



The effectiveness of religious and cultural values in South African schools: A case study on the effectiveness of religious and cultural values in South African schools Post Apartheid Era

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the effectiveness of religious and cultural values in South Africa during the post-apartheid era. Currently, South African schools are faced with unrest and instability triggered by social ills such as lawlessness, bullying and violence. The available literature proves that indiscipline in schools is a serious matter that needs urgent attention. The rationale behind this paper is to combat these social ills in South African schools. Eradicating social ills in schools can result in a positive school culture for quality education. A qualitative research method within the context of an interpretive-constructivist paradigm was used to gather data. Fifteen (15) participants were purposively selected for semi-structured face-to-face individual interviews, with 5 participants from each of the 3 chosen schools. Data were thematically analysed with the following findings: Religious and cultural values receive less attention from the school setting; Religious and cultural values are not well understood by both teachers and parents, and this resulted in the prevalence of lawlessness, bullying and violence in South African schools. This paper recommends that the Department of Basic Education reconsiders religious and cultural values in schools to combat social ills. There is a need for training workshops to equip all school stakeholders to curb lawlessness, bullying and violence in schools.

Keywords: Religious Values, Religious Education, School Culture, Religious Policies.

INTRODUCTION

This paper focuses on religious and cultural values such as good discipline, sense of identity and belonging, religious worldviews and others that can impact advancing the school culture, especially the core business of teaching and learning. It is alarming that unrest and instability in South African schools after 1994 are still prevalent. The havoc and pandemonium that prevail in schools are caused by social ills such as lawlessness, bullying, violence, and others.¹ Normally, violent acts are perpetrated due to a

¹ Ngogi Emmanuel Mahaye and Oluwatoyin Ajani, "School Instability in South Africa: A Systematic Review of Reflections and Experiences for a Way Forward," June 5, 2023, <https://doi.org/10.32388/U9LBH1>.

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great dissatisfaction, for instance, in the school context, lack of service delivery, such as insufficient resources, multi-grade teaching, mismanagement, and misappropriation of funds, to mention but a few.²

Literature studied indicated that the education system of South Africa is in crisis, where lawlessness, bullying and violence prevail. Clearly, this negatively impacts the teaching and learning culture in schools. Precisely, if religious and cultural values are not instilled as part of school activities, teachers might struggle to maintain learner discipline in schools, and as a result, lawlessness, bullying and violence might remain the order of the day. Therefore, in education, discipline is considered a priority, and as such, without discipline, education cannot take place in schools.³ Religious, cultural and moral values of society can promote discipline, which, consequently, portrays the potential for maintaining a positive school climate.⁴ Therefore, religious and cultural values tend to bind the community coherently in a school environment, including teachers, parents, religious leaders, and learners, since most people are religious, whether they belong to different religions, even those who are non-religious belong to their own cultural and moral values in their communities.⁵

This paper, therefore, is underpinned by three lenses of the objectives: To establish the role of religious and cultural values in teaching and learning culture, to determine how schools reconcile religion, culture and education practices within the school curriculum, and to ascertain how teachers could be supported in promoting religious and cultural values in schools so that a positive school climate can be enhanced. The details of the paper are presented in the subsequent sections.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Religious and cultural values can positively impact the violent situation taking place in schools in South Africa only when they are inculcated into learners through the subject called Religious Education (RE), which is embodied within.⁶ Furthermore, they can positively influence this current turmoil when integrated into Religious Education since they have the potential to foster respect, tolerance, and a sense of community. The religious and cultural values are built into RE, which, in turn, is regarded as a subject that involves all religions, in that it teaches about religious values, or it is a multi-traditional approach of teaching or simply a multi-religious approach that can embrace knowledge and values from all religions.⁷ Therefore, if religious and cultural activities can be introduced in schools to instill various values from different religions, there could be discipline and stability in schools, and this could improve the quality of education. Traditionally, cultural values inspire good discipline that consequently results in learners' better citizenship.⁸

Good discipline as a religious and cultural value

Good discipline in learners can be fostered by traditional cultural values emanating from Religious Education through instilling respect, community values and a sense of responsibility to school stakeholders and community members.⁹ This author states that good discipline can help teachers to be respected by learners, as elderly people are obligated to take care of them in the place of a parent (*in loco parentis*). Furthermore, traditional cultural values can shape individual learners who are more likely to be cooperative in terms of following rules and regulations of the school, and as such, a positive learner attitude can impact teaching and learning positively. Therefore, traditional cultural values also help teachers to uphold their dignity as elderly people and learners being more receptive to school rules and

² Mothofela R. Msimanga, "Managing the Use of Resources in Multi-Grade Classrooms," *South African Journal of Education* 39, no. . (August 31, 2019): 1–9, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v39n3a1599>.

³ P. Venpakal, "Understanding Disciplines and Subjects" (ALAGAPPA University, 2017); Zongyi Deng, "School Subjects and Academic Disciplines: The Differences," in *Curriculum, Syllabus Design and Equity* (Routledge, 2012), 50–63.

⁴ Muhammad D Dasopang, Ismail F A Nasution, and Azmil H Lubis, "The Role of Religious and Cultural Education as a Resolution of Radicalism Conflict in Sibolga Community," *HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies* 79, no. 1 (2023): 8469.

⁵ Jim Davies, "Religion Does Not Determine Your Morality," Carleton University, 2018, <https://carleton.ca/news/story/religion-morality/>.

⁶ Bekithemba Dube, "Religious Education as a Pedagogy of Care in the Context of Violence: Re-Imaging Working and Thinking Together," *E-Journal of Religious and Theological Studies* 9, no. 8 (2023): 408–16.

⁷ Simone White-House, "The Importance of Religious Education (RE) in a School's Curriculum," Services for Education, August 10, 2022, <https://www.servicesforeducation.co.uk/blog/schools/why-is-re-important-in-schools/>.

