

Religious Education or Christian-Oriented Education not a matter in teaching: Sensitivity to Opportunity Gaps Educational Classroom Discourses matters: Case of Eswatini

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Abstract: This study examines the existing common misconception that the religious curriculum changes which occurred in 2017 had potential of affecting students' teaching and learning in the Kingdom of ESwatini. This was a descriptive survey study based on Milner's (2010) Opportunity Gap explanatory framework which assisted in unpacking and understanding, and explaining educational practices related to opportunity: diversity blindness, teacher deficit mindsets, low expectations and teacher competencies. Qualitative approach was used to reflect on the religious curriculum changes. Qualitative approach was considered as relevant because of the curriculum complexities. As Grant, (2003) noted that educational matters such as religious education are complex and unstable processes. Data from policy related documents were used because government's practices and intentions are captured on policies. Content analysis was used as an ideal data analysis procedure in this study, where the relevant documents, were interrogated, compared objectively and inferences drawn. The study indicated that the institutionalised issues such as teacher religious blindness and deficit mindsets which fail them to recognise and to teach all the religions in a RE class affected the learning process; Parents and teachers' failure to accept the RE Curriculum negatively affect the teaching process, and the culture of institutional racism was manifested in schools; the absence of the culture of questioning what goes on in schools or classroom influenced the teaching of RE in schools. The study concluded that teaching either RE or Christian-oriented curriculum is not a key matter; the crucial matter is the educational processes which frustrate or enhance the processes of teaching and learning in schools. It also concluded that it was not RE Curriculum per se which affect the teaching and learning in a religious-oriented classroom but a host of factors which need to be understood by teachers and others. It is recommended that teachers and other professionals should be provided with appropriate training opportunities to acquire the relevant knowledge, capabilities to understand and disentangle how their behaviours or attitudes towards curriculum changes can influence students learning opportunities.

Key words: Christian-Oriented Education, misconception, teaching, Religious Education.

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I. INTRODUCTION

For the past few years Religious Educational pedagogical discourses in the Kingdom of ESwatini have been changing as religion itself. The changes have influenced the teaching and learning of students and peoples' thinking and attitudes towards religious education and its purpose. In the Kingdom of ESwatini, some social analysts have claimed that the religious curriculum changes, particularly those related to the Christian-oriented curriculum had a potential of undermining teaching and learning, and denying other children their rights to learn other religious values. This study aims at examining the impact of religious curriculum changes on students teaching and learning in the Kingdom of ESwatini. The first section of the paper explains the socio-historical contexts of the study so that the intended audience can understand the emergence of the current situation; the introduction of Christian-oriented curriculum in the Kingdom of ESwatini. The historical background helps in understanding the sequences of the events (religious curriculum changes) in the Kingdom of ESwatini and how it relates to the study and the fact that the study's approach is process-oriented research. Its key objective is to provide a better understanding of how and why the curriculum changes interactions positively or negatively influence the process of teaching and learning.

II. BACKGROUND

In the Kingdom of Eswatini, the concept of religion is as old as the existence of the people of Eswatini. The Eswatini people had their own traditional religion, passed from generation to generations. They believed in a

super being referred to as Mvelinchanti or mkhulunchanti (someone above everything), who Kansane (1993) referred to as the only originator of humanity and the answer to any problem. The Swazi people believed that the creator of everything or Mvelinchanti was there or existed before anything existed. The Eswatini people believed and still believe that Mvelinchanti is accessible through their ancestors, particularly the great ancestor, whom they believed to be closer to Mvelinchanti. Their lives are characterised by this kind of belief.

The traditional religion was more dominant in the 1700 and later influenced or polluted by Christian religion, which started spreading among the royal circles around 1836 (Matsebula, 1987). Matsebula, (1987) claimed that one of the Swazi Kings, King Somhlolo or Sobhuza 1, had a dream on a Christian-oriented religion and shared it firstly with his counsellors. He told his counsellors that white skinned people would arrive in the country bringing with them two things: umchulu interpreted to mean the (bible) and indilinga (money) (Matsebula, 1987). This suggests that Christian religion was firstly known among the royal household.

It is claimed that King Sobhuza 1 advised his people to choose the bible or indilinga and avoid the money for a peaceful-oriented reasons. This notes that the Swazi king was helped by the mvelinchanti or creator of everything to be aware and understand the complexities of money and the power it commands to influence societal peace and stability, and the existence of societies. This further revealed that Christian-oriented curriculum in schools has its roots or anchored on the 1836 King's dream and its interpretation.

From 1836, and beyond the Christian religion thinking penetrated the royal household and spread across the kingdom of Eswatini, through different forums, including the education system. In 1844, Christian religion became part of the nation through education. The Missionaries built more schools across the kingdom for dual purposes: spreading Christianity and providing education to members of the society. Most of the missionaries were of great Britain origin, from different dominations: Roman catholic, and Nazareth. Education was considered by the missionaries as the dissemination vehicle for Christian values of love and peace, knowledge and skills. The missionaries' aims were to bring changes in peoples' behaviours, for sustainable living and development. As Grim, (2015) claimed that faith-oriented education provides education, health services and social safety nets for Orphans, disabled people and people who are left behind in community participation. Grim's (2015) study revealed the hidden reason why Christian religion was accepted by the royal household and the nation without resistance. Both traditional religion and Christian religion have core similarities: the issue of inclusivity, embracing everyone-through the spirit of Ubuntu, which provides clarity and meaning on the issue of life and living.

