The role of Religious Studies in the development of social justice competences: A case of three secondary schools in Leribe district

The National University of Lesotho

By

Lehlohonolo Kurata (201500449)

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education in the Department of Languages and Social Education, Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho

Supervisor

Rev. Dr. Mokotso Isaac Rasebate

July 2024

Declaration of authorship

I, Lehlohonolo Kurata, declare that this study, entitled "The role of Religious Studies in the development of social justice competences: a case of three secondary schools in Leribe district," is my own original work. It has not been submitted for any degree or examination at any other university. All sources used or quoted have been acknowledged by means of complete references.

Lehlohonolo Kurata

Signature …………………………………….   Date……………………………….

Certification

I certify that this dissertation, entitled "The role of Religious Studies in the development of social justice competences: a case of three secondary schools in Leribe district," submitted by Lehlohonolo Kurata (Student Number: 201500449), is a result of the candidate's own work. This work has been conducted under my supervision and is approved for submission in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts in Education (MA. Ed.), at the National University of Lesotho.

Supervisor: Rev. Dr. Mokotso Isaac Rasebate

…………………………..……………..

Head of Department: Dr. M. Makumane

…………………………..……………

Dean of Faculty of Education: Prof. P. A. Mosia

…………………………………..………

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my late father, Makalo Ephraim Kurata. Your unwavering belief in my potential and your enduring love as the only son among four girls have been my guiding light. Although you are no longer with us, your wisdom, strength, and spirit continue to inspire me in my every endeavour. This work is a tribute to the values you instilled in me. Continue to rest in peace. This accomplishment is for you.

Acknowledgements

Abstract

There is growing interest among countries to update their curricula to respond to contemporary challenges. Among several challenges that threaten the world, social injustice and oppression are some of the key issues. To address these social issues, many countries are updating their curricula with the aim of integrating social justice content into subject curricula, including Religious Studies. Several studies have attempted to investigate the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice. However, very little research has directly investigated this issue in Lesotho. Therefore, the current study employed a qualitative case study method to investigate the role of Religious Studies in cultivating social justice competences, focusing on three schools in Lesotho's context. Participants in the study were Religious Studies teachers from three church-owned secondary schools in Leribe district. Their selection relied on purposive sampling, as they possess rich information on the topic. Furthermore, qualitative data collection tools, including non-participatory observations and semi-structured interviews, were employed to collect useful data. To analyse the data from these tools, thematic analysis was used. The findings revealed that Religious Studies significantly contribute to creating an environment that fosters social justice, fairness, equity, cooperation, and inclusivity. Moreover, the teaching methods employed in religious studies play a crucial role in developing social justice competences. However, the study also highlighted challenges such as limited school resources and inconsistent learner engagement by some teachers. Based on these findings, it is recommended that teacher-training programmes be enhanced to equip teachers with the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively integrate social justice themes into their teaching practices. Additionally, a systematic and equitable distribution mechanism for educational resources should be implemented to ensure all schools have access to the necessary materials for promoting social justice competences. By addressing these challenges and implementing the recommended strategies, stakeholders can work together to create a more equitable and inclusive learning environment where learners are empowered to challenge injustice and advocate for positive social change.

Keywords: Social justice, Religious Studies, Competences, Teaching methods, Curriculum

Abbreviations and Acronyms

CAP   **Curriculum and Assessment Policy**

LBECP   **Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy**

LECSA   **Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa**

MoET   **Ministry of Education and Training**

RCC   **Roman Catholic Church**

SDGs   **Sustainable Development Goals**

UNESCO   **United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization**

UN   **United Nations**

Table of Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

Chapter 1: Introduction and Background

1. Introduction

The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO, 2017) indicates that education is vital in the pursuit of a just and equal society. Recently, there has been a greater emphasis on education's role in developing social justice competences. Leading organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC) have invested their efforts in promoting social justice to improve societal well-being (SADC, 2020). Interestingly, this initiative by these organisations has influenced member states to recognise that education is more than just imparting knowledge and skills; it also has the power to shape individuals' beliefs, values, and attitudes, particularly in the context of social justice (Carmody, 2022). The desire for social justice inspires us to investigate how Religious Studies in Lesotho secondary schools might be employed to promote social justice competences.

To understand the processes of developing social justice competences, it is important to first examine Lesotho's educational history. Missionaries who arrived in Lesotho in the 1830s were the first to establish formal education. Missionaries gained authority over the school system until Lesotho gained independence in 1966 (Molelle, 2006). This missionary-led education system was widely accepted as Christian-centred, and it continues to be so to this day (Selepe, 2016; Mokotso, 2017). Indeed, the purpose of Religious Studies was to instil Christian values and attitudes. Therefore, discussing Religious Studies is essentially equivalent to discussing Christian education. As a result, this study employs the concept of Religious Studies in accordance with its specific contextual applicability.

Lesotho, like England and Zambia (Hannam & May, 2022; Carmody, 2022), has several significant social issues, including inequities, persecution, and religious prejudice. Undoubtedly, these challenges have a negative impact on societal well-being. Lesotho's efforts to foster social justice competences take on an important dimension considering the country's unique educational setting, which has been influenced by a long history of church and state partnership in the education system. Lesotho, like England and Zambia, has Religious Studies in its curriculum to foster social justice competences. This effort was strengthened by

curriculum reforms that resulted in the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP), 2009 (Ministry of Education and Training [MoET], 2009).

