



Evaluating the Pedagogical Impact of Lesotho's Grade 10 Religious Studies Syllabus: Educational Implications

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ABSTRACT

Recent educational reforms worldwide have focused on developing 21st-century skills and aligning curricula with contemporary needs. In this dynamic context, it is important to understand the role of religious studies in Lesotho. This study explores the pedagogical value of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, particularly its influence on cognitive and moral development. Using a critical pedagogy approach, this qualitative study involves semi-structured interviews with religious studies teachers and an analysis of the syllabus document. The findings show that while the syllabus promotes critical thinking, moral development, and cultural awareness, challenges like limited resources, insufficient teacher training, and a lack of contextual relevance limit its effectiveness. The study recommended for provision of more support, and offering professional development to enhance the impact of religious studies teaching and learning. This research contributes to discussions on curriculum development and pedagogy in religious studies, providing insights for policymakers, teachers, and stakeholders seeking to improve educational outcomes in Lesotho.

Keywords: Religious studies, Educational, Impacts, Grade 10

1. Introduction

Recent developments in education have highlighted the global adoption of curriculum reforms to cultivate 21st-century skills and align educational systems with contemporary needs (Kurata, 2023; Ayanwale, 2023; Parmini et al., 2023). In this rapidly changing context, understanding the role of religious studies in Lesotho becomes increasingly crucial. This study aims to explore the inherent pedagogical value embedded in the syllabus, with a specific focus on how it shapes both immediate cognitive growth and the moral foundation of future generations.

Prominent organisations, such as the United Nations (UN) and the Southern African Development Community Secretariat (SADC), have advocated for the development of contemporary competencies, particularly through initiatives like SDG 4, which targets inclusive and equitable quality education (UNESCO, 2017). Lesotho, as a member of both the UN and SADC, has adopted the 2030 Agenda and the RISDP 2020-2030 through its Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2016-2026, which aims to ensure access to inclusive and relevant education (MoET, 2016).

The curriculum review in Lesotho, which occurred after 43 years of unsuccessful efforts, has shifted the focus from content mastery for examination purposes to the development of a range of skills that address contemporary needs (Mokotso, 2020). This shift has also influenced subject curricula, including religious studies, which now emphasises the cultivation of advanced competencies to address contemporary needs and promote appropriate values and attitudes (MoET, 2021).

However, concerns have been raised regarding the perceived educational value of religious studies in Lesotho's Grade 10 syllabus. Religious studies teachers argue that the syllabus lacks relevance, resulting in a gap between the implemented and official syllabi. This raises questions about the effectiveness of these courses in promoting holistic learning. This study aims to evaluating impact of Lesotho's Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, taking into account teachers' perceptions of its significance and concerns.

Research questions:

1. How do religious studies teachers perceive the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho in terms of its effectiveness in promoting holistic learning?
2. What specific knowledge, skills, and values are emphasized in the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho?

2. Literature review

2.1 Underpinning theory

The study employs critical pedagogy to address teachers' perceived relevance and concerns regarding the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho. The use of critical theory is justified by its emphasis on education's transformative potential in resolving societal problems and fostering critical thinking skills (Tjabane, 2010). Critical pedagogy, based on the work of Paulo Freire, promotes social justice and equality in educational settings (Klaasen, 2023). It focuses on how the Grade 10 religious education syllabus addresses gender roles, inclusivity, and socioeconomic implications. This approach fosters a democratic and participatory learning environment, allowing students to actively engage in discussions about the ethical and moral components of religious beliefs. Beyond the classroom, critical pedagogy seeks personal and social transformation by questioning preconceived notions, building empathy, and motivating a sense of social responsibility (Hannam & May, 2022).

This theoretical framework informs the evaluation of the potential of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus for holistically developing learners. It encourages students to apply their knowledge in real-world situations to effect positive social change. In summary, the study employs critical pedagogy as a lens to assess the relevance and concerns expressed by teachers regarding the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho. This approach highlights the transformative potential of education in addressing societal issues, promoting critical thinking, and fostering students' ability to apply their knowledge to drive positive social change.

2.2 Historical context of religious studies in Lesotho

According to Mokotso (2017), indigenous belief systems and cultural practices have influenced Lesotho's early educational setting since before colonial rule. The arrival of European missionaries in the 1830s marked the beginning of formal education under British colonial rule, resulting in the adoption of the British curriculum, which was primarily aimed at the spread of Christianity (Mokotso, 2017; Selepe, 2016). Missionaries established church-owned schools to teach reading and writing skills for Biblical literacy, resulting in an undemocratic teaching method that discouraged critical analysis of biblical texts for practical application (Kurata, 2023; Mokotso, 2020).

Following Lesotho's independence in 1966, the country made modifications to the curriculum to align education with local realities amidst political and social transformations (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). The Comprehensive Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) was formed in 2009, representing a significant shift away from the British Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) curriculum and towards a learner-centred pedagogy that reflects global educational trends and encourages the development of modern skills (Mokotso, 2020).

The most recent change in 2021, which resulted in the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP), further emphasises learner-centred approaches in the study of religion for Grades 9 and 10. The goal is to equip students with critical skills for the modern world (MoET, 2021). These policy changes have influenced the current state of religious education in Lesotho, promoting critical thinking, active involvement, and the development of modern skills necessary to address today's challenges and opportunities.

2.3 Importance of religious studies

Religious studies is a crucial part of a well-rounded education, as it serves several objectives beyond just providing religious knowledge. According to Ayala-Pazmiño (2023), religious studies equips students with ethical and responsible decision-making skills. The emphasis is on how religious and moral education can foster cultural understanding and tolerance among students.

Furthermore, Holt (2022) claims that religious studies provide students with the opportunity to study a variety of religions. As a result, students gain insight into diverse beliefs and traditions, which helps cultivate empathy and respect for others. Andrei (2023) agrees that religious studies improve students' emotional and spiritual intelligence by increasing self-awareness, empathy, and social skills, thereby contributing to their overall development and ability to navigate the world effectively.

Bekithemba et al. (2015) discovered that religious studies in secondary schools not only promote academic excellence but also have a substantial impact on students' moral development and emotional well-being. Bamford et al.'s (2023) study revealed that non-religious adolescents had worse mental well-being scores than those who prioritised religious studies and had higher mental well-being. Religious studies aid in understanding the impact of religion on individuals and communities while also encouraging respect for diversity (Bekithemba et al., 2015). Furthermore, it has been identified as an important component in enhancing adolescent mental health by developing coping mechanisms, raising awareness of beliefs, and building relationships (Bekithemba et al., 2015). Ardel and Koenig (2007) reported that an intrinsic religious orientation is linked to a cosmic sense of purpose in life, promoting personal happiness even in the face of death. As a result, religious studies in secondary schools provide students with extensive knowledge of religion, spirituality, and culture, while also promoting their mental and emotional well-being.

Religious studies are being integrated into curricula around the world, employing innovative teaching methods and various approaches aimed at developing cultural understanding and ethical development (Hage, Ring, & Lantz, 2011). In the United States, efforts to address social issues and inequality in marginalised neighbourhoods have been seen, with studies such as Sporre (2020) emphasising the inclusion of social justice aspects in curricula to counteract imbalances. Religious instruction is permitted in state schools in England under legislation enacted in 1870, and several European countries have established inclusive models that emphasise exposing children to various global religions to encourage tolerance and interfaith

discourse (Davis and Miroshnikova, 2013). Finland provides religious education with the purpose of improving social skills, similar to Zambia, where the church has a prominent role in education, ensuring the inclusion of religious studies in the curriculum to create 21st-century abilities (Carmody, 2022).

2.4 The role of religious studies in cognitive development

Research by Shuib et al. (2023) emphasises the importance of religious studies in promoting students' cognitive development. They found that religious studies encourage critical thinking, analytical skills, and intellectual growth among students. This view is supported by Kurata (2024), who argues that religious studies enables students to investigate, analyse, and evaluate religious concepts, texts, and practices, thereby fostering independent thinking and informed decision-making. Mehmet (2022) further validates the role of religious studies in cognitive development, claiming that studying diverse religious perspectives and exploring their historical and cultural contexts empowers students to think independently and make well-informed decisions.

Shuib et al.'s (2023) study revealed that students' responses showed a moderate level of cognitive engagement, with 71% focused on lower-level thinking, particularly in applying knowledge. However, the study also found that 79% of students demonstrated the ability to organise and characterise religious studies knowledge. Interestingly, these cognitive abilities encouraged by religious studies align with Lesotho's educational objective of developing students' competencies, in which religious studies play a role (MoET, 2021). To further develop competencies among learners, Shuib et al. (2023) suggest that religious studies teachers should focus on teaching practices that promote cognitive growth, particularly the development of higher-order thinking skills. This recommendation is supported by research by Wellman et al. (2001) and Dumontheil et al. (2010), which indicates that children's understanding of both human and supernatural beings develops around the age of four and continues to evolve throughout adolescence.

