

## Redressing the Inadequacies of the Religious Education Curriculum in The Kingdom of Eswatini

Bandile M. Shabangu

[bandileshabangu1@gmail.com](mailto:bandileshabangu1@gmail.com)

Sithulisiwe Bhebhe

[sithulisiwebhebhe@gmail.com](mailto:sithulisiwebhebhe@gmail.com)

Nonhlanhla Nothando Moletsane

[nonhlanhladlaminin@gmail.com](mailto:nonhlanhladlaminin@gmail.com)

Faculty of Education, University of Eswatini

Kwaluseni, Eswatini

### ***Corresponding author***

Sithulisiwe Bhebhe

[sithulisiwebhebhe@gmail.com](mailto:sithulisiwebhebhe@gmail.com) or [sbhebhe@uniswa.sz](mailto:sbhebhe@uniswa.sz)

### ***Abstract***

*This paper provides a critical appraisal of the improvements done on the education system of Eswatini while at the same time laments the death of an inclusive and religious friendly type of education system. In any country, education is an important conduit or agent of change and development. There are many factors that can influence the education system of a country. They range from politics, economy, society, technology and religion itself. However, politics has proven to be the major driving force in Eswatini's education system as through the Prime Minister's Office, Christian Religious Education was announced to the country's ever changing education system. This is also because education in the country is thought to be a government venture as opposed to being a privately owned enterprise. This paper focuses on how best the inadequacies of the Religious Education curriculum can be redressed.*

### **Keywords**

Religious Education, Redress, Curriculum, Inadequacies, Education.

### **Background to the study**

Religion has been the major cause of unrests in some countries, world over (UNESCO, 2012). Ajah, (2015) argues that a total takeover by government of the education system can collapse even the once reputable institutions in terms of academic performance and even infrastructural development. This is one of the major reasons why (Itonga and Millicent, 2011) called for the secularization of the Religious Education curriculum of any country in the world and or that the Religious Education curriculum should have no sponsor at all. In most countries, it is a subject that is guarded by the constitution and or legislations on human rights so that the curriculum does not infringe the right to freedom of religion of others (Long, 2016). For instance, in England, it is guided by the Schools Standards and Framework Act of 1998 and the Education Act of 1996 which provides for the right to withdrawal from the subject without explaining yourself. The Cardus Education Survey (2011) and Van Den Kerchowe (2013) advocated for the secularization of the education system and went as far as stating that there is room for religion outside state schools while in state schools if present, it must never be confessional.

The curriculum of most schools worldwide has always contained Religious Education. This has been mainly because Religious Education has actively been known to be a strong promoter of the values of genuineness, fairness, honesty, good morale in learners, deference for others and care of the environment (QCDA, 1993 as cited in Itulua-Abumere, 2013). The Eswatini Religious Education curriculum which ended in December 2016 has always been encouraging children to learn from various religious beliefs, values and cultures while at the same time, exploring their own beliefs concerning their own religion. This type of Religious Education curriculum especially at primary school level where it has always been instructional and compulsory, has been helping children to mature personally and socially as well as refining their psychological judgments and decisions on religious, moral and social issues, preparing them for life in a secular society (Itulua-Abumere, 2013). In January 2017, Christian Religious Education haphazardly came into effect through secular No. 1 of 2017. Fowler, (1981) in his theory on stages of faith development reveals that learners in the adolescent stage are aware of their immediate environment and they have an understanding of the faith attitudes of other people on their religion. This alludes with the notion that a Muslim child grows up well aware that society

regards Muslims as terrorists, which is undeniably false because every religion worldwide has its own extremists.

Education all over the world is regarded as a basic human right. It has also been affirmed in various global human rights treaties such as the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education (1960), the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (1966) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (1981). The right to education also comes with the duty to uproot discrimination at all levels of the education system and to improve the quality of the education. Education is also integral in the fulfillment of any other civil, political, social and or economic right (UNESCO, 2012).