In CAP 2009, Religious Studies plays a significant role in the "Personal, Spiritual, and Social" learning area, with the clear objective of teaching the skills, values, and attitudes required to address societal challenges, including issues of social injustice. In 2021, the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) was introduced. Notably, Religious Studies is a key component of the social sciences, a field aimed at developing basic competences, such as social skills, in order to solve societal concerns in Lesotho (MoET, 2021). In light of this background, the purpose of this study is to examine if the existing Religious Studies curriculum in Lesotho's secondary schools is explicitly designed to cultivate social justice competences.

1.1   Background to the study

In the 21st century, Hannam and May (2022) note that the world faces major challenges, including the most pressing: social injustice. This situation necessitates investigating the function of subject curricula, notably Religious Studies, in fostering social justice. To better understand the concept of social justice, Dickson (2013) indicates that it is relevant in many domains, including philosophy and sociology. It boils down to the belief that all individuals should have equal access to income, health, opportunities, and privileges (Dickson, 2013). Teaching social justice in schools entails eliminating unfair systems, connecting learning to learners' real-life experiences, and encouraging reflection. Hackman (2005) defines fundamental parts of social justice education as subject mastery, recognising oppressive structures, taking action for change, self-reflection, and appreciation for diverse groups.

Furthermore, it is crucial to emphasise that the concept of fairness, where everyone has an equal chance regardless of background, has broad recognition internationally (Bobbert, 2017). To attain this goal of fairness, worldwide organisations are striving to create more equitable educational systems. While initiatives such as Education for All (EFA) and Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) did not attain full success by 2015, the United Nations (UN) announced new targets for 2030 known as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which included a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Agenda 2030's main objective is to promote sustainability by addressing several social, economic, and environmental issues in a comprehensive and integrated manner. The most important SDG is

SDG 4, which focuses on quality, inclusive, and equitable education for all (United Nations Educational, Scientific, and Cultural Organisation [UNESCO], 2017). According to Stabback (2016), SDG4 suggests that schools should provide learners with the skills and values they need to lead meaningful lives, and Religious Studies could contribute by emphasising social justice and developing social justice competences. Furthermore, the formation of the International Research Network on Education for Social Justice (IRN-EduSocJustice) in 2019 emphasises the global significance of education as a weapon for social change and inclusivity (Bobbert, 2017).

Promoting social justice is, as previously stated by UNESCO (2017), a global commitment. In particular, in the United States, some learners endure educational inequities due to circumstances such as low resources, teacher shortages, and overcrowded classrooms, particularly in poor communities with Black and Hispanic pupils (Hage et al., 2011). However, efforts such as the Boston Connects Programme and Tools for Tomorrow aim to tackle these obstacles and enhance learners' knowledge of systemic concerns such as racism and classism (Kozol, 2005; Solberg et al., 2002). Furthermore, there has been recognition in America's education system that the curriculum itself has the potential to impact learners' perceptions and ideas about equality, as evidenced by Sporre's (2020) investigation, which identified components of social justice in the American curriculum. In England, despite persistent societal inequities, government policies openly support Religious Studies. This viewpoint is reinforced by the 1870 legislation that permits religious instruction in state schools (Davis & Miroshnikova, 2013). However, scholars such as Strhan and Shillitoe (2019) contend that, while England's curriculum aims to promote social justice values, adjustments are required to more effectively attract non-religious learners and emphasise social justice ideas. Hannam and May (2022) emphasise the need to empower teachers to critically analyse social justice-related educational goals in order to engage all learners.

Similarly, Kimanen (2022) stresses that in Finland, Religious Studies is assigned to raising awareness of social justice and promoting a more fair and just society for all learners. The Finnish core curriculum emphasises principles such as fairness and involvement in religious studies. Kimanen (2022) further points out that, despite encouraging social justice promotion through Religious Studies, the Finnish curriculum makes no explicit reference to justice, equality, or equity. This provides evidence that the curriculum may be revised to better promote

learners' knowledge of fairness and engagement in Religious Studies. In Zambia, the church plays a crucial role in the educational system, ensuring that Religious Studies is included in the curriculum. Despite the church's influence, Carmody (2022) finds it strange that the church does not advocate for a robust social justice agenda in Religious Studies. Carmody (2022) proposes that the curriculum should be revised in order to accomplish its goal of fostering social justice.

Lesotho is a member of several notable organisations, including the United Nations through Agenda 2030 and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), both of which promote social justice. The SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030 addresses cross-cutting themes, including women and youth. Objective 1, for example, seeks "Enhanced gender equality as well as women's empowerment and development, as well as the elimination of gender-based violence" (SADC, 2020, p. 55). Lesotho responds to frameworks such as Agenda 2030 and RISDP 2020-2030 through its Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2016-2026, which serves as a direction for the country's educational system. One of the goals of ESP 2016–2026 is to provide outstanding learning opportunities while emphasising values connected with social justice (MoET, 2016). Notably, these efforts align with the crucial role of education in promoting equity and equality among learners.

