



# Analysing Teachers' Perspectives on the Significance of Religious Education to Curb Learners-on-Teacher Violence in South African Schools

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## ABSTRACT

The purpose of this empirical study was to discuss the perspectives of teachers on the significance of Religious Education (RE) in curbing learner-on-teacher violence in schools. It also discussed the challenges faced by teachers in promoting a healthy relationship with their learners. Globally teachers are faced with violent acts perpetrated by learners against them, and these acts disturb teaching and learning as well as their relationships. The paper which was couched in Critical Social Theory (CST), argued that human beings should be emancipation and liberated from the circumstances that enslave them. CST challenges the status quo and strives for a balanced and democratic society. It is concerned with the issue of power relations within society and the interaction of education, economy, religion, and other social institutions that contribute to a social system. The study adopted Participatory Action Research (PAR). PAR advocates for community engagements. PAR was adopted because it advocates for open, clear communication and critical self-reflection among co-researchers during action. The paper responded to two questions. *What are teachers' perspectives on Religious Education in schools and how can religious education curb learners-on-teacher violence in schools?* The study found that teaching RE in schools fostered tolerance and respect for diversity and teachers. In light of the findings, the study recommends that teaching RE at school requires reintroduction to curb learner-on-teacher violence. This study will bring a unique perspective on sustainable teacher-learner relationships through Religious Education and make policymakers aware about the significance of RE in schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

Christianity in South African schools dates back to the time of apartheid and missionaries. According to Mashabela, Christianity was introduced by European and American missionaries with various church societies as part of community development.<sup>1</sup> One of the main characteristics of its spread has

<sup>1</sup> James Kenokeno Mashabela, "Lutheran Theological Education to Christian Education in (South) Africa: A Decolonial Conversion in the African Church," *Religions* 15, no. 4 (2024): 479.

been Christian Education (CE).<sup>2</sup> Pastoral ministry in schools proved to be a challenging task for Christian organizations in the 1980s when learners revolted in South Africa<sup>3</sup>. According to<sup>3</sup> students were wary of Christianity and religion in general because they believed that the system was using these ‘things’ to subdue their desire for freedom. Thus, following the 1994 democratic dispensation, there has been a decline in moral Christian values in our societies as well as in our schools.<sup>3</sup> Even though South Africa's constitution guarantees religious freedom, efforts have been made to remove religion from the educational system.<sup>4</sup>

This notion was proved by Hodgson when he argued that the national curriculum cannot include religious teaching, or taught in public schools. Instead, parents, families, and local religious organizations and institutions should pursue religious education outside of the classroom.<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, the policy makes provision for schools to allow their facilities to be used by religious organizations after school and/or in a manner that does not interrupt schooling. Thus, voluntary gatherings and meetings of learner-run societies, associations, and unions during break times and after school appear to be permitted by the Policy.<sup>6</sup> The policy continues to state that religious instruction in public schools is "inappropriate" for the learning environment and curriculum.<sup>7</sup> This suggests that homes and religious institutions should be the only places where religion can be observed. Due to the unsustainable nature of learner-on-teacher violence, the South African educational authorities have introduced many policies on safety and discipline in schools like (The South African Schools Act (SASA), Guidelines for consideration of governing bodies when adopting a code of conduct, regulations for safety measures at public schools), when to subdue the climate of learner-on-teacher violence, however, no meaningful change has been achieved because schools remain unsafe, especially for teachers.<sup>8</sup> asserts that school violence is a worldwide issue and that teachers are powerless to stop the learners' challenging aggressive behaviour in the classroom. Consequently, schools no longer always guarantee the protection of their teachers.<sup>9</sup> This notion is supported by Dube when he argues that numerous publications have extensively documented the deaths or severe injuries that have resulted from school violence among learners and teachers.<sup>10</sup> The proliferation of weapons in classroom hallways exacerbates these toxic relationships between school stakeholders. Therefore, every poorly handled disagreement ends in death and makes schools dangerous places for people of different backgrounds to coexist.<sup>11</sup>