⁸ A. Eva, "How to Inspire Students to Become Better Citizens," *Greater Good Magazine*, 2018.

⁹ Eva, "How to Inspire Students to Become Better Citizens."

instructions, whereby religious and cultural values can be promoted by teachers in school.¹⁰ The notion of good discipline focuses on what learners should do and be able to correct unwanted behavior and promote self-disciplined behavior to mitigate the current turmoil of unrest and instability taking place in schools.¹¹

Sense of identity and belonging

Traditional cultural values provide learners with a strong sense of identity and belonging.¹² Furthermore, such a strong sense of identity and belonging has the potential to motivate learners to uphold cultural norms and values, especially those that are related to discipline and responsible citizenship. Traditional cultural values support teachers by instilling a sound understanding in learners about the importance of community collective responsibility.¹³ This author states that collective community responsibility can lead to a stronger sense of belonging and motivate learners to contribute positively to the well-being of the group, enhancing good discipline and civic engagement. Therefore, we are convinced that once learners become imbued with the spirit of community collective responsibility, they become respectful towards the norms and values of society. Consequently, the unrest and instability that take place in schools can be reduced, if not completely eradicated.

Religious worldviews

Religious and cultural values are advantageous for both teachers and learners to be aware of the world around them, so that they can tolerate diverse religions and cultures throughout the world.¹⁴ National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE) stipulates clearly that one of its objectives is to ensure that Religious Education addresses the notion of learners' cultural backgrounds, unity in diversity and worldviews in terms of recognition and respect.¹⁵ The worldview in relation to RE is a global study of world religions.¹⁶ The worldview is not concerned with RE only, but with various curriculum dimensions; for instance, according to Amara et al., knowledge of other foreign languages is needed to maintain contact with other parts of the world.¹⁷ In other words, a worldview is a comprehensive conception or apprehension of the world, especially from a specific standpoint. Worldview includes the aspiration that learners develop a sound understanding of the role that worldviews play in human life, be they religious or non-religious.¹⁸

Various scholars argue that the notion of religious and cultural values entrenched in Religious Education for learner education is an international issue with varying approaches and challenges worldwide, and its inclusion in the school curriculum is still debated, for instance, in Romania.¹⁹ According to this author, Religious Education is suitable for all learners, as society becomes more diverse and the world more globalized. In Indonesia, for instance, Dasopang avers that religious and cultural elements in the education system play a major role in the building of learners' character.²⁰ Such elements, according to this author, are also creating tolerance among religious communities to maintain

¹⁰ Akinlolu Onaolapo and Sekitla Daniel Makhasane, "Cultural Significance of Elderly Guidance in Shaping Learner Discipline Management: A Case of Two Secondary Schools in Nigeria.," *Interdisciplinary Journal of Social Studies* 4 (2024): 1–13.

¹¹ Petro Du Preez and Cornelia Roux, "Human Rights Values or Cultural Values? Pursuing Values to Maintain Positive Discipline in Multicultural Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 30, no. 1 (2010): 13–26.

¹² Studocu, *Cultural Practices in South Africa* (Studocu Publishers, 2025).

¹³ Onaolapo and Makhasane, "Cultural Significance of Elderly Guidance in Shaping Learner Discipline Management: A Case of Two Secondary Schools in Nigeria."

¹⁴ White-House, "The Importance of Religious Education (RE) in a School's Curriculum."

¹⁵ Kader Asmal, *The National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE)* (Pretoria: University of Pretoria, 2003).

¹⁶ M. K. Miller, *Shock to the System: Coups, Elections, and War on the Road to Democratization* (Princeton University Press, 2021).

¹⁷ Putri Amara Dzurolul Ilmi and Khoirul Anwar, "STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF TOTAL PHYSICAL RESPONSE METHOD IN TEACHING ENGLISH VOCABULARY AT BAN NONSAWAN SCHOOL, THAILAND," *Journal of Languages and Language Teaching* 10, no. 2 (April 19, 2022): 266, <https://doi.org/10.33394/jollt.v10i2.4989>.

¹⁸ Trevor Cooling, "Worldview in Religious Education: Autobiographical Reflections on The Commission on Religious Education in England Final Report," *British Journal of Religious Education* 42, no. 4 (October 1, 2020): 403–14, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2020.1764497>.

¹⁹ Vasile Priala, "Religious Education in the Context of Interculturality," in *Proceedings of the 36th International RAIS Conference on Social Sciences and Humanities* (Scientia Moralitas Research Institute, 2024), 209–15.

²⁰ Dasopang, Nasution, and Lubis, "The Role of Religious and Cultural Education as a Resolution of Radicalism Conflict in Sibolga Community."

unity and integrity among citizens, which eventually acts as a controller of differences in society. This implies that the inclusion of RE in schools' curricula can have a positive impact in terms of reducing unrest and instability, especially in South African schools.

Learner discipline

Learner discipline comprises the controlling of learner behavior and the fostering of learner compliance by school management and is regarded as one of the foundations of effective teaching and learning.²¹ Originally, from the sociological point of view, the topic of religion is always centered around discipline.²² To discipline is to teach acceptable behaviors by supporting, guiding and directing behavior management against learning maladaptive behaviors.²³ Generally, discipline is the practice of training people to obey rules and orders and administering punishment in the event of non-compliance.²⁴ For instance, classroom discipline is important as it enhances effective teaching and learning, although it constitutes a challenge to teachers nowadays. However, effective school discipline practices help learners make critical decisions and allow them to focus on their studies.²⁵ This indicates that if a learner can maintain self-discipline by planning a prior examination period and crafting a study timetable, surely that learner can obtain a good or excellent pass mark. This indicates that if this good school culture can be established and maintained by all learners in all South African schools, Sustainable Development Goal number 4 of the United Nations 2030, which emphasises the achievement of quality education, can be attained. The achievement of the above goal can also lead to the solution of goal number 1, which deals with the eradication of poverty by 2030.