2.5 The role of religious studies in moral development

According to Khanam (2008), moral development is based on principles that distinguish between "good" and "wrong" actions. Estrada et al. (2019) explain that religious studies is important because it promotes moral growth. Research has shown that religious studies can foster religious morality, strengthen coping mechanisms, promote respect for religious diversity, and increase a sense of oneness. Similar views are shared by Tamaki et al. (2021) and Zubiru (2016), who suggest that religious studies has been linked to the development of students' moral skills. These perspectives on the role of religious studies are validated by Bekithemba et al. (2015), who revealed that religious studies not only provides academic excellence but also has a substantial impact on students' moral development. Nur (2019) agrees that religious studies is associated with the development of values such as compassion, dignity, tolerance, openness, and respect, which are connected to morality.

Zhang et al. (2022) assert that the curriculum and teachers are crucial elements in moral development. They emphasise that a religious studies curriculum serves as a tool for establishing values, and teachers are directly involved in this educational process. Furthermore, Horowski (2020) states that religious studies teaches about other religions and emphasises the relationship between religion and morals, which is important for the development of moral virtues, including tolerance, peacefulness, and respect. Shah (2004) strongly emphasises that a strong religious foundation, along with parental support for religious studies, helps to safeguard teenagers against inappropriate behavior. This view is supported by Kurata (2024), who suggests that religious studies in Lesotho has the potential to develop moral values and mitigate moral decadence.

2.6 The role of religious studies in cultural and religious awareness

Religious studies plays an important role in Lesotho secondary schools by fostering cultural and religious awareness. It facilitates interaction between various ethnic groups speaking different languages and religions, emphasising the need to cultivate understanding and tolerance for difference, as Portera (2008) has stated. Adolescents develop values and respect through religious education, which should be included not only in the academic programme but also in programmes that build interreligious interactions, as observed by López-Cordero et al. (2021). Lestari et al. (2023) emphasise that strengthening religious moral development through school cultural activities has an important effect on students' cultural and religious awareness.

Religious studies in Lesotho encourages tolerance, cultural appreciation, and social togetherness. According to Zulaikhah and Misbah (2023), the curriculum breaks down cultural boundaries and appreciates the various tapestries of beliefs, creating an inclusive atmosphere in which people of different religions and origins can live together peacefully. However, Rissanen et al. (2020) emphasise the importance of addressing religious literacy challenges, particularly those related to managing religious diversity within multi-faith schools. Religious studies fosters a sense of openness and inclusivity among students by encouraging them to investigate the similarities and contrasts between many religions, creating a foundation for harmonious relations in a diverse community.

Furthermore, religious studies instils values of social responsibility in students, encouraging them to actively participate in community activities and positively contribute to society's well-being. This comprehensive approach to education not only deepens students' understanding of various cultures and religions but also prepares them to succeed in a diverse and interconnected world.

2.7 Social engagement and community building

Religious studies is important in Lesotho high schools for encouraging students to engage in community service. By studying diverse religions, students gain values such as compassion, justice, and service to others, which instils a sense of social responsibility in them. This education encourages students

to use their knowledge to address contemporary issues and actively participate in their communities through service projects, volunteering, and community outreach programs. Students can positively impact their communities by putting their values into action (Sinha et al., 2006).

Furthermore, religious studies fosters a sense of belonging and unity among communities. Students gain a better understanding of varied identities and backgrounds by exploring their own religious and cultural heritage, boosting social harmony. They become social justice leaders, community development catalysts, and ambassadors of peace and understanding (Jeynes 2012). This sense of solidarity and understanding provides students with the values and motivation to actively contribute to their communities, addressing local issues, and working for positive change (Knight et al., 2021). Additionally, community engagement is critical to developing strong bonds between schools and local communities. Collaboration among parents, community members, and teachers' results in more responsive schools that better serve low-income populations (Baquedano-López et al., 2013). Schools can enhance community development and social cohesion by involving parents in decision-making processes and interacting with the larger local community (Warren, 2005).

3. Methods

3.1 Context of the study

This study is situated within the broader context of educational reforms in Lesotho. These reforms aim to integrate 21st-century skills into the curriculum in order to meet global educational standards and developmental goals outlined by organisations such as the United Nations and the Southern African Development Community.

Recent curriculum revisions in Lesotho have sought to move beyond traditional content-focused approaches, including in religious studies, which historically emphasised rote memorization of religious doctrines. The shift in Lesotho's educational framework towards more inclusive and competency-based learning underpins this investigation.

Specifically, this study explores the pedagogical value embedded in the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus. It focuses on the syllabus' immediate impact on students' cognitive and moral development, as well as its potential long-term benefits. The study also addresses concerns raised by teachers regarding the syllabus' relevance and effectiveness in promoting comprehensive learning experiences aligned with contemporary educational needs and societal expectations.