While the above studies have made contributions to the study, none of the studies has focused on using Critical Social Theory (CST); thus, this study is unique in the sense that it argues for the use of CST as it advocates for emancipation and, the building of relations with others. In light of this, the study aims to discuss the significance of Religious Education in schools and suggest how religious education can curb learner-on-teacher violence in schools.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Based on the foregoing, moral values in schools play a very important role in the overall behaviour of stakeholders. Schools are now breeding grounds for ill-discipline and immoral behaviour and teachers

<sup>2</sup> Francis Machingura and Cecil Samuel Kalizi, "Christian Education in Colonial and Post-Independent Zimbabwe: A Paradigm Shift," *Religions* 15, no. 2 (2024): 213.

<sup>3</sup> Tromp, G. 2020. *Inclusive Education: the clerical perspective Vol 1*. Reach Publishers. Cape Town.

<sup>3</sup> Francis Osei-Tetteh, "Challenges Facing the Church in Dealing with Moral Issues in Ghana: The Way Forward," *Universal Journal of Social Sciences and Humanities*, 2024, 34–42.

<sup>4</sup> B. Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime," in *Regime and Education in Zimbabwe. Unpacking Post-Independence Curriculum Crisis*, ed. B Dube and A. Mufanechiya (Lexington Books, 2024).408.

<sup>5</sup> Tim Fish Hodgson, "Religion and Culture in Public Education in South Africa," *Basic Education Rights Handbook in South Africa*, 2017, 193.

<sup>6</sup> Hodgson, "Religion and Culture in Public Education in South Africa."193.

<sup>7</sup> Hodgson, "Religion and Culture in Public Education in South Africa."193.

<sup>8</sup> Govender, K., 2015. *Primary school teachers' experiences of violence towards them perpetrated by learners* (Doctoral dissertation).

<sup>9</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime."408.

<sup>10</sup> Simphiwe Windvoël, "Teachers' Lived Experiences of School Violence: A Phenomenological Case Study," 2023.1.

<sup>11</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime."409.

<sup>12</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime."409.

are frequently held accountable for acts of indiscipline in schools.<sup>12</sup> This paper advocates that religious education to be considered as an instrument to be used to curb learner-on-teacher violence in schools. Research has shown that if religion is taught in schools, it can alter people's behaviour. For instance, religious education is taught in Swedish schools to prepare students to live responsibly in a diverse world.<sup>13</sup> Teachers have the responsibility of teaching and acting in *loco parentis*. This can be achieved if the schooling environment is safe for all stakeholders. It is the responsibility of the teacher and all stakeholders to instil social consciousness in their pupils and assist them in acquiring social skills. Thus, for schools to become trustworthy institutions for mental formation, discipline is essential.<sup>14</sup> The researchers further said that without the value of discipline, schools will only turn into places of conflict where disciplinary action may result in chaos.<sup>3</sup> argues that research has reflected that religion, when given its rightful place in the education system, creates prospects for the impartation of ethical values and improves democratic values and nation-building among youth.

Various studies have been conducted on the significance of religious education in promoting teacher-learner relationships in South African schools. Adiyono noted that Islamic religious education is crucial in helping learners develop into people with high moral standards and firm convictions.<sup>14</sup> This notion was supported by Mardhatillah, *et al* when they added that for learners to comprehend and apply Islamic teachings in their daily lives, teachers must possess a thorough understanding of Islamic teachings and be able to inspire and mentor them.<sup>15</sup> Other studies show that RE is one of the subjects that learners must study to become people who believe in and fear God, have moral character, and exhibit a sense of social tolerance.<sup>16</sup> A study worth mentioning was done by Machingura and Kalizi, in which they agreed that Christian education gives students the ability to think critically and make judgments both personally and professionally that have a good impact on society because it is based on Christian moral ideals.<sup>17</sup> Patandung, *et al* argue that since critical thinking requires a deep comprehension of religious teachings and their practical application in daily life, it is an essential subject in Christian education.<sup>18</sup> Patandung *et al* further agreed that studies have indicated that youths possessing critical thinking abilities are more likely to analyse information thoroughly, comprehend the viewpoints of others, and arrive at sound conclusions in complex circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

## THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The Critical Social Theory (CST) was used as a theoretical lens in this project. The theory was developed by Max Horkheimer in the 1930s. The core concerns of Horkheimer's materialist social theory are human needs and suffering, how economic circumstances contribute to pain, and the adjustments required to end suffering and promote human well-being; its main aim is emancipation from slavery.<sup>16</sup> It is primarily concerned with people's social lives, as well as the state, the law, the economics, and religion, that is, with humanity's whole material and spiritual culture.<sup>17</sup> Some of the main principles of CST are as follows:

- i. It is explanatory about what is wrong with current social reality  
Critical Social Theory (CST) challenges the present status quo that is happening in schools, and the violent realities that teachers face daily.
- ii. It must identify the action to change it  
It is through CST that teachers could be emancipated and empowered to apply and use RE as an alternative weapon to act and change their situations.
- iii. It must provide both clear norms for criticism and transformation

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<sup>13</sup> Osei-Tetteh, "Challenges Facing the Church in Dealing with Moral Issues in Ghana: The Way Forward."2.

<sup>13</sup> Daniel Enstedt, "6 Exploring Religious Practice in the Non-Confessional Religious Education Classroom," *Religious Literacy in Secular Religious Education: Nordic Perspectives and Beyond*, 2024, 89.

<sup>14</sup> Galuh Listiyanti and Umar Alfaruq A Hasyim, "The Role of Islamic Religious Education Teachers in Fostering Student Learning Discipline at SMK N 1 Pekalongan," *Assyfa Journal of Islamic Studies* 2, no. 1 (2024): 11.

<sup>15</sup> Patandung, Panggua, and Weol, "Adolescence Students' Critical Thinking Skills in The Context of Christian Education."150.

<sup>16</sup> Douglas Kellner, "Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory," *Sociological Perspectives* 33, no. 1 (1990): 25.

<sup>17</sup> Kellner, "Critical Theory and the Crisis of Social Theory."25.

CST criticizes the power relations that exist within societies, thus exposing the hidden realities of power, privilege, and social identity to transform how learners and teachers view reality and their relationships.

The theory is relevant for this study because critical theory attempts to transform oppressed people and to save them from being objects of educational institutions to subjects of their autonomy and emancipation. In this view, students should act in a way that enables them to transform their societies, which is best achieved through religious education. Through problem-posing RE and questioning the problematic issues in learners' lives, learners learn to think critically and develop a critical awareness that helps them to improve their life conditions and to take necessary actions to build a more just and equitable society. Therefore, it can be said that CST challenges any form of domination, oppression, and subordination that aims to emancipate oppressed or marginalized people.<sup>18</sup> Religious education has played an important role in our South African education, even though it was not an examinable subject. Learners were taught moral values, respect, love for one another, respect for authority, freedom to express their religious beliefs, empowerment in terms of self-efficacy and transformation of understanding diversity. Teachers, on the other hand, had ways to deal with and control learners without using a stick because learners were disciplined. Violence reported in schools daily is due to a lack of morality and respect for teachers. It is vital to note that the State is working to recognize the value of religion as an important human attempt, something that all learners should be aware of if they are to receive a comprehensive education, given the current concerns about the general decline in moral standards, the high rate of crime, and the seeming disregard for human life in this nation.<sup>19</sup> In this regard, CST will empower teachers and equip them with the necessary skills to deal with learners.

## METHODOLOGY

This article adopted qualitative research that was based on the Participation Action Research (PAR) approach. PAR was chosen as the methodology because it places a strong emphasis on the usefulness of firsthand information to solve problems caused by unfair and destructive social structures, as well as to develop and implement alternatives. Teachers who are facing violent acts from their learners will work together and participate in PAR and take the lead in implementing emancipatory social change,<sup>20</sup> to come up with a tentative solution to violence in schools. The paradigm makes it possible for different stakeholders to collaborate and identify options that can reduce violence between teachers and learners.<sup>21</sup> PAR also advocates that all people have valuable knowledge about their lives and experiences.<sup>27</sup> Consequently, empowerment and emancipation are fundamental to all participants and applicable to CST through which this study evolves.

