

Declining Academic Performance in Multi-faith Religious Education in Botswana Public Junior Secondary Schools

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Abstract:- The study investigated the possible causes regarding the decline of students' academic performance in Religious Education in the national examinations. From the findings it is clear that Religious Education (RE) teachers are not aware that there has been a shift in the teaching of the subject from the phenomenological approach to the interpretive approach. Teachers' inadequate knowledge and competency about the approach to be used necessarily affects the way in which they teach and assess, hence eventually affecting negatively the students' academic performance. In order to improve the academic performance of students, all relevant stakeholders have to work together as a team.

Keywords: academic performance, religious education, multi-faith syllabus, academic work, interpretive approach.

I. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

For close to thirty years after independence in 1966, Botswana adopted the confessional approach in Religious Education (RE) teaching and learning and only made a shift after the 1994 Revised National Policy on Education (Botswana Government, 1994) when the phenomenological approach was introduced in 1996 (Dinama, 2010). This approach had an impact on RE pedagogy which naturally had implications on students' academic performance. Consequently, in 2008 there was a shift from the phenomenological approach to an interpretive approach (Dinama, 2013). Just like the phenomenological approach, this newly introduced approach aimed at exposing learner's into making their own thoughtful judgments about different religions. The approach further aimed at equipping students in ways which could allow them to examine the different religious views in class amongst students as well as enabling teachers to explore different beliefs and values picked from students' experiences, and practices, that is, at least for those who practiced a religion.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

It has been observed that there is a notable decline of RE results in public junior secondary schools in Botswana at least since the introduction of the interpretive approach in 2008. The assumption is that, teachers are still using the old confessional approach and that most of them are not even aware that there has been a shift in the approach. Furthermore, it is evident that, there are a few studies conducted in this area

regarding performance and assessment in RE (Dinama, 2013). Accusations have been traded from students to teachers, parents and education officials and even about the whole educational system. However, poor students' academic performance has been a concern in especially different developing countries (Adeyemi 2011; Akinsolu, 2010; Pathania, 2011) including Botswana (Ramahobo, 1996). On the basis of our teaching experiences and knowledge gained, we observed that the use of the interpretive approach as per the syllabus requirement has largely been ignored mainly possibly through ignorance since its implementation in 2008.

Before the adoption of multi-faith syllabus, students generally performed well. However, when the multi-faith RE curriculum and its associated approaches was introduced, teachers were not "re-tooled" in order to deal with the new syllabus, and naturally this affected both the teaching and the learning of RE hence a decline in performance (Dinama, 2010). For example, teacher's inadequate assessment skills to deal with the new syllabus negatively affected the academic performance of students (Dinama, 2013). Furthermore, when the multi-faith syllabus that used the interpretive approach was revised in 2008, there were no professional development activities such as in-service workshops for teachers. Due to teachers' lack of knowledge and understanding of the new approach and the demands expected by the interpretive approach, students' academic performance was naturally affected negatively.

II. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What are the views of the teachers and students regarding the decline of academic performance in Religious Education?
2. What are the opinions of teachers and students' about ways of improving academic performance?
3. To what extent do teachers demonstrate their pedagogical skills in RE lessons?

III. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

3.1 Absenteeism, Resources and Academic Performance

There are several factors that can affect students' academic performance. Studies have shown that students who

are frequently absent from school perform poorly academically since they would have missed on many concepts covered on that particular day and that it is not easy to understand the content taught when studying on their own and hence a decline in academic performance (Moonie, Sterling, Figgis and Castro, 2008; Reche, Bundi and Riungi, 2012). In their study, Shahzada, Ghazi, Nawaz and Khan (2011) found that absenteeism is a major problem among secondary school students in developing countries due to several factors such as ill-health, financial hardships and social class. Other factors that are caused by absenteeism are harsh school rules and corporal punishment hence poor academic performance (Jotia and Boikhutso, 2012). Also, those students who miss school frequently are more likely to drop out of school.

The availability of educational resources have a positive effect on students' academic performance since they help them obtain better results (Olayiwola et al, 2011; Olkaba, 2013; Reche, Bundi, Riungu and Mbugua, 2012). In contrast, schools with inadequate resources such as, poor teaching and library resources, inadequately qualified teachers and overcrowded classrooms, find it difficult to achieve good results (Donald, Lazarus and Lolwana, 2009).

