

# Exploring Christian Religious Education and Learners' Behaviour among Primary School Learners in the Manzini Urban Area of Eswatini

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**Abstract:-** The main purpose of the study was to explore the extent to which Religious Education moulds behaviour among primary school learners. The study used a qualitative approach and it followed a case study design of one school in the Manzini urban area of Eswatini. A purposive sampling technique was used to select a sample of participants comprising of Christian Religious Education (CRE) teachers, and grade seven learners. The study revealed that learners were aware of the Christian based Religious Education and that the learners believed that Christianity teaches them good morals. Teachers on the other hand were of the view that CRE was not enough as a tool in moulding learners' behaviour. The study concluded that teachers need to be trained in CRE competences. It was recommended that schools should foster the cooperation between teachers and parents in moulding learners' behaviour through active parental involvement initiatives. It was proposed that the INSET department should ensure proper training is given to CRE teachers so that they are an effective tools in implementing the CRE syllabus for effective harnessing of positive behaviour.

## I. INTRODUCTION

In most African countries Christian Religious Education (CRE) was taught by missionaries in mission schools mainly for evangelical purposes. In the mission schools, the local people were taught how to read and write and the Bible was used as the main reference book (Onsongo, 2008). The schools were used as focal centres for winning converts as the Christian missionaries had a preconceived idea that Africans could easily be converted to Christianity through schooling. The teaching of the Bible was emphasized and CRE formed the core of the whole school curriculum. Schools started and ended the day with prayers and hymns and although other subjects were later taught, they were only included because they were supportive to the Christian instruction (Onsongo, 2008).

C.R.E moulds students into mature people who will positively contribute towards the good of their nation.

Njoku (2015) argues that the aim of teaching CRE in schools is to produce boys and girls who will be men and women of real Christian character. C.R.E has a great potential to carry out this responsibility because its objectives are not only on acquisition of knowledge but also about the formation of the right moral values. In other words, as much as CRE has an academic component it has not left out the issue of character formation, both at the attitudinal and behavioural levels. Kipkemboi (2009), discussing about Christian Religion and the development of Africa, says that there is need to strengthen CRE in schools at all levels. CRE should be a compulsory subject due to its importance in inculcating Christian values and morals. Kipkemboi (2009) also adds that there is need to support Christian Union and Young Christian Society activities and all colleges should have Chaplains to take care of the spiritual nurture of staff and students. CRE has a unique potential to help young people to live more fully and more richly. The knowledge and understanding acquired in other subjects can be brought together in the CRE class to enable students to develop a holistic vision of life. CRE is not only consistent with the essential purposes of liberal learning but is likely to contribute to the humane, spiritual and civilizing purposes which characterize the pursuit of that learning.

In Eswatini Religious Education, like the education system itself has been and is in a state of continuous change, it is changing in different ways. For example, education has changed and extended from being confined to the elite and the rich towards the Education For All- Free Education. All these changes aim at reducing or eradicating inequalities and poverty in societies and eventually promoting sustainable development. Religion and education are extremely linked in Eswatini and elsewhere in the sense that both aim at enhancing the process of socialisation of students and citizens to sustainable practices. Socialisation in terms of developing intercultural competencies, knowledge of human rights, values such as respect of oneself and others.

Eswatini and other states are concerned with religion and Religious Education offered in their school systems. Religion and Religious Education continue to have massive

influence on societies. For example, people are or may be positioned by religion and also position themselves in their religious identity (Njoku, 2015). This has serious implications for societies and sustainable development. Eswatini perceives education or what goes on in schools as critical matters. Schools are microcosms of society and the complexities of religious differences are of concern because they are reflected in schools and eventually in society. Schools are a mirror of current and future societies. Religious differences have become a concern in Eswatini, USA, and other parts of Europe, since the attack of United States on the 11th of September 2011. This terrorism related attacks have challenged different states including the Kingdom of Eswatini to question taken-for granted assumption about Religious Education and religious institutions practices and the laws governing the states. Institutions such as schools with potential powers to influence students to live through a set of particular religious or other experiences became a focus point for governments, including the government of Eswatini.