In selecting PAR, a qualitative approach was adopted because it focuses on how individuals and groups scrutinize and appreciate the world and construct meaning out of their experiences.<sup>22</sup> The researcher further says that a qualitative inquiry is concerned with understanding the procedures and the social and cultural environment that underlie various behavioural patterns.<sup>23</sup> In implementing the PAR paradigm in a qualitative approach rich evocative data will be obtained to assist the researcher and co-researchers in understanding the construction of knowledge and social reality by the participants.<sup>24</sup> For this article, purposive and snowball approaches were used to identify co-researchers

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<sup>18</sup> Mohammad Aliakbari and Elham Faraji, "Basic Principles of Critical Pedagogy," in *2nd International Conference on Humanities, Historical and Social Sciences IPEDR*, vol. 17, 2011, 77.

<sup>19</sup> Albertina Maitumeleng Ntho-Ntho and Jan Nieuwenhuis, "Religion in Education Policy in South Africa: A Challenge of Change," *British Journal of Religious Education* 38, no. 3 (2016): 236–48.

<sup>20</sup> Flora Cornish et al., "Participatory Action Research," *Nature Reviews Methods Primers* 3, no. 1 (2023): 34.

<sup>21</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime." 411.

<sup>27</sup> Tshelane, M.D., 2015. Enhancing the principal's leadership role in the usage of information and communication technology at school (Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State).

<sup>22</sup> J. Nieuwenhuis, "Introducing Qualitative Research," in *First Steps in Research*, ed. J. Nieuwenhuis, Revised Edition (Hatfield: Van Schaik Publishers, 2012).48.

<sup>23</sup> Nieuwenhuis, "Introducing Qualitative Research."49.

<sup>24</sup> J. Nieuwenhuis, "Introducing Qualitative Research," in *First Step in Research*, ed. K. Maree (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 2010).87.

based on the knowledge of learner-on-teacher violence and the importance of religious education in fostering interpersonal relationships, the two techniques will help us select just those co-researchers who meet the study's objectives and a high-quality sample free from biases will be obtained order to boost the trustworthiness and reliability of the results.<sup>25</sup>

The researchers interviewed 6 participants from two different schools which included 2 former religious education teachers, 2 teachers in the School Governing body committee, and 2 teachers who are in the disciplinary school committee. Group discussions in the form of Free Attitude Interviews (FAI) were conducted to collect data in two days, and 2 hours were spent with co-researchers from each school. The discussion with the co-researchers was based on two questions; What are teachers' perspectives on Religious Education in schools and how can religious education improve teacher-learner relationships? The study complied with ethical requirements. Permission was requested and approved by the Department of Education and the institutional ethics committee of the university. Informed consent, the right to withdraw, and participant identity protection were other ethical considerations that were upheld.

## DATA ANALYSIS

This research paper used Thematic Analysis (TA) to analyse data. According to Naeem, *et al*, one way to examine qualitative data is through thematic analysis.<sup>26</sup> It entails finding and reporting patterns in a set of data, which are subsequently deciphered to reveal their underlying significance.<sup>27</sup> These data were coded based on group interview questions and categorized into themes stemming from the discussions with co-researchers. The researchers followed the Riger and Sigurvinsdottir model of thematic analysis. They follow the following steps.

Stage 1: Immersing oneself in the data: This stage entails transcribing group interviews and reading the transcripts numerous times. This is helpful because it gives the researcher the chance to identify patterns and meanings.

Stage 2: Generating initial codes: The data was arranged into meaningful units. Major themes and issues emerged.

Stage 3: Searching for themes: The researchers used tables to classify themes and codes.

Stage 4: Reviewing themes: A set of potential themes was identified, and they were reviewed and filtered. This was done because some themes may not apply to the research question.

