

Content Analysis of LGCSE Religious Studies Syllabus: To What Extend Does It Address the 21st Century Skills?

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ABSTRACT

Recently, there has been renewed interest of countries to reform their curriculum in order to promote 21st century skills among learners. It is expected too, that subject syllabi should align with the curriculum in promoting such skills. However, most studies in the field of religious studies in Lesotho have not focused on the extent to which this subject contributes to the promotion of 21st century skills and that prompted the present study. Qualitative Content Analysis was employed to determine the extent to which religious studies syllabus promotes 21st century skills. Document Analysis was used to analyze aims of the syllabus to establish different skills which are promoted by each aim. The findings indicated that religious studies syllabus aims differ in terms of the degree at which they promote 21st century skills. It also appeared that learning and innovation skills are predominantly promoted by the syllabus aims. However, the syllabus' aims seem to shrink from promoting technological skills. As a result, the following suggestions were made; first, the curriculum developers should emphasize all skills equivalently. Additionally, curriculum developers should restructure the curriculum to promote technological skills.

Keywords: curriculum alignment, LGCSE religious studies, 21st century skills.

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I. INTRODUCTION

The contemporary technological changes have affected individual's daily lives. Undoubtedly, people have to respond to the challenges and opportunities brought forth by these changes. On that basis, United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2015) highlighted a worrisome concern that education system in various developing countries have not kept pace with these technological changes. By virtue of this, it is therefore likely that schools will produce incompetent students who lack relevant skills for the world of work (Lekhanya & Raselimo, 2022). To salvage the effects of the above incongruity between curriculum and technological literacy, Selepe (2016) explicates that different countries often resort to reforming their curriculum in order to embrace the technological, learning and innovation, and life skills and career skills.

In regard to the above outlined skills, there is adequate literature supporting the view that such skills seem to be advocated mostly by leading advocacy organizations. Subsequently, these skills are adopted by regional organizations and likewise contextualized in various countries. Taken altogether, UNESCO (2015) acknowledged that all organizations advocating for 21st century skills seem to be sharing a similar goal on education. Viz, they strive to ensure the infusion of 21st century skills into the education

system in order to ensure that every learner is empowered to be a successful citizen and a worker in the 21st century.

Furthermore, United Nations (UN) as being one of the 21st century advocacy organization, it explicitly indicated in the Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) that it attempts to "ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong" (UNESCO, 2017). This goal seems to convey several important features but more remarkably, the aspect of quality education. For Stabback (2016), the salient aspect of quality education among others implies that a curriculum should prepare learners through the development of relevant skills in the 21st century. This above emphasis of promotions of 21st century skills clearly certify Selepe's (2016) stance that frequent reforms are necessary for the curriculum to keep pace with the needs of this fast-changing world.

Moreover, being guided by the Sustainable Development Goals 4 (SDG4), the Southern African Development Community Secretariat (SADC), the Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030 by the same token, it advocates for the development of 21st century skill in education. For instance, objective 3 espouses for "increased access to quality and relevant education and skills development, including in science and technology, for SADC citizens" (Southern African Development Community Secretariat [SADC], 2020). As a result of being a signatory of SADC and UN, Lesotho made a vivid outline

in the Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2016–2026 that it pulls out all the stops to “ensure access to inclusive relevant education” (Ministry of Education and Training, [MoET], 2016). This ESP declaration seems to solidify the view that Lesotho by the same token, encourages the promotion of the 21st century skills which are indeed relevant and applicable.

As it had been accentuated earlier, curriculum reforms in different countries have been a navigator in addressing the needs of any country and Lesotho is not an exception to this. This is supported by the fact that, since forty- three years of tenacious attempts to develop a relevant curriculum in Lesotho, it was only in 2009 when Lesotho through the MoET developed a comprehensive Curriculum and Assessment Policy framework of 2009 (CAP 2009). One notable point concerning CAP is that scholars seem to be in accordance that it signifies a paradigm shift (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015; Mokotso, 2020). In other words, it marks a departure from the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) curriculum which emphasized mastery of content to meet examination requirements. In addition, COSC failed to promote relevant skills to salvage the prevailing socio-economic crisis in Lesotho (Selepe, 2016). It was because of this situation that a need to reform the curriculum became imperative and this only materialized in 2009.

As a contrary to COSC, CAP seems to be more learner-centered since it puts students at the center of the learning process through employment of learner-centered teaching methodologies (Raselimo & Mahao, 2015). The benefit of these democratic teaching methods as acknowledged by Mokhetšengoane and Pallai (2021) is that they develop 21st century skills. This articulation of the above researchers seems to corroborate Schiro’s (2018) adjuration that the purpose of schooling in the 21st century should be to extricate learners from being fed with information but be empowered to meet the contemporary societal needs. This principal trait of CAP clearly correlates with the educational goals envisaged in SDG 4, RISDP 2020–2030 and ESP 2016–2026.

The above process of curriculum development which was underlined earlier was coupled with the development of Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCSE) subject syllabi. Furthermore, these syllabi were piloted in 2016 at secondary level replacing COSC subject syllabi. Without any doubt, the development of the LGCSE subject syllabi ensured alignment with CAP. This opinion is based on the assertion of Bhola *et al.* (2003), that alignment between any syllabus and a policy is mandatory to ensure that the content to be taught in the classroom is compatible with the standards. Based on this above necessity for alignment, this paper is benchmarked on a presupposition that LGCSE syllabi are inclined to promoting 21st century skills. On account of this above assumption, this study sought to assess the extent to which LGCSE Religious studies syllabus promotes the 21st century skills.

II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Importance of the 21st Century Skills

Much emphasis across the world is given to 21st century skills. It is of course important for every country to embrace

such skills in order to produce global citizens. At present, there is a growing body of literature supporting the view that there is radical transformation of the education system in order to address the demands of the perpetually changing world (Erol, 2021; UNESCO, 2015; Welker & Mohr, 2017). As it had been discussed in the preceding chapter, Lesotho is not an exception to this global initiative to promote 21st century skills. Apparent evidence which Selepe (2016) reiterated is that primarily, the curriculum reforms were aimed to liberate the country from its socio- economic impediments through promotion of 21st century skills.

Although the available literature recognizes 21st century skills, there are several divergent frameworks developed by various educational groups; (Metiri Group & NCREL, 2003; OECD, 2005a; Partnership for 21st Century Skills (P21), 2008; American Association of Colleges and Universities, 2007; 21st Century School, 2010). It is fair to articulate that each of the above groups has provided its distinct operational definition of 21st century skills. Equally important, each organization has conveyed a prescription of some pedagogical practices intended to develop such skills in classrooms. Moreover, a relevant illustration of this is the framework suggested by Partnership for the 21st century skills (2009) and it has been more widely accepted by schools globally. For the purpose of this article, the evidence borne out of the research was drawn from the same framework. The basic premises for using the framework is that it is clearer and well-structured.

Regarding the definition of 21st century skills, Duncan (2009) referred them to, “skills that increasingly demand creativity, perseverance and problem solving combined with performing well as a team.” This definition is close to that of Secondary Board of Education in India (2020) which defines 21st century skills as skills that are needed by people to attain a comprehensive growth so that they can contribute positively to the development of their societies, nation, or world. With the above definitions, one can deduce that 21st century skills are significant in contributing to the sustainable growth of society. In fact, these skills equip a learner to become successful at school and in life.

What is notable about the 21st century skills are that they constitute three broad categories which are: the learning and innovation skills, information, media, and technology skills (literacy skills) and life and career skills (Partnership for the 21st century skills, 2008). Under the learning and innovation skills, emphasis is given on the 4 Cs being Communication, Critical thinking, Collaboration and Creativity. On the other hand, the literacy skills pay much attention to IMT- Information Literacy, Media Literacy, and Technology Literacy while Life skills focuses on FLIPS-Flexibility and Adaptability, Leadership and Responsibility, Initiative and Self-direction, Social and Cross-Cultural Interaction.

B. Learning and Innovation Skills

Collaboration is one of the indispensable skills of the 21st century since it enables an individual to work well with others. In substantiating a need for this skill, there is more literature supporting the view that most work environments require collaboration as ideas and thoughts are coming from different perspectives (Child & Shaw, 2015). Based on this evidence from literature, one would concur with Laal *et al.*

(2012) and Santos (2017) that through collaboration, people get a chance to hear others perception. Additionally, collaboration brings people together. In other words, there is that friendship and spirit of unionism and solidarity developed through collaboration. These results appear to support Erol's (2021) opinion that due to teamwork, productivity increases.

The literature gathered in the present study also validates that communication mostly amalgamate with collaboration. A study undertaken by Khoiri *et al.* (2021) corroborates the idea that communication is one of the important interpersonal skills which is needed in order to survive and build strong relationships with others in the 21st century world. Furthermore, it is through communication that different ideas are being shared. Khoiri's ideas are at par with the beliefs of Campbell Jr. and Kresyman (2015) that interpersonal communication is the most important skill indispensable in the 21st century.