In Lesotho's educational system, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy of 2009 (CAP 2009) is considered essential in promoting learners' holistic growth, with a strong focus on promoting social justice competences (MoET, 2009). Notably, within CAP 2009, the "Personal, Spiritual, and Social" learning area, encompassing Religious Studies, had a clear objective of imparting a variety of skills that could address societal concerns, including issues of social injustice (MoET, 2009). While CAP 2009 experienced challenges in terms of implementation, local context, and resource availability, it eventually led to the development of the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) in 2021.

What defines LBECP 2021 is its significant emphasis on developing 21st-century competences, including social justice competences (MoET, 2021). This emphasis corresponds with the overarching goal of basic education in Lesotho, which is to "provide learners with a moral and religious/spiritual foundation for developing a character that is socially and culturally inclusive and capable of embracing diversity and the values essential for national

unity" (MoET, 2021, p. 8). Miller (2006) emphasises the critical need for recognising the 'spiritual' dimension in Religious Studies. Miller (2006) emphasises the critical role that spirituality plays in an individual's general well-being and proper functioning. The spiritual dimensions stretch beyond merely gaining knowledge or skills; they focus on the inner regions of ethics and morals, which shape an individual's development, including their social justice competences. The spiritual aspect, which is often disregarded by many other subjects in school, demonstrates that Religious Studies has the capacity to equip learners with a spiritual foundation that encourages the development of social justice competences. Wanjau (2019) concurs with this viewpoint, asserting that Religious Studies influences an individual's social behaviour.

1.2   Statement of the problem

In Lesotho, various contemporary issues are associated with the concept of social justice and the role of Religious Studies. To begin, Lesotho is a member of well-known international organisations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Southern African Development Community (SADC), both of which strive for social justice. Second, in Lesotho's education system, the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) of 2021 incorporates Religious Studies as an area of study within the social sciences, which is integrated into both the lower secondary (Grades 8–9) and upper secondary (Grades 10–12) school phases. Notably, the discipline of social sciences, to which Religious Studies belongs, strives to develop social skills, including those connected to social justice (MoET, 2021).

However, despite the alignment of these frameworks with social justice principles and the explicit goal of LBECP 2021 to cultivate social skills relevant to social justice, De Wet (2007) and Mosia (2019) have highlighted the prevalence of issues such as violence, bullying, and hostility in Lesotho's secondary schools. These issues present serious challenges that significantly undermine educational efforts to promote social justice. Furthermore, Ntombana and Mokotso (2018) remark that Lesotho has been facing democratic instability, with instances of political disruption and electoral disputes triggering societal conflict. Finally, Mokotso (2017) discusses how Lesotho's educational environment struggles with the challenges of inclusive Religious Studies, where non-Christian beliefs are excluded from the school system.

This situation appears to raise concerns regarding the equal development of social justice competences through Religious Studies in a multi-religious nation, including Lesotho.

Given the challenges that Lesotho faces, a number of nations, including the United States (Kozol, 2005), England (Hannam & May, 2022), Finland (Kimanen, 2022), and Zambia (Carmody, 2023), perceive Religious Studies as an indispensable tool in developing social justice competences that are essential for guiding learners towards meaningful and successful lives. In the context of Lesotho, the current study is being undertaken to determine if the country's Religious Studies teaching and learning aligns with the critical mandate of promoting social justice competences in secondary schools. This is the gap that this study aims to address, taking into account social justice issues such as exclusive Religious Studies, bullying, violence, discrimination among learners, weakened moral values in schools, and democratic instability (De Wet, 2007; Mokotso, 2017; Mokotso, 2018; Mosia, 2019). Religious Studies was supposed to contribute positively to addressing these social injustices.

.1.3   Research questions

The study is anchored on the following research questions:

1. What is the role of Religious Studies in the promotion of social justice competences in Lesotho?
2. What are relevant Religious Studies teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences in Lesotho?

1.4   Purpose of the study

The purpose of the study is:

1. To examine the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences among learners in Lesotho.
2. To establish whether there are relevant Religious Studies teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences in Lesotho.

1.5   Significance of the study

1.5.1   Significance for the Government

Since the government is in the position of designing policies to promote inclusion in society, this study could potentially help the government develop and effectively implement educational policies that prioritise the promotion of social justice competences. Furthermore, the policy may clearly specify required teaching practices that can effectively promote social justice competences.

1.5.2   Significance for Teachers

The study's findings may help Religious Studies teachers identify relevant methods of teaching that enhance the development of social justice competences. Undoubtedly, teachers are responsible for curriculum implementation in schools. Therefore, the findings could help teachers organise lessons that promote social justice competences. In fact, teachers may gain an understanding of successful approaches to teaching and learning aids for fostering social justice competences.

Furthermore, teachers may apply the study's findings to further enhance their career development. It is widely recognised that the effectiveness of any curriculum, including the current one in Lesotho, is strongly dependent on the quality of teachers and their ability to implement it effectively. This work may therefore make a substantial contribution. This study may thus provide important feedback to teachers, allowing them to reflect on the teaching strategies they employ in Religious Studies and better connect them to the promotion of social justice competences.

1.5.3   Significance for Learners

As learners come across different systems that could oppress them, the study's findings may assist them develop critical thinking skills. For instance, they could be able to spot situations in which their rights are being violated while searching for solutions to liberate themselves and other people.