#### **-CAUSES OF THE INADEQUACIES IN THE TEACHING OF CRE**

**Politics-role of cannot be ignored)\_- education or the school is one of the institutions that must be secularized.**

Matemba (2011) argues that the relationship between politics and religion is bi-directional. That is, they cannot be divorced from each other. Religion has been politicized in existing national frameworks to an extent that the dominant religion is elevated to the position of a national religion, making the minority ones to be viewed as inferior. Eswatini, Zambia and Indonesia are good examples of such cases (Dlamini 2018; Kamanga 2013 and Sejati & Gazali, 2016). Courts in South Africa and around the world have explained clearly that it is not the place of a government to establish an official state religion. Separation of the church and the state does not necessarily mean that religion no longer has a role to play in society and schools. The challenge for schools is finding a place for all religions, without favoring a single religion. In trying to avoid making one religion superior than others, national context and direct community context should always be considered (Hodgson, 2010).

Politics of any country have a huge impact on education. More-so because politics dictate how schools should be governed and they also underlie the content of the education system (Mackatiani et al., 2016). For example, in the Social Studies curriculum of Eswatini schools, there are sections where the Tinkhundla system, Monarchical Democracy, system of governance is discussed. This is a system that is relatively unknown to the wider world. On the contrary, politics

in education are essential for the formulation of educational policies, endorsement and implementation. Again, the U.S. Department of State (2016) reported that government owned media houses conducted Christian-programming. The government of the kingdom is also being accused of imposing restrictions on minority religious groups as minority religious groups are denied airplay. Further, chiefs mostly in rural areas encourage their subjects to shun businesses owned mostly by Muslims and they also do not allow a religious group rights to set up a structure in their communities, if they suspect that the religious practices of that religious group may conflict with the tradition and culture of the Swazi people.

Religion, politics and education will always be related, unless a state decides to secularize the education system of its country (Itonga and Millicent, 2011). South African courts and around the world clearly explained that it is not the place of a government to establish an official state religion and that separation of the church and the state does not mean that religion does not have an important role to play in our society, including in schools (Hodgson, 2010). Separating the state from religion can help to avoid tampering with the people's right to freedom of religion and also to ensure that all religions in a country are accorded a similar status. Matemba (2009) argues that proponents of multi-faith Religious Education long declared that multi-faith religious education is the way to go as it is believed that it fosters understanding among people of different religious and political beliefs in an era where a majority of the people are aware of their personal, social and political identity.

### **-formal and non-formal education(interreligious tensions**

Religious conflict is largely defined as a disagreement between two or more religious groups and it is as old as mankind (Ushe 2015 in Igbokweet.al. 2019). The education system of any country on the other hand, can only be defined from the aspect of the formal education system. This incorporates early childhood education, primary education, secondary education, and tertiary education and (Mackatiani, Imbovah, Imbova, & Gakungai, 2016). Frazer and Friedli (2015) are of the idea that the United Nations (UN), and all organizations and or individuals who seek to positively contribute to the attainment of peace and stability, need to broaden their toolboxes on dialogue and certain interventions in order to better engage with the role religion plays in conflict. This can be done through creating a strong working relationship between traditional and

religious leaders. Igbokwe, Enem, Oparaku & Akpom, (2019) assert that interreligious conflicts and or religious conflicts can be curbed through promoting inter-religious dialogues.

Religious organizations, in addition, can either act as conflicting parties, bystanders, peace-makers and or peace-builders. They can also be used to bring about societal peace, as powerful tools for social tolerance, democratic pluralism and constructive conflict management (Omosho, 2014 as cited in Igbokwe et.al. 2019). Dialogue is used to understand human existence. It is not just an end but means to bring to a halt existing or intending conflicts (Igbokwe et.al. 2019). Sulaimani (2016) as cited in Igbokwe et.al. (2019) opined that dialogue must be utilized to discuss the different dimensions of the problem which threaten the co-existence of two or more religious groups in a community. Lenshi & Akipu (2014) in Igbokwe et.al. (2019) asset that religious conflicts can occur when certain adherents assume that their belief system is superior to other religions and or when a sense of religious deprivation is nurtured.