Another important learning skill is critical thinking. Current literature on critical thinking indicates that this skill goes hand in glove with being able to solve problems. One benefit of this skill is that it creates critical thinkers who are able to reason, have logic of thought and are able to solve practical problems existing in their communities (Anazifa & Djukri, 2017; Indah, 2020). On these grounds we can argue that the Lesotho curriculum of the 21st century should create individuals that think in abstract terms and generate solutions to the problems emanating from their societies. In accordance with Bashith and Amin (2017), the 21st century should have an army of individuals who can think critically, be innovative such as, developing vaccines, hence saving lives.

Furthermore, creativity is also a pivotal skill. In reviewing the literature by Gundry *et al.* (2014), researchers reckoned that these 21st century skills enable students to come up with novel ideas that can contribute to the development of their nations. Moreover, there is an emerging recognition from governments and businesses globally that creativity and innovation are essential for the competitiveness of different organizations in the global economy (Lekhanya & Raselimo, 2022). As a result of this, the employers of the 21st century require people who can take their businesses or companies to greater heights because of the new innovations they bring within the workplace. Based on these findings from different scholars, we can therefore conclude that creativity and innovation are one of the paramount skills of the 21st century which the school curriculum should inculcate and nurture into their students so that they remain relevant in the faced radical globalization.

C. Information, Media, and Technological Skills

Digital literacies: comprising of media literacy, information literacy and technology literacy are perceived as crucial skills to be attained in the 21st century. These skills involve the ability to access information, either traditionally or digitally. Digital literacy is ranking higher than all other skills in researchers and education stakeholders' interest. In fact, it is stated that the primary reason why 21st century skills differ from those of the previous century is due to the emergence of advanced information and communication technologies (Chalkiadaki, 2018.). Similar argument has

been raised by Van Laar *et al.* (2017) that digital competence has become a principal concept in what skills and understanding citizens must have in the knowledge society. It is imperative to note that these skills are highly important in the present context. Therefore, curriculum design should incorporate digital skills so that their citizens become part of the global world.

Admittedly, there is a prevalence of technology in today's society. As a result, students need increased expertise in digital technologies such as computers, Global Positioning System (GPS) electronic white boards, among others. Most importantly, students will be able to use technology for research and communication purposes. The curriculum of the 21st century should therefore incorporate digital resources for effective teaching and learning.

D. Life and Career Skills

The Partnership for the 21st century skills (2009) consider the following as Life skills which should be nurtured in students, flexibility and Adaptability, Leadership and Responsibility, Initiative and self-direction, productivity, and accountability, social and cross-cultural interaction. Collie *et al.* (2016) is on the same wavelength with Central Board of Secondary Education in India (2020) that flexibility and adaptability are crucial in a sense that they instill adjustment capabilities which assists students to thrive in different situations hence being able to tackle challenges encountered in different occasions presented to them. In connection with leadership and responsibility as skills needed in the 21st century, Erol (2021) suggests that these skills grant students an opportunity to lead a team effectively and empower students to nurture others for growth. Additionally, this assists students in realizing social and national issues that may affect their lives.

The contemporary world further requires students who are initiative and self-directed (Kivunja, 2015). These skills do not only involve students' ability to independently initiate a task with little assistance from others but also contribute to the holistic development of a student since they become creative and self-reliant. Working independently further instills intrinsic motivation. In the same vein, developing productivity and accountability in students helps them work effectively with others and account for their actions (Erol, 2021). Lastly, social, and cross-cultural interaction skills allow students to live harmoniously in multi-cultural and pluralistic societies.

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper has adopted Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) to determine the extent to which religious studies syllabus promotes 21st century skills. Qualitative Content Analysis (QCA) can be defined as a technique for gathering and analyzing content of text (Gibbs, 2002). The selection of this method is based upon Stake's (1995) assertion that QCA produces rich descriptive data of a phenomenon. It has therefore been assumed by the researchers that QCA will be useful in analyzing the aims of the LGCSE Religious studies syllabus for their coherence with the 21st century skills.

Document Analysis (DA) method was employed for data generation. In particular, LGCSE Religious Studies syllabus

was used. For clarity, Bowen (2009) defined document analysis as “a systematic procedure for reviewing or evaluating documents both printed and electronic (computer based and Internet transmitted) material” (p. 27). In relation to sampling, purposive sampling technique was deployed. In this case, the religious studies syllabus aims were used. The underlying motivation for the selection of aims is grounded on Mamun’s (2009) affirmation that all sorts of documents can be helpful to the researcher to reveal the meaning and insights to the research problem. Being the fact, syllabus’ aims were chosen on the solid grounds that they entail the foundation and direction on which the specific objectives of the syllabus are derived.