1.5.4   Significance for Communities

The study's findings may promote social cohesion. In pluralistic countries such as Lesotho, it is critical for communities to acquire social justice competences in order to foster peace, tolerance, and respect for diversity. One way for communities to learn about social justice is to foster social justice competences among learners, who may then pass these competences on to their communities.

1.5.5   Significance for Schools proprietors

The study may inform school proprietors about the value of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences. This awareness may encourage schools that do not currently offer Religious Studies to reconsider their decision for the sake of learners' development of social justice competences.

1.5.6   Significance for research community

The study may contribute to our understanding of the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences pertaining to Lesotho. Furthermore, the findings presented in this study may contribute to the ongoing debates on how subject curricula can promote social justice.

1.6   Delimitation of the study

According to Lephoi (2021), a delimitation of a study refers to what the investigation will not cover, emphasising the research's known limitations and exclusions, such as population size, participant type, and other specific constraints. Simon and Goes (2013) argue that delimitations are important because they narrow down the study to make it more manageable and relevant to the research objectives, ensuring the study is focused and reasonably possible. For the current study, its geographic scope is limited to the Leribe district. The implication for this scope implies that any conclusions reached cannot be applied to other districts in Lesotho. Furthermore, the research is confined to investigating how social justice competences are integrated and taught exclusively in secondary Religious Studies.

1.7   Operationalisation of terms

Social justice: It refers to the concept of equality and the fair distribution of resources and opportunities to every member of society.

Religious Studies: It is the teaching and learning process that involves the development of students' lives through the impartation of skills, knowledge, and attitudes drawn from the Christian religion.

Competence: This refers to the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are necessary for one to be successful in life.

Church-owned schools: These are schools that are initially built by churches, and the churches are the proprietors.

1.8   Summary

The chapter provided the context for the research problem, revealing that different countries view Religious Studies as a tool for promoting social justice competences. In this regard, the study's purpose specifies that it is to investigate the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools. The chapter delves deeper into the key research questions. It also emphasises how the findings will benefit different groups and institutions, including the government, teachers, learners, communities, researchers, and school administrators. The chapter emphasises the study's delimitations, highlighting the study's limitation to only Leribe district and the promotion of social justice competences exclusively in secondary Religious Studies. Finally, the operating terminology was defined.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2. Introduction

The literature review investigates the relationship between Religious Studies, as an independent variable, and social justice competences, as dependent variables. The literature review is intended for the following:

1. To employ the theoretical framework that guides the study.
2. To analyse the role of Religious Studies in the development of social justice competences.
3. To examine the challenges that may hamper the promotion of social justice competences through Religious Studies.
4. To explore relevant teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences.
5. To identify gaps in the literature concerning the role of Religious Studies in effectively promoting social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools.

2.1   Theoretical Framework

This study employs a critical theory framework to assess the role of religious studies in the development of social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools. The motivation for using critical theory is its emphasis on investigating and critiquing social power and dominance systems that perpetuate injustices and inequalities such as race, gender, and class in order to reform them (Kimanen, 2022; Tjabane, 2010). The theory aims to reveal the underlying beliefs, language, and social structures that create and sustain these power relations (Sarmah, 2023). The theory's commitment to transformation and emancipation supports the current study's aim of the development of social justice competences. Critical theory serves as a lens through which to examine the literature in order to better understand the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences. This theory also provides a framework for determining whether the content and teaching strategies of Religious Studies actively foster social justice competences or unintentionally perpetuate societal injustices. The approach thus takes the form of analysing the Religious Studies curriculum and teaching materials in order to obtain the desired result.

According to Crossman (2019), critical theory originated from the Frankfurt School and was particularly influenced by first-generation researchers such as Horkheimer, who intended to

create a society free of injustice and oppression. Tjabane (2010) acknowledges that studying social mechanisms that perpetuate injustice is an essential component of critical theory. This theory critically examines traditional ideas that motivate the oppression of marginalised communities. Interestingly, this viewpoint is consistent with Horkheimer's (1972) position that a theory becomes essential when it seeks to liberate people from social issues. In other words, to consider a theory critical, it should critique the current social reality, identify change agents, provide explicit standards for criticism, and suggest attainable goals for social transformation. The emphasis on transformation and emancipation aligns with the current study's focus on the development of social justice competences through Religious Studies. Critical theory enables a literature search for understanding the importance of Religious Studies in helping individuals escape the challenges of society, and fosters a commitment to social justice perspectives.

Hannam and May (2022) emphasise that critical theory argues for taking into account marginalised groups' experiences and viewpoints. It emphasises the significance of an education that recognises learners' diverse cultures and points of view in order to prevent disregarding their experiences and perpetuating social dominance. Furthermore, critical theory emphasises the significance of involving learners in dialogues to promote social justice competences (Klaasen, 2023). This feature of the ability to create dialogues may assist in the search for literature-based pedagogical strategies that initiate dialogues about social justice content. It also enables the analysis of relevant teaching methods utilised in Lesotho secondary Religious Studies to develop social justice competences.