In Eswatini, the U.S. Department of State (2016) revealed that prior to the introduction of the current Religious Education curriculum there were reports of societal discrimination based on religious belief, affiliation and or practice, including a lack of trust on non-Christian religious groups especially in the rural areas. This has been mainly because the traditional laws and customs of the country provide less protection for minority religious groups as chiefs or local authorities may direct their subjects to shun a certain religion if they see its religious practices to be in conflict with the Swazi tradition and culture. Dlamini (2018) and the U.S. Department of State (2016) also highlight that Christianity has always been the dominant religion in Eswatini's Religious Education curriculum and that Christian denominations have always suggested to government to declare Christianity a national religion. This means that Circular No. 1 of 2017 came at no surprise to Christian denominations. The lack of cooperation amongst the religious groups, their leaders and traditional leaders like chiefs breeds a negative impact on social justice, economic development, the education system and sometimes politics of a country (Igbokwe et.al, 2019)

### **Religious Education CurriculumIn A Multi-Religious Society**

From a socio-cultural perspective, Religious Education is a subject taught to assist learners to develop their religious identity and this can be achieved through allowing them to participate in religious practices (Itulua-Abumere, 2013). One then wonders how learners can achieve their religious identity if and only if a government imposes a religion on them. Such an act has been seen as a major cause of interreligious tensions and unrest in society as it is the case in Malawi (Ndekha, 2014). A culture of violence and hatred is spreading fast across the world (UNESCO, 2007). Curbing the violence and the ongoing hatred cannot be possible without the support and cooperation of all religious groups. Mercedo (2007) states that the cases of repression and religious discrimination in countries that give lip service to human rights as contained in the UN Declaration of Human Rights is a travesty not only of their commitments proclaimed in world forum such as this but also of their belief in a living God who is Mercy and Compassion. Their actual praxis denies what they profess in public. This he says in a way to tell us that elevating one religion and overlooking the others is a violation of human rights.

In view of the Challenges affecting the implementation of the Christian Religious Education in Nigerian Schools Mordi and Sunday (2017) discovered the challenges were caused by that most of the Primary Schools in the country were under-staffed with qualified Christian Religious Education teachers. Again, Christian Religious Knowledge teachers in the Primary Schools lack professional competence in using various teaching methods during lessons. Most of them have not been keeping abreast with the new trends in the teaching of the subject. They continue to state that there are inadequate instructional materials in all Primary Schools in Nigeria and lastly, most CRK teachers do not seem to use appropriate simple methods or techniques of evaluation such as easy question, objective in assessing their pupils. Mordi and Sunday (2017) then conclude that the problem affecting the successful implementation of the CRE Curriculum lies with the methods of teaching Christian Religious Education, the use of unqualified teachers and inadequate facilities in the schools.

The education system has dissociated children from their parents and extended family members especially grandparents who are supposed to be custodians of morals. This is so because one of the aims of Christian Religious Education is to foster morals to learners (Itolondo, 2012). The rights of parents to give their children an education which conforms to their convictions also

forms an integral part of some national constitutions and raises the question of the priority given to the convictions and interests of parents over those of their children. The application of this right can lead to particular difficulties (Pepin, 2009). The European Union states that any form of a compulsory subject on religion is usually a big disadvantage mostly to immigrant learners as they do not have rights unlike children of citizens of that country who are allowed to opt out of a Religious Education that is not within their convictions (European Commission, 2008). UNESCO (2012) reveals that most education systems in the world have shown disregard for the existence of minority populations such as children of migrant workers and domestic workers. Such an education system is strongly condemned because it is against United Nations' education for all policy which frowns upon an education that has elements of discrimination and or favouritism.

Elihami (2016) states that the adoption of a single religion in schools and society contributes to making negative interpretations of other religious texts as sacred as the Holy Book itself and the religions in general. The next impact is the emergence of violence in the name of religion such as using religion to justify actions of violence. One way of reinforcing the strategies aimed at addressing conflicts rooted in religion is to involve local religious and traditional structures in conflict resolution and state building processes (Frazer and Friedli, 2015). The doctrine of jihad, for example, is often used to justify actions of violence in Muslims. Some of this violence can make some learners not to be outspoken about their religious convictions in fear of being beheaded together with their families. Based on The Wahid Institute's information, violence in the name of religion is a common phenomenon in Indonesia. There were 54 cases of religious-based violence in Indonesia in year 2009 alone, 8 cases in relation to the establishment of place of worship, 25 cases in relation to misguided religion and 11 cases in relation to Ahmadiyah group of Islam. Religion-related violence is a confusing occurrence in Indonesia since that country's constitution allows for freedom of religion and for one to observe the rituals of his or her religion. Elihami (2016) states that their government pays a lot of attention to religious life. One of its examples is by establishing the Department of Religious Affairs in January, 1946, soon after the independence by Sutan Syahrir, as a Prime Minister in that time. This department still exists even today and probably none of the future Presidents would like to abolish this department, otherwise would face a big resistance from the Muslims.



In Kenya, Jebungei (2013) notes that the teaching and learning of Christian Religious Education in secondary school reveals that the subject has continued to be less prominent among the learners. Eshiwani (2010), on the quality of secondary education in Kenya, notes that the challenge associated with the teaching of subjects like Christian Religious Education is perceived by learners as having a minimal contribution to the job-market. This is mainly because the subject is not a prerequisite for entry to highly ranked professional courses like medicine, engineering, law and computer science. Many students are opting for Science subjects. Some people believe that this subject is an easy one, while offering no job prospects except becoming preachers or teachers of CRE (Chemutai, 2008). Some learners decry the over-emphasis on excellence in Sciences and Mathematics as a gateway to tertiary institutions as a contribution towards their negative attitude on this subject (Situma, 2016). Ngusa and Makewa (2018) note that much as Christian Religious Education is designed to prepare learners to be morally upright, most learners fail to take it serious because it is an academic subject that is not used as an entry requirement to university education in Tanzania.

Peterson (2017) revealed that learners from non-Christian backgrounds face the challenge of learning about Jesus Christ for the first time in their lives, to some learning about a doctrine they are not subscribed to, whilst in the same class with people who fully believe in that doctrine and who are comfortable in learning about it. Muslim learners positively perceive content that is easily applicable in their daily lives, and have negative perceptions on content that requires lots of memorization and too many theories such as Christianity (Sejati & Gazali, 2016).

Christian Religious Education in trying to achieve its goals competes with the negative influence from print and electronic media and the internet which many youths have been hooked to (Jebungei, 2013). These channels have introduced learners and the youth to foreign, conflicting values and immoral practices. There is a worrying trend of increasing cases of addiction to internet pornography in Kenya among children and youth through cell phones and computers. The situation is worsened by the general moral decay in the society evidenced by cases of robbery, violence, rape and defiling, murder, corruption even among top government officials such as the Goldenberg, Anglo leasing and the Nairobi City Council cemetery scams. Ndarwa (2007) makes similar observations in her study on the role of Christian Religious Education in students' moral development. Situma (2016) in a study that investigated methods used by



teachers to teach Christian Religious Education also states that the failure to use technology in teaching this subject makes learners to take this subject as irrelevant and boring to their lives. Situma (2017) further states that the unavailability of facilities and materials is one of the major constraints to effective instruction in most schools in Kenya Mutsotso (ibid.) further observes that relevant Social Education and Ethics (SEE) instructional resources materials such as audiovisuals are inadequate or lacking in many schools.