3.2 Research paradigm

This study employed an interpretivist approach as the guiding paradigm for collecting and interpreting the data. The interpretivist paradigm is based on the notion that knowledge cannot be derived from a single objective reality (Research Methodology, 2016). In other words, it rejects the idea of an absolute, universal truth and instead asserts that individuals can interpret their world in unique and subjective ways. The ontological, epistemological, and axiological assumptions of interpretivism align well with the research approach and design used in this study. Interpretivism emphasises the subjective, context-dependent nature of reality, the constructed nature of knowledge, and the role of values in the research process. This paradigm allows for a deep, nuanced understanding of the participants' (the Grade 10 religious studies teachers) experiences and perceptions, providing valuable insights into the pedagogical value and concerns surrounding the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus.

3.3 Research approach

The research approach employed in this study is qualitative. This choice is rooted in Leedy and Ormrod's (2005) assertion that a qualitative research approach is well-suited to answering questions about the intricate nature of a phenomenon and describing and comprehending that phenomenon from the participants' perspective. Given that the study aims to uncover the pedagogical value and address concerns through teachers' perceptions, qualitative methods will allow for in-depth exploration and understanding of these issues.

3.4 Research design

This study adopts a case study research design in order to delve deeply into specific aspects of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus. As Nieuwenhuis (2011) explains, qualitative case study research is a "systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (p. 75). The case study design is inherently descriptive, allowing the researcher to gather comprehensive data that facilitates a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 2009). This research design aligns with the study's goal of understanding the pedagogical value and addressing the concerns related to the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus.

3.5. Data Collection Methods

Semi-structured interviews

The study utilised semi-structured interviews to collect information from the Grade 10 religious studies teachers. The data collection occurred between July 1 and July 6, 2024. Semi-structured interviews involve the researcher asking a few predetermined questions but then allowing the conversation to

flow organically with unplanned follow-up questions. This interview format helps develop a relationship between the researcher and participants, allowing their experiences to be explored in depth. Furthermore, the spontaneous nature of semi-structured interviews enables the exploration of topics that are directly relevant to the main research focus. Given these benefits, the researcher chose this interview approach to deeply explore the teachers' experiences, perceptions, and challenges regarding the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus.

Document analysis

The study also used document analysis to analyse the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus. Document analysis is a research method where researchers examine already-available documents and data to explore a problem. In this case, the researcher analysed the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus itself to understand the intended goals and compare them with the teachers' perceptions and experiences. This document analysis provided additional insights beyond just the interview data from the teachers.

3.6 Sampling Strategy

Purposeful Sampling

The researcher utilised purposeful sampling in this study. Purposeful sampling involves deliberately selecting participants, sites, documents, or other materials that will best help the researcher understand the problem and research question (Creswell & Creswell, 2023). In this case, the researcher chose five Grade 10 religious studies teachers specifically because they had relevant information and experience concerning the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus. This purposeful selection of participants allowed the researcher to gather the most relevant and informative data to address the research question.

Recruitment

To recruit the participants, the researcher sent a message to the WhatsApp group for the religious studies teachers' association. The participants were selected to represent a diversity of experiences, ages, and perspectives on the syllabus, ensuring representation from different schools and backgrounds. The researcher also used purposeful sampling to select a specific section of the Grade 10 syllabus for analysis. The analysis focused on the syllabus overview, which provides a summary of all the learning outcomes to be covered. This section was selected as it was deemed to contain rich information that could provide valuable insights into the value and concerns of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus.

3.7 Data Analysis

Since this study used qualitative data collection methods, the researchers also utilised qualitative data analysis techniques. Qualitative data analysis involves categorising, describing, and summarising the data. In particular, this study used thematic data analysis. Thematic analysis follows a structured six-phase approach, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This includes familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining those themes, and finally producing a comprehensive report based on the identified themes. Thematic data analysis involves carefully describing and summarising the extensive amount of textual data generated from interviews or observations (Creswell & Poth, 2017). In this study, the researchers recorded detailed notes to capture the participants' responses from the interviews and the findings from the document analysis of the syllabus. To systematically compile and analyse this qualitative data, the researchers followed the thematic analysis process described by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic analysis was chosen as the appropriate approach because it allowed the researchers to make sense of the meanings, perspectives, and experiences expressed by the religious studies teachers, as well as the insights gained from the document analysis of the syllabus.