Furthermore, Hannam and May (2022) suggest that critical theory promotes human agency, which is defined as individuals' ability to take action and make decisions that affect their lives and the wider community. This factor is critical in determining how learners' participation in Religious Studies can enable them to develop social justice competences. Critical theory focuses on empowering individuals to critically engage with societal norms, values, and structures, fostering their ability to shape their understanding of social justice principles (Kimanen, 2022). Exploring the relationship between Religious Studies and social justice competences reveals that critical theory guides the search for pedagogies that promote critical thinking about religious teachings and their impact on social systems (Klaasen, 2023; Orner, 2024). The theory further motivates a search for literature that addresses the challenges that

Religious Studies encounters with regard to the promotion of social justice competences in Lesotho.

In the 21st century's educational landscape, critical theory incorporates principles from second-generation critical theorists, including Habermas and Freire. Morrow and Torres (2003) emphasise that these scholars address modern societal issues and suggest answers for achieving social justice through the promotion of social justice competences. Habermas, in particular, focuses on present societal issues that contribute to injustice and therefore develops the theory of communicative action. This theory, which draws its principles from critical theory, emphasises the significance of language and dialogue for developing our social environment. In relation to Religious Studies, this emphasises the significance of using interactive methods in order to promote learners' development of social justice competences. This notion drives the investigation into whether Religious Studies in Lesotho provides an environment for open discussions of taught Religious Studies concepts, thus allowing learners to deeply reflect on their social justice competences.

Furthermore, the concept of "communicative action" is rooted in the framework of the "lifeworld," which represents the shared information, norms, and meanings held together by individuals in a community (Pollefeyt, 2020). When evaluating the impact of Religious Studies on developing social justice competences, it is obvious that Religious Studies offer an important impact on this lifeworld by changing learners' views and fostering social justice competences. Morrow and Torres (2003) indicate that Habermas proposes that changes in the lifeworld could occur under certain conditions, indicating that what learners learn in Lesotho's religious studies may vary over time due to educational updates such as curriculum reforms. Therefore, incorporating Habermas' ideas may help us understand how Religious Studies in Lesotho, learners' discussions about the subject, and the lifeworld all influence learners' decisions and opinions on social justice.

Along similar lines, Freire expresses concerns about contemporary injustices. In contrast to Habermas, Freire endorses critical pedagogy as a solution to prevailing injustices (Olave et al., 2023; Torres et al., 2023). What is important to understand here is that Freirean critical pedagogy draws on critical theory, utilising its principles to promote social justice competences within the educational setting. It advocates for pedagogies that consider the experiences and perspectives of marginalised groups, emphasising the importance of incorporating diverse

backgrounds to avoid devaluing these experiences and perpetuating social dominance (Dahlgren, 2022; Hailes et al., 2021). This critical pedagogy aims to conscientise learners to change their learning environment to be democratic, promote social justice competences, and facilitate progressive transformation (Kimanen, 2022; Leung, 2020; Tjabane, 2010).

Both perspectives from Habermas and Freire are relevant to understanding the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences. In connection with this study, Religious Studies may play a crucial role in promoting social justice competences by encouraging freedom and fostering relationships between teachers and learners (Pietersen, 2023). This approach has the potential to foster informed empathy and the development of social justice competences in educational settings. In the scope of this review, the Freirean concept of critical pedagogy, which uses principles of critical theory, operates as a guide to the literature search for effective pedagogies in the teaching of Religious Studies for the promotion of social justice competences. Critical pedagogy provides a lens through which to analyse the applicability of democratic teaching methods that stimulate student-teacher interaction connected to Religious Studies in Lesotho.

In conclusion, critical theory provides a complete framework for investigating the role of religious studies in developing social justice competences in three secondary schools in the Leribe district. Within the context of this literature review, the theoretical framework serves as a lens to examine how Religious Studies addresses social challenges and fosters social justice competencies in Lesotho. Freire's support for critical pedagogy as a strategy for countering injustice emphasises the critical importance of incorporating different learner views and experiences into educational processes to foster social justice competences. The literature search, which is influenced by critical pedagogy, illuminates possible teaching methodologies that could be employed in Religious Studies for developing social justice competences. By identifying appropriate Religious Studies methods and recognising challenges to effective teaching of Religious Studies, learners can better gain social justice competences, appreciate marginalised groups, engage in dialogues on social justice matters, and promote human agency.

Both the literature review and the theoretical framework play a key role in determining the role of Lesotho's Religious Studies in developing social justice competences. When critical theory is employed to analyse data on Religious Studies in Lesotho, the focus is on determining whether the subject promotes social justice competences or perpetuates inequalities by ignoring

important information about power dynamics and inclusivity within the subject curriculum. Furthermore, both the theoretical framework and the literature review play an important role in determining if the teaching methods used in Religious Studies at the selected secondary schools in Leribe have the potential to develop social justice competences in learners.

.2.2 The importance of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences

Religious Studies plays a critical role in the development of social justice competences aimed at creating an equitable and just society. This viewpoint is specifically related to the comprehensive study conducted by Sporre (2020), who evaluated the curricula of various countries, including South Africa, Canada's Québec region, Sweden, Namibia, and the US state of California regarding their role in promoting social justice. One of the most significant findings from this evaluation is that the curricula of these countries and regions incorporate content related to social justice. For example, learners are introduced to diversities within society, including aspects such as religious affiliations and gender. This introduction to societal diversities is intended to cultivate values, attitudes, and behaviours associated with social justice.