Nevertheless, the South African government prescribed new forms of discipline such as verbal warnings, community service, demerit systems, additional work, small menial tasks, and detention;²⁶ hence, corporal punishment was outlawed in South Africa.²⁷ However, despite the above measures, indiscipline and violence are escalating in South African schools. Corporal punishment is any form of punishment involving physical force against a learner or individual to cause some pain or discomfort, or may cause injury.²⁸ For instance, in the public health domain, corporal punishment is very problematic due to its physical, psychological, and social interactions of children.²⁹

Bowlby's theory, within which this study is premised, emphasizes the inculcation of religious and cultural values in children without any corporal punishment; it is not one of the strategies that can be used to maintain discipline both at home and at school.³⁰ Seemingly, teachers tend to struggle in maintaining discipline without corporal punishment, and as a result of that, they feel thwarted and frustrated, but all the same, such a form of punishment was outlawed in South Africa. Ebrahim argues that ever since corporal punishment was abolished, teaching and learning have been negatively affected.³¹ Various scholars observed schools over a long period of time and found that lawlessness, bullying and violence in schools were prevalent, even religious leaders and the entire community were hesitant in terms of participating in learner discipline.³²

All in all, the South African schools are still experiencing learner disciplinary problems despite the stipulations and measures that have been laid down by the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa Act 108 of 1996 and the South African Schools Act 84 of 1996, which is a shift from a focus on

²¹ Olufunmilayo Tenidade Obadire and Dzivhonele Albert Sinthumule, "Learner Discipline in the Post-Corporal Punishment Era: What an Experience!," *South African Journal of Education* 41, no. 2 (May 31, 2021): 1–8, <https://doi.org/10.15700/saje.v41n2a1862>.

²² Encyclopedia of Sociology, *Religion, Sociology of: Encyclopedia of Science and Religion* (Oxford University Press, 2018).

²³ Shem Okore Bodo, "The Education Pendulum: The Role of Discipline in Learner Performance and Quality of Life," ADEA, 2020, <https://www.adeanet.org/en/blogs/education-pendulum-role-discipline-learner-performance-quality-life>.

²⁴ Studocu, *The Practice of Training People to Obey Rules or a Code of Behavior* (Lyceum College of Education, 2025).

²⁵ Riverside Military Academy, *What Is the Importance of Discipline in School?* (RMA Publishers., 2021).

²⁶ S Ebrahim, "Discipline in Schools: What the Law Says You Can and Can't Do," *Mail & Guardian* 9 (2017).

²⁷ Iain Currie and Johan De Waal, *The Bill of Rights Handbook* (Juta and Company Ltd, 2013).

²⁸ World Health Organization, *Corporal Punishment and Health*. (WHO Publishing Organization., 2021).

²⁹ Eid Bassam et al., "Corporal Punishment of Children: Discipline or Abuse?," *Libyan Journal of Medicine* 13, no. 1 (January 26, 2018): 1485456, <https://doi.org/10.1080/19932820.2018.1485456>.

³⁰ J. Bowlby, *Attachment Theory: Caregiving Is Adaptive* (University of Hull StudoCo Publishers, 2022).

³¹ Ebrahim, "Discipline in Schools: What the Law Says You Can and Can't Do."

³² M. Fengu, *Drugs, Gangs and Pangas – the Soweto High School Beset by Violence and Lawlessness*. (DAILY & MAVERICK Publishers, 2023); Government Communications, *Government and Stakeholders Meet over School Violence* (Government Communications Publishers., 2018).

deficit and control towards a developmental and restorative approach. Nevertheless, if religious and cultural values can be recognized through the inclusion of RE into the school curriculum, then that alone can leave a benchmark for addressing learner indiscipline in schools.³³

Religion and school curriculum

The school curriculum refers to all subjects' lesson programs that are run by the school and all academic content taught in schools.³⁴ Curriculum in a broader sense can be termed as all subjects or courses that are designated by a group of academics, and this refers to various activities that are designed to promote education and satisfy the needs of a learning community.³⁵ This study is of the view that human beings, by nature, are religious beings and therefore, for the RE to add value to learner education, religion should be infused into the curriculum as a subject that can be taught in schools. Religion is a strong belief that God or gods exist, and all activities that are conducted must be in line with their worship of them.³⁶

Then, therefore, according to Ambrosino, religion is not a divine revelation but a function of human nature; hence, all religions should be taught about, and are flexible, subject to modification and improvement since it is of human origin.³⁷ Moreover, Religious Education releases autonomy for all religions for the benefit of individuals and largely for institutions, though the issue of being included in the curriculum as a subject is still debated.³⁸ Religion is an important part of human culture that assists people in celebrating and understanding their position in the world.³⁹ Hence, this paper is linked to the emotional attachment theory of Bowlby, who maintains that care giving, passion and love between a child and a parent, specifically a mother, is a human cultural influence from all societies.⁴⁰ Apart from religion, we acknowledge a need to focus on teaching about religions instead of a particular religion. Religious Education (RE), therefore, should reflect teaching about religions that are embedded in religious and cultural values in schools.⁴¹

Asmal established a National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE), which comprises all the South African religions on an equal basis to play a role in learner discipline in schools.⁴² The change in the teaching of religion established by the NPRE (2003) was an important step towards religious equality and tolerance.⁴³ Furthermore, the idea to transform the curriculum from a mono-religious to a multi-religious state presents a platform where all religions can be recognized and respected. The multi-religious approach regarding RE is a pluralistic religious tradition that implies that everyone is entitled to freedom of religion and the right to worship God or gods as enshrined in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa.⁴⁴

The teaching about religion is not the same as teaching religion.⁴⁵ The latter author further stresses that we teach facts about the belief systems of different religions to understand how the narrative of world history is unlocked. Therefore, RE with its built-in religious and cultural values is justified through its input to the advancement of social justice and respect for the environment, and this can be

³³ Gawie Schlebusch, Solomon Makola, and Mkhumbulo Ndlovu, "Positive Learner Discipline for Public Secondary Schools," *International Journal of Innovation, Creativity and Change* 16, no. 1 (2022): 2022.