3.8 Trustworthiness and rigour

To ensure the credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability of the research findings, the researcher took several important steps: To ensure credibility, the researcher spent significant time engaged with the Grade 10 religious studies teachers, checked the emerging findings with the participants to validate the interpretations, and used multiple data sources, including interviews and document analysis. To ensure dependability, the researcher kept detailed records documenting the entire research process and had other researchers review the work to identify any potential biases or inconsistencies. To ensure confirmability, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to document their own biases and provided transparent documentation of the entire research process. Rigour was further maintained through systematic data collection and analysis procedures, following structured methodologies like thematic analysis, and using a detailed coding process to develop the key themes. These combined efforts to establish credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability ensure that the study's findings on the educational value of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus are credible, reliable, and valuable for informing educational practices and policies in Lesotho.

3.9 Ethical considerations

The main focus of this study was to maintain rigorous ethical standards throughout the research process. To protect the rights and well-being of the participants, the researcher employed several key ethical strategies. First, the researcher obtained informed consent from all participants. This process clearly explained the purpose of the study, what would be expected of the participants, and their right to withdraw at any time without penalty. Additionally, the researcher took steps to ensure the participants' information remained private and anonymous. Fake names were used, and the data

was kept securely so that no individual participant could be identified in the published results. The researcher also obtained the necessary approvals from the relevant ethics review boards to ensure the study adhered to established ethical guidelines and protocols. Honesty and transparency were prioritised throughout the research process. The participants were fully informed about the goals and methods of the study, and the researcher respected their diverse cultural, social, and personal backgrounds, treating them with the utmost respect and care.

4. Findings

Research question one: How do religious studies teachers perceive the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho in terms of its effectiveness in promoting holistic learning?

The qualitative data analysis provided an in-depth exploration of the teachers' responses regarding the effectiveness of the syllabus in promoting holistic student learning. Six key themes emerged inductively from the analysis of the interview data.

Overall thoughts on the syllabus

Overall, the participants expressed a range of perspectives on the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, reflecting both positive appraisals and critical reflections. On the positive side, Participant 1 lauded the syllabus, emphasising its constructive influence on students' educational journeys. For example, participants commented:

"It is outstanding." Participant 1

"very interesting initiative," Participant 2

"very helpful," Participant 3

"good." Participant 6

However, some participants highlighted concerns. They said,

"there is a noticeable gap between the curriculum's aims and the actual classroom experience." Participant 4

"This syllabus might be good, however, I have not had a chance to be trained on teaching it." Participant 5

Participant 7 expressed uncertainty, stating,

"I think we have a problem with this syllabus. I am not sure whether this syllabus has to be taught or not."

The teachers expressed varied views on the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, reflecting a mix of positive assessments and critical perspectives. Overall, the majority of teachers had a favourable opinion of the syllabus, suggesting strong support based on the positive outcomes they observed in teaching and learning. Participants 1, 2, 3, and 6 praised the syllabus and highlighted its beneficial impact. However, some teachers also raised concerns about the practical implementation of the syllabus. Participants 4, 5, and 7 identified gaps between the curriculum's aims and the realities in the classroom. This indicates a need to better align the syllabus with the practical requirements and adjust it accordingly. The general consensus leans towards the syllabus being potentially beneficial, but its implementation is hindered by practical challenges, such as a lack of teacher training and limited resources. This mix of positive appraisals and critical reflections suggests the syllabus has promising elements, but there are areas that require attention and refinement to address the implementation gaps and ensure the curriculum translates effectively into improved teaching and learning outcomes.

Effectiveness in student development

Participants highlighted various ways in which the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus contributes to students' holistic development, encompassing moral, mental, and emotional growth:

Participant 1 observed the behavioural and cognitive role of the syllabus, indicating that students,

"do things differently, perceiving the world and people around them."

Participant 2 emphasised the syllabus' role in promoting critical thinking and creating a sense of belonging among students. They noted,

"Bringing sanity, critical thinking, and creating intuitive feelings,"

Participant 3 described how the syllabus enhances students' moral, mental, and emotional skills. They stated,

"Morally, they see different views of things happening around them."

Participants T4 and 5 articulated comprehensive benefits, stating,

"I believe the syllabus is quite effective in promoting holistic development among students, though there is always room for improvement. Morally, the syllabus includes lessons on various ethical dilemmas, which encourages students to reflect on their values and develop a strong moral compass. For instance, justice helps students understand and internalise these values."

Participant T5 recognised the syllabus' relevance to modern educational demands, stating,

"I still believe it is crucial, especially now that the syllabus has to align with the 21st century."

However, participant T7 expressed concerns about alignment with assessment requirements despite its developmental benefits, saying,

"I am aware the syllabus has changed, but we still have Luke and Acts, which the final assessment has to test. Even though the syllabus seems to develop learners, sticking to it for a long time wastes time for students."