Stage 5: Defining and naming themes: Themes were derived from the data collection, and key concepts were recognized and given succinct names.

Stage 6: Producing the report: Following the complete identification of themes and their relationships, a research report was written.

The researcher applied the member-checking concept to validate data. To ensure that the data represented the conclusions drawn from the interviews and, more importantly, addressed the study objectives, the data was coded and analyzed, and the themes were sent to the participants. The conclusions and debates resulting from the study questions are shown in the next section.

## PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

This section of the research will discuss the responses from the co-researchers based on the first question; *What are teachers' perspectives on Religious Education in schools?*

### Morality

When considering both the good and evil aspects of human nature, morality serves as a yardstick for judging whether human attitudes and behaviours are right or wrong. Morality, then, is composed of

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<sup>25</sup> Friday Nyimbili and David Sani Mwanza, "Translanguaging Challenges Faced by Teachers and Learners in First Grade Multilingual Literacy Classrooms in Zambia," *International Journal on Studies in English Language and Literature (IJSELL)* 9, no.3(2021):20-31.

<sup>26</sup> Muhammad Naeem et al., "A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research," *International Journal of Qualitative Methods* 22 (2023): 16094069231205788.

<sup>27</sup> Naeem et al., "A Step-by-Step Process of Thematic Analysis to Develop a Conceptual Model in Qualitative Research."

standards and values derived from the human conscience.<sup>28</sup> Thus, having high moral integrity, or living up to one's religious principles in both interactions with God and other people, is a sign of religious character.<sup>29</sup> A teacher on a school disciplinary committee said.

*When I was in primary school, we were taught religious education, at that time I did not understand why, but what I noticed when I was growing up was that most of my schoolmates respected teachers and you could hardly hear a learner backchatting to the teacher. We had morals and respected each other and our teachers. Unlike what is happening now in our schools...[breathing heavily, no respect at all, it's like these kids are possessed]*

In addition to this, the teacher in the school governing body said.

*You know you are so right; it was the case with me at school, religious education was a key to morality. I grew up going to church and I also knew that we had assembly and we prayed in our classes and that helped to shape how we relate to each other. RE was very important in schools, but now Oh My Word, just a disaster in our schools). I'm not even sure if we as teachers can stand up and face the education department to bring it back.*

Based on the above, it is evident that RE played a role in schools in the past, which is what teachers are saying. Its absence in schools has brought a different dimension to how learners view each other and their teachers.

The following section discusses a second point raised by a former RE teacher, "religious education shapes learners holistically, it instills values, such as respect towards others"

### **Respect towards others**

One of the fundamental causes of school violence is the high level of intolerance among teachers and learners, leading to constant confrontation in the classroom.<sup>30</sup> It has been documented in newspaper articles and social media about the constant confrontations between learners and teachers, which escalate to verbal, as well as physical violence. Teachers feel trapped and not emancipated by the education department to deal with these issues of violence in schools. Thus, teachers feel that it's only through religious education that respect among stakeholders can be improved. In light of the renunciation, the RE teacher said:

*In my view, RE in schools is a necessity, particularly in schools from a lower level to high school. What I can tell you about religion is that it's a voice of authority and respect. During those school days, we understood the importance of going to the assembly we would start a day with a prayer and scripture reading. You know we were not perfect as kids; some were (stout: naughty) but the level of respect for our teachers was very high, and not for the teachers only as well as amongst us learners. I remember this one teacher who used to say, "A child who does not respect his or her elders will go nowhere in life." Till today I still live that biblical principle. You know gentlemen when I arrived at this school many moons ago, we used to have prayers in our classes and the level of respect for our children was high but since we were told to stop it, a lot has changed we are even afraid of these kids.*

The SGB teachers added that:

*Not to take your platform, but I agree with you, violence in our public schools is getting worse. Every day there are cases where learners do something to the teacher. Not long ago actually today, the parents of this boy were called to school because he used the (f..) word to the teacher and he was so proud in the presence of his parents to say he is a satanist, can you believe that. No this is terrible, what happened to those children we used to teach who knew what respect was? RE used to be our instrument of authority. We have no control, our hands are tied, our*

<sup>28</sup> Bucky Wibawa Karya Guna and Sri Endah Yuwantiningrum, "Building Morality and Ethics Through Islamic Religious Education In Schools," *IJGIE (International Journal of Graduate of Islamic Education)* 5, no. 1 (2024): 15.