The arrival of Christianity in the Kingdom of Eswatini was fairly managed and not perceived as a threat to the existence of the traditional religion and sustainability of the nation. Both religions existed side by side, without complexities or an element of supremacy of Christianity. Christian religion values further influenced the national policies of the land. For example, the first ever written policy of the Eswatini was based on both traditional religion and Christian principles. This policy puts more emphasis on non-racial society and in the equality of man (Imbokodvo manifesto, 1972), these principles are also Christian principles.

Christianity and traditional religion dominated the Kingdom for decades until the late 1990's. Late in 1990's the Kingdom of Eswatini was characterised by a variety of religions within and across the four regions of the country. For example, the United States Department of Religious Freedom Report, (2012) claimed that the percentile distribution of religion practices in Eswatini ranges between 90% Christianity, 10% other religious groups and 2% Islam. The existence of these religions is guaranteed and safeguarded by the country's obligation to protect peoples' rights including peoples' religious rights. In addition, the Kingdom of Eswatini is signatory to many world conventions, as promoted by the Universal Declarations of human rights (UDHR) of 1948 and the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of racial discrimination (ICERD) is always urged to respect peoples' rights and peoples' diversity and religious diversity.

Peoples' rights, including religious rights are also protected by the Swaziland Constitution of 2005, as noted in P 16, section, 23 (2): a person has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion: the right includes the freedom to change his religion or belief, either alone or in community with others and in public or in private to manifest his religion or belief in teaching, practice, worship and observance.

III. CONSTITUTIONAL PROVISION AND SCHOOL CURRICULUM

The Kingdom of Eswatini has crafted the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 as the supreme law of the land to ensure that equality for all, citizens and for inclusive Eswatini society and inclusive world. This Constitution was founded on the spirit of Ubuntu, which is anchored on the Swazi traditions or Nguni traditions and philosophy which note that sustainability of a society depends on a caring society, where individuals know that a person is considered as a fully-fledged person because of other fellow citizens of the world, "Umuntfungumuntfungabantfu". This Swazi or Nguni philosophy is an aspect of both the Swazi traditions and Christian religion. Both religions put more emphasis on interdependence and relationships between and among people. As noted in the Apostle Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:12-24 verse 26, where it is stated that: if one part of

the suffers, every parts suffers with it; if one part is honoured, every part rejoices with it. This highlights the inclusivity as supported by the school curriculum and Swaziland Constitution of 2005.

In the Kingdom of Eswatini and elsewhere, school curriculum is a constitutional, political matter as education itself. It is a political matter because educational policies belong to government as custodian of education and guided by the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 as the supreme law of the land. Educational matters such as policies belong to the state and curriculum as a political matter is influenced by government's interests and by both local and international social forces. In the Kingdom of Eswatini the school curriculum was and is currently influenced by local and international socio-economic forces (Dlamini, 2018). Back in the 1960s the school curriculum was influenced by local social forces because the country was expected to respond to local economic challenges as the country had just gained its independence from Britain. The curriculum guided by local policy was aligned to the country's existing socio-economic challenges. The first ever written Imbokodvo Manifesto of 1972, influenced the school curriculum. The content of the curriculum was drawn from what was known and proven. This includes Christian and traditional values. As stated earlier that Christian values were introduced by missionaries in 1844 in the Kingdom. The Christian-oriented curriculum was introduced because the new country was more concerned about peace and stability and sustainable development. The curriculum was aligned with the national Imbokodvo manifesto policy of 1972, which aimed at promoting cooperation among the Swazi nation and with other nations, for mutual benefit, bridging the gap between rich and poor.

The Christian –oriented curriculum dominated the education system until 2006, when the multi-faith based curriculum was introduced by government. Concepts from different religions (Buddhism, Bahai, Islam, and Christianity) form part of the curriculum. Section of 23 (2) of the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 states that a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of the freedom of conscience or religion, and for the purpose of this section freedom of conscience includes freedom of thoughts and of religion, freedom to change religion or belief and freedom of worship either alone or in community with others.