In Nigeria, Njoku & Njoku (2015) identified various challenges, which range from poor understanding of pedagogical and theological aims of the subject, societal moral decadence, lack of passion and love for students and the job, poor communication technique to the vast and abstract nature of subject. Worth noting is that Christian Religious Education is a subject that has always been taught in both Nigerian primary and high school as a core subject since the inception of education in Nigeria. Sunday & Mordi (2017) conclude that the problem affecting the successful implementation of the Christian Religious Education Curriculum lies with the methods of teaching the subject, the use of unqualified teachers and inadequate facilities in the schools. Most CRE teachers do not seem to use appropriate simple methods or techniques of evaluation such as easy question, objective in assessing their pupils.

Hodgson (2010) in the Basic Education Rights Handbook of South Africa states that the challenge for schools is finding a place for all religions, without favouring any one religion. In this process, national context and direct community context should always be considered. For instance, public schools in a majority-Muslim community must be extremely careful not to promote or endorse Islam. Generally, because the significant majority of South Africans identify as Christian, this threat is almost always relevant with regard to schools' promotion of Christianity. When public schools declare a Christian religious ethos publicly, they undoubtedly risk creating the reasonable impression that the state endorses Christianity over other religions. This can be very alienating for learners of other religions (Hodgson, 2010).

### **Improving the Quality of Christian Religious Education**

Solutions to these inadequacies have also been sought; hence they need to adhere strictly to the demands of stakeholders in education of children, because factors affecting teachers' preparation and execution of their duties effectively jeopardize the aim of establishing the subject. This

otherwise mars the general aim of education, which is geared towards developing in man the knowledge and right attitude towards his neighbor (Njoku&Njoku, 2015). Sunday and Mordi (2017) state that priority should be given to qualified teachers in the field to teach the subject in the primary schools.

Njoku (2016) asserts that untrained Christian Religious Education teachers who are teaching the subject should be encouraged to go for training in CRE. This will guarantee the level of competency expected of teachers within the field. Again, Christian Religious Education teachers should be encouraged to attend workshops and seminars to broaden their knowledge in the subject. Teachers are also encouraged to use diverse teaching methods that are learner-centred. Government on her part should provide all instructional materials and equipment lacking in the primary and secondary schools for the teaching of CRE. Njoku (2016) advised governments to provide incentives to teachers who conduct research so as to motivate teachers to further their studies and also improve the quality of education offered in schools. SOURCE].

In minimizing the challenges faced by learners, Ilechukwu and Ugwuozor (2014) recommends that Religious Education teachers and Heads of Departments should intensify their efforts in teaching, so that the learners can grasp the need of sacredness and abhor secularism. Secondly, the students are to be made to pursue more things of the other world and little of this world. Additionally, school owners should ensure that a conducive atmosphere is created for teaching and learning of Religious Education. In a religious educational setting, the classroom environment must be set up in a way that allows for participants to express doubts about the intellectual and faith development (Johnson-Miller, 2013). Lastly, government should encourage the curriculum designers to re-design the curriculum of Christian Religious Education to reflect the realities of the present time.

Situma (2016) notes that in minimizing the challenges learners face in this subject, many CRE teachers prefer to teach using other methods such as discussion, class presentation and library research. Audiovisual method is the least used in teaching mainly because audiovisual resources are not easily available. It is further recommended that curriculum planners and other educational stakeholders in Kenya should establish CRE resource centres in every district so that resources for teaching CRE can easily be availed to teachers for teaching the subject. In addition,

principals of secondary schools in Kenya should encourage and support CRE teachers by ensuring that the requisite teaching aids are bought as a matter of priority. Again, If a teacher can create a classroom environment that engages students and creates a positive view of themselves, their teachers, and of the content being learned, the learner can have positive perceptions about the content taught in class and the teacher (Peterson, 2017).

### **Flaws of Christian Religious Education**

Conroy (2011) notes that Christian Religious Education does not make students religiously literate. It also sees learners demonstrate widespread ignorance of basic religious concepts. This is also a subject that suffers from too many competing expectations, under-resourcing, limited time allocations, placing examination and non-examination pupils in the same class, being too dependent upon local conditions and the disposition and skills of the teacher.

Teachers in Britain on the other hand, feel under a lot of pressure, and this lowers their confidence levels and in many cases feel undervalued. Teachers struggle to find a pedagogic middle path between allowing pupils to develop their own values and offering more substantive accounts of particular values, claims or doctrines. Teachers are also not infrequently under qualified with the result that their coverage of a given subject can be limited. They also find themselves caught between the goals they want to pursue in helping students explore the big questions of life, and the increasing need to teach to the test in order to secure resource and status (Conroy, 2011).

Sunday and Mordi (2017) uncovered that learners in Nigeria now have unlimited access to the internet where they get exposed to circular music and graphic content such as pornographic films which threaten their morals. Jebungei (2013) also agrees that the internet has a negative influence on learners, something that waters down the efforts of Christian Religious Education in Kenya of trying to build and develop learners' spirituality and also inculcate morals in them.

### **Theoretical framework**

The study made use of Jean Piaget's (1983) theory of cognitive development. Piaget's theory is of the understanding that children actively create their understanding of the world, introducing new information into existing schemas through the process of assimilation. (Rathus 2003 in

Loots 2016). This is also a theory that explains the change in the reasoning levels of a child acquiring new ways of understanding their world (Lefa, 2014). In classroom settings, teachers must facilitate learning through exposing learners to various experiences and opportunities for learners to explore and experience. This will encourage their new understandings. The concrete operational and formal operations stage was of huge relevance to this study as both the teachers and learners who participated in this study fall under those two stages of cognitive development.

### **Statement of the problem**

Goal number 4, 10 and 16 of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda of Sustainable Development Goals are aimed at reducing inequalities within countries and societies and promoting inclusive environments and quality, non-discriminatory education both at primary and secondary school levels, for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015). The Kingdom of Eswatini is interestingly a multi-religious society with diverse religious and spiritual beliefs, but all learners in the country's schools are expected to learn Christian education. The teaching of Christianity alone in Religious Education classes in both public and private schools came into effect through a circular, dubbed Circular No.1 of 2017 or Kholwane Declaration. Article 23 of the country's constitution on the other hand, provides for the right to freedom of religion, thought and or conscience, a right that has been infringed by the aforementioned circular. The constitution, laws and other policies of the kingdom protect religious freedom and also grant individuals the right to worship either alone or in community with others. Religious Instruction is mandatory in all school levels in Eswatini and only Christian organized youth groups are allowed to operate and conduct daily prayer services in most schools in the country, downplaying the existence of the multi-religious societies that Eswatini schools have increasingly become (Human Rights Watch, 2017: U.S. Department of State, 2016). The United Nations, which Eswatini is a member of, regards education as a basic human right and this has been the case since 1948 up to this day (UNESCO, 2012).

### **Research Methodology**

Kumar (2011) defines research as one way amongst many of searching for answers to your question. Igwenagu (2016) defines it as a process of merging experience with reasoning as it is

believed to be the only way of unearthing truth, especially in Natural Sciences. Research methodology is further defined by Igwenagu (2016) as a user manual to research.

### **Research Approach**

This study utilized a qualitative approach of research design. A qualitative research approach was used in this study as it proved to be advantageous in giving a succinct understanding of how well the inadequacies caused by the Christian Religious Education curriculum can be addressed in Eswatini schools. Chumbow (2012) states that a qualitative approach is done to unearth tendencies in thoughts, views and opinions and gets deeper into the problem. Creswell (2012) declares that qualitative research begins with an assumption, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meanings of individuals or groups ascribes to a human or social problem. Indeed a theory was employed in this study. The qualitative research approach was used in this study because it simplified information gathered from the field and places it in understandable themes and sub-themes which then state the reasons why a certain phenomenon is taking place in that environment (Creswell, 2012).

### **Research Design**

McMillan and Schumacher (2010) define research design as a technique or general plan used for involvements in a research study and the type of data collection this plan includes. A research design is also seen as the general strategy for solving a research study (Leedy & Omrod, 2014). Horava (2012) states that a case study is suitable in instances where an investigation is done for purposes of learning more about a little known or poorly understood situation. The study used a descriptive research design and specifically a case study. Horava (2012) further states that case studies can be used to describe the implementation of a program or policy. In this case, a case study was to understand the inequalities that came with current Religious Education curriculum in Eswatini schools.

### **Results of the study**

The declaration by government to abolish the teaching of other religions save for Christianity in Religious Education classes engendered the existence of silent interreligious conflicts in the country. This is mainly because the Swazi society is multi-religious and or multi-cultural in

nature. Again, there is not much cooperation between religious leaders and or traditional leaders at community level, since Christians have always enjoyed preferential treatment from the traditional leaders (U.S. Department of State, 2016).

### **Strategies That Can Be Used To Minimize The Challenges Faced By The Learners From Non-Christian Backgrounds In Learning Christian Religious Education**

Most learners and teachers advised that government must revise this circular in a way to make the curriculum inclusive and non-discriminatory. Since the affected learners are also future leaders, government is advised to stop raising a divided and an angry nation but instead our government must raise a united nation that respects each and everyone's religious conviction. When asked how the challenges they face can be minimised, Teacher 1 said: *Government must reform the curriculum or make the subject optional. According to my understanding, Religious Education serves to promote harmony and morals in society.* Some teachers stated that government can either continue with the current curriculum but it should no longer be compulsory, instead, learners should be allowed to opt out without stating a reason especially if they are from a non-Christian religious background..

Teacher 3 added by stating that: *At least government must bring back the inclusive curriculum which will either co-exist with the current one or operate on its own.* Some learners stated that in policies that relate to education, Religious Education must be a subject that is guided and protected by the constitution to avoid government's interference on the school and religion. Learners actually suggested that education must be separated from politics, which means that any decision with regards to the content taught in schools must be decided by educationists instead of politicians.

During the collection of data it was noted that most learners complained about the teaching methods. When teachers were asked on how best they can minimize the challenges faced by these learners in Christian Religious Education classes, Teacher 3 revealed that: *To counter the dominance of Christian learners in role plays and group works, schools should now use audio-visuals instead of the role plays for all learners to master the concept being taught. Watching can be friendlier to all learners as opposed to making them act out something they do not believe in.*

Again, both teachers and learners during the collection of data stated that teachers should use less of the lecture method because it is the very same method that prompts teachers to find themselves changing the whole lesson into a sermon without noticing. The discussion method was favoured by most of these learners as it allows them to have an input in the lesson. They also stated that the discussion method also allows them to state their own understanding of the concept being taught in class, rather than relying entirely on the understanding of the teachers and their fellow Christian colleagues. Some learners pointed out that teachers should respect the fact that they subscribe to a different religion by avoiding to indirectly or directly undermine other religions. This was seen to be mostly the case with teachers who are sworn Christians.

### **Attitudes, Interests and Perceptions On The Subject (Christian Religious Education)**

Findings from the study reveal that some Christian Religious Education teachers have a negative attitude towards the subject. This is mainly because at tertiary they are trained to teach all religions whereas the situation in schools is such that they have to teach Christianity only as per the dictates of Circular No.1 of 2017. This is how Teacher 4 responded to one of our questions:

*I do not understand where government thinks I will utilize the training I received on Islam, Bahai, Judaism and our own Swazi Traditional Religion since I am not allowed to even exemplify with the other religions as the curriculum now is Christian-centered.*