3.2 Language of Instruction in RE Teaching and Learning

Banks and Banks (1989) highlight that "Language...has a tremendous power as the paramount instrument of cognitive development; it can open or close doors to academic achievement" (p. 208). Israel and Thomas (2013) also note that language or medium of communication is undoubtedly one of the most important aspects of a curriculum. Through appropriate language use, students can grasp the content intellectually and understand the taught concepts (Ramahobo, 2008), hence developing critical and analytical skills which will ultimately help them perform academically well. In Nigeria, and Botswana, for example, the use of mother tongue in teaching has not been encouraged in the school system and this has affected students' academic performance in various disciplines (Boikhutso and Jotia 2013; Israel and Thomas, 2013; Ramahobo, 2008).

Learners whose mother tongue is not recognized in schools are at a great disadvantage since they end up performing badly in their examinations which is necessarily the case in the Botswana context where English is the medium of instruction in public schools and where almost all students do not speak English as a mother tongue (Boikhutso and Jotia 2013; Ramahobo, 2008). Irvine (2003) further notes that students may be speaking English which does not match the requirements of standard English or who speak English as the second language often experience academic difficulties since their language may not be compatible with the language of the school and this can lead to poor performance. That is why Nyathi-Ramahobo, (1996) argues from a Botswana context that curriculum materials have to be written in the child's mother tongue which is currently not the case.

Within the Botswana context, and possibly elsewhere, it is not easy for parents to help their children with homework due to language barrier (Molosiwa, 2009; Chebanne, 2010; Pansiri 2011). English and Setswana (national language of Botswana) which are languages of instruction at different levels in the education system affects children from ethnic minority groups negatively as they are the ones who have highest failure rate in Primary School Leaving Examinations (Molosiwa, 2009). In Botswana, students who are competent in English language tend to perform better in examinations especially since examinations are written in the English language (Boikhutso and Jotia, 2013) except Setswana and French.

3.3 Teachers' Competence and Students' Academic Performance

The important role of the teachers in learning is unquestionable. Akiri and Ugborugbo (2009) observe that the quality of education depends on the skills that teachers possess since they have a great influence on students' academic achievement as they are responsible for translating the policy into action and principle based on practice during interaction with the students. With regard to Religious Education teachers in Botswana, Dinama (2010) points out that there is evidence that many teachers are struggling to translate the multi-faith curriculum into practice. Studies have revealed that teachers' professional adequacy and competency in respect to their pedagogical practices and strategies and mastery of curriculum and subject content enhances their classroom effectiveness (Akinsolu, 2010; Kosgei, Mise, Odera, and Ayugi, 2013; Etsey, 2006). Furthermore, teacher identities are equally important in terms of how they view themselves in relation to their profession as well as their commitment to work (Akiri and Ugborugbo, 2009; Riche et al (2012). For example, teachers' commitment to work could be seen in their enthusiasm as they carry out their daily professional chores (Mart, 2013; Mwesiga and Okendo, 2018).

Bugler (2002) notes that, teaching effectiveness is dependent upon the interaction between the instructor's subject matter knowledge and his or her teaching competence. Teachers need to understand their own practice and how it affects students' achievement as they exhibit a set of pedagogical knowledge and skills in the classroom (Adeyemi, 2011; Adedoyin, 2011; Bulger, 2002). In the same vein, they also need to be trained alongside the changing teaching approaches in order to apply them in their classroom teaching since teachers' inadequate pedagogical knowledge and skills can make it difficult to interpret the syllabus content (Adedoyin, 2011).

Furthermore, teacher absenteeism is a factor that can contribute to poor academic performance (Ameeq, Hassan, Jabeen and Fatima, 2018; Riche et al 2012; Suryadarma et al, 2003) since it reduces the amount of instructional time and this may result in the syllabi not being completed well on time.