Although the development of moral competence of children is often seen as a family matter, schools have a major impact on the moral development of learners and should therefore see it as their task to nurture this. In Eswatini, the new curriculum which was bankrolled in 2017 features Religious Education as a critical part of behaviour change in learners. To this effect, one of the key objectives of the new Religious Education curriculum is to: shape the behaviour of learners as they progress through their basic education at primary and secondary level. In this regard Religious Education in Eswatini is part of the formal curriculum which has been tasked to shape the behaviour of learners and instill moral values within learners at a young age.

The primary goal of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) is to develop norms and values and change practices and lifestyles to ensure sustainable living (The Swaziland Education Sector policy, 2011). The Ministry of Education and Training has implemented some educational reforms which saw the introduction of a Christian based Religious Education for the promotion of moral values as captured by the new Religious Education syllabus. The basic philosophy of such reforms lies in the belief that education is a vehicle of social transformation and reconstruction. The aim of the Christian based Religious Education is to ensure that school children have the ability to differentiate between morality and immorality and also to ensure that children are not confused. It is believed that Christianity is the best way to achieve these goals (Zulu, 2017).

## II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Principals and teachers spend a significant amount of time dealing with inappropriate behavior of learners. For example The Times of Swaziland (February 20, 2019) reported that a school in Manzini Urban area of Eswatini banned the use of backpacks by pupils because pupils smuggle drugs into the school using the backpacks. In

another case reported by the Times of Swaziland (May 10, 2019) pupils burnt down school furniture and destroyed school property in protest against the Headteacher whom they accused of mismanaging funds. The assumption is that the new Religious Education curriculum can mould appropriate moral behavior to improve discipline in schools and ultimately promote responsible future citizens. Considering that principals are still reporting many cases of ill-discipline in schools this study seeks to explore the extent to which Christian based R.E is influential in the moulding of primary school learners behaviour in the Manzini region of Eswatini. The problem lies in that it is not clear whether or not Religious Education is instilling the values and morals which directly lead to the change of behaviour in learners. Thus the study will explore the extent to which R.E moulds learners' behaviour.

## III. THE ROLE OF CHRISTIAN RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN MOULDING BEHAVIOUR

The major aims of inclusion of Christian Religious Studies (CRS) in the education curriculum is to raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and feelings of others, appreciate dignity of labour and those moral values specified in the broad national aims as good citizens. While at the secondary school level the subject is meant to prepare learners for useful living through inculcation of Christian attitudes and values, and to prepare learners for higher education (Akubue, 2012). To this effect CRS is designed to achieve many goals in the lives of the pupils ranging from teaching the pupils about God to the teaching of moral values which is geared towards shaping human behavior. These values are embedded in the stories and events recorded in the Bible (drawn from the life of Jesus Christ). Notwithstanding the lofty aims of CRS, a study by Adukwu (2014) also showed that learners' moral attitude have not improved greatly especially at this era. Meanwhile, an appraisal of CRS curriculum contents revealed that the subject has the potentials required to build one's moral character.

Digga (2011) states that educators need to acknowledge the profound relationship between the moral, the religious, and the spiritual. In the new millennium, educators must continue to acknowledge that law is central to morality. Even though there will always be new situations not envisioned by the law, there are certain unchangeable principles of right action which are almost universally held. They form the bedrock of moral action. These principles include: "do good and avoid evil; do to others as you would have them do to you; live not by lies; love and do what you will. Aside from associating morals with religion, Digga (2011) suggested that moral principles do not depend solely on a particular religious belief. There are laws written in the hearts of individuals, which is their spirituality, and to enable these ordinances to become personal principles of action, leaders need to help educate a student's conscience.

Njoku & Njoku (2014) posit that the education of a conscience is essential to growth, maturity in behavioural change and is a life-long achievement. It takes place through the influence of, and personal reflection on experience. Children are pilgrims on a journey towards finding peace and a sense of connection with God. They are innately spiritual beings, who are in need of guidance while on a pilgrimage. Educators can teach a moral way of life by informing the conscience through proclamation, instruction, public debate, and particularly by being exemplary and this will ultimately instill long term behaviour change.

Chemutai (2013) like other scholars classified the behavioural objectives of teaching and learning C.R.E into three categories and they are cognitive, affective and psychomotor. Objectives in the cognitive domain emphasize the recalling or recognition of facts. Objectives of the affective domain are concerned with the changes in interest, attitudes and values, and the development of appreciation and judgment. Psychomotor domain objectives have to do with physical skills such as manipulation of materials and objects. It summarizes the overall objectives of teaching and learning CRE in Nigeria schools.

**Religious Objectives:** have to do with intimating the learner pupils on how God deals with His people as contained in the Holy Bible, as the Loving Father who cares for His children and who needs His children's commitment to Him in Worship, faith and obedience to His will.

**Moral Objectives:** deal with the ethical teaching of the Bible to the learner; it states that the teacher should let the learner see it as the directives from God the Father to guide the lives of the learners so that they can live a proper human life without being forced to do so.

**Social Objective:** Could be summed up as the promotion of harmonious human relationships in schools, in the family and in the local community.

**Civil Objectives:** in CRE helps the learner to grow up to be alert, responsible, tolerant, both courageous and patriotic citizens of a democratic and diverse nation (Chemutai, 2013).

**Spiritual and Personal Objectives:** The personal spiritual development of the learner is central to all the other. The objectives deal with inward activities of the learner. Having led the learner to understand the Christian faith responsibility and his relationship with God in Christ Jesus, the teacher has to encourage the learner to continue to grow in faith until he gets to majority (Chemutai, 2013).

**Academic Objectives:** This involves "memorizing and inwardly digesting a body of factual information from the Jewish and Christian scriptures. It also makes the learner to acquire knowledge in order to reach an academic height

#### IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study used Bandura's Social Learning Theory (SLT) as the theoretical framework. The study considered social learning theory (Bandura, 1969, 1973, 1977a, 1986; Bandura & Walters, 1963) as providing a broad-band explanation for both desirable and undesirable behavioral outcomes. It includes a broad array of theory and practice in learning and change and encompasses both cognitive and behavioral approaches.

Social learning theory focuses on the learning that occurs within a social context. It considers that people learn from one another. The SLT holds the belief that behavior is influenced by environmental factors, and not just psychological or cognitive factors. Thus, SLT assumes that psychological and environmental factors when combined influence the development of specific behaviors. SLT stresses the importance of attending to and modeling the behaviors, cognitions (e.g., attitudes and beliefs) and emotions of others. SLT sees an interactive process between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences (Gross, 2010).

There are three principles that help define SLT:

- Observational learning which is achieved when the modeled behavior is structured or organized, rehearsed symbolically and then overtly enacted. Retention of that behavior occurs when the modeled behavior is coded into words, labels or images.
- The adoption of the modeled behavior is strengthened when the outcomes of that behavior are valued, seen as important to the individual or lead to desirable and expected outcome.
- The modeled behavior is more likely to be integrated by the observer when the model has characteristics similar to the observer, there is a cognitive-behavioral connection with the model, the model is admired by the observer, and the behavior that is adopted has practical or functional value.

SLT defines four requirements for learning and modeling behavior.

- **Attention:** Observers cannot learn unless they pay attention to what is happening around them. This process is influenced by the characteristics of the model, such as how much one like or identifies with the model. It is also influenced by the characteristics of the observer such as the observer's expectations of level of emotional arousal.
- **Retention:** which is the cognitive component involving remembering what one observed, coding, organizing and rehearsing it at the cognitive level. The observer must not only recognize the observed behavior but also remember it at a later time in order to perform it.
- **Reproduction:** Is the ability to reproduce or copy the modeled behavior. Observers must be physically and intellectually capable of producing the act.

➤ **Motivation:** Refers to the behavioral consequence that justifies wanting to adopt the behavior which includes self-reinforcement. Observers will perform the act only if they have some motivation or reason to do so. The presence of reinforcement or punishment either to the model or the directly to the observer becomes important in this process.

Based on these general principles, learning can occur without a change in behavior. In other words, behaviorists say that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behavior; while in contrast social learning theorists say that because people can learn through observation alone, their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance. (Bandura, 1965). Learning may or may not result in a behavior change (Bandura, 2006b). Bandura demonstrated that cognition plays a role in learning and over the last 30 years social learning theory has become increasingly cognitive in its interpretation of human learning.

This theory is suitable and relevant for the study because it demonstrates that behaviours can be learned through modeling. Some examples that can be cited on this regard are that students can watch parents read, students can watch the demonstrations of Mathematics problems, or observe someone acting bravely in a fearful situation (Bandura, 2006a). Based on this point, children's behaviour can be modelled through the teaching of specific values. Consequently, moral thinking and moral behavior are influenced by observation and modeling and hence it is envisaged that Christian based RE is modelling learners behaviour. Effectively, learning includes moral judgments regarding right and wrong which can in part, develop through modeling. This theory therefore sets the platform to explore the extent to which learners' behaviour is being moulded by the C.R.E syllabus.

## V. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A case study research design was preferred because the study was qualitative and involves learners and teachers in social environments being the school in which they are teaching and learning Christian based Religious Education. Creswell (2012) defines case study research as describing and interpreting events as they happen in the present. The strength of opting for a case study is that the researcher made an in-depth exploration of phenomena; it is therefore fitting for the case study design to be used.

The research was carried out in one school in the Manzini urban area of Eswatini. Manzini is the country's second largest urban centre second to Mbabane. It has an estimated demographic population of 110,537 people (World Population Review, 2018). There are 10 primary schools within a 5km radius of the city centre and the study took place in one school for the purpose of ease of accessibility of the school and due to time constraints as the researcher is employed fulltime as a teacher.

Population is a group of items with the same characteristics (Creswell 2012). The population of this particular study comprised of all the all learners and teachers of in the selected primary school. The population consisted of all grade seven learners in the school who are boys only due to the fact that the selected school is a boys' school. The targeted school has a combined total of 450 people in total (National Statistics Center, 2012).

According to Creswell (2012), purposive sampling attempts to select the participant based on certain characteristics or a criterion which brings the most benefits to the study. The purposive sampling technique therefore was used to select a sample of C.R.E teachers, and the grade seven learners who have been learning the C.R.E curriculum from the time of its inception.

Purposive sampling was key to the study in order to involve only information rich participants who increased the value of the study including teachers with responsibility of teaching RE at the schools, as well as the learners with who are learning C.R.E.

## VI. DATA COLLECTION INSTRUMENTS

A research instrument is a tool used to facilitate data collection. The researcher used a focus group discussion for learners and a semi-structured interview guide for teachers as the primary tools for data collection. Using the interview method, it was possible to ask follow up questions, participants were available to clarify immediate concerns and ambiguous statements (Creswell 2012). Furthermore, through the establishment of trust and rapport, a researcher is likely to gather more information that he or she would not have been able to get by any other method of data collection. Interviews were conducted to collect data from all teachers involved in this study.

The researcher also used focus group discussions for learners. Engel &Schutt (2013) posit that focus groups are an effective data collection method especially in problems which are not confidential and where the focus group possesses the larger part of the evidence sought. Data was collected through a semi-structured group interview guide where the researcher was leading the discussion. Focus groups are generally used to collect data on a specific topic. The strength focused group discussion of discussion relies on allowing the participants to agree or disagree with each other so that it provides an insight into how a group thinks about an issue, about the range of opinion and ideas, and the inconsistencies and variation that exists in a particular community in terms of beliefs and their experiences and practices.

Although focus group research has many advantages, as with all research methods there are limitations. Some can be overcome by careful planning and moderating, but others are unavoidable and peculiar to this approach. The researcher, or moderator, for example, has less control over the data produced (Guest, Namey, & Mitchell, 2013) than in either quantitative studies or one-to-one interviewing.

The researcher has to allow participants to talk to each other, ask questions and express doubts and opinions, while having very little control over the interaction other than generally keeping participants focused on the topic. By its nature focused group discussion is open ended and cannot be entirely predetermined.

## VII. RESULTS OF THE STUDY

The results in this study were presented according to the themes that emerged from the study. The themes were, the role of Christian Religious Education in moulding learners' behaviour, towards behaviour moulding behaviour, learners' behaviour change.

### ➤ *The role of Christian Religious Education in moulding learners' behaviour*

The study sought to ask the teachers their thoughts regarding the objectives of the CRE curriculum. There were different sentiments passed by the participants, however the most prominent issues included that the C.R.E was fairly effective towards behaviour change; there was not a great impact on behaviour change and C.R.E was prematurely introduced.

### ➤ *Towards behaviour moulding behaviour*

In this regard, the majority of the participants were in agreement that the ultimate objectives of the C.R.E were very much good. This was supported by five out of the eight participants as provided by one participant who had this to say: *"I think the new Religious Education curriculum objectives are well articulated and relate to what is happening in the society of Eswatini. Its goal is to mould learner's morals so that they grow up as responsible learners and promote a peaceful society"* (Participant # B, 33 year old female teacher). Another participant agreed with this view by submitting that: *"It is a very good curriculum in instilling Christian values to children and for improving the passing rate as well"* (Participant # F, 36 year old, male teacher).

Furthermore, when the teachers were asked to respond to whether or not they thought C.R.E can contribute in the changing of the behaviour of learners, it was the submission of the majority of the participants that indeed C.R.E contributed toward the change of behaviour. One of the participant said *"There are too many wrong teachings in the world. The community is rife with bad things and the new R.E curriculum is helpful in ensuring that students are properly guided and are aware of how to behave properly."* (Participant # A, 33 year old, male teacher).

When the teachers were asked whether or not they believe some of the current behavioural challenges experienced from learners could be sufficiently addressed by C.R.E, a majority of the participants believe that the new curriculum tackled the major behaviour challenges very effectively as submitted by one participant who said that *"Of course some learners still hold the belief that what the teachers say is always right compared to what parents say, hence morals can be effective to impart at school than at*

*home. And C.R.E is designed to do exactly that"* (Participant # F, 34 year, female teacher).

### ➤ *Learners' behaviour change*

On the other hand there were participants who expressed negative sentiments towards the C.R.E curriculum and in this regard some of the teachers believed that there was not much impact on behaviour change as given by one participants who said: *"Personally, I am not pleased because pupils need the information about all other religions as opposed to Christianity alone"* (Participant # B, 33 year old female teacher).

The above view indicate that while it is quite clear that the majority are in support of the new curriculum as being grounded in supporting Christianity, there are also others who have a different view. Additionally, there were teachers who believed that this was not a helpful move as presented by one the participant who said *"The theory is that it should change learner's behavior for the better, but the practice is quite different. This is the problem, not all learners are of a Christian background and they will not easily change their religions and behaviours simply because it's imposed in a class"* (Participant E, 41 year, female teacher).

There were participants who believed that the new syllabus was not enough to address the behaviour of learners. In this regard one participant expressed her view by stating that *"There is more to the behaviour of people than just religion. Behaviour is influenced by many factors e.g. poverty and these are not directly addressed by the new syllabus"* (Participant # B, 33 year old female teacher).

In addition to this, regarding the effectiveness of C.R.E in instilling good morals and behaviour change as compared to the previous syllabus, the majority seemed to be in consensus that the C.R.E was not that much different. In fact there were those who believed that the old syllabus was better. *"The old syllabus was so much better because it touched on all regions and was quite inclusive which is lacking in the current one. No religion in the old syllabus taught learners to be mischievous or immoral"* (Participant # H, 48 year old, male head teacher). Another participant said that: *"There are so many churches around us, if Christianity changes behaviour, we would not have any misbehaving challenges among the population, in the same way expecting that the values of Christianity will suddenly change the way learners behave then we are in for a tough time. It has to begin at home, at church and then fostered at school"* (Participant # E, 41 year, female teacher).

## VIII. CONCLUSIONS

The study concludes that the majority of learners believed that Christianity Religious Education teaches them good morals as well as basic values of life. Teachers are also in agreement that the objectives of the new syllabus are very promising however; teachers have doubts regarding the practical effectiveness of Christian Religious Education in shaping the morals and behaviour of learners

in the long term. Teachers have limited competencies and skills to ensure that CRE is used as a powerful tool to advocate for morality and behaviour change.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended in this study that more topics on morality can be included in the curriculum to improve its impact. Also moral education as a school subject can be introduced by the Ministry of Education. Parents, schools and churches should work in cooperation in moulding the behaviour of learners through active parental involvement initiatives such as teacher-parent meetings, open days among others. Schools must consider giving awards and incentives to the most behaved learners per class to ensure that learners are truly motivated and see the rewards of expressing good behaviour. Further studies can be done to ascertain the extent to which RE moulds secondary school learners since the curriculum is also compulsory for all secondary school learners.

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