, taboos-project could be written', (RET-8).

A teacher suggested that ATR ought to be taught as a language to enable young people to articulate their culture in their mother languages.

'I suggest that ATR is taught as a religion but also as a language, it is through our languages that we express our culture; a culture goes hand in hand with a language, cultural traditions, taboos, wise sayings and proverbs are expressed in a language, African morals are expressed in a language', (RET-6).

'The proverbs, wise sayings and riddles that are laden with meanings about morality and traditional values are clearly understood in mother tongues. ATR need to be taught in its language', (CRL-2).

Participants expressed that ATR ought to be taught as a foundational component at all levels of education, from kindergarten through secondary schools and at University.

'ATR has several educational components, it should be a foundational subject, different tribes need to have different ATR content but using the same methodology, it is through education that we can preserve our culture, let education not be a tool to extinct our culture', (RET-L).

'To maintain both tradition and ethos, we need to design an African educational framework that is founded in 'Africanness', the African

pedagogy; the Eurocentric education framework is landing us into values that are European' (RET-9).

Different authors, such as Mswazie and Mudyahoto (2013), Onwuatuegwu and Mgbeafulike (2023), together with proponents of Pan Africanism, have expressed arguments about Africanizing education. They contend that for sustainable, political and socio-economic growth and development of all sectors, Africans need to design African educational frameworks. Dzata (2022) has suggested several approaches for teaching ATR, namely phenomenological, historical, enumerative, comparative, thematic, particularistic and unity approaches.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: The article has analysed the RE framework to examine the status of integration of ATR both in content and the rationale of integration. The documentary analysis reveals that ATR's integration in the RE curriculum is not comprehensive enough, and it is not intended to ground learners in ATR. The study revealed that ATR is reluctantly integrated into some RE learning outcomes. An analysis of the RE curriculum indicates that where ATR is incorporated in RE, it is aimed at promoting the supremacy of foreign religions (Islam and Christianity). Interactions with teachers indicate the importance of ATR, particularly the teaching of African moral values. In the same way, RE teachers stressed the benefits of incorporating ATR in RE and in Africa's education system in general. Findings imply that there is a need to design policies that incorporate ATR in Uganda's education system.

Recommendation: Recommendation: It is important to create educational avenues that give an opportunity for young people to appreciate and learn about African cultures and values through African Traditional Religion. The Ministry of Education and Sports needs to contribute towards the efforts for creating African solutions for African problems by integrating recognisable and meaningful African knowledge in the educational framework through; Curriculum reforms to ensure integration of ATR both as a core and compulsory subject for all learners; Teachers need to be trained about the teaching of ATR and design pedagogies that include ATR; and Departments of Religious Studies in Ugandan universities should be funded to develop resources and publications about ATR. One of the challenges of

teaching ATR is the unavailability of resources. African authors need to initiate projects to document ATR beliefs and practices.

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