³⁴ Glossary of Education Reforms, *Defines and Describes School-Improvement Terms, Concepts and Strategies for Journalists, Parents, and Community Members* (Government Printers., 2015).

³⁵ Shao-Wen Su, "The Various Concepts of Curriculum and the Factors Involved in Curricula-Making," *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 3, no. 1 (2012): 153–58.

³⁶ Kevin Schilbrack, "The Concept of Religion," 2022.

³⁷ Brandon Ambrosino, "Do Humans Have a 'Religion Instinct,'" *BBC*, May 30 (2019).

³⁸ Nigel Fancourt, "The Meaning of Religious Education in English Legislation from 1800 to 2020," *British Journal of Religious Education* 44, no. 4 (June 7, 2022): 497–511, <https://doi.org/10.1080/01416200.2021.1968793>.

³⁹ Albert Team, *The Ethnic vs Universalizing Religions: AP Human Geography Crash Course*. (AP® Geography. , 2020).

⁴⁰ Bowlby, *Attachment Theory: Caregiving Is Adaptive*.

⁴¹ R.I. Mokotso and L. Ntombana, "Religious Pluralism for Inclusive Education in Lesotho Senior Secondary Schools: Religion – Educational Approach." (Cape Town (RSA): The Incwadi Press., 2022).

⁴² Asmal, *The National Policy on Religion and Education (NPRE)*.

⁴³ L Ntombana, N Mndende, and N Mkuzo, "Decolonizing Religious Education in Institutions of Learning: A Backer for the African" Traditional" Religion," 2018.

⁴⁴ George C. Asadu, Nicholas Asogwa, and Benjamin C. Diara, "Religious Pluralism and Its Implications for Church Development," *HTS Theologes Studies / Theological Studies* 76, no. 3 (July 28, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v76i3.5955>.

⁴⁵ California Teachers Association, "Teaching About Religion," *California Educator*, January 11, 2018, <https://www.cta.org/educator/posts/teaching-about-religion>.

enhanced by this stream of paper within the school curriculum, as witnessed by Dreyer.⁴⁶ The authors are convinced that religious and cultural values integrated into RE can be a solution to the problem of learner indiscipline currently prevailing in South African schools. In this manner, the degenerated morals in our schools and communities can be regenerated.

School violence

School violence refers to all forms of violence which occur inside and around the school premises, and it mostly affects learners and is perpetrated by other learners or teachers and other school staff members.⁴⁷ Violence in schools can be regarded as one of the most visible forms of violence against children.⁴⁸ This source further states that school violence can take different forms, ranging from physical violence to psychological violence. Violence can be regarded as one of the factors that impede the effectiveness of teaching and learning culture in the education system of South Africa and worldwide.⁴⁹ This may be physical, psychological, sexual, neglect or preventing the fulfilment of the basic needs of children, elderly persons or disabled persons.⁵⁰ Hamby defines violence as a phenomenon that tends to exclude certain behaviors such as accidents and self-defense; it includes behaviors such as child abuse, rape, bullying, murder, and others.⁵¹

Violence in South African schools has escalated since 1994, despite the interventions introduced by the relevant structures under the authorization and auspices of the Department of Education (DoE). It can be said that among the socio-economic factors that may lead to violence is poverty. It is beyond reasonable doubt that poverty is a major source of all kinds of violence.⁵² The absolute deprivation is mainly responsible for violent crime, which emanates from poverty.⁵³ Furthermore, absolute deprivation of care giving, love and passion to children at home can be one of the causal factors of lawlessness, bullying and violence in schools. Hence, Bowlby emphasizes the theory of attachment or bond between a mother and a child, which can be a means to curb this turmoil in the schools of South Africa.⁵⁴

Role of community religious leaders in schools

Community religious leaders (CRLs) are recognized as figureheads of the community who are placed in a position of trust and are responsible for leading society according to its norms and values.⁵⁵ The CRLs are leaders within religious groups, and their best-organized civil institutions claim to have the allegiance of large numbers of believers. The community leaders are regarded as change agents based on core ideals and community operation principles;⁵⁶ therefore, it is highly expected that in the implementation process of RE, as part of the curriculum, CRLs should be fully involved as stakeholders of the schools. Such leaders are recognized for school development and for learners' achievement and work hand in glove with Professional Learning Communities (PLCs).⁵⁷

⁴⁶ Jaco Dreyer, "The National Policy on Religion and Education in South Africa: Reflections from a Public Practical Theology," *Practical Theology in South Africa* 22 (December 1, 2007): 40–60.

⁴⁷ UNESCO, *What You Need to Know about School Violence and Bullying*. (UNESCO Publishers, 2020).

⁴⁸ Council of Europe Portal, *The Council of Europe: Guardian of Human Rights* (Council of Europe Publishers, 2022).

⁴⁹ B M Zulu et al., "Violence as an Impediment to a Culture of Teaching and Learning in Some South African Schools," *South African Journal of Education* 24, no. 2 (2004): 170–75.

⁵⁰ Nollalinja, *Special Rapporteur on Violence against Women, Its Causes and Consequences* (Finland: United Nations Digital Library Printers, 2021).

⁵¹ Sherry Hamby, "On Defining Violence, and Why It Matters," 2017.