Kimainen (2022) provides further evidence to support the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice. Kimainen's (2022) evidence highlights that the Religious Studies curriculum in Finland underwent a revision to address issues of oppression and inequalities. This effort to update the Religious Studies curriculum reinforces the assertion that Religious Studies plays a vital role in fostering social justice competences, which are increasingly important in today's era marked by pervasive social challenges. Furthermore, Balkaya-Ince et al. (2020) concur that Religious Studies encourage civic engagement among learners, providing them with a platform to express their views on oppression and injustices.

Furthermore, Beukes (2023) promotes a social justice approach within religious contexts, stressing the importance of defining social justice, recognising Biblical principles, and taking strong stances on addressing contemporary social issues. Interestingly, these platforms provided by Religious Studies align with Freire's (1973) perspective that education should be transformative. In fact, Freire (1973) advocates for education as a tool to equip learners with relevant competences to address global challenges, including social injustice. From Freire's perspective, integrating learners' personal experiences into the teaching and learning process

is crucial, as it ensures that the knowledge they acquire at school remains relevant. Considering learners' personal experiences and viewpoints, as discussed here, helps learners understand how they can actively advocate for social justice both within and outside the school environment.

2.3   Challenges in implementing social justice in Religious Studies

There is a consensus among researchers, including Carmody (2022), Hannam and May (2022), and Kimanen (2022), that the utilisation of Religious Studies for developing social justice competences encounters serious challenges, necessitating a need for further investigation of these challenges. These researchers highlight challenges including resistance to change, lack of school resources, inadequate teacher training, and assessment gaps. A thorough examination of these obstacles may provide an understanding of the challenging landscape surrounding the successful use of Religious Studies for promoting social justice competences in school environments.

2.3.1   Resistance to change

The literature points to the fact that implementing and promoting social justice competences within Religious Studies may face obstacles. Gallo-Gómez (2023) highlights that resistance to change is a key factor that may have the potential to pose a formidable challenge in promoting social justice; a sentiment that may resonate with the challenges faced in using Religious Studies to promote social justice competences. In fact, resistance to change may pose a major challenge, as traditional perspectives can be against the effective teaching of social justice components for the promotion of social justice competences. Miller and Guerrero (2022) outline several variables, including misunderstandings and cultural orientations, which can lead to resistance to social change. They expound that stakeholders in Religious Studies may fear that introducing social justice themes could dilute religious teachings. This resistance may be apparent in the belief that religious studies should maintain a singular focus on doctrinal teachings, neglecting the relevance of broader societal issues.

Moreover, much of the recent literature argues that teachers' resistance becomes a critical issue, as they are the implementers of the curriculum. For instance, Cochran-Smith (2003) points out that teachers accustomed to the traditional doctrinal approach may resist adapting new methods to include and discuss social justice concepts. Cownie and Bradney (2013) concur that

teachers' resistance may stem from their belief that Religious Studies should solely emphasise doctrinal teachings. The likely results of emphasising doctrinal teaching stimulate the memorisation of Biblical texts and may compromise learners' development of social justice competences. To overcome this resistance, Andrei (2023) and Walidin and Widyanto (2023) maintain that it is crucial to provide training for teachers. The researchers further emphasise that such training may be essential for effective teaching of the subject. It therefore becomes imperative to investigate whether resistance to change may be one of the challenges hampering effective promotion of social justice competences through Religious Studies in Lesotho secondary schools.

2.3.2 Lack of school resources

According to the available literature, limited school resources pose a significant challenge to the teaching and learning of any subject curriculum. According to Archer (2022), the absence of basic resources like desks, textbooks, and essential materials can hinder teachers' ability to effectively incorporate social justice principles into their teaching practices. Jenkins et al. (2020) concur that this scarcity of resources can impact the quality of education provided to learners and limit opportunities for critical discussions on social justice issues within the classroom.

In the context of Religious Studies, the lack of textbooks, including Bibles, arriving late to schools can significantly impede teaching for the development of social justice competences. Mohoebi (2013) highlighted that delays in securing and distributing textbooks negatively affect teaching and learning, potentially hindering the effective delivery of the subject matter. This issue of limited school resources is also affirmed by the government of Lesotho, through the Ministry of Education and Training, that the implementation of the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) framework of 2009 faced various challenges, including a lack of appropriate resources (MoET, 2021). It is crucial to note that the lack of resources and delay in the availability of Religious Studies materials may hinder the comprehensive teaching of social justice principles within the Religious Studies curriculum. Understanding these specific resource gaps and their impact on the promotion of social justice principles within the Religious Studies curriculum is crucial so that teachers may identify strategies to overcome this challenge.

2.3.3 Diversity of religious beliefs

According to the available literature, the implementation of social justice in Religious Studies faces a significant impediment in the form of religious diversity. In particular, Naz and Afzal (2023) indicate that the diversity of religious beliefs among learners could hinder their ability to develop social justice understanding. This challenge may arise from teachers who struggle to find common ground when addressing social justice issues, such as gender equality and rights. Mustahiqurrahman et al. (2023) emphasise that diverse religious beliefs can significantly diverge on issues of social justice. In light of this, adopting an inclusive and culturally relevant approach to social justice content may be challenging for some Religious Studies teachers.