3.4 Parents' Involvement and Students' Academic Work

Since parents can instill a sense of responsibility and an ethic of hard work (Acar, 2011; Dufur, Parcel and Troutman, 2013) they can significantly contribute to the academic success of their children if they are fully involved in the education of their children (Jeyness, 2005; Obama, 2004). However some parents would not deliberately cooperate with school authority due to their illiteracy (Mbugua, Kibet, Muthaa and Nkonke, 2012). Farooq et al (2011) also point out that students whose parents are educated score higher marks than those whose parents are not which means that students whose parents are not educated are at a disadvantage. Parents who are educated can decisively assist their children with their academic work as they can discuss academic issues with their children and also participate in school activities (Osonwa, Adejobi, Iyamand Osonwa, 2013). For example they saddle their children with household chores such as cleaning the yard before going to school and after school hours hence leaving children with little or no time for study (Osonwa, Adejobi, Iyamand Osonwa, 2013).

In many developing countries, students in public schools are generally from poor families who possess little or no educational background unlike those from affluent ones (Akiri and Ugborugbo, 2009; Farooq, 2011). From a Botswana perspective, Pansiri (2011) observes that students who are from economically disadvantaged families are faced with a lot of challenges hence denying them a chance to perform well in their academic work, and that is why the socio-economic status of parents is an important factor in understanding the students' academic performance (Bhat, Joshi and Wani, 2016; Broer, Bai and Fonseca, (2019); Rodríguez-Hernández, Cascallar, and Kynd, 2019; Sirin, 2005). In their study, Farooq, Chaudhry and Behanu (2011) concluded that, the low socio-economic status has a negative effect on the academic performance of students as their basic needs such as shelter; food and clothing remain unfulfilled in most cases, and hence low academic performance. Furthermore, they found out that children from low income families are subjected to child labor and therefore have limited time for study. It also has to be noted that students whose parents are employed in less paid jobs are likely to get inadequate learning resources at home which could otherwise enhance their academic performance (Reche et al. 2012).

In their study Suryadarma, Suryahadi and Sumarto (2003) found that students' individual characteristics, attitudes towards school and family encouragement are crucial in their academic work. Rafiq, Fatima, Sohail, Saleem and Khan (2013) also observed that, academic achievement of students may not only depend on the quality of schools and the teachers, but rather the extent of parental involvement.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This study adopted a qualitative approach which is relevant in understanding a phenomenon holistically and in depth whilst done in its natural setting (Bell, 2010).

Teheraniet al (2015) note that the "phenomena can include, but are not limited to, how people experience aspects of their lives, how individuals and/or groups behave, how organizations function, and how interactions shape relationships" (p. 1). There is an emphasis on while stressing "multiple constructed realities and a holistic view of the reasons for a social phenomenon's occurrence" (Lee and Krauss, 2015, p. 5). The methodology clearly deals with the feelings and other non-quantifiable human elements like customs and culture (Akinsolu, 2010; Opie, 2004) which is an important factor in the daily activity of any teacher and in this case the RE teacher.

4.1 Interviews, Classroom Observations and Documents

Classroom observations were core in picking the practices surrounding teaching in the two places of study since they are ideal as the researchers observed and recorded what they saw (Neuman, 2000; Opie, 2004). In order to obtain a holistic view of how the lesson were taught classroom observations were carried out during the eighty minutes lessons, on two different occasions in each school. Hancock, Ockleford and Windridge (2009) note that observations can assist in producing data that verifies or nullifies information provided in face to face encounters.

Face to face interviews elicited the participants' views in a detailed and comprehensive manner, thus allowed the researchers to have a clear understanding of what they were doing. The interviews were guided by a list of questions (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2011) and while each group of participants had their own interview guideline. Furthermore, face-to-face interviews were used to allow participants to freely express their views on the subject under study and in this way, researchers were able to collect more detailed information from participants.

As noted by O'Connor and Gibson (2010), in this study, documents such as schemes of work, lesson plans, syllabus document, and students' textbooks were consulted in order to further elucidate aspects found in interviews and observations. The schemes of work and lesson plans were important in this study since they are part and parcel of teaching and learning of RE. Teachers' lesson plans were determined by whether the lessons were effectively taught and objectives achieved. This was also a way of determining their point of convergence and divergence with respect to the teaching and learning of RE. The textbooks were used to check if the information was relevant, and that it met the level of understanding of the learners and if they addressed syllabus objectives.