⁵² C. Abulencia, *10 Major Causes of Poverty and How We Can Help Solve Them* (Canada: World Vision Publications, 2022).

⁵³ Baomin Dong, Peter H. Egger, and Yibei Guo, "Is Poverty the Mother of Crime? Evidence from Homicide Rates in China," *PLOS ONE* 15, no. 5 (May 18, 2020): e0233034, <https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pone.0233034>.

⁵⁴ Bowlby, *Attachment Theory: Caregiving Is Adaptive*.

⁵⁵ Iavan Pijoos, "What Makes a Community? Religious Leaders Provide Input during CRL Dialogue," News24, September 27, 2022, <https://www.news24.com/southafrica/news/what-makes-a-community-religious-leaders-provide-input-during-crl-dialogue-20220927>.

⁵⁶ S.D. Evans, "Community Leadership: Department of Educational and Psychological Studies School of Education.," *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice* 3, no. 3 (2017): 1–6.

⁵⁷ Markku Antinluoma, Liisa Ilomäki, and Auli Toom, "Practices of Professional Learning Communities," in *Frontiers in Education*, vol. 6 (Frontiers Media SA, 2021), 617613.

Implementation of religious policies in schools

The implementation of a policy is a way of executing an agreed-upon written agreement to complete a given task.⁵⁸ This scholar further states that policy implementation often takes various forms depending on diverse cultures and institutional settings. It has been observed that a religious policy implementation in schools faced some challenges, especially during the South African transition to democracy. Seopetsa avers that South Africa's transition to democracy portrayed new dynamics that discarded all social structures that were established under apartheid.⁵⁹ This scholar states that one of such prominent challenges faced by the South African education system is the question of reforming the implementation of religious policies in public schools. The implementation process of religious policies that took place in schools affects the notion of RE, which is currently excluded from the school curriculum.⁶⁰

The DBE often distributes policies to schools, including religious policies, so that schools are aware of what is contained in those documents.⁶¹ The expectation of the department is that policies and circulars such as Circular S8 of 2020, which talks about the retention and retrieval of textbooks issued to learners, should be unpacked, read, discussed and interpreted correctly by the relevant stakeholders.⁶² However, in the education system of South Africa, shortfalls often occur in terms of religious policy and other policies during implementation processes.⁶³ The distribution of leadership to community members is happening less formally.⁶⁴ Mabasa and Themane, in their report, indicated that SGBs are often not well trained before assuming duties, and this creates problems such as unfamiliarity with meeting procedures and specialist language used in meetings, which leads to misinterpretation of school policies, including religious policies.⁶⁵

Seemingly, some principals and SGB members lack expertise, which is often related to low literacy levels.⁶⁶ For instance, it was reported for one reason or another that the burning of schools in the Eastern Cape was the misrepresentation of assessment instructions to learners by school principals and their internal school stakeholders.⁶⁷ This indicates a clear example of misinterpretation of school policies, including religious ones, by school authorities, and as a consequence of this, it can be assumed that religious policies in schools might not be correctly applied and fully implemented or are partially implemented, and this needs more attention from the stakeholders and the government. It is understood that the lack of implementation of religious policies means a lack of religious and cultural values that might be valuable to learners' education. The incorrect implementation of school policies might result in unrest and instability in schools; therefore, school stakeholders should pull up their socks and improve the implementation of school policies, including religious ones.⁶⁸

School culture

School culture is concerned with shared values, beliefs, and norms that influence human resource thinking, emotions and behavior in a school setting.⁶⁹ The latter author elaborates by saying that school

⁵⁸ T.I. Modipa, "An Analysis of the Implementation of the Policy on Religion and Education in Schools" (University of Pretoria, 2014).

⁵⁹ T. Seopetsa, "Challenges Facing Implementation of Public Policies in South Africa.," *Braamfontein* (Damelin Publishers., 2018).

⁶⁰ Maitumeleng Albertina Nthonto, "Religion in South African Education: A Divisive or Unifying Force?," *Religious Education* 119, no. 2 (March 14, 2024): 134–46, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00344087.2023.2289266>.

⁶¹ NEOGOV, *Importance of Clear Policies and Procedures in Schools* (Power DMS Publications, 2020).

⁶² Department of Education, *Leadership and Management. Faculty of Education* (Johannesburg (South Africa): University of Johannesburg, 2022).

⁶³ J L Van der Walt, "Religion in Education: Is There yet Another Solution?," *Koers: Bulletin for Christian Scholarship= Koers: Bulletin Vir Christelike Wetenskap* 75, no. 1 (2010): 79–98.

⁶⁴ Lebogang M Kekana and Alfred H Makura, "The Importance Of School Governing Bodies In The Effective Governance Of The Public Schools: Do Women Have A Role?," *Proceedings of ADVED* 2020, no. 6th (2020).

⁶⁵ Thomas Mabasa and Johannes Themane, "Stakeholder Participation in School Governance in South Africa," *Perspectives in Education* 20, no. 3 (2002): 111–16; J. Nwankwo, "Wastewater Intensification: Fate of Emerging Pollutants and Future Health Implications.," (Nigeria: University of Nigeria, 2021). Mampaqa Anna Hlojeng and Alfred Henry Makura, "Out-of-School Factors Contributing towards Academic Underachievement of Vulnerable Learners in Lesotho High Schools," *Proceedings of ADVED* 2020, no. 6th (2020).

⁶⁶ N Duku and I A Salami, "The Relevance of the School Governance Body to the Effective Decolonisation of Education in South Africa," 2017.

⁶⁷ M. Ziduli, "Shared Leadership Perspectives in Rural Secondary Schools: A Case Study of One South African Education District" (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa, 2019).

⁶⁸ Bekithemba Dube, "Religious Education as a Pedagogy of Care in the Context of Violence: Re-Imaging Working and Thinking Together.," *E-Journal of Religious & Theological Studies (ERATS)* 9, no. 8 (2023): 408.