These challenges are visible in Lesotho's context, where various religious beliefs coexist. They include Islam, Hinduism the Baha'i Faith indigenous religions, and Christianity as the dominant faith (Mokotso, 2017). To respond to religious diversity in Lesotho, the aim of Religious Studies is to "develop religious awareness and appreciation of religious diversity" (MoET, 2020). It is therefore essential that Religious Studies teachers emphasise universal social justice competences as a means of respecting diversity. Additionally, teachers must engage learners in interfaith dialogue to facilitate discussions on social justice, enabling all learners to develop social justice competences within the context of diverse religious beliefs (Knoblauch, 2023; Naz & Afzal, 2023; Utami, 2022).

2.3.4 Lack of teacher training

The current literature on teacher training indicates that successful implementation of any curriculum is contingent on ongoing teacher training programmes. However, Edibgo (2023) indicates that the lack of adequate teacher training poses a significant challenge to the effective teaching of Religious Studies for the promotion of social justice competences. Without proper training in teaching Religious Studies for social justice, teachers may shy away from discussing complex social issues and struggle to connect religious teachings with contemporary social justice concepts (Mąkosa, 2020).

In Lesotho, the scarcity of training programmes for curriculum implementation is reported by Selepe (2016), affecting the effective teaching of subject curricula. Wanjau (2019) emphasises that the effectiveness of teaching Religious Studies relies on various factors, including the

relevance and manageability of the curriculum and the availability of qualified and motivated teachers. However, it is common that training programmes in Lesotho primarily focus on piloting schools during the introduction of a curriculum, leading to challenges during the broader roll-out where comprehensive training is lacking in other schools. Consequently, Religious Studies teachers may lack the confidence to guide learners through discussions on social justice issues (Mąkosa, 2020). Ineffective teaching of Religious Studies for the promotion of social justice competences may result in students missing opportunities for meaningful discourse and critical thinking about social concerns. To address this issue, Opik et al. (2023) argue that continuous professional development programmes are necessary for empowering Religious Studies teachers. However, it is necessary to study whether a lack of training is a possible factor hindering the teaching of Religious Studies for the advancement of social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools.

2.3.5 Assessment and evaluation challenges

As Ilechukwu (2014) points out, assessment in Religious Studies is important for evaluating learners' progress and knowledge of diverse religious concepts. According to Johnston (2023), assessment in Religious Studies includes formative, summative, benchmark, and cumulative examinations intended to gather data on learner development and performance. However, Masengwe and Dube (2020) are concerned that traditional methods of assessment may not sufficiently measure the core competences necessary in the twenty-first century.

Researchers such as Hannam and May (2022) and Kimanen (2022) argue that developing social justice competences is the primary objective of Religious Studies, emphasising the need for assessments that target the development of such competences. Ilechukwu (2014) recommends assessments that focus on learners' capacity to connect information from diverse sources rather than simply testing knowledge quantity, thus highlighting the importance of assessing the development of social justice competences. Kukea Shultz and Englert (2023) and Lipiäinen (2020) and raise concerns that conventional methods of assessment provide challenges in monitoring learners' progress in developing social justice competences. The absence of emphasis on real evaluation methodologies such as assessment of performance, reflective assignments, portfolios, and project assessments impedes proper measurement of social justice competences.

In Lesotho, ambiguity in curriculum statements associated with assessment resulted in amendments to the Curriculum and Assessment Policy (CAP) of 2009 (MoET, 2021), which may contribute to teachers' continued use of traditional methods of assessment. This condition may limit the development of competences, notably those related to social justice. The issue at hand is identifying assessment methodologies that properly test learners' grasp and implementation of religious concepts within the framework of social justice; incorporating more than just factual information.

2.4 Teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences

Recently, considerable evidence has accumulated to show that teachers play a significant role in curriculum implementation. In the words of Selepe (2016), "the success, or lack thereof, in any curriculum implementation lies mostly, but not solely, with the teachers, as they are implementers of such reform" (p. 9). It is evident from Selepe's (2016) remarks that achieving the goals of education relies on the effective teaching strategies employed by teachers.

Currently, Religious Studies in Lesotho aims at contributing to the promotion of social justice (MoET, 2019). Consequently, it becomes the responsibility of teachers to ensure the promotion of social justice competences. Further evidence supporting teachers' roles in advancing social justice can be found in Power's (2008) argument, asserting that teachers bear the responsibility of aligning their teaching practices with curriculum and policies to promote social justice. Drawing from the literature, Martin (2015) identifies specific teaching strategies that could be relevant to the promotion of social justice competences. These strategies include critical pedagogy, multicultural education, equity pedagogy, and experiential pedagogy.

2.4.1 Critical pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach rooted in the principles of critical theory, with teachers striving to create a more just and equitable society. Teachers working within the critical pedagogy paradigm are influenced by the work of Paulo Freire (Stromquist, 2014). Freire (1973) opposes the 'banking model' of education, which portrays teachers as depositors of knowledge and skills into passive learners who merely receive and later retrieve this knowledge and skills. The banking approach essentially employs teacher-centred methodologies that deny students the opportunity to actively engage in the knowledge-creation

process. This teaching approach is a clear example of the oppression learners may face in classrooms.

In contrast to this undemocratic banking system, Martin (2015) reveals that Freire (1973) advocates for the problem-posing approach. This approach encourages both teachers and learners to investigate oppressions and injustices to critically analyse and address them. In the context of Religious Studies, critical pedagogy could involve sensitising learners about marginalised groups, the oppressions they face, and potential resolutions to their challenges. According to Morrissey (2023) and Sibbett (2016), critical pedagogy has two dimensions of change: personal change and social change. The assumption is that by sensitising individuals to oppressions and potential resolutions, they ought to adopt a more critical perception of social realities, which in turn should result in social change in the form of a more democratic, just, and liberal society. This intervention is designed to develop social justice competences and empower the marginalised simultaneously.

Moreover, critical pedagogy promotes democratic teaching and learning practices that provide opportunities for learners to engage in discussions about issues of injustice (Lesaoana, 2018). In essence, critical pedagogy advocates for learners, not merely as passive recipients of knowledge but as active participants in addressing issues related to social justice. Hackman (2005) appears to endorse this democratic teaching approach, suggesting that teaching for social justice should not overwhelm learners solely with issues of oppression and injustices but should equip them with the tools needed to combat injustices. Some of these tools include encouraging learners to exercise their rights and participate in campaigns aimed at advocating social justice (Arévalo & García, 2023; Morrissey, 2023). Initiatives such as engaging in campaigns are often considered effective means of developing social justice competences among learners.

2.4.2 Multicultural education

The multicultural teaching strategy aims to transform the school environment to reflect the diverse cultures present within classrooms. To gain a deeper understanding of multicultural education, Hackman (2005) provides this example: In an all-white classroom, the content presented about racism will differ from the content presented in a class with a diverse range of racial identities. Hackman's (2005) justification for these divergent teaching approaches in two

different groups is based on a teacher's need to effectively address learners' unique needs and promote social justice competences. Hackman's (2005) example underscores an important point that the core objective of multicultural education is the development of social justice among learners from diverse cultural backgrounds.

It is crucial at the present moment to acknowledge the perspective of Banks and Banks (2007), who assert that multicultural education strives for cultural democracy. According to Banks and Banks (2007), cultural democracy is built on the premise that all cultural groups should have equal participation and equal rights to political, social, and economic power. In Lesotho secondary schools, cultural democracy implies that students from diverse cultures are valued equally. Certainly, practices such as valuing learners' cultures indiscriminately are likely to promote values and attitudes of respect, acceptance, and tolerance towards other learners, which are closely related to social justice.

In addition to the positive relationships, teachers foster through culturally relevant pedagogy, it is also crucial for them to take keen interest in learning about learners' lives both inside and outside the school context. This places learners' identity at the centre of the teaching and learning process, enabling them to achieve academic success (Byrd, 2021; Martin, 2015). Learners' identities are shaped by their cultural values, practices, and norms. Therefore, when learners' identities are acknowledged and respected, they become empowered and are more likely to succeed academically. Learners' academic success plays a pivotal role in advocating social justice. To support this perspective, Hackman (2005) contends that learners' academic achievement indicates that they have developed critical consciousness, enabling them to challenge cultural norms that perpetuate injustices.

Another vital aspect of an effective multicultural approach is a focus on multicultural competency and prejudice reduction. According to Martin (2015), the journey towards social justice begins with teachers. It is therefore imperative that the beliefs and practices of religious studies teachers be taken into account to ensure that they understand their roles in promoting social justice competences. Castron (2010) calls for pre-service and in-service training to foster cultural competence among teachers. In essence, training is essential for teachers to structure their lessons to incorporate the perspectives of disadvantaged groups. It is undeniable that some of the prevailing injustices and oppressions in schools and society are exacerbated by teachers'

cultural incompetence, as they often fail to address issues of religious and ethnic dominance both in schools and in the broader community. Due to this cultural incompetence, the promotion of social justice competences is compromised.

2.4.3 Equity pedagogy

Equity pedagogy is another approach that Religious Studies teachers can employ to cultivate social justice competences. According to Martin (2015), equity pedagogy posits that learners possess the capacity to achieve specific goals, and the role of education is to provide them with opportunities to do so. One of the opportunities that education can offer learners is to help them comprehend the power dynamics inherent in social systems and, as a result, equip them with the competences needed to address oppressions imposed by these systems. Banks and Banks (2007) and Romanyshyn et al. (2023) emphasise that, in this scenario, a teacher's role is to assist learners in acquiring social justice competences that enable them to critique and question prevailing structures. In the context of Religious Studies, this implies that the discipline must promote competences such as critical thinking and problem-solving skills, which are essential for learners to effectively, address the challenges they encounter.

2.4.4 Experiential approach to learning

The concept of experiential learning is associated with educational philosophers such as Dewey (1963), Freire (1970), and Vygotsky (1978). Despite the distinct backgrounds of these educational thinkers, their theories converge in their approach to teaching and learning. What they have in common is the belief that learning is closely connected to learners' daily experiences (Skrefsrud, