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Assessing the Authenticity of Assessment Methods in Lesotho Secondary Religious Education: To What Extent are 21st Century Skills Integrated?

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A B S T R A C T

There is a growing recognition of the importance of quality education that fosters essential skills for students' future success in the 21st century. To ensure the development of the 21st century skills, it is imperative to employ authentic assessment methods that integrate and nurture these skills that include critical thinking, creativity and communication. However, very little is currently known about the authenticity of assessment methods employed by Lesotho secondary Religious Education (RE) teachers. This study therefore employed qualitative case study buttressed by Theory of Multiple Intelligences to assess the prevailing assessment methods used in RE classrooms to determine the extent to which they integrate and foster 21st century skills. For data collection, semi-structured interview was utilized to gather useful data. To determine the eligibility of those to comprise the sample, purposive sampling was employed to select fifteen RE teachers; five participants from each of the three RE associations found in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Lesotho. Data collected from interviews was analyzed qualitatively and the following results were found: first, to a large extent, the assessment methods used by RE teachers are traditional and offer no place for integration of 21st century skills. It was also revealed that teachers lack comprehensive knowledge of the implementation of authentic assessment methods that target the nurture 21st century skills. It was therefore recommended that RE associations in Lesotho should put accent on the implementation guidance and benefits of authentic assessment methods for holistic development of learners.

Keywords: Authenticity, assessment methods, 21st century skills, Religious Education

1. Introduction

The world today is undergoing a constant and rapid change attributable to the proliferation of information and the advancement of technology among others. Admittedly, how we live and learn has drastically been transformed by the advancement of technology over some past years. This change therefore compels schools to develop advanced skills aimed at empowering students to embrace opportunities and also address challenges of this digital era (Kurata, 2023; Ayanwale, 2023; Parmini, Rai putra, Mukhamdanah, Aridawati, & Sudiartha, 2023). A quest for endorsement of 21st century skills is also accentuated by Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD, 2013) which divulges that skills such as information-processing skills, literacy, problem solving, self-management and interpersonal communication are more crucial for students today than ever to enable students' flourish despite the competitiveness and complexity of this world. Strangely enough, the integration of these skills in the assessment methods utilized by teachers in Lesotho secondary Religious Education (RE) still remains unclear.

Drawing on a need to evaluate the assessment methods in RE, Husain (2023) makes an effort to provide illumination on assessment methods in RE that were utilized in the past. The crux of Husain's remarks is that education in the past primarily emphasized memorization of subject content in order to retrieve that information during quizzes and examinations. Interestingly, Masengwe and Dube (2020) reveal corresponding evidence that RE curriculum was "Eurocentric, Bibliocentric and Christocentric" (p.128). To be precise, it involved the indoctrination of students with Christians' beliefs. To better understand the teaching and assessment of RE in the context of Lesotho, such explication is largely based in Mokotso's (2017) work thesis that avers that RE in the past put more emphasis on memorizing Biblical texts and dogmas that were aimed to be retrieved for satisfying the requirement of pen and paper examination. The essence of Mokotso's remarks is that memorization for pen and paper denied learners opportunity for dialogues, problem-based learning and analytical discussions among others. Indeed, it is highly likely suggestive that assessment methods of RE in the past hardly targeted fostering skills needed for holistic development of students.

Recognising a need for more comprehensive assessment methods compatible with the 21st century, countries around the globe including Lesotho revised their curricula with the aim of keeping their curricula abreast with the 21st century demands (Kurata, Mokhets'engoane & Selialia, 2022). The current remarks of these researchers validate the view of Stabback (2016) that our contemporary world is constantly changing and consequently demanding new knowledge to navigate effortlessly in it. It is as a result of this intricateness of this world that Lesotho developed and implemented the Curriculum and

Assessment Policy (CAP) of 2009 which researchers generally acknowledge that the policy signifies a paradigm shift in the teaching and assessment processes. In support of their stance, they pinpoint that CAP 2009 has broaden the assessment modes to ensure authenticity of assessment process. These assessment modes include formative, monitoring of educational progress and summative assessment (Mokotso, 2020; Lesitsi, 2022).