<sup>29</sup> Mohamad Yudianto et al., "Development of Religious Character in the Learning of Moral Creed in Madrasah Ibtidaiyah," *Jurnal Ilmiah Wahana Pendidikan* 9, no. 7 (2023): 733.

<sup>30</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime ."412.

*authority is taken away from us, and it's like we are in prison. We really need a word of authority over these kids. Policies don't work anymore, so maybe we should go back and check what worked and use it again.*

The teacher in the discipline committee said:

*Religious education provides learners with skills on how to resolve conflicts. They will not just disrespect teachers, but they will know how to approach them politely when they know conflict resolution skills, they will also avoid conflict or provoking other learners. Respect is vital in schools and among all stakeholders.*

The sentiments shared by co-researchers agree that RE is necessary in schools as it will bring a sense of order and respect to authority. It will again teach learners how to confront conflict situations. Violence in schools has taken a different shape because learners do not respect their teachers and research has shown that religious education is a subject that can deliver tolerance to allow teachers and learners to work together to talk about learners-on-teacher violence.<sup>31</sup> A crucial aspect of education for learners in both family and school settings is ensuring they receive the appropriate amount of religious education.<sup>32</sup> The researchers further say that given the seriousness of the situation, this should be taken very seriously as it serves as the basis for developing their character, personality, and respect towards others.<sup>33</sup>

### **Religious Education moulds behaviour**

Aseery posits that by providing a positive and stimulating learning environment, teachers play a critical role in supporting students' motivation.<sup>34</sup> He further says that to increase students' enthusiasm and engagement, teachers should actively encourage and support their capacity for action and creativity.<sup>35</sup> As teachers act in *loco parentis*, it is their responsibility to teach their learners moral values. Young people's morality is currently undergoing rapid changes and these changes affect the way they respond to their relationships with their teachers, thus, research indicates that RE can help learners develop morally and mould behaviour.<sup>36</sup> In getting more details into this, RE teachers said:

*Our learners are behaving unacceptably, there is a lot that is happening in our schools across the globe and it looks like it's the same thing from one country to the next. I can still remember those good old days when we were growing up. You know our government and education department can say whatever they want but RE was the best thing not only for us as teachers but for our learners as well. There was a great sense of good behaviour amongst them, lots of respect and yes there were some who misbehaved but the majority behaved very well.*

In addition to this, the SBS teacher said:

*Our schools are under siege, teachers are being killed, and teachers are resigning from their posts due to this democracy and the power our learners have. We are not free; we live in constant fear of our learners. Even though we can still think RE was the white man thing, it used to mould behaviour. But now I don't know, all that I know is that we need RE back in our schools.*

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<sup>31</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime ."413.

<sup>32</sup> Nurul Komariah and Ishmatun Nihayah, "Improving the Personality Character of Students through Learning Islamic Religious Education," *At-Tadzkir: Islamic Education Journal* 2, no. 1 (2023): 66.

<sup>33</sup> Komariah and Nihayah, "Improving the Personality Character of Students through Learning Islamic Religious Education."66.

<sup>34</sup> Ahmad Aseery, "Enhancing Learners' Motivation and Engagement in Religious Education Classes at Elementary Levels," *British Journal of Religious Education* 46, no. 1 (2024): 44.

<sup>35</sup> Aseery, "Enhancing Learners' Motivation and Engagement in Religious Education Classes at Elementary Levels."44.

<sup>36</sup> Komariah and Nihayah, "Improving the Personality Character of Students through Learning Islamic Religious Education"66; Jason Metcalfe, K Kristjánsson, and A Peterson, "Exploring Religious Education Teachers' Perspectives on Character Development and Moral Virtues, in State-Funded, Non-Faith Schools in England," *Journal of Beliefs & Values*, 2023, 2.