The teachers generally agreed that the syllabus has a positive impact on student development, particularly in the moral, mental, and emotional domains. This suggests the teachers view the syllabus as beneficial for supporting students' holistic growth. However, some teachers believe there is room for improving the syllabus, especially in terms of aligning the content more closely with contemporary needs and realities. Participants 4, 5, and 7 highlighted this as an area that requires attention and adjustment. While the teachers recognise the syllabus' positive contributions to student learning and development, the feedback also indicates a need to review and adapt the curriculum to ensure it remains relevant and responsive to the evolving needs of the learners. The overall consensus is that the syllabus has merit, but there may be a need for continued refinement and implementation support to maximise its effectiveness in the classroom and ensure it meets the contemporary requirements of the students. Overall, the teachers' feedback indicates that the syllabus is effective in providing a holistic educational experience that goes beyond mere knowledge transfer. It seems to equip students with critical thinking skills, inclusive perspectives, and a strong foundation for personal growth and moral development.

Main strengths of the syllabus

Participants identified several strengths of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus that contribute to its effectiveness in an educational context. Participants 1 and 3 appreciated the syllabus' practical application in real-life situations. They stated,

"The syllabus helps students bring what they are taught into real-life situations."

Participant T2 valued the syllabus' analytical components and integration with previous grade content. They noted,

"Analytic part more in particular and linking it with grade 9,"

. Participant T4 praised the syllabus' inclusivity in addressing diverse religious, social, and ethical issues. They emphasised,

"It covers a wide range of religious, social, and ethical issues."

Participant T6 and 7 recognised the syllabus' support for emotional and moral development through reflection on personal beliefs and values. They noted,

"The syllabus supports emotional and moral development by providing students with opportunities to reflect on their own beliefs and values."

The teachers highlighted several key strengths of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, which suggest its effectiveness in delivering a well-rounded education. The participants noted that the syllabus not only imparts knowledge but also fosters critical thinking, inclusivity, and personal development among the students. The identified strengths of the syllabus include its practical application, analytical depth, contemporary relevance, and inclusivity. Specifically, Participant 4 highlighted the syllabus' comprehensive coverage and its ability to promote inclusivity. Meanwhile, Participants 1, 3, 6, and 7 emphasised the real-life relevance of the syllabus and its contributions to students' moral development.

Challenges encountered

Participants identified significant challenges and obstacles in implementing the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus. Participant T1 cited overwhelming content and time constraints as major challenges in syllabus implementation. They noted,

"The content is too much; there is no time."

Participant T2 highlighted resource scarcity and the independent nature of topics as barriers to effective syllabus implementation. They noted,

"Time, resources needed, and independence of topics"

Participant T3 expressed concerns about student expression and comprehension difficulties. They stated,

"It is very challenging because the learners that we have find it difficult to express themselves."

Participant T4 identified the lack of textbooks and training as critical challenges in syllabus implementation. They noted,

"There are no textbooks for this syllabus."

Participants T5 and T6 noted variability in syllabus implementation practices. Participant T5 stated,

"We do not usually teach it,"

Participant T7 expressed concerns about assessment alignment and curriculum goals. They noted,

"There are no textbooks, and we have not received prior training to teach."

The teachers highlighted several significant challenges in effectively implementing the syllabus. These include content overload, scarcity of resources, and inadequate teacher training. The primary issues seem to be the lack of necessary resources and training, as well as time constraints. These factors hinder the ability to deliver the syllabus effectively and engage students meaningfully. Specifically, teachers like Participants 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, and 7 noted the absence of textbooks and insufficient training provided to teachers. These challenges collectively impact the delivery of the syllabus and student engagement.

Implementation in the classroom

Participant T1 emphasised the use of daily exercises, reading assignments, and essay writing to reinforce the syllabus concepts and actively engage students in the learning activities. In their words,

“Regular exercises every day, instilling reading and writing of the essays and comments, motivate learners.”

Participant T2 highlighted the importance of creating conducive learning environments that support student engagement and participation. They noted that

“Conducive learning environments are key.”

Participant T3 described using interactive methods such as role-plays, songs related to scriptures, and student debates to facilitate understanding and retention of the syllabus content. They stated,

“I have to look at different aspects to make my learners understand.”

Participants T4, T5, and T6 faced challenges in implementing the syllabus due to various factors, including resource constraints, lack of training, and curriculum alignment issues. Participant T4 noted,

“We don't usually teach it.”

While participants T5 and T6 mentioned selectively integrating only the syllabus topics relevant to assessment criteria and student learning needs, Participant T6 stated,

“I look for topics I could teach that are relevant to Luke and Acts and teach them.”