4.2 Targeted Population, Sampling Procedures and Data Analysis

This study adopted purposive sampling because it allowed the researchers to select and work with participants who were most likely to provide information-rich and appropriate data, both in terms of relevance and depth (Neuman, 200; Black, 1999). Palinkaset al (2015) further

observes that this sampling technique allows researchers to choose participants who are easily available and willing to engage in a study where they can “communicate experiences and opinions in an articulate, expressive, and reflective manner” (p. 2). Furthermore, it requires researchers to gather data from the various contexts associated with the participants, and this aimed at assisting researchers to understand better the phenomenon under study.

Two junior schools in the city of Taupye were chosen, namely Makuta Junior Secondary School and Beetah Junior Secondary School- the former is located in a low income area while the latter is located in a middle income area where families whose economic status is generally average. A sample of form three students who are in their final year at junior secondary school level was used because they were about three-quarter way through the syllabus and were able to adequately articulate their experiences as they reflected on what they have been taught in the past two years. Ten students were sampled, that is, a focus group of five students in each school, as well as two RE teachers from each school who had more than seven years of RE teaching experience were selected. The sampled teachers were Mr Billy and Ms Shikati from Makuta Junior Secondary School and Mr Tanaka and Ms Shebah from Beetah Junior Secondary School. The sampled teachers were considered to be suitable for the study because they were the ones teaching RE and were in a good position to share their experiences in this process. Kosgie, Mise, Odera and Ayugi (2013) observe that experienced teachers have a richer background of experience to draw from and can contribute insight and ideas to the course of teaching and learning since they are open to correction and are less dictatorial in their classrooms. In addition, one senior teacher from each school was selected because they supervise RE teachers. Furthermore, one Education Officer (EO) who is a supervisor accountable to several subjects which fall under his supervision including RE was chosen. The EO is expected to be a subject specialist who possesses adequate expert knowledge to guide the teachers in a particular subject.

After collecting data the researchers analyzed the data using emerging themes derived from the interviews, observations and documents. It involved reading, re-reading and exploring the data collected (O'Connor and Gibson, 2010). In this study, researchers collected data using tape recordings which they later listened to and transcribed.

4.3 Ethical Considerations

The researchers explained to the participants the nature, purpose and significance of the study. All participants were assured of confidentiality of the information they shared with researchers and were also informed that they were free to quit the research at any time if they so wished. Rahman (2017) notes that ethical issues are sensitive since it is important that researchers do not harm or distress participants or any other person who may help in the research, and Opie (2004) emphasizes that ethics has to do with the application of moral principles that promote respect and fairness to

participants. In this study, schools and participants' real names were not used, so as to ensure confidentiality.

V. PRESENTATION OF DATA

There were several issues that cropped out in the data collected and they were divided in themes, namely: understanding of the approach; teaching competencies; students' performance; teachers and senior management relations; inadequate resources; lack of parental involvement; perceptions of parents and students about learning RE.

5.1 Teaching Competencies and Understanding of the Interpretive Approach

Teachers' responses concerning the approach used in the teaching of RE syllabus varied. Almost all teachers interviewed have shown that they do not know which approach is used in the teaching of RE. For instance, Mr. Billy could not make any difference between an approach used in teaching a subject and a method or technique used in a lesson. He said, “I do not know which approach you are asking for, do you mean lecture or group work? Well, I use the usual method which I think is the phenomenological”. Mr Tanaka was clueless when asked about the approach when he said that; “it is mainly class discussion, that is whereby the teacher and the students discuss in class and questions asked”. Similarly, Ms Shikati said, “I am hearing this concept for the second time. I first heard about it at Botswana Examinations Council during marking of national examinations”. However, Ms Shebah had a slight idea when she said; “I am not sure of the approach that is being used. I think it is the interpretive approach”. It is clearly evident on the basis of the responses that teachers are not aware of the approach that is recommended in the teaching of RE syllabus and no little wonder why they will have problems in interpreting syllabus objectives. It also emerged that had teachers been involved in in-service training especially workshops, they would have been aware of the change in approach and possibly taught differently.

Teachers' inadequate grasp of the appropriate approach affected their competencies in teaching RE effectively hence a negative effect on the academic performance of students. Teachers' lack of competency on the subject was also evident when Mr Tanaka said “in most cases we use the past papers and see how questions have been set”. From the above statement one can deduce that teachers do not use the syllabus when setting the test items, since they just retrieve questions from the past examination papers without aligning them with what they taught. This is an indication that assessment procedures are not adhered to.