Regarding the analysis, the study deployed qualitative data analysis approach. Primarily, the researchers considered the classification of the skills as conveyed by Partnership for 21st Century Skills. It is vital to specify that these categories include the following: learning and innovation skills, the information, media, and technology skills and lastly, the life and career skills. Furthermore, the researchers identified the aims of the syllabus which are compared to the three categories of skills indicated above. Finally, the findings obtained from such comparison were synthesized in order to provide understanding of the extent to which the syllabus seems to address the 21st century skills.

IV. FINDINGS

A. *The Striking Features of LGCSE Religious Studies Syllabus*

The LGCSE Religious Studies syllabus is fragmented into three sections. For illustration, section A (Religious diversity) introduces students to world religions. Furthermore, section B (Luke’s Gospel and Acts of the Apostles) introduces learners to the life and teachings of Jesus Christ and the life of the early Christian Church. Lastly, section C (Religion in Society) encourages the use of biblical texts to solve contemporary issues of concern such as respect for life, prejudice, discrimination, issues of equality, HIV/AIDS, human and substance abuse, teenage pregnancy, divorce, poverty, unemployment, corruption, crime and punishment and environmental issues (MoET, 2020).

Although section A seems to address religious diversity, there is convincing evidence that it does not adequately offer justice to all world religions. Supporting evidence from Mokotso (2017) is that in as much as CAP 2009 advocates for inclusivity, section A of the syllabus neglects other religions. Basically, students are only introduced to the world religions and deny students an opportunity to learn from such religions. It is somehow surprising since only Christianity appears to be more emphasized in this section. Undoubtedly, this favoritism deprives students an opportunity to develop life and career skills which equip them to live amicably with others in a pluralistic society. In concurrence with Mokotso (2020), this above situation could lead to a stage where religious studies forfeit its opportunity of being included in the curriculum.

Another striking feature of religious studies syllabus is that a prominent section which addresses life and career skills is treated at the last section of the syllabus. Equally surprising is the fact that this section is awarded the least percentage of marks in the scheme of assessment (MoET, 2020). On these grounds we can argue that this positioning has potential to depriving learners the opportunity to develop life and career skills. This view is premised on the basis that section C distinctively promotes life and career skills. In fact, it is in this section where learners reflect on their experiences to solve real life problems. In this case, one would concur with Raselimo and Thamae’s (2018) findings that, placing of any content at the last section of syllabus is risking its likelihood of being given fair consideration.

Although the above discussion may sound that section C fails to adequately promote relevant skills, such sentiments deviate from Mokotso’s (2020) argument that religious studies fit well in CAP. In corroboration with Mokotso, religious studies syllabus indeed, promote skills applicable for addressing societal needs. To authenticate this view, the general aim of the syllabus is to solve the contemporary issues of concern as highlighted earlier. This above discussion gives concrete grounds that certainly this syllabus is at par with CAP to address contemporary issues of concern.

B. *Relevance of Religious Studies in Addressing the 21st Century Demands*

Basically, the LGCSE Religious Studies syllabus comprises of seven aims. The most striking result emerging from data is that the representation of the learning and innovation skills appears to dominate other skills. These results are rather remarkable since they provide confirmatory evidence that all aims seem to address the learning and innovation skills as illustrated in table 1. However, one noticeable point about the sub-skills embedded in these aims is that their representation diverges dismally. For instance, skills such as collaboration and critical thinking are represented in all aims. Conversely, the least represented sub-skill under learning and innovation is creativity skill which is represented in only five aims. We therefore ground our argument that these findings discussed are somewhat interesting given the fact that they corroborate the findings of Mokotso (2020) that religious studies syllabus fits well in CAP. These sentiments of Mokotso are agreeable based on the evidence given in Table I which denotes that Religion studies promote the 21st century skills.

Further analysis reveals that life and career skills are represented. However, only a trace of these skills could be detected. It is apparent from table 1 that out of the seven aims, only aim Number 3, 5 and 6 address life and career skills. In particular, aim 3 and 5 emphasize self- direct while aim 6 stresses social interaction. Based on these findings, the researchers believe that the only possible explanation for this average representation of the above skills might be that religious studies syllabus is assertive over aim No 6 specifically. This is because it endeavors to develop attitudes and skills for coping with life challenges (MoET, 2009).

Nevertheless, the syllabus aims appear to provide limited opportunities in promoting more life and career skills such as flexibility, leadership, adaptability skills, to mention but a few. Worryingly, the syllabus seems to promote only self-direction and social interaction as sub-skills. What is curious about these results is the fact that we are living in a complex world where individuals face different dilemmas such as business, social and emotional challenges. Indisputably, it is only through the acquisition of the above deprived sub-skills that one could become successful in the midst of this competitive and globalized world.

Contrary to the expectations, this study did not find any aim promoting the information, media, and technological skills. Data collected from table 1 appears to suggest that there is a significant proportion of aims promoting the two categories of skills at the expense of technological skills. The basic premises of these results are somewhat displeasing since it is clear that while the world has considerably shifted to technology, religious studies shrink from promoting the relevant skills. These views coincide with Peace's (2021) articulation that it is possible, therefore that, while a syllabus fails to promote technological skills, learners fail to cope at higher education. For instance, they face challenges in utilizing digital resources for their visual classes and research. The Table I below illustrates the discussion of the findings above.

TABLE I: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN RELIGIOUS STUDIES SYLLABUS AIMS AND 21ST CENTURY SKILLS

Religious studies syllabus aims	Skills	Sub-skills
1. Develop religious awareness and appreciation of religious diversity	Learning and innovation	Collaboration, critical thinking
2. Reflect on religious responses to contemporary issues	Learning and innovation	Collaboration, information finding, creativity, critical thinking
3. Acquire a knowledge and understanding of the life and teaching of Jesus Christ through a study of Luke's gospel and the development of the early Christian church through a study of the acts of the apostles;	Learning and innovation, life, and career	Collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, self-direct
4. Develop and enquire critical approach to the study of biblical texts and the ideas they contain and the ways they may be interpreted;	Learning and innovation	Collaboration, creativity, critical thinking,
5. Recognise and appreciate the contribution of religion in the formation of patterns of beliefs and behaviour;	Learning and innovation, life, and career	Collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, self-direct
6. Develop positive attitudes to social behaviour and the skills for coping with life challenges;	Learning and innovation Life & career	Collaboration, creativity, communication, critical thinking, social and cross-cultural interaction
7. Develop a range of transferable skills and attitudes	Learning and innovation	Collaboration, critical thinking

V. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study sets out to analyze the LGCSE Religious studies syllabus to weigh the extent to which it promotes the 21st century skills. As apparent in the previous chapter, the focus was specifically on the aims of the syllabus. The available evidence seems to suggest that the results of this investigation reflect that the syllabus aims differ in terms of the degree to which they promote the 21st century skills. On this basis, the researchers' inferences rest on the fact that there is ample evidence to support that actually, the syllabus seems to emphasize learning and innovation skills. Consequently, the conclusion that can be drawn from this prevalence presupposes that such emphasis has potential of producing students who are globally minded. As concurred by P21 (2015), there is more depiction of skills such as interpreting, analysis, solving problems to equip learners to make informed decisions and think critically in solving real life problems.

Another major finding is that there is a significant representation of the Life & Career Skills by the three syllabus aims. Based on the finding conveyed, it is possible to conclude that the religious studies are consistent with the principal aim of Lesotho curriculum and assessment policy of 2009 syllabus. For explication, it had been pronounced earlier, the aim to CAP is to address contemporary issues of concern (MoET, 2009). Along similar lines, the identified skills being self- direct and social interaction fortifies this aim of CAP since these aims prepare learners to be resilient, have respect for others in a pluralistic society.

However, it was portrayed earlier that religious studies syllabus is weak in promoting Technology skills. As Table I illustrates, there is no syllabus aim that target promoting technological skills. These results are rather overwhelming since they are contrary to the expectations of CAP that it seeks to promote technological skills (MoET, 2009). These findings are grounds from which one could conclude that to a large extent, religious studies syllabus deprives students of their opportunity to be literate in manipulating technological opportunities. In situations such as this, one would wonder how religious studies students will survive in this complex world where technology is the order of the day.

Taken all together, the findings of the study suggest that evidently, religious studies syllabus promotes the 21st century skills nevertheless; the syllabus fails to consider the differing representation of categories of the 21st century skills. In other words, there are disparities to the degree of how each syllabus aim seems to promote major skills and the sub-skills. As a result of this discrepancy, the study recommends that the curriculum should make necessary adjustments to address the majority of skills and sub-skills so as to promote holistic development of learners.

Furthermore, the syllabus aims seem to neglect the promotion of technological skills. As had been disclosed earlier, this is rather anomalous as technological skills are considered fundamental in this 21st century. This situation therefore calls for curriculum developers to incorporate the promotion of technological skills. This suggestion is based on the fact that currently, CAP 2009 is in its pilot stage. Therefore, this recommendation could constitute one of the

challenges which could be addressed during the evaluation of subject syllabi, in particular, religious studies syllabus.

VI. CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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