In this specified section of the Constitution of 2005, the issue of school curriculum, students' learning and being taught of a certain religion or not being taught is not covered on the Constitution of 2005. Thus, students could be taught of a certain religion and not being taught any specific religion at a given time, is not a constitutional matter. The Swaziland Constitution of 2005 is silent on curriculum matters or curriculum matters are not explicitly explained or clearly mentioned. This scenario, gives government a legal base to introduce any type of religion into the education system without a challenge. For example, when the government of Eswatini introduced the Christian- oriented curriculum in 2016, parents with children in schools who may be happy to see their children studying or learning a multi-faith religious curriculum were reluctant to challenge government in court because the issue of learning a multi-faith or Christian oriented curriculum has no legal or Constitutional base in the Kingdom of Eswatini (see Section 23 (1) of Swaziland Constitution of 2005). This section allows government to introduce any religious curriculum deemed fit for the country's sustainability, national interest or peace and stability. This also notes that education belongs to the state and government is the custodian of education. The control of education lies with the government of Eswatini, public or private schools. This emphasises the argument that curriculum prescriptions derives from a state's commitment to pursue a key goal of national interests, based on analysis of perceptive analysis of developments in current societal challenges to which schools have to respond in a sustainable way.

IV. SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF THE CONTEXT

It is appreciated that school curriculum changes were guided by the analysis of culture and perceptive analysis of change and development but it paid limited or little focus on sociological analysis of the context in which government plan to implement it. These include teachers' capabilities to effectively implement the curriculum and recognises the curriculum political significance; teachers and others inability to engage in the process of deconstruction of key policy documents (Swaziland Constitution of 2005 and other related acts), in the present context. Deconstructing the key policy has a potential of helping teachers and others to "read" the significance or gist of what the policy texts say regarding the curriculum, and not say for their work and for the existence of the country. In addition, the deconstruction of policy documents could lead to an understanding of the important shift of the curriculum and need for training institutions and other relevant departments to realise the relevance and importance of policy text analysis in their training programmes. This could further help teachers and other professionals to relate their professional work and practices to the requirement of the state.

V. HISTORICAL –ORIENTED POLICIES

The Kingdom of Eswatini used the historical approach guided by historical –oriented policies to initiate the religious curriculum changes. This provides vital insights into the way the Eswatini government aims at promoting social values and ideas through the curriculum and the education system. For example, the introduction of the Christian-oriented curriculum project was guided by the first ever written policy (Imbokodvo Manifesto of 1972 policy), which puts more emphasis on key social values for sustainable development

purposes. It was claimed that the Christian-oriented curriculum aims at mediating society's concerns (decay of societal values, unpredictable future society). The curriculum is about the future that should be constructed today through the classroom. The re-introduction of the Christian-oriented curriculum was an acknowledgement by government that the education system could not continue changing and in these challenging societies as if nothing mattered for her. This type of a curriculum has to respond appropriately to state vision set for a variety of purposes including the pressure to the preserve religious values for peaceful benefits. This state vision is captured on section 23 (2) of the Swaziland Constitution of 2005: state aspires to establish a society characterised by freedom of religion and based on core sustainable historical values (respect of self and others).

VI. NATURE OF TEACHER EDUCATION RELIGIOUS CURRICULUM AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

It is important that the teachers who are products of teacher education match the range of faith, beliefs, cultures in their explicit practices, teaching and learning and in their behaviour and attitudes. This suggests that the formal curriculum (teaching of Christian-oriented religion in schools) need to be delivered in a way that reflects classroom context and be sensitive to the varieties of social cultures of students. It should also aim at delivering an education which make each students feel that his/her religious or social culture is acknowledged, valued. This also highlights that teaching is complex and delicate educational project, which its success depends on vigorous training for teachers and well enlightened key educational and non-educational partners (policymakers, parents).

Vigorous training on the teachings of the Christian-oriented curriculum could help teachers to conceptualise the religious-blind approach not as a form of denial of multi-faith but of understanding multi-faith related social forces that undermine and promote teaching and learning. For example, training on religious blind approach could help teachers to critical examine the nature of the curriculum processes which involves (what is taught and how it is taught), and in turn design strategies to counteract destructive practices, which promote inequalities in educational attainment and learning opportunities.

Teacher education in the Kingdom is about improving quality of teaching and learning and provision of quality education (Ministry of Education and Training Sector policy, 2018). The policy also acknowledges that quality education depends on teachers' competencies and on sensitive ways of organising learning in the classroom or schools. Teacher education is perceived as a formative process conducted through different processes which some of them are explicit (prescribed in the subject curriculum) and some of them are implicit, subtle, alien to some learners' cultures and teachers' cultures (not relating to their cultures). These may be deterrent to students' learning. Osler, (1997) and Ghuaman, (1995) noted that any pedagogical discourses or type of a curriculum which teachers are required to teach can be a deterrent to learning, particularly if it does not relate sufficiently to their own cultures and of those learners.

In the Kingdom of Eswatini, Teacher Training institutions are currently complex because they are training teachers on multi-faith curriculum, yet in schools are expected to teach a Christian-oriented curriculum, which focuses on Christianity. This has a potential of undermining the learning processes in the classroom because the University programmes are incongruent with the expected classroom pedagogical practices. Training teachers on multi-faith curriculum and expect them to effectively teach a Christian-oriented curriculum was a complex matter, which was further complicated by the none existence of teachers from the ethnic minorities. The absence of ethnic religious minority teachers may undermine the learning social process, which occurs-through the interactions between teachers and learners in the classroom. Ross, (2002) noted that it is important to have a more representative proportion of teachers in the profession because of the character, persuasiveness of teaching as a social process characterised by cultural and religious sensitivity.