In support of this, the teacher in the discipline committee said:

*I agree with my colleagues that, our learners are now involved in drugs, and it is like the parents are helpless because they now think we as teachers are a solution. But it's funny at the same time because last year in 2023, one parent said that she is not a Christian and they don't even go to church in her whole house. To quote she said, "you as the school can not tell me that my child is misbehaving as if you are good people yourselves." Now you tell me how these learners will behave if parents say this kind of thing. Thus, people need to change their mindset else, we are going to achieve nothing. It is only through partitioning as teachers that we talk to the department to reintroduce RE to schools.*

The participants all seem to agree that religion has the power to make people pause and think carefully about what it means to live.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, some teachers had some reservations about RE at school in the sense that they feared that it might not be welcomed with open hands. In essence, they are pro-RE teachers who believe that it will make a difference in the lives of all stakeholders in their schools. To a certain extent, there was a question that since there is freedom of religion in the country, what would happen if some people want to practice satanism or their cultural practices? The researchers largely believe that it is only through the word of God that schools will overcome this pandemic that is eating away at the freedom of teachers. It is thus apparent that RE is important in schools.

### **Learner-on-teacher violence**

Since the dawn of democracy, there have been many changes in society and those changes have affected the schools as well. The influx of drugs in communities, changes in laws that favour learners over teachers, and parents being afraid to reprimand their children, the violence of learners-on-teachers, and violence against learners themselves are changes in current societies. Most of the time things that happen in communities overlap with schools and consequently, this situation affects the normal running of the school as well as the relationship between the teachers and learners. No person is born with a bad personality, all men are given a choice to love or hate, and hence behaviour can be moulded. The crux of the issue is that there needs to be a consensus among the co-researchers that RE education can assist in curbing learner-on-teacher violence. Based on the foregoing, the following suggestions were made:

#### **a. Rebuking bad unacceptable behaviour**

Learners' ability to succeed depends on their level of discipline, which can be developed through formal education. Schools should equip teachers with the skills they need to effectively mentor learners. Based on the newspaper article and other social media it has been reported that violence against teachers has reached an undesirable proportion here in South Africa and the situation threatens all the stakeholders, as teachers are resigning from their posts. Based on the report from News24, unsettling data from earlier this year showed that, on the grounds of educational institutions, such as daycare centres and universities, the province saw 238 instances of assault and serious bodily harm, 84 cases of rape, 8 murders, and 14 attempted murders between January and March<sup>42</sup>. These data reflect the seriousness of violence in schools that requires serious intervention. The researchers noted that since available government policies are not assisting the situation, it is only through the reintroduction of religion in school that learner-on-teacher violence can be mitigated. According to Wangila, religion encompasses not only spiritual experiences but also the development of attitudes and identities and religion is a way of life because of its impact on moral principles, culture, and identity.<sup>38</sup> Looking at developed countries like China, moral behaviour and personal accountability are highly

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<sup>42</sup>News24.com. 2018a. *Violence and killing at SA schools: These stories shocked us in 2018*. Available from <https://www.news24.com/News24/violence-and-killing-at-sa-schools-these-stories-shocked-us-in-2018-20181122> [accessed 18 April 2022].

<sup>37</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime ." 414.

<sup>38</sup> M.N. Wangila, "Religion and the Cultures of Kenya," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Contemporary Kenya* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2023), 253–66.

valued and virtues like respect for elders, devotion to family and friends, kindness and compassion for others, peace and collaboration in society, and righteousness and justice in action are examples of values and norms.<sup>39</sup>

In addition, Malaysian people believe that religion is recognized as having a significant role in upholding tolerance and correcting misbehaviour in society.<sup>40</sup> South Africa can imitate new practices from other countries and reincorporate religion into schools as a good practice.

### **b. Hearing the word of God daily humbles a person**

In South African schools, school violence and learner-to-teacher violence are still major societal ills, and despite several efforts to address them, little real progress appears to be being made.<sup>41</sup> Stakeholders are not safe; this includes learners themselves. It is for this reason that South Africa needs to bring balance into its communities. South Africa is not an Island, thus things that affect other countries affect all citizens as well. The lack of peace in schools is one of the major problems, as well as, violence, specifically learner-on-teacher violence, which is also a concern. It is therefore necessary to come up with the forgotten solutions to this problem. According to Chamami, *et al*, religion is perceived as a belief system that mirrors the distorted morality and character in society, reflecting power morals on both an individual and societal level.<sup>42</sup> From a human perspective, God is not physical, especially for people who do not believe in His supernatural ways of making things possible, it might seem impossible that the word of God can bring a transformation in society. However, research has proved that the word of God brings humility, peace, and respect to others. Therefore, the government and the education department have the responsibility to keep teachers safe. This can only happen when all stakeholders are included, such as religious leaders and school management boards. Furthermore, RE needs to be brought back into schools, because it has the potential to liberate and transform the status quo in schools. To create an atmosphere in schools that reduces the feelings of rage and sadness that contribute to acts of violence in schools, the Department of Basic Education should collaborate with schools and religious leaders.<sup>43</sup> The researchers are sure that reintroducing RE in schools could liberate teachers and bring stability to schools. This will not only benefit teachers, but it will be for the benefit of the whole school.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on this study, the following recommendations were made: morality and moral values play an important part in every human life. Thus, through the teaching of religion in school moral values can be instilled starting from primary schools. It has been proved from different religions in South Africa that children who obey and abide by Christian values grow up as responsible citizens.

### **Respect towards others**

Respect towards others is a virtue that is instilled in the constitution and part of the *Ubuntu* philosophy. Humans do not exist in silos, as a result, there is a need to respect each other in order to build a better South Africa. Through religious teachings, teachers can play a pivotal role in their classes to mould behaviour and respect for learners. This can be done through assembly briefings, morning briefings in classes, reading and explaining bible verses in classes and also having RE periods once a week.

### **Religious education moulds behaviour**

Based on the findings of the research, it is evident that children in South African schools have lost the fight to uphold moral behaviour. This could be due to societal changes, family background, economic

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<sup>39</sup> Baozhai Jing, "Role of Religious Rituals in Shaping Moral Values and Social Norms in China," *Journal of Philosophy, Culture and Religion* 7, no. 1 (2024): 25.

<sup>40</sup> Mashitah Sabdin and Mohd Ikhwan Izzat Zulkefli, "The Relationship Between Religious Knowledge, Religious Personality and Inter-Ethnic Tolerance Among Malaysian Undergraduate Students," *KnE Social Sciences*, 2023, 336.

<sup>41</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime ." 415.

<sup>42</sup> M Chamami et al., "Islamic Boarding School Education Format Based on Peace Building Character at Ponpes YPMI Al Firdaus Semarang (Optimization of Pesantren Principles and Values)," in *Proceedings of the 2nd Multidisciplinary International Conference, MIC 2022, 12 November 2022, Semarang, Central Java, Indonesia, 2023.2*.

<sup>43</sup> Dube, "Religious Education as an Ideological Tool in Zimbabwe: Unpacking the Strategy of the Regime ."415.

situations at home, and peer pressure. However, if behaviour is not properly moulded from a young age it will be difficult to mould it at a later stage. That is why the saying that charity begins at home. Parents need to be involved to pressure the education department to reinstate RE in schools and push for policy changes.

## CONCLUSION

Learner-to-teacher violence remains a problem in the world. Teachers' health and well-being are severely impacted by violence against them, which is a public health concern that also negatively impacts teaching and learning and the well-being of the whole school. In recent years, there have been many violent acts against teachers and teachers alike and these acts of violence make South African schools not safe places. Safety in schools for both teachers and learners should be a primary concern for the education department. Thus, this paper has made recommendations to help develop strategies to combat this canker. This study concludes that the education department should reintroduce religious education into South African schools for the sake of posterity.

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