Data revealed that, teachers are not competent on the subject, since, they possessed limited pedagogical content knowledge and also especially how to assess it. A teacher, Ms Shikati indicated that most of the time teachers do not understand syllabus objectives and Mr Billy commented; “I usually have problems with interpretation of syllabus objectives. I do not know how far I have to go with the

objectives and even how to unpack the syllabus". Mr Billy further lamented that "it has been too long since the school organized a Religious Education workshop. I think it is five years ago". Teachers also indicated that their general knowledge of various religions is also limited, and this is expressed by Ms Shikati when she said; "since we are expected to use examples from various religions we lack content of such; we have minimal knowledge about most religion except for a few such as Christianity, Islam and Judaism." Furthermore, teachers indicated the challenge regarding inviting resource persons, that in most cases religious practitioners were easily available but teachers had challenges on how they could use the knowledge of resource persons in their lessons due to their limited knowledge of classroom practice.

The subject does not have a substantive Education Officer since the one who is expected to be responsible for it said; "I am not an RE officer, I am just babysitting and I know nothing about the subject – I am Physical Education specialist. The substantive RE officer long left about two years ago". The EO further acknowledged that she does not visit schools to see how RE is doing on the ground in order to appreciate the progress, and possible challenges associated with it. She further highlighted that "to comment on the results, means one should have gone to schools to see what is happening, something I have never done". One can therefore conclude that teachers' competencies could have been improved if they were supervised by an EO who is an RE specialist. Another challenge raised was of the BEC grading system which stipulates that a student could obtain a good grade if he or she passed the six core subjects that are compulsory and one optional subject.

5.2 Students' Performance in Religious Education

Teachers and students at Makuta Junior Secondary School indicated that, the results at their schools were not satisfactory since students fail both school and national examinations. However, Mr. Billy added that the "impact of the teacher on the subject is important since they can instill appreciation for the subject in students as well as the teachers' willingness to go an extra mile to find information". He further, asserted that, senior teachers should periodically check students' exercise books but according to him they rarely do that students were also in agreement that the performance is unsatisfactory. For example, Kago, a female form three student at Makuta Junior Secondary School said; "we learn differently, it is better to experience some of the practices, like visiting places of worship than just reading about them from a book or just being told aspects of a religion by a teacher. We need to visit places of worship of different religions found around". Another female student in the same school, Alina said that, "most of the time the teacher is just talking, and I do not learn much by just listening. We need to be involved in some way". Kobani, a male student agreed and added; "I think a teacher must also use students to explain

some of the concepts. We learn quicker when another student explains to us".

Based on the students' responses, it is evident that teachers lecture to their students instead of involving them in their lessons. This was confirmed by the lessons we observed and in contrast to what was shown in lesson plans, since they indicated that the teacher was going to engage students in group and pair work. It is a clear that teachers do not follow what is in the lesson plans, but instead prepare them just as a formality and a way of pleasing their supervisors.

The two teachers at Makuta Junior Secondary School complained that the school was located next to bars which are always noisy and this disturbed students and also made it hard for them to concentrate. For example Mr Billy jokingly said "this place is very noisy. We can even dance to a song whilst in classrooms. Just listen (one could hear some music not far from where the researchers were). We cannot do anything about it".

Teachers at Beetah Junior Secondary School situated in a middle income location gave a slightly different picture concerning student's academic performance. They indicated that school performance is satisfactory because they train the students by always giving them high order questions since that helps students to answer the final examination questions with ease. Mr Tanaka said; "we set high order questions as a way of preparing students for the final examinations; our essay questions are full of application questions and this makes the final examination easier for our students". Despite the satisfactory results, it does not imply that all students are performing well as expressed by Ms Shebah when she said that "it varies from one class to another, because we teach mixed ability classes. Some learners grasp concepts quicker than others". Also the researchers observed that some topics were easy to understand while others were not. However, teachers at Beetah Junior Secondary School were in agreement that the results were not good enough despite their efforts.

Unlike students at Makuta Junior Secondary School, those at Beetah Junior Secondary School were positive and attributed good performance to the fact that they were taught and tested on concepts that relate to their background and this was confirmed by James, when he pointed out that "the results here are good because what is taught and examined is part of our beliefs and practices". Though the performance was relatively good at Beetah Junior Secondary School, a teacher at that school, Mr Tanaka was not happy because they are not meeting the school set target, even though when compared to other schools they perform better. Although most students at Beetah Junior Secondary School were of the view that the results were good, one of them, Thato, differed when he said "results are a bit low because some students will claim that they do understand during the lesson but would fail a test". He further made the claim that RE results are low when compared to other subjects.

Teachers in both schools attributed poor academic performance due to interference caused by many activities such as Performance Management System (PMS) activities, designing of teaching time-table and subject cluster meetings. Ms Shebah said, "Working on our PMS is very demanding and it interferes with the school programme. We also spend a lot of time attending cluster meetings". Students also echoed the same sentiment by saying that much of the teaching and learning time is consumed by the many meetings that teachers engage in instead of assisting students.

5.3 Teachers and Senior Management Team Relations

From the participants' responses it revealed that teacher's morale at Makuta Junior Secondary School was low and also that the working relations between the senior management team and teachers was not cordial, since there was lack of team-work in their institution. For example, Ms Shikati, a teacher at Makuta Junior Secondary School said that, "this management (*referring to the senior management team of the school*) is a problem; nobody cares about what is happening, this top five people are just a disaster, and there is too much *laissez-faire*. The school head is rarely in school, since he spends most of the time at his farm." From this statement one may deduce that, the teacher was frustrated by the way management conducted its business since this could be read even from her facial expression.

5.4 Inadequate Resources and Students' Academic Performance

Even though the resources might be available in schools, sometimes it is not easy for teachers to have access to such facilities. Ms Shikati a teacher at Makuta Junior Secondary School lamented that "the computer laboratory is always locked and hence not accessible to teachers to carry out research in preparation for lessons. It is always booked for school meetings and not used for its main purpose". Contrary to what Ms Shikati mentioned, Mr. Tanaka at Beetah Junior Secondary School had a different experience and attitude towards work, since he indicated that he spent most of his time in the library, reading and, researching and preparing for his lessons. He also indicated that he used his personal laptop to do school work. In addition to being exposed to different work environments, the two teachers seem to have different work ethics, as one relies more on school resources and the other can go an extra mile by using his personal property to enhance the quality of his work.

In both schools, teachers were unhappy that the textbooks were not enough for students since from what we observed, textbooks were the only learning resource that teachers and students heavily relied on. For instance, during lessons, teachers would ask students to read from textbooks most of the time since there were no alternative printed teaching aids. Scheme books also showed that textbooks were the only teaching aids reflected in lesson plans. In addition to textbooks, that were not enough. Ms Shikati from Makuta Junior Secondary School also complained about the

inadequate information in the textbooks and as a result they could not be fully relied upon. Just like their teachers, students complained about shortage of textbooks because they were being forced to share textbooks. For example, Thato, a male student suggested that the school should buy more textbooks so that students could have individual copies. His colleague, James, added and noted that it was easier to revise for a test when one uses a text book than when a teacher gives notes which are a summary of what is contained in a book – notes also lack detail since some concepts could have been clarified graphically through pictures if it were a textbook. Thato further suggested that textbooks should include all religions because during tests teachers bring questions that are not fully covered in the textbooks. Another student Peggy concurred and said; "the information about some religions is shallow and it would be better if each religion could have its own textbook in order to fully address issues in the syllabus".

Teachers' reasons for not partaking in educational tours were varied. Ms Shebah indicated that lack of funds to secure transport for excursions was a challenge, even though there was a Hindu temple and a church about 200 meters way from her school. Her colleague Mr. Tanaka could not relate educational trips to learning when he said; "I fear to lose out on the syllabus while on the school trips. Remember that it is the results that count when one is assessed". Teachers also indicated that security and consultation procedures associated with the arrangement of such trips was another challenge. Mr. Tanaka complained that "students are rowdy and are not easy to control when on trips, so it is risky to take them out."

5.5 Inadequate Parental Involvement and Academic Performance

Teachers at Makuta Junior Secondary School complained that there is lack of parental support in the education of their children. For example, Ms Shikati commented that, "parents do not care about their children's academic work and students are aware of that and know that even if they do something wrong their parents will never turn up when they are summoned at school". Mr. Billy agreed: "It is only parents whose children are doing well who come to school when they are summoned. Parents whose children are not academically gifted do not turn up when called". Contrary to the experiences of teachers at Makuta Junior Secondary School, those at Beetah Junior Secondary School had a different view point concerning parental involvement in the academic work of their children. They indicated that parents are very supportive in their children's academic work. For example, Ms Shebah said that, "some parents are very supportive since they sometimes visit the school and check their children's progress". Sometimes, they help in photocopying notes and other materials for students when asked to do so. They check their children's exercise and note books and append their signatures". Despite the fact that, the two schools are located in the same urban area, parental involvement differs from one school to the next, possibly due to their economic and educational status hence one can

attribute this scenario to the parents level of literacy and the location of the school.

5.6 Parents' Literacy Level and Students' Academic Performance

Participants revealed that, parents and students have a negative perception about the subject, hence, they do not consider the subject to be important in their lives. For instance Ms Shebaha teacher from Beetah Junior Secondary School – a school that was performing relatively well nationally for years said; “students tell us that their parents have advised them to focus on science and business related subjects”. Another teacher Mr Tanaka said; “students have a negative attitude towards the subject, since they ask teachers about the benefits of studying RE in terms of future career paths. Some students said that their parents advised them not to choose RE because it is simple. For example, James said; “students pass the subject because it is simple”. Another student, Thato, agreed and said “RE is not a complicated subject compared to science”. Though parents were not directly contacted in order to solicit their views, students' responses reflected the latter's view of the subject hence the negative perception.

Most students focus on the subjects that they value much and neglect the less valued. For example, Ms Shebahs aid; “high achievers feel that we should do away with RE so that they could focus on other subjects. Some students tell us that their parents have advised them to focus on science and business related subjects and not RE that does not have a future”. One can deduce that, the Botswana Examinations Council (BEC) grading system can have a negative impact on certain subjects, since students will know that, only one best optional subject will be added to the six compulsory ones, hence a student might opt to put more effort on one subject over the other, and in this case teachers have shown that RE is a victim.

VI. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the findings it is clear that RE teachers are not aware that there has been a shift from the phenomenological approach to the interpretive approach. This lack of awareness leads teachers to complain about the lengthy syllabus, hence rushing in order to finish the syllabus without stressing important aspect of the syllabus that can assist in students' improved academic performance. Furthermore, teachers' lack of knowledge and competency about the approach to be used would necessarily affect the way in which they teach and assess, hence eventually affecting the students' academic performance. No workshops or any other in-service activity have been done to make teachers aware of the new approach and how they could use it in class. This therefore, makes RE teaching a hit and miss affair where teachers just apply whatever approach they can think of.

From the class observations it is evident that, teachers are mostly using the lecture technique and there is little involvement of students if ever there is any in the teaching and learning process. In such a situation, the teacher

becomes the fountain of knowledge while students are depositories, hence no dialogue between the teacher and students. Teachers revealed that schools which perform well are characterized by a calm environment and where parents are being supportive in their children's work. Furthermore, shortage of resources especially textbooks was cited as one of the major challenges. Educational trips can enrich students' grasp of contents and appreciation of the subject but this does not happen.

The study has shown that, some parents and students have a negative perception about RE and as such parents advised their children to focus much on science and business related subjects as they are perceived to have better future career prospects. Therefore, some students still do not take RE serious, despite the teachers' efforts in trying to show the importance of the subject. Another challenge is the BEC grading system that stresses pass in core subjects and less on optional subjects under which RE belongs.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Basing on the research findings, the following recommendations are made:

- Teachers are important agents in the education system and as such it is always imperative to involve them in any changes concerning the curriculum. The Department of Curriculum Development and Evaluation should ensure that, when a syllabus is revised all relevant stakeholders are invited and especially teachers who are the main syllabus implementers.
- When a new syllabus is rolled out to schools, an appropriate implementation strategy should be effected. Workshops should be conducted for teachers and follow-ups made by qualified education officers specializing in RE.
- Subjects in general and RE in particular should be supervised by an EO who a subject specialist.
- There is need to find ways of involving parents more since they are key stakeholders in the learning of the children.

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