In countries such as the Kingdom of Eswatini, a more representative proportion of teachers is more problematic because there are few teachers from the religious minorities who are attracted to the teaching profession. This challenges the existing teacher education institutions to provide trainers with the capacity to reflect and accommodate the full spectrum of students' religious and cultural traditions in their classroom professional practices.

VII. TEACHERS' EXPECTATIONS

Teachers' expectations on non-Christian students or Christian students have a potential of negatively or positively affecting the student's achievement and learning opportunities. In addition, the attitudes and behaviours of teachers convey messages about non-Christian students or the other students' ability to learn either Christian concepts or concepts related to other religions. This suggests that teachers play a role in shaping the ways non-Christian or Christian students in particular to understand their religion and others. It also suggests that there are many processes (religious blindness, context-neutral) that marginalise and exclude learners from their learning rather than the curriculum per se (being Multi-faith curriculum or Christian-oriented

curriculum). For, example, the absence of religious ethnic minorities in teacher education and in the teaching profession undermines the capacity of the teaching profession itself to reflect and acknowledge individual and institutional racism and its impact on classroom teaching and learning.

VIII. DEBATES AND CONTROVERSIES

When the Christian-oriented curriculum was re-introduced in 2017, it provided a sphere for open debates on religious matters for both policymakers and practitioners but that opportunity was never fully utilised to improve teaching and learning at training institutions and schools. This curriculum was introduced precisely at a time where it mediated society's concerns and the country's aspirations. The society was concerned about the uncontrolled or poorly managed influx of "business" people of Asian origins. These came in with their business expertise and religious beliefs, which were totally unique to the majority of the citizens.

Religious educational matters as a key aspect of education of the Eswatini education system remains controversial because it is both apolitical and classroom-oriented matter, expected to spark debates from both policymakers and citizens. The re-introduction of Christian-oriented curriculum in 2017 sparked some debates some citizens generally considered Christianity to be at the centre of Eswatini society's self-understanding, renewal and the hallmark of societal values, which needs to be open to debates. While others claimed that the then Prime minister (Sibusiso Dlamini) and his collective leadership violated the Swaziland Constitution of 2006, when announcing that government would ban the teachings of other religions in local schools. To respond to this claim others noted that the introduction of the Christian-oriented curriculum could enhance students' learning of key values which are highly need in the present Eswatini society facing the decay of societal values, not to violate learners' rights to their religions. It was clarified that teachers were not in schools to preach certain religion or to form certain religious groups but were in schools as members of the teaching profession or community to teach Christian values as per the Ministry of Education and Training Sector Policy of 2011.

There were some arguments that Christianity could become the national religion of the Kingdom, but this overlooked the fact that making Christianity a national religion was rejected while the process of crafting the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 was at the advanced stage. It was noted that Christianity could not be a national religion because the country has its own indigenous religion (traditional religion) inherited from the founders of the nation. In addition, Christianity is perceived as a foreign concept and its existence or arrival to the Kingdom was interpreted by some with mixed feelings, as some claimed that it was a tool for promoting imperialism by people of foreign origin. Though Christianity is not a national religion but it remains respected and followed by the majority of the citizens partly because it was introduced to the citizens by king Sobhuza 1 in 1836. This is further substantiated by the fact that the majority of the citizens support the existence of the Eswatini monarchy.

In the Kingdom of Eswatini religious matters, including religious education have always been associated with the political objectives of the state. Political objectives of the state either educational or non-educational are always controversial and open to debates. Any move by the state on religious education is perceived as a political project with political objectives, to be achieved through education. Since, the introduction of formal education in the Kingdom of Eswatini, Christianity has contributed to sustainable ethics, for example, in instilling and promoting the fundamental values of trust and faith, hope and humility and purity among the people of Eswatini (Dlamini, 2018). To a certain extent, this perception had influenced educational stakeholders to overlook educational matters and practices that may help practitioners to better meet the needs of all students. Educational matters such as practitioners' culture of perceiving issues such as diversity as insignificant in the classroom social contexts, yet teachers are expected to learn about the social contexts opportunity gap provided by the diversity of learners and develop learning opportunities that help students transform their learning and lives.

The political-oriented religious education change in the Kingdom of Eswatini was observed during the curriculum review process in 2014, where it was reported that some schools were not teaching religious education as per policy (Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum Support Mission Report, 2014). Teachers did not have an understanding on the learning processes and pedagogies related to religious education; they had to learn through the classroom. This suggests the complexities of a political-oriented or driven curriculum and lack of understanding that a curriculum is not a matter of a simply form of structure but a multifaceted matter concerned with different substances: what the teachers and learners are expected to give their attention to; what experiences are to be used or provided to facilitated the learning processes and what is expected by the state as custodian of the curriculum. These substances involve defining the things to be leaned.