Teacher 2 had this to say: *The current curriculum is broader in scope than the previous one. It takes away all the love we had for Religious Education because the workload we had before has doubled. Sometimes I wish I taught practical subjects such as Agriculture and Consumer Sciences which never undergo any drastic changes.* What makes the current curriculum to have a wider scope is that it now evangelizes the learners. It also requires learners to not only read the verses for understanding but also prepare a sermon and apply the teachings of that verse to real-life situations. This then becomes a problem for learners with differing religious beliefs mainly because they are aware of their right to freedom of religion, conscience and thought. To their innerselves, it also sounds like they are betraying the values and dictates of their religion

### **Appraisal Of Divergent Views And Religious Tolerance**



Going forward there is a growing urge for government and society at large to start appraising differing views in matters of faith and or religion. Governments must also be seen to be promoting religious tolerance not only on paper but also in practice. In alleviating religious discrimination, Miracle (2015) advises that governments should never consult beneficiaries of the schooling system when addressing the inadequacies of a curriculum, instead advice should rather be sought from the various religious groups and civil society groups. Teachers are bound to be biased because they fear losing their jobs. Learner 3 was of the idea that they can't say as Swazis they are knowledgeable in matters of religion when in Religious Education classes they are taught on one religion, Christianity. This is what the learner had to say: *We are going to be a generation of people lacking religious knowledge because we will never be able to hold and sustain a conversation with non-Christians and this on its own stifles our efforts of trying to identify with a religion of our choice. Christianity is being imposed on us. Again, we are not versed on the major religions currently being practiced in the country and outside our borders.*

It is very important to allow people to use their religions for religious identity because it is through man's religion that man can learn that some actions are either good or bad and this can be helpful in directing man to live a purposeful life (Onah, 2017 in Okwuchukwu, 2019). Religious tolerance is needed and is good for creating and strengthening a good relationship amongst individuals and for national development. With the presence of Christianity as the only religion that is taught in Eswatini's Religious Education classes and in the wake of the multi-religious nature of our classrooms one then wonders how is our future generation going to live in harmony in future as the non-Christian learners feel like the current curriculum is to their detriment. Learner 5, a Muslim by religious conviction had this to say: *When the circular was effected, I was about to start Grade 5 and in the previous books we were learning about all the major religions practiced in the country and beyond our borders. We felt equal and we enjoyed that fellow countrymen were also learning about my religion, whereby, even participation during lessons was more or less evenly distributed. Now we feel like Christianity in the country have been given a status of superiority.* Divergent views in terms of faith and belief must be tolerated so as to allow learners to learn from each other and also to realize that the Eswatini constitution allows for religious freedom and it also gives all religion a similar status. However, it was also

discovered that teachers in Eswatini sometimes do not permit Muslim learners to leave school early on Fridays to attend prayers at a mosque.

## **Discussion of Findings**

## **Conclusions**

Education is key in any country's development process, however, religion seems to not be a viable instrument a state can use to foster and promote social cohesion. Education can be an effective instrument when it comes to promoting a country's economic so long as it is clearly defined, legislatively protected and owned by the people. From the findings of the study one can conclude that the current Religious Education has engendered conflicting views in matters of religious freedom in the country and the classroom environment. An emerging need for the separation of the state from religion and education from religion was identified. The study also identified the need for proper training and provision workshops to teachers of Christian Religious Education and provision of incentives to teachers who conduct research. This can improve their commitment and strategies of implementing the curriculum. Again, the study uncovered that the curriculum lacks religious knowledge and religious instruction infringes the learners' right to religious freedom.

## **Recommendations**

It is recommended that the Eswatini government ties its development agenda together with its educational goals in consideration of the multi-religious society that Eswatini is. It is also necessary for curriculum planners to always consult the stakeholders of our education system before any changes could be effected. Lastly, beneficiaries of the education system should be overlooked to avoid their biasness during consultations, instead, advice should be sought from the constitution, existing education policies, and policies and goals set by the United Nations on education of any country.

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