Putting more emphasis on the authenticity of the assessment methods is the most substantial factor for attainment of any educational goal. The concept of authenticity of assessment methods has proven to be a matter of ongoing discussion among researchers (Mueller, 2014; Fitriani, 2017). Although differences of opinion still exist, State University of Makassar (SUM, 2013) refers it to the 21st century methods assess students' competences and attitudes on instructionally-relevant activities. Contrary to traditional assessment that posed threats to students, authentic assessment methods provide feedback that could be utilized by a teacher for the purpose of therapy and progress. In the context of RE, Mokotso (2017) and Masengwe and Dube (2020) are in accord to stress that traditional assessment methods fail to covey what students are really capable of doing. It would therefore be fitting to assess whether the authentic assessment methods that are encouraged by CAP 2009 are utilized for the development of 21st century skills.

Indeed, a topic of the extent to which the assessment methods in RE integrate the 21st century skills is vital bearing in mind that the promotion of 21st century skills is one of the principal goals of education in Lesotho. Nevertheless, Mokhets'engoane and Pallai (2023) present a concern that teachers are not adequately trained to teach in for 21st century. Even though their sentiments have not yet been established in RE, their articulation however, would suggest that a RE teacher who lacks training on authentic assessment would persistently encourages memorization of Biblical texts to meet the pen and paper test demands. In the view of Fitriani (2017), one possible result of this pen and paper assessment is that rote memorization leads to lack of enthusiasm and disengagement of students. On the other hand, a competent RE teacher would employ authentic assessment methods that engage learners in application of their knowledge and skills in practical contexts and consequently offer a promising avenue for evaluating RE students holistically.

1.1 Statement to the problem

Evidence from a number of studies assert that traditional assessment methods of RE emphasize rote memorization of Biblical texts and overlooked the development and evaluation of 21st century skills such as collaboration, critical thinking and problem-solving. Despite the global appeal for the development and evaluation of 21st century skills to prepare students for the demands of the modern world, it has been established that there is no research, if any, there is limited information regarding the extent to which 21st century skills are integrated in the assessment methods of Lesotho secondary RE. Several studies investigating the authenticity of assessment methods never focused in RE in Lesotho (Pakpahan, 2020; Achmad & Prastowo, 2022; Francisco, 2023). For this reason, our understanding of the authenticity of assessment methods utilized by RE teachers is notably underdeveloped. The study therefore, sought to bridge this knowledge gap, taking into consideration that a report on skills audit in Lesotho revealed that there is an alarming mismatch between skills possessed by students and the skills demanded by the market (Council on Higher Education [CHE], 2023). Notably, RE is aimed at developing these 21st century skills indispensable in this modern world.

1.2 Research objective s

(a) To examine the assessment methods typically used by Religious Education teachers.

(b) To explore the 21st century assessment methods in Religious Education and determine the extent to which they are employed by RE teachers.

2. Literature review

2.1 Theory underpinning

This study adopts the theory of multiple intelligences (TMI) as its lens to assess the authenticity of assessment methods in RE on their capacity to integrate 21st century skills. This theory which is supported by Gardner and Hatch (1989) holds that an individual possesses different abilities or intelligences including spatial, aural, verbal, physical, logical, social, solitary and naturalist intelligence. For that reason, learning and assessment ought to strive for the nurturing of different intelligences of students. Armstrong (2009) is clearly right to stress that TMI rebuts traditional assessments methods on the grounds that they measures one kind of intelligence. As it is the case with RE, traditional assessment methods in RE focused in linguistic and logical-mathematical given that they accentuate memorization of Biblical texts (Masengwe and Dube, 2020). In this regard, TMI will inform the study in ensuring that assessment in RE captures a broad range of intelligences for promotion of 21st century skills.

2.2 Importance of the 21st century skills

The value of 21st century skills cannot be underestimated. To further understand this assertion, Kurata et al (2022) and Ayanwale (2023) maintain that one substantial thing a country could do for its citizens is to equip its citizens with skills to enable them to be successful in the contemporary world. Given this compelling need for countries to act, educational systems of many countries including Lesotho have embraced diverse frameworks for the 21st century skills to benchmark the teaching and in particular the assessment processes for the development and nurturing of the 21st century skills. Inasmuch as there are several frameworks for 21st century skills, this study has adopted the Partnership for 21st century skills (P21) Framework on the basis that it is well-defined and consequently widely accepted (Joynes, Rossignoli & Fenyiwa Amonoo-Kuofi, 2019). What is worthy to note here is that P21 categorizes skills into three broad categories namely: life and career skills (LC), learning and innovation skills (LI), information, media, and technology

skills (IMT) (Partnership for the 21st century skills [P21], 2008). On the other hand, Voogt and Roblin (2010) in their analytical discussion of different frameworks revealed that common skills reflected in these frameworks involve essential skills such as communication, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity (4Cs). These skills are expounded below.

Communication skills

Communication skills comprise of the ability to express oneself orally and in writing. Actually, they involve the ability to present ideas, opinions and instructions effectively, listening, writing and reading. At present, it is undisputable that we live in the digital world where communication skills especially through digital devices are indispensable needs particularly in education sector (Joynes et al., 2019). To validate the expediency of communication skills through digital devices, the ambush of COVID-19 confronted the bricks and walls classroom teaching and forced schools to shift to online learning. However, several studies that focused on the efficiency of online learning amid COVID-19 report that online learning was challenging to both teachers and students and this negatively impacted effective teaching, learning and assessment (Makumane, 2021; Sepiriti, 2021). The evidence provided here about the value of communication skills is suggestive of emphasis that ought to be put on promotion of communication skills though RE to enable students to learn effectively and build relationships with their colleagues (Bialik, Trilling, Fadel & Nilsson, 2015).

Collaboration skills

P21 (2008) defines collaboration as working together to attain a certain goal. This definition provided here reveals an interesting point that collaboration goes hand in hand with communication skills. For instance, it is impossible for RE to work together while there is poor communication among them. Johnson & Johnson (2009) claim that collaboration is highly valued in the in schools on the basis that it enables the exchange of skills and ideas among students. Furthermore, it ensures improved relationships, confidence and accountability of students who due to different backgrounds and abilities, they complement each other in different aspects. Bialik et al. (2015) hold similar views that collaboration enhances some of the macro skills including listening and speaking which are crucial to ensure that any given task in RE is done successfully.

Creativity and innovation skills

Contrary to the traditional perception of creativity as associated arts and music, Francisco (2023) maintains that creativity in the 21st century is associated with innovation skills. It is therefore crucial to understand the nuances in the two categories skills to appreciate their value. Basically, it refers to students' ability to generate solutions to complex issues. Undoubtedly, this would involve skills such as analysing, synthesising and application of skills learned to solve complex problems in a RE class and in societies. Worryingly, the report on skills audit by CHE (2023) revealed that 59.2% of unemployed females and 40.0% of unemployed males "felt that they had inadequate technical and soft skill to lend them a job" (p.165). The implication of this report is that subject curricula including RE have a compelling need to intensify the assessment methods for fostering 21st century skills including creativity and innovation skills.

Critical thinking skills

Critical thinking is one of the important skills in the 21st century. According to Joynes et al (2019), critical thinking refers to students' ability to apply high order skills to solve problems in a new viewpoint and avoiding conventional thinking. Husain (2023) draws our attention to unshaken admiration granted to critical thinking skills from educational thinkers from Plato, Socrates and to John Dewey. For Husain, such attention on critical thinking triggered by the fact that critical thing skills comprise a myriad of skills such as analysis, application, reasoning and problem-solving abilities. Certainly these skills are needed to be integrated in the assessment methods of RE to enable students to solve prevailing life nuisances emanating in societies.