Both the religious education and Christian-oriented curricular introduction and implementation were characterised by lack of deep content analysis by political drivers for curriculum change (Policymakers) and practitioners, the teachers. This denied both professionals teachers and policymakers the opportunities to think deeply about their roles in helping the learners to learn from perspectives different from their own or what they have experienced through observing their teachers or following their intuitive sense. Content analysis which

pays more attention on the matter of educational and political processes in particular social context is important in ensuring that key issues are not ignored. Key issues such as addressing complex questions which more often than not are a challenge for some teachers: how to integrate experiences from various social context or religions to facilitate the learning processes, particularly on dealing with the interrelationships that exist between ideas, concepts learners learn in one religion as compared to the others.

Both policymakers and practitioners overlooked the fact that it is insufficient for teachers to possess subject matter in religious education or Christian-oriented curriculum when they do not understand how to relate that curriculum to particular students' in particular social context (ESwatini context). Such deficit on integrating subject knowledge and social context knowledge and dealing with interrelationships that exist between religious related ideas and concepts and they can be transferred into classroom instructional designs and practices remain a problem for effective teaching and learning. The deficit on integrating subject knowledge and social context proved detrimental to students' academic and social success. This is noted in the primary Curriculum report of 2014 where it recommended that teachers were to be advised and urged to do additional reading about the other faiths besides his or hers before teaching some lessons (Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum Support Mission Report, 2014), Curriculum Developers too were also urged to familiarise themselves with more than one religion in order to produce more varied materials to help teachers relate their specific religion concepts to other types of religious concepts. This notes that teaching multi-faith curriculum or Christian-oriented curriculum is complex in nature and controversial in the public space.

The silence of the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 on what to be taught and how to be taught on religious related matters in schools caused some controversies when government re-introduced the Christian-oriented curriculum in 2006. As noted earlier, section of 23 (2) of the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 states that a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of the freedom of conscience or religion, and for the purpose of this section freedom of conscience includes freedom of thoughts and of religion, freedom to change religion or belief and freedom of worship either alone or in community with others. This section allows government to introduce any religious curriculum deemed fit for the country's sustainability, national interest or peace and stability. This re-emphasises the argument that curriculum prescriptions derives from a state's commitment to pursue a perceived key goal of national interests, based on analysis of perceptive analysis of changes and developments in current environment to which schools have to respond in a sustainable way.

IX. METHODOLOGY

Theoretical Framework

The Opportunity gap explanatory framework was used in this study. It helped in explaining the educational practices and processes that affect teaching and learning of religious education or Christian-oriented religion in the Kingdom of ESwatini. It was helpful in examining the causes, and disparities that exists between and among students when being taught either religious education or Christian-oriented religion. It pays more attention on inequality processes in the classroom, policies and professionals' practices that can prevent some students from reaching their full capacity in learning religious concepts (Milner, 2012; Anyon, 1980).

The Opportunity gap explanatory framework helps to examine the standardisation of policy-related matters in which, in many ways are antithetical and insensitive to diversity of students because they suggest that all students are from, live and operate in a homogeneous religious environments with equality and equity of opportunities access to religious concepts afforded to them (Tate, 2008). Ladson-Billing's (2006) study findings indicated that the standardized educational policies and others (on recruiting and training of teachers in training institutions) efforts advance a sameness agenda, when the playing field for the students is not fairly level because they are from different religious backgrounds. This notes the importance of holding policymakers, training institutions, lecturers and other professionals accountable for providing professional learning opportunities for all students, through policies which are sensitive to diversity of students, sensitive training programmes, sensitive teaching methods and strategies to students' religious diversity in the classroom.

The Opportunity gap explanatory frameworks is relevant to this study because it has the potential of unpacking any existing gaps opportunity in access to teaching and learning because of the nature of the curriculum (Christian oriented curriculum in schools. It pays attention on the processes that influence and lead to the educational outcomes, such as "education debt", the debt the education system owes to some students it has failed to serve or it has poorly served. Unpacking this education debt is important because it has a potential of leading to other debts (moral debt, economic debt, political debt and societal sustainable development debt).

X. THE STUDY'S OBJECTIVE

This study examines the existing common misconception that the religious curriculum changes which occurred in 2017 have potential of affecting students' teaching and learning in the Kingdom of ESwatini. This was achieved through Milner's (2010) Opportunity Gap explanatory framework. It is essential in unpacking and understanding, and explaining educational practices related to opportunity:diversity blindness, deficit mindsets,

low expectations and teacher competencies. The opportunity gap explanatory frame work helps to unpack the factors which affects students teaching and learning in any subject in schools (Milner, 2010), including religious education and Christian-oriented religion.

In this study, a qualitative approach was used because of the focus of the study, which reflects on the religious curriculum changes in the Kingdom of ESwatini. Qualitative approach was used in this study because it was considered as helpful and relevant when researching complex matters in education and in other social related studies. As Grant, (2003) noted that educational matters such as religious education are complex and unstable processes because it involves complex policy related issues which are political oriented in nature and scope. Qualitative approach has the potential of capturing the dynamics and realities of supervision (Yin, 2006).