Participant T7 described adapting their teaching practices to effectively integrate the syllabus topics within their classroom instruction. They noted,

“There are some topics I integrate into Luke and Acts, while others I do not teach at all.”

Participants described various strategies and approaches used to implement the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in classroom settings. Participant T1 emphasised the use of daily exercises, reading assignments, and essay writing to reinforce syllabus concepts and promote active student engagement in learning activities. The participant said,

“Regular exercises every day; instil reading and writing of the essays and comments; motivate learners.”

Participant T2 highlighted the importance of creating conducive learning environments that support student engagement and participation. They noted,

“Conducive learning environments are key.”

Participant T3 described using interactive methods such as role-plays, songs related to scriptures, and student debates to facilitate understanding and retention of syllabus content. They noted,

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Participants T4, T5, and T6 highlighted challenges in syllabus implementation due to various factors such as resource constraints, lack of training, and curriculum alignment issues. Participant T4 noted,

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“I look for topics I could teach that are relevant to Luke and Acts and teach them.”

Participant T7 described adapting teaching practices to integrate syllabus topics effectively within classroom instruction. They noted,

“There are some topics I integrate into Luke and Acts, while others I do not teach at all.”

The teachers utilise a range of instructional approaches to deliver the syllabus, with a focus on active learning strategies. These include techniques like role-playing, debates, and practical applications that engage students actively in the learning process. The implementation approaches vary across the different teachers. Some, like Participants 1, 2, and 3, actively engage students through these interactive methods. However, others, such as Participants 4 and 5, are unable to teach the syllabus due to various constraints. Additionally, participants 6 and 7 selectively cover topics from the syllabus. This

disparity in instructional approaches and syllabus coverage across different classrooms suggests a need for addressing these inconsistencies. Ensuring equitable learning experiences and maximising the impact of the religious studies syllabus will require addressing these disparities in implementation.

Research question two: What specific knowledge, skills, and values are emphasized in the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho?

Learning outcome	Moral and ethical values	Cognitive and analytical skills	Emotional and social development
Respect leadership as an authority from God	Promoting respect for leadership	Reflecting on the role of leadership in society	Fostering respect for authority figures
Demonstrate understanding of the concept of prophecy	Promoting faith, Courage, sympathy	Analysing the role and significance of prophets	
Appreciate the sacrifice Jesus made to save humankind	Promoting values of sacrifice and compassion	Reflecting on the significance of Jesus' sacrifice	Encouraging empathy and gratitude
Honour marriage as a union instituted by God	Promoting commitment and respect in relationships	Analysing the marriage from a religious perspective	Fostering appreciation for marital values
Appreciate the value of friendship	Promoting empathy and loyalty	Understanding teachings on friendship	Encouraging interpersonal skills and relationships
Honour justice of God	Promoting fairness and integrity	Analysing concepts of justice	Encouraging social justice
Demonstrate understanding of the concept of hope	Promoting optimism and resilience	Understanding hope	Encouraging emotional resilience
Demonstrate understanding of the concept of resurrection		Analysing the theological implications of resurrection	Encouraging spiritual reflection
Appreciate the importance of ascension		Reflecting on the theological importance of ascension	Encouraging spiritual reflection
Acknowledge the nature of trinity		Analysing the complexity of the Trinity	Encouraging spiritual reflection

Table 1: Content analysis for Grade 10 religious studies syllabus (Learning outcomes)

The table analysis reveals that the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho emphasises a comprehensive approach to education, moral and ethical values, cognitive and analytical skills, and emotional and social development.

Moral and Ethical Values

The syllabus places a strong emphasis on promoting moral and ethical values. Learning outcomes, such as respecting leadership, honouring marriage, appreciating sacrifice, and understanding justice, underscore the importance of values like respect, compassion, integrity, and fairness. These values are crucial for students' moral development and ethical reasoning, equipping them to navigate ethical dilemmas in their personal and social lives.

Cognitive and Analytical Skills

The syllabus encourages the development of critical thinking and analytical skills. Students are prompted to analyse and critically evaluate concepts like prophecy, resurrection, and the nature of the Trinity. This approach not only deepens their understanding of religious teachings but also enhances their ability to engage in rigorous intellectual inquiry, fostering cognitive growth and analytical reasoning.

Emotional and Social Development

Emotional and social development is integral to the syllabus through activities that promote empathy, gratitude, and interpersonal skills. Learning outcomes such as appreciating the value of friendship, understanding hope, and reflecting on spiritual concepts like ascension contribute to students' emotional resilience and their capacity to interact empathetically with others. This aspect of the syllabus prepares students to navigate social relationships and contribute positively to their communities.