⁶⁹ M. Dogan, "School Culture and Effectiveness: OKUL-Kulturu Ve ETKİLİLİK.," *Canakkale Onsekiz Mart Üniversitesi*, 2018.

culture can positively or negatively impact students' achievement effectiveness. School culture may also mean that there is a big gap between shared leadership talk and shared leadership in the context of reality.⁷⁰ The latter scholars, further, state that this simply means that participation by the broader community in schools for decision-making takes place in symbolic rather than authentic forms. In this manner, school managers claim that they often open space for shared leadership with communities, whereas such a leadership style does not apply.⁷¹ The culture of the school is more important than resources.⁷²

Generally, culture enables people to believe in identifying assertive multiculturalism, and it seeks inclusion and encourages a sense of belonging in the national community.⁷³ Culture is an agreed-upon way of doing things by a particular group of people, community, organization or nation.⁷⁴ Furthermore, culture implies customs or traditions and beliefs of a particular group, family, community or society that are expected to be honored by all members. For instance, Bowlby's theory emphasizes the emotional attachment or bond between a parent and a child, specifically a mother who cares for a child, loving and passionate enough as a caregiver driven by the cultural values of society.⁷⁵ Culture often stresses behavior, and it can be argued that the success of leaders is based on their behavior rather than their natural attributes.⁷⁶ Culture creates a sound understanding of the differences in thinking modes, problem-solving, and communication.⁷⁷

Shared leadership, for instance, is a description of a culture where power is shared, individuals are held accountable, and decisions are made in a collaborative manner and not dictated.⁷⁸ A school without a positive culture cannot meet the required standards of sustainability regarding its progress, as concurred by Yli-Panula.⁷⁹ Seemingly, it is possible for human resources to manage and use school resources only if the school culture is conducive enough to allow these people to work smoothly. Therefore, this paper divulges the possibility of overcoming the violent situation in schools by improving school culture and religious values for sustainability in relation to their progress.

METHODOLOGY

A qualitative research methodology with a case study design was used to gather data. Convenience sampling was used to select 15 participants from 3 schools; these were principals, HODs, teachers, SGBs and community religious leaders (CRLs), which means 5 participants from each school. The participants were chosen on the grounds that they were easily and conveniently available.⁸⁰ The data collected through interviews and the data collection tool used was an interview schedule. This was used to ensure the reliability and validity of research instruments, and was tested and scrutinized during a pilot study, and corrections were made before the real collection of data exercise began. This means that the interview schedule was used for the second time during data collection. Dunn acknowledges the pilot study imperative because it tends to suggest changes and adjustments to the research protocol.⁸¹ All ethical issues were duly considered while conducting research. The purpose of the study was clearly explained to all participants, and their consent was sought for their participation in writing. Participants

⁷⁰ Mlungiseleli Ziduli and Andrea Mqondiso Buka, "Salvaging the Educational System through Effective Leadership: A Case Study of Rural Secondary Schools in South Africa," *Journal of Education* 22, no. 1-3 (2018): 1-10.

⁷¹ Ziduli and Buka, "Salvaging the Educational System through Effective Leadership: A Case Study of Rural Secondary Schools in South Africa."

⁷² V. Msila, "In Search of a Liberating Practice; Leadership, Teacher Commitment and the Struggle for Effective Schools. Education Leadership and Management" (University of South Africa (UNISA), 2014).

⁷³ Geoffrey Brahm Levey, "The Bristol School of Multiculturalism," *Ethnicities* 19, no. 1 (February 10, 2019): 200-226, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1468796818787413>.

⁷⁴ I.T.A. Dara-Abasi, *Corporate Culture Definition, Characteristics, and Importance* (Investopedia Publications, 2025).

⁷⁵ Bowlby, *Attachment Theory: Caregiving Is Adaptive*.

⁷⁶ B. Angell, *Behavioral Theory. Encyclopedia of Social Work* (Oxford University Press, 2022).

⁷⁷ J. Atkinson, "Do Cultural Models Actually Work? 2020.," 2020.

⁷⁸ C Cran, *Shared Leadership Is Aspirational – A Shared Leadership Culture Requires Individual Commitment to Evolution* (LinkedIn Publishers, 2020).

⁷⁹ Eija Yli-Panula, Eila Jeronen, and Sanna Mäki, "School Culture Promoting Sustainability in Student Teachers' Views," *Sustainability* 14, no. 12 (2022): 7440.

⁸⁰ Kobus Maree, *First Steps in Research* (Van Schaik Publishers, 2007).

⁸¹ T.S. Dunn, *22 Miles: When Good People Make Bad Decisions (Flying for Money)*, Kindle Edition. (Bellman Multimedia Publishing, 2023).

were given a guarantee that researchers would adhere to ethical research procedures. The confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were ensured by using pseudonyms during the transcription of interview responses. The ethical clearance certificate was provided by Walter Sisulu University, and the approval was granted by the DBE, school principals, and participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS

The following findings are presented under themes that emerged from the responses of the participants: Firstly, data collected indicated that religion and culture receive less attention from school settings in South Africa. Secondly, the religious and cultural values were not well understood by either teachers or parents. Thirdly, lawlessness, bullying and violence in South African schools were prevalent. All of these findings portray the element of unrest, disrespect and instability that takes place in South African schools. This indicates that school stakeholders are still struggling to implement religious policies due to a lack of knowledge of religious and cultural values, which results in lawlessness, bullying and violence in schools. Therefore, the Department of Basic Education (DBE) still has a huge responsibility of conducting workshops and restructuring the school curriculum for the benefit of school community stakeholders.