2.3 Authentic assessment methods in Religious Education

Assessment is one of key component in learning process of RE. One of the fundamental goals of assessment is to gather information on the level of effectiveness of the teaching process SUM (2013). What is important for us to recognise here, is that assessment methods develop as the curriculum changes. The possible explanation of this change is triggered by a need to maintain the quality of learning. In actual fact, assessment methods employed in the 20th century might not necessarily be relevant in the 21st century. It is therefore fitting to assess the authenticity of some assessment methods employed in RE to ensure the promotion of 21st century skills. There are several authentic assessment methods but this study focuses on the following: performance, portfolio, self- and peer-feedback and project assessment

Performance assessment

Performance assessment is a systematic process where teachers evaluate learners' ability, skills and knowledge in a given area or task. Actually, it involves engaging students in projects, test and presentations with the intention of measuring students' ability to apply knowledge (Fitriani, 2017). In RE, performance assessment could be utilized to assess students' understanding of Biblical texts by engaging them in real life application to solve life issues including religious intolerance, poverty and social injustices. It is also worthy to highlight that performance assessment project-based assessment that involve assigning projects that require them to research, analyse and present their work on religious issues. It is clear from this description that projects and other approaches such as ethical dilemmas and simulations give a way for assessing a rage of 21st century skills such as, information finding, collaboration, critical thinking and creativity.

Portfolio assessment

Chere-Masopha and Mothetsi-Mothiba (2022) acknowledge that portfolio is a concept associated to teaching, learning and assessment but refuse to claim its definition. However, they state that portfolio involved various aspects including collaboration between a teacher and students and documenting students' work from the beginning to the end. A further supporting contribution by Mueller (2014) is that portfolio assessment involves a continuous collection of students' work with the intention of showing students' progress over time. In RE, portfolio assessment could be employed through setting a goal for RE such as developing critical thinking or engaging in personal reflections. Afterwards, a RE teacher determines the type of artefacts that students will include in their portfolios. This may involve projects or presentations. Furthermore a teacher set a timeline for submission of a portfolio and finally provides feedback. This detailed description suggests that portfolio assessment fosters skills such as critical thinking and self-reflection which are vital in the 21st century

Project assessment

Fitriani (2017) considers project assessment as an assessment of students' tasks which have been finished within a certain period of time. The further explication is that when assessing a project, focus is put on the planning, gathering of data, organizing, analysing of data and data presenting. Along similar lines, Abubakar, Madugu and Idrisargue (2020) argue that project assessment is used to know students' understanding and ability on a certain concept by engaging students in an intensive research on subject content. They further brought our attention to the value of this assessment that it provides students with opportunity for exploration, critical thinking, creativity, presentation and self-direction. The practicality of this method in RE is that a RE teacher could choose a topic on ethical issues, present it to students and offer research guidelines to learners who will present their findings upon completion. The assessment of the project would focus on skills such as among others.

Self and peer assessment

Self and peer assessment are generally understood as involving offering students an opportunity to assess their abilities and that of their peers (Kitsantas, Reisner & Doster, 2004). In actual fact, instead of a teacher grading students, a teacher allows students to allow students to correct their work. There are advantages associated with these assessments and SUM (2013) point out that they promote self-directed learning and autonomous learning that are essential today. Noonan and Duncan (2005) provide a supporting evidence that self and peer assessment are essential when a teacher seeks to assess 21st century skills that cannot be assessed directly without prior planning. For instance, these assessments could be utilized to assess critical thinking and information collaboration of students in RE spontaneous tasks.

3. Methodology

The current study adopts qualitative case study (QCS) approach to assess the authenticity of assessment methods in RE, with focus on the 21st century skills integration. This approach is widely acknowledged on the basis that it enables a researcher to make an in-depth collection, examination and presentation of data about a particular incident with the purpose of learning more about it (Lapan, Quartaroli & Riemer, 2012). The QCS was embraced to allow the researcher to obtain an in-depth understanding about the extent to which methods used in RE reflect the 21st century skills.