Overall, the syllabus emphasises a holistic approach to student development, encompassing moral, ethical, cognitive, analytical, emotional, and social dimensions. This multifaceted focus aims to equip students with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to navigate the complexities of personal and social life.

5. Discussions

The study explored the educational impact of Lesotho's Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, revealing a mix of positive appraisals and critical reflections from teachers (Raselimo&Mahao, 2015). Some teachers strongly endorsed the syllabus, viewing it as a valuable educational tool that fosters meaningful learning experiences. This positive sentiment may be attributed to the training these teachers have received from workshops. However, others pointed out significant issues, such as a noticeable gap between the curriculum's aims and actual classroom experiences, lack of training, and uncertainty about the syllabus's relevance (Raselimo&Mahao, 2015). This discrepancy suggests that the ambitious goals of the syllabus may not be fully realised in practice due to various constraints.

A key finding is that both interviews and content analysis affirm the syllabus's positive impact on students' holistic development, encompassing moral, mental, and emotional growth (Bekithemba et al., 2015; Andrei, 2023). Teachers noted changes in students' behaviour and perception, the promotion of critical thinking, and the modern relevance of the syllabus. For instance, one participant observed that students "do things differently, perceiving the world and people around them," while another emphasised the syllabus's role in fostering critical thinking and creating a sense of belonging among students. However, some interviewees expressed concerns about the alignment with assessment requirements, highlighting an area for potential improvement.

The strengths of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, as identified by both interviews and content analysis, include its practical application, analytical depth, inclusivity, and support for emotional and moral development (Mokotso, 2020; Bekithemba et al., 2015; Andrei, 2023). Teachers appreciated how the syllabus helps students apply what they are taught to real-life situations and its integration with previous grade content. This result may be explained by the fact that teachers have gone through the syllabus to teach its content.

The study also revealed significant challenges in implementing the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus, as identified in both interviews and content analysis (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2021). Teachers cited overwhelming content, time constraints, resource scarcity, and inadequate training as major obstacles. These challenges hinder effective implementation and suggest a need for better resource allocation and teacher training.

The study further revealed that teachers employ various strategies to implement the syllabus, as detailed in both the interviews and content analysis. Strategies include daily exercises, reading assignments, and interactive methods such as role-plays and debates. However, some teachers do not teach the syllabus due to resource constraints and curriculum alignment issues, and others selectively cover topics relevant to assessments. The specific knowledge, skills, and values emphasised in the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho are consistently identified in both interviews and content analysis (Ayala-Pazmiño, 2023; Nur, 2019; Bekithemba et al., 2015). These include promoting moral and ethical values, developing cognitive and analytical skills, and fostering emotional and social development.

In conclusion, the findings from interviews and content analysis provide a comprehensive understanding of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus's effectiveness in promoting holistic learning. While the syllabus has strengths, significant challenges hinder its effective implementation. Addressing these issues is crucial to maximising the syllabus's impact on students' holistic development and ensuring it meets the evolving demands of modern education.

6. Conclusions and recommendations

The study presents a comprehensive analysis of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho. It reveals a mix of positive feedback and critical concerns from teachers. The findings indicate that the syllabus significantly contributes to students' holistic development, fostering moral, mental, and emotional growth. Teachers highlighted the syllabus's strengths in promoting ethical values, critical thinking, and emotional resilience, as well as its practical application, inclusivity, and support for personal development. The content analysis corroborates these perceptions of teachers, suggesting that the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus is crucial for the curriculum in Lesotho.

However, the study also identified notable challenges hindering effective implementation, including overwhelming content, time constraints, resource scarcity, and inadequate teacher training. These challenges suggest a gap between the syllabus's ambitious goals and its actual classroom execution. The need for better resource allocation, continuous updates, and alignment with assessment requirements is evident.

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are proposed to enhance the effectiveness of the Grade 10 religious studies syllabus in Lesotho:

- The Ministry of Education and Training should prioritise the provision of adequate resources, including textbooks and teaching aids, and offer regular training programmes for teachers. This will ensure that teachers are well-equipped to deliver the syllabus effectively.
- To address the issue of overwhelming content, the syllabus should be streamlined to focus on key concepts and learning outcomes. This will help manage time constraints and ensure that essential topics are covered comprehensively.

- Ensure that the syllabus content aligns with assessment requirements to provide a coherent and integrated learning experience. This will help students understand the relevance of what they are learning and perform better in evaluations.

Limitations

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Although efforts were made to ensure diversity among the participants, it is possible that the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of all religious teachers in Lesotho's secondary schools. Furthermore, Reliance on qualitative data from interviews and document analysis may introduce subjectivity. The absence of quantitative measures may limit the ability to statistically validate findings.

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