Religion and culture receive less attention in school settings in South Africa

The responses of the participants indicated that religion and culture receive less attention from school settings in South Africa. This is based on the fact that religious and cultural values embodied in Religious Education, which, in turn, are integrated into Life Orientation, whose content can be too little, and the LO teacher may focus on other parts and perhaps ignore the RE part, which may be caused by the lack of knowledge on this topic, or less interest or heavy workload. The participants claimed that RE is not part of the school curriculum; there is no subject called RE, and it does not appear in the school timetable. For instance, the following participants claimed that:

I am aware that there is a policy for religion and education, and it clearly stipulates that religion must contribute to the learner's discipline in schools, but the problem is that RE does not appear in the school timetable; in actual fact, it is not accommodated at all, hence it is said that religious and cultural values entrenched in RE were not part of the curriculum.

I see RE as an influential study, and its influence is on learner discipline, which suggests that RE can be infused into the school curriculum as a subject that might be taught in schools.

First and foremost, the problem is with the school managers who always confuse Religious Education with Religious Instruction. Seemingly, they lack the role definition of the two; for instance, they think Religious Education has replaced Religious Instruction, unaware that Religious Instruction teaches religion, and Religious Education teaches about religion/s. According to participants' responses, there are calls for Religious Education, with its embodiment of religious and cultural values, to be infused into the school curriculum as a standalone subject. Therefore, all school stakeholders have an obligation to work collaboratively so that important issues can be discussed to equip everyone in schools.

Teachers and Parents lack understanding of Religious and cultural values

The responses from participants revealed that religious and cultural values were not clear to our teachers and parents, perhaps it is because teachers are not trained in Religious Education, and even fewer of them are trained in Life Orientation. Ideally, culture is at the center of the organization, and it should shape our minds, provide and construct not only our worlds but ourselves and our powers.⁸² Moreover, through religious and cultural values misunderstandings that might happen among stakeholders when they are trying to keep everyone abreast, can also negatively impact in minimizing lawlessness, bullying and violence in schools. Therefore, a positive climate cannot be enhanced. The following participants claimed that:

⁸² Martin Ubani and Raili Keränen-Pantsu, "Evolving Cultures of Religious Education: New Perspectives on Research, Policies and Practices," *Journal of Beliefs & Values* (Taylor & Francis, 2018).

At my school, self-management is a problem. My teachers often sit in the staffroom in the absence of the principal while their subject periods are proceeding, and when they see the principal coming, they stand up and walk to their classes. Seemingly, they don't understand that teaching and learning should be the culture of the school.

I used to see some teachers who, when they saw one learner bullying another learner, looked away, saying, nothing that we can do because corporal punishment was abolished. This indicates that Education Law, Policy, and their implementation are not well understood by teachers. This shows that they are unaware that bullying is a serious offense and that they are responsible for whatever is done by learners in the school.

I know that parents are aware of the violence that takes place in schools, and our SGBs seek a breakthrough out of this current turmoil, although most parents are not familiar with the subject called RE, and are ignorant of religious and cultural values because of illiteracy. Moreover, parents are not capable of comparing bullying and violence between the apartheid and post-apartheid eras in schools of South Africa because of their illiteracy.

This shows that religious and cultural values are not known and understood even by parents due to illiteracy, especially in the rural areas where the study was undertaken. Parents often claim that they lack updates from school managers about school activities, including the importance of Religious Education values. Parents also claim that school management often keeps them at arm's length, which means that they are not fully involved in school affairs. Teachers are also not well-versed in religious and cultural values due to various reasons; one of them is that most teachers are not trained in RE studies, and the worst part of it is that school management does not work collaboratively with teachers, especially Life Orientation teachers. Nevertheless, participants' responses indicated clearly that teachers are still struggling to attain self-management skills; as a result, they are not enthusiastic about teaching in the absence of their managers, and they often rely on being pushed by the principals. This indicates that school managers fail to establish a positive school environment for quality education. Moreover, they are still battling with the learner disciplinary measures due to the abolition of corporal punishment, when they come across learner misbehavior knowing that it has been outlawed by SASA of 1996 and the South African Constitution Act 108 of 1996. Therefore, school managers, as accountable leaders in schools, should take the initiative as presiding officers to lead the way to success through consulting relevant structures and sharing leadership skills for the benefit of the school. For this reason, Ziduli argues that the school principal, as a school manager, is responsible for whatever is taking place in the school.⁸³

The prevalence of lawlessness, bullying and violence in South African schools

The participants' responses indicated that schools in South Africa are faced with ill-discipline of learners; as a result, lawlessness, bullying and violence occur on a daily basis. Various incidents of such social ills often occur in schools; for instance, it was estimated that more than 3.2 million learners are bullied yearly in South Africa.⁸⁴ The latter author states that 90% of school bullying is carried out by learners. Furthermore, more than 67% of bullying victims are reluctant to ask for help from teachers because they do not think it will change their situation. This one is a bit older than what happened in Bisho High School; a 15-year-old girl committed suicide because she was often bullied by other learners and neglected by teachers.⁸⁵ Bullying and violence are also caused by factors such as learner drug abuse, abusive behavior, broken families and poor cultural background.⁸⁶

⁸³ Mlungiseleli Ziduli, "The Managerial Leadership Styles of School Principals for School Effectiveness." (Walter Sisulu University, South Africa, 2016).

⁸⁴ Delmaine Christians MP, "Teen Suicide Prevention Week: The Importance of Stopping Bullying in School," Democratic Alliance, February 13, 2025, <https://www.da.org.za/2025/02/teen-suicide-prevention-week-the-importance-of-stopping-bullying-in-schools>.

⁸⁵ D. Jobela, *Pupil Commits Suicide after Being Bullied for Practicing Witchcraft* (Eastern Cape (Bisho): SABC 1 News 24 Publishers, 2021).