For sampling, purposive sampling was utilized to select fifteen RE teachers from diverse secondary schools that constitute three RE associations in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Lesotho on the basis that RE teachers possess information about the topic. Convenience sampling was used to select these teachers who belonged to three RE associations in Lesotho situated in the Northern, Central and Southern regions of Lesotho. It is important to note that from each region, five teachers with at least two years teaching experience were eligible for selection. The selected teachers were recruited from WhatsApp groups of the three RE associations and the recruitment of teachers from diverse associations corroborated Cohen, Manion and Morrison's (2011) assertion that variation of populations increases the richness of data.

In respect to data collection, semi-structured interview as being one of the widely used methods was employed. The decision to use this method is based on Leavy's (2017) remarks that semi-structured interview allows participants to "use their own language, provide long and detailed responses if they choose, and go in any direction they want in response to the question" (p.139). Being the fact, this method was utilized on the basis that it provides detailed responses through probing. Furthermore, telephonic method was employed to administer five interview questions that address the research questions. For data analysis, qualitative data analysis was used to analyze data from semi-structured interview. For ethical consideration, the researcher informed teachers about the study, and they were asked to participate voluntarily. For confidentiality, the identity of participants, RE associations and schools were not revealed.

4. Findings and discussions

This current chapter of findings and discussions presents the findings and discussions obtained from the semi-structured interview that were administered over fifteen teachers. It is worth noting that such findings and discussions correspond with the objectives of the study being: (1) to examine the assessment methods typically used by Religious Education teachers. (2) To explore the 21st century assessment methods in Religious Education and determine the extent to which they are employed by RE teachers. Equally important, teachers' responses are categorized based of the questions that were administered to address the two objectives.

4.1 To examine the assessment methods typically used Religious Education

Assessment methods typically used by RE teachers in classes

All fifteen teachers provided diverse assessment methods they employ in RE. In particular, they highlighted the following assessment methods: written examinations at the end of the year, monthly tests, class discussions, quarterly tests, self and peer-assessment, group projects, quizzes and oral presentations. It is crucial to indicate that only five out of fifteen teachers claimed using authentic assessment methods in RE. One of them said,

> *Apart from these other common methods, I also use other assessment methods since these students get demotivated by written exams.*

In summary, these results convey that a minority of 33% interviewed teachers employ alternative assessment methods in assessing RE while the majority of 67% of teachers persistently employ traditional assessment methods. What can be clearly seen in these results is the difference between the number teachers employing traditional and authentic assessment methods in RE. It is therefore apparent that teachers have limited knowledge about the authentic methods in RE. The possible explanation of this is that teachers lack professional development that unpacks the assessment methods in CAP 2009.

Challenges or benefits of using the current assessment methods

The results from revealing teachers' views on the benefits of their current assessment methods in RE revealed that nine teachers are convinced that the benefits of traditional assessment methods outweigh those of modern methods. They vehemently criticized students of the current curriculum on the grounds of laziness, unwillingness to participate and their inability to think critically. One teacher said,

These students are so lazy and stubborn. They enjoy talking than writing and for me they are worth nothing since they will not proceed to the next class only talking.

In a contrary, a few number of six teachers, acknowledged that modern assessment methods in RE are crucial. They highlighted some benefits including development of critical thinking, application of text in real life contexts, engaging students to reflect upon ethical dilemma. One teacher said,

For now, we have the problem of manomoro [gangsters] in schools. Using these modern methods will help us monitor students behaviours of which it is impossible to do with the pen and paper assessment.

In general, these results reveal that majority of teachers are convinced that traditional assessment methods still imperative in assessing RE. Only a minority embrace the benefits of modern assessment methods in RE. What is most disturbing about these results is that all fifteen RE teachers acknowledge that there is a paradigm shift in assessing students. However, there is divergence in their views concerning assessment. This clearly conveys that there are complexities in the implementation of the assessment methods in RE. It is also fitting to suggests that summative assessment negatively impacts the effective implementation of authentic assessment since schools strives for recognition and therefore persuade teachers to teach for attainment of good grades and oblivious that they jeopardize students' success.