XI. STUDY DESIGN

The study was designed to be descriptive in nature, using descriptive survey design and qualitative data collection procedures. It was adopted for the study because it allowed visible and invisible complex questions and practices to be investigated. The descriptive survey design has the capability to unpack sensitive complex matters and respond to how the religious curriculum change in ESwatini and other educational related processes influenced teaching and learning in primary schools. In this study the desire was to capture social meanings of the curriculum changes and influences on students' teaching and learning.

Like all other studies, this study is paradigmatically anchored (Rowlands, 2005), and adopted the interpretive paradigm based on the assumption that world of reality are interpreted by individuals in their historical contexts. This relates to the study because religious curriculum policies and changes in the Kingdom are historical interpreted. Rowlands's (2005) study indicated that interpretative study focuses on the human actions aspect related to educational matters such as the religious curriculum changes and teaching and learning.

Curriculum changes are then seen as a product of individuals' interpretations events, interventions to social problems and policymakers' decisions which are embedded in policy documents and reports. Interpretative researchers attempt to understand educational matters or phenomena through assessing the meanings that policy documents and other texts assign to them. Thus, content analysis was used to analyse the relevant documents and policy documents. These documents (ESwatini Constitution of 2005; RE syllabuses; Independent Review of Primary Curriculum Report, 2014 and other related reports) were used as sources of data (see Table 1). Data from policy related documents are important because government's practices or any public institution is not innocent spatial reference or passive matters; they are embedded in peoples or social dynamic practices and struggles which influence educational practice, students' opportunities to effective teaching and learning.

XII. DATA ANALYSIS AND PRESENTATION

Content analysis

According to Krippendorff (1989) content analysis is a research method that uses different procedures to make inferences from text. Content analysis remains an ideal data analysis procedure in this study, where the relevant documents, educational reports and policies were interrogated, compared objectively and inferences drawn.

Content analysis was used to analyse the data. It was used to provide insights, facts and guide to actions (Krippendorff, 1989; and Holsti, 1969), on the issue of religious curriculum changes in the Kingdom of ESwatini education system. This suggests that inferences drawn from the relevant documents can be used to develop insights on the changes and the state's reasons for initiating the changes and impact on teaching and learning. This is important because government's practices or any public institution is not innocent spatial reference or passive matters; they are embedded in peoples or social dynamic practices and struggles (Ber and Vuolteehaho, 2009; Kolbe et al. 1991). These struggles usually involve defending the state's practices while overlooking the implications of their practices on students' teaching and learning.

The content or documentary analysis helped in unpacking the curriculum political significance embedded on the texts and other educational significance such as teachers and others inability to engage in the process of deconstruction of key policy documents (Swaziland Constitution of 2005 and other related acts), in the present context and classroom practice. Teachers are expected to deconstruct the policies in relation to their classroom lesson plans and Curriculum designers in relation to their curriculum design activities. Curriculum Designers have to pay attention on syllabus articulation, to ensure that the syllabus provides a continuum of learning from entry to exit level, and across common strands and skills. Deconstructing the key policy has a potential of helping teachers and others to "read" the significance or gist of what the policy texts say regarding the curriculum, and not say for their work and for the existence of the country. In addition, the deconstruction of policy documents could lead to an understanding of the important shift of the curriculum and need for training institutions and other relevant departments to realise the relevance and importance of policies in their places of work.

The content analysis provided an empirical starting point for generating new research evidence about the nature of educational programmes: In this study, content analysis was helpful in unpacking the misconceptions and controversies surrounding the Religious education which was in place prior 2017 and the current Christian-oriented education, by facilitating the observation of the symbolic nature of communications or messages embedded on the policy documents and other related documents (see Table 1 Sources of Controversies and their effects on teaching and learning). Related documents and policies were analysed to trace the controversies which influenced the teaching and learning of RE in the Kingdom of ESwatini (see table 1 below).

Table 1 Sources of Controversies and their effects on teaching and learning).

Sources of Controversies	Their effects on Teaching and Learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Standardised national policies (R.E and Christian-oriented policies) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Standardised national policies overlooked some processes related to teaching and learning, indirectly advances the sameness agenda overlooking the uneven educational field; -National policies less sensitive or antithetical to students' diversity, sometimes they suggests that learn and operate in a homogenous classrooms environments
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> History and distributions of religion practices in the land 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -These forced government and teachers to skew their practices towards the dominant religion and historical known religion.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Curriculum Designers' insensitivity to opportunity gaps educational practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -lack of attention on syllabus articulation, to ensure that the syllabus provides a continuum of learning from entry to exit level, and across common strands and skills.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers' insensitivity to opportunity gaps educational practice 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - insensitivity to deficit mindsets, low expectations and contextual neutral mindsets and practice
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of effective accountability culture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Absence of accountability culture undermines the learning processes, as one report claimed that some schools did not teach RE because they do not wish to teach the other religions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Absence of the culture of questioning what goes in schools or classroom 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Absence of the culture of questioning undermines the educational discourses because some teachers were teaching the religious concepts which were comfortable with, not as the policy dictates.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The nature of the Country's Constitution of 2005 sub. 23 (2). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It puts more emphasis on inclusivity but inclusive teaching processes becomes a challenge for teachers either teaching RE or Christian-oriented education
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents and teachers' failure to accept or to understand the Curriculum change process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Parents and teachers' failure to accept the Curriculum negatively affect the teaching process, thus the culture of institutional racism is manifested in schools (it is not the curriculum per se which is affect learning but other related processes within and outside the schools)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Constitution of 2005 being silent on religious curriculum matters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -thus, it fails to provide a sphere for open debates on religious matters for both policymakers and practitioners to enhance teaching and learning at both training institutions and schools
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Competiveness of the Syllabus 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -RE syllabus had no rationale outlining the reasons for teaching RE yet, rationale was expected to explain how through RE. Learners should understand their religious beliefs, values and traditions and accept others and peoples' whose values and religious traditions' differs from their own. Explain and set reasons why there is an emphasis on Christianity with the RE curriculum; -Syllabus should help teachers by advising them on how to teach learners with different religious beliefs.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Incomplete relevant teaching methods 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -there was very brief section on relevant methods, without providing teachers with proper guidance on using multiple forms of teaching and learning approaches relevant or which can be used to teach RE, which include: collaborative learning, which urges students to discuss and share ideas,

	experiences in different ways.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Unexplained assessment procedures 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -no section on assessment, yet the syllabus should provide teachers with guidance on using different forms of assessment such as portfolios to build a comprehensive picture of what learners have learnt and can do in RE; -An assessment which can help in identifying the extent to which learners can reflect on the beliefs, values and traditions they have studied
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Some RE Components not taught 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -It was noted that some schools/teachers were not teaching some component of RE subject because they did not want to teach about the other religions. Thus, it was suggested that the subject syllabus should be restructured around two key components/themes: Christianity and other religions. Depending on the circumstances of the school and religions of the learner, schools then could opt to teach only Christianity them, compare and contrast Christianity with other religions. NB: this shows the complexities of teaching RE.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Teachers and Curriculum Designers and Developers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -teachers were urged to do additional reading about the faiths before teaching some of the lessons, and the Curriculum developers needs to familiarise themselves with the different religions in order to produce more varied learning materials.

XIII. DISCUSSIONS

The discussions were guided by the objective of the study, which examines the existing common misconception that the religious curriculum changes which occurred in 2017 had a potential of affecting students' teaching and learning in the Kingdom of ESwatini.

The study indicated that the institutionalised issues such as teacher religious blindness and deficit mindsets and practices which fail them to recognise and to teach all the religions in a RE class affected the learning process not the changes per se. This finding is in line with Molestene (2005) study's findings which indicated that classroom practice and school experience had influence on students' learning. Other barriers that permeate policies that prevents some students from reaching their full capacity in learning religious concepts and ideas were revealed and re-emphasised by the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum Support Mission Report, 2014, Annex 13 subject review: *there was lack of attention on syllabus articulation, to ensure that the syllabus provides a continuum of learning from entry to exit level, and across common strands and skills.*

The study also revealed that the policy on standardised religious curriculum negatively influenced students' learning because the standardisation aspect influences professionals to overlook other key teaching processes such as assessment which has a potential of influencing and affecting the means necessary for the achievement of the state educational goals. For example, the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum Support Mission Report, 2014, Annex 13 subject review notes: *no section on assessment, yet the syllabus should provide teachers with guidance on using different forms of assessment such as portfolios to build a comprehensive picture of what learners have learnt and can do in RE.* An assessment which can help in identifying the extent to which learners can reflect on the beliefs, values and traditions they have studied is important. More often, students study RE curriculum not in harmonious learning environments with equality and equity of opportunities afforded to them by professionals, thus effective assessment practices are crucial for enhancing teaching and learning. As it is perceived as accountability policy matter intended to promote a number of changes in practice including the quality of teaching and learning and enhancing the effectiveness of school staff.

The study indicated that the absence or lack of effective culture of accountability on classroom practices influenced the teaching and learning of RE. There was no accountability evidence based knowledge, where monitoring of instructional practices and other educational experiences were closely assessed, professional constructed, delivered in ways that addresses and responds to RE students' religious concepts, as dictated by the religious differences and experiences that students bring into the classroom because of their religious social contexts (in case of ESwatini, it means traditional religion, Christianity, Bahias, Muslims and others).

The study revealed that the culture of religious blindness among teachers and others (head teachers) in the classroom affected the teaching of RE. Teachers' religious blindness has been cited as influential in

influencing teachers' instructional practices. Teachers adopted areligious blind attitudes, beliefs, and practices, which consciously and unconsciously influenced them to overlook the importance of students' religious beliefs in their teachings. Teachers who adopt a religion blind approach may not recognised how their own religion and "religionialised" or religious experiences can shape and influence what they teach, how they teach, and how they assess what has been taught.

The study indicated that the absence of context-neutral mindsets, attitudes among teachers affected the teaching of RE in schools because both students and teachers live in social contexts that have bearing on their thinking, behaviours and learning. This mindsets might blindfold teachers not to recognise the deep-rooted religious realities among students, which could be utilised to enhance teaching and learning or disrupt them. This further revealed that it is not enough for teachers to have or possess the RE subject matter knowledge if they lack deeply situated context-centred knowledge to enhance students' teaching and learning.

The study revealed that the absence of the culture of questioning what goes on in schools or classroom influenced the teaching of RE in schools. As the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum Support Mission Report, 2014, Annex 13 subject review indicated that some teachers were teaching the religious concepts which they were comfortable with, not as the policy dictates. It was claimed that there were incomplete relevant teaching methods and unexplained assessment procedures which were undermining the RE learning processes.

The study indicated that some teachers and Curriculum Designers and Developers did not possess the skills and knowledge for designing and developing relevant and inclusive teaching materials. As noted on the Independent Review of the Primary Curriculum Support Mission Report, 2014, Annex 13 subject review : religious education where it notes: *some RE teachers were urged to do additional reading about the faiths before teaching some of the lessons, and the Curriculum developers needs to familiarise themselves with the different religions in order to produce more varied learning materials.*

The study indicated that the Constitution of 2005 being silent on religious curriculum matters influenced the teaching of RE in schools because the teachers and other professionals have no constitutional ground to question religious curriculum matters. In Section of 23 (2) of the Constitution of 2005, the issue of school curriculum, students' learning and being taught of a certain religion or not being taught is not covered in the Constitution of 2005. Thus, students could be taught of a certain religion and not being taught any specific religion at a given time, is not a constitutional matter and this has implications on teaching and learning in schools.

The study revealed that parents and teachers' failure to accept or to understand national related policies and the Curriculum change process affected the processes of teaching and learning in schools. This depicts that it is not the curriculum per se which affect students' learning but other related processes within and outside the schools. This finding is in agreement with Dlamini, (2018) study finding which indicated that parents' failure to understand section of 23 (2) of the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 which states that a person shall not be hindered in the enjoyment of the freedom of conscience or religion, and for the purpose of this section freedom of conscience includes freedom of thoughts and of religion, freedom to change religion or belief and freedom of worship either alone or in community led to some controversies in the teaching RE in schools. The study also indicated that teachers' inability to engage in the process of interpreting key policy documents (Swaziland Constitution of 2005), also affected the teaching of RE in schools. The study revealed that teachers' failure to deconstruct the key related policies has a potential of influencing their classroom pedagogical discourses.

XIV. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that teaching either RE or Christian-oriented curriculum is not a key matter; the crucial matter is the educational processes which frustrate or enhances the processes of teaching and learning in schools. Thus, explaining opportunity gaps in educational practices is of fundamental importance.

The study concluded that it was not RE Curriculum per se which affect the teaching and learning in a religious-oriented classroom but a host of factors which need to be understood by teachers and others. The opportunity gap explanatory framework could be used to unpack the educational practices in diverse social contexts.

The study concluded that the teaching of RE curriculum in the Kingdom of Eswatini was a complex matter which could not be easily understood in isolation because of its historical interrelationship with teachers' religious beliefs and knowledge. This notes that teaching of RE or Christian-oriented curriculum could not be understood in isolation from the country's political, legal or constitutional perimeters and other social contexts.

It further concludes that teachers and others' failure to interpret legal or constitutional framework of the country and to locate the religious curriculum to the past and to the country's current social contexts made teachers to find it difficult to design and construct instructional practices and other related educational experiences in ways that addresses and responsive to students' varying needs because of the range of religious

differences that they bring into the classroom because of the social contexts in which they live (home) and learn (churches or mosques) .

It concludes that Curriculum Designers and Developers' possession and non-possession of relevant skills and knowledge in designing and developing relevant and inclusive teaching materials have an influence on teaching and learning. Relevant teaching materials are the key in enhancing teaching and learning in schools.

XV. RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that teachers and other professionals should be provided with appropriate training opportunities to acquire the relevant knowledge, capabilities to understand and disentangle how school related factors and community factors can influence students learning opportunities. This is crucial because, it may not be enough for teachers to possess subject matter or knowledge if they lack deeply situated context-centred knowledge.

It is also recommended that teachers and other professionals should be exposed to the Opportunity Gap explanatory framework to assist them in analysing, understanding educational practice in complex educational matters such as teaching RE or any subject and social contexts.

It is also recommended that Teacher Training institutions may consider restructuring their training procedures and programmes to ensure that their emphasis is more on opportunities rather than achievement. This may help teachers and other professionals to be sensitive to institutionalised and systemic issues and other barriers that permeate policies and professionals practices such institutional racism, teacher deficit mindsets, religious blindness, low expectations and teacher context-neutral mindsets.

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