⁸⁶ Stacey Nofziger and Don Kurtz, "Violent Lives: A Lifestyle Model Linking Exposure to Violence to Juvenile Violent

The following participants claimed that:

I see that our community has a common understanding that effectiveness can be measured through the high levels of learner discipline that show a positive school environment; schools without lawlessness, bullying and violence.

I noticed that the community has a belief that the effectiveness of school culture is also measured through the high levels of good conduct in teachers, for instance, teachers who understand that they are at school to teach and supervise learners, not having any sexual relationship with learners, but resemble their parents in all respects.

The participants' responses indicated that most community members believe that high levels of learner discipline show school cultural effectiveness and a positive school environment. They also believe that good conduct of teachers could sort out the violent situation of lawlessness, bullying and violence that takes place in schools. Therefore, it is advisable that all school stakeholders, including teachers, learners, parents and community members, should work coherently in fighting bullying and violence in schools. Also, there should be intensive implementation of policies in order to normalize this situation.

Discussion Summary

The findings in this study indicated that religion and culture received less attention in South African schools; RE was not part of the school curriculum; religious and cultural values were not well understood by teachers, parents and learners; lawlessness, bullying and violence were prevalent and remain the order of the day, which result to poor quality education in schools. The reason may be that some principals are not well-trained in educational management and policy; therefore, it is difficult for them to implement the managerial functions, especially parental involvement. Another reason may be that parents in rural schools may be stuck in participating in school activities because most of them are illiterate, which often impedes their participation in school affairs. The other participants revealed that school leadership and leaders in the community need to understand that leadership is a shared phenomenon and that it is a skill that needs to be learned. This indicates that school managers lack the knowledge and skills to work collaboratively with school stakeholders and community members. The study maintains that the practice of religious and cultural values can reduce social ills in schools if not completely eradicate them.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To curb this chaotic situation prevailing in schools in South Africa, all school stakeholders should be fully involved in school affairs, as it is stipulated in the education legislation (SASA, 1996). By depriving stakeholders of their responsibility, it is equivalent to a violation of their rights, especially their participation in critical decision-making in schools as stakeholders. Community stakeholders are only involved in school affairs when there is a crisis; once the crisis is over, they are no longer needed. The concerted effort of stakeholders can be advantageous to school development since different and important ideas from the joint meeting fraternity will emerge to reach a consensus of purpose. For instance, the issue of religious and cultural values entrenched in Religious Education, which was not included in the school curriculum, though integrated with Life Orientation, is a burning issue that needs varied opinions. Usually, RE content can be too little since LO comprises many aspects. It is further recommended that RE should be made a standalone subject because it is a very broad study that covers many areas such as learner discipline, identity and belonging, worldviews, and others. Moreover, principals are fully aware that policies exist in schools and find it difficult to implement, especially religious policies. They claim that they have no time, and schools are understaffed. This paper, therefore, suggested that for the Department of Basic Education (DBE) to mitigate this problem, it should create opportunities for vacancies in the teaching profession to reduce the workload.

Offending," *Journal of Research in Crime and Delinquency* 42, no. 1 (2005): 3–26.

The findings indicated that most principals run schools with good communication and management; however, some of them are still struggling in terms of communication and also lack time management skills. It is of significant importance for the school leaders to improve communication, including time management, because communication is the key managerial function, and time is the soul of any business. Some participants, especially SGBs, complained that important information does not reach them timeously, for example, the call for special meetings reaches some members, and as such, some members think that they have been sidelined deliberately by the principal. Therefore, it is recommended that the DBE should organize workshops in order to capacitate principals in this regard.

This study found that most school HoDs acknowledge the importance of implementing policies, including religious policies; however, some of them tend to misinterpret departmental circulars and policies. For this reason, participants complained that religious policies are often not implemented while all other policies are implemented, claiming that RE policy is just done for compliance's sake, and that the focus is on other policies such as admission, language, HIV/AIDs and others, saying those are often demanded by the district office. As a result of this, we recommend that DBE hold regular training workshops to capacitate school managers and teachers on the practices and sustenance of religious and cultural values for a positive school climate and high-quality teaching and learning practices.

The study revealed that lawlessness, bullying and violence in South African schools were prevalent. All community religious leaders (CRLs) are convinced that in schools where learner discipline is manageable and controllable, the school climate becomes positive. Such schools are run peacefully and harmoniously with minimal problems that can be easily solved. Other participants claimed that Religious Education values can assist schools to curb lawlessness, bullying and violence in schools just to create order and stability. Unfortunately, Religious and cultural values are undermined and given less attention by school managers. They also claimed that some principals are not well-trained in education management and administration, and as such, they lack management and leadership skills. Others complained of community illiteracy, especially in rural areas where the study was undertaken. It is therefore recommended that principals should hold sessions with community leaders so that they can equip them with the necessary expertise to monitor discipline and to create a conducive learning environment. The DBE should also take responsibility for training principals who are less qualified to overcome the current turmoil.

CONCLUSION

The paper has discussed religious and cultural values embodied in RE, and its intervention in learner education in South African schools through exploring their impact on school culture, especially the culture of teaching and learning. It was discussed that most principals and teachers lack knowledge and skills in managerial functions. Parents in rural communities who are illiterate are being accused of non-cooperation by school leaders. The prevailing problem in this paper was ignited by unrest and instability in schools caused by social ills such as lawlessness, bullying, and violence. The study found that RE was not part of the school curriculum and that religious and cultural values were not well understood by either teachers or parents. For this reason, bullying and violence in South African schools were prevalent. It has been recommended that Religious Education should be a stand-alone subject instead of being a Life Orientation chapter. Various recommendations based on findings have been provided to curb violent situations in South African schools. This paper is of the view that the eradication of such turmoil in schools can improve the quality of education. Hence, the establishment of religious and cultural values can play a major role in ensuring that discipline is maintained at schools, which can result in a positive school climate for quality education.

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