4.2 The 21st century assessment methods and their incorporation in Religious Education

Teachers' knowledge of the alignment of their assessment methods with RE goals

Another finding from the interviews is that almost all teachers lacked comprehensive knowledge goals and objectives of RE syllabus. For this reason, it was problematic for them to justify the alignment of their current assessment practices with the objectives of RE syllabus. One of those teachers said,

I put more emphasis on memorising Biblical texts. We were also advised by markers of Examination Council of Lesotho (ECoL) who are also our colleagues that, question (a) of paper two of Religious Education question papers demands students to memorise the stories and not leave even a single word like 'is.'

Another teacher said,

> *These assessments help students to know God. The have to recognise that God still perform miracles even today. Also, have to learn to live peaceful with one another. The parable of a Good Samaritan is a good example.*

These findings convey a significant mismatch between their assessment methods and the goals of RE. In my view, the most compelling explanation for this mismatch is that teachers lack intensive training on the objectives of RE since they only put emphasis on the cognitive domain. These seem to contradict what RE syllabus postulates by vividly positing that assessment in RE ought to acknowledge also the psychomotor and affective domains (The National Curriculum Development Centre [NCDC], 2020).

Teachers' knowledge of 21st century assessment methods and the extent they use them

The findings of this question are found to amplify the findings on the benefits of the current assessment methods teachers employ. It is hardly surprising that almost all teachers have an idea of the concept of 21st century methods of assessment. However, five teachers claimed to employ these methods frequently. One of those teachers said,

> *I allow students to assess each other's work and sometime engage them in presentations.*

These results are somehow disconcerting owing to the fact that teachers seem to have an idea of the 21st century assessment methods but only 33% frequently employ these methods to assess RE. In actual fact, the use of digital and presentations, performance-based tasks and collaborative tasks integrates evaluate skills such as creativity, collaboration and critical thinking among others. However, such benefits are in vail since the majority of teachers rarely use authentic assessment methods in RE.

Examples of how teachers integrate 21st century assessment methods in RE

Despite some teachers' bold claims regarding their knowledge and frequent implementation of modern assessments methods, the results convey that one teacher out of five failed to provide accurate example of how they implement the 21st century assessment methods in RE. One teacher provided this example,

I allow my students to present Biblical stories at the assembly and in class without reading from the Bible. Sometime when doing revision for quarterly examinations, I allow them to mark each other and then bring the books so that I confirm the marks.

These examples provided here clearly misalign with the teacher's claims regarding their understanding of authentic assessment methods. In my view, the presentations utilized by the teacher are only aimed to anchor students' memorization ability not to develop students' confidence and eloquence. As a result of these unconvincing illustrations, the validity and effectiveness of this teacher's assessment methods remains questionable since such presentations and claimed peer-assessment mimics the traits of traditional assessments methods.

Conclusions and recommendations

In summary, the findings indicate that the majority of RE teachers typically use traditional assessment methods in RE. This finding draws support from the listing of assessment methods RE typically employs. Evidently, the majority of RE teachers indicated that they employ traditional assessment methods. Their preference was blamed on the caliber of students they teach and the bad influence of final examinations. The conclusion that could be drawn is that assessment methods used in RE are not authentic. In fact, they neglect the development and nurturing of 21st century skills such as creativity and problem solving which RE encourages their development for addressing prevailing life issues (NCDC, 2020).

Furthermore the study revealed that teachers lack comprehensive knowledge about authentic assessment methods. In fact, the authentic methods some claim they utilization, are not lack the integration of the 21st century skills that are widely celebrated for their prominence. a further supporting evidence is that, all teachers claimed that they are familiar with the concept of 21st century assessment methods. However, a minority claimed to use these methods frequently. What was striking was only to find that one of those who claimed use these methods have limited understanding about the implementation of these methods. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that RE associations in Lesotho are not doing enough to equip teachers on the implementation of authentic assessment methods; rather, they exhaust much of their energy on summative assessment. As a result, teachers are not competent to assess for the holistic development of students. Undeniably, these conclusions are compelling for one to recommend that the ministry of Education in Lesotho and RE associations in Lesotho should offer continuous professional development that focus on the implementation of authentic assessment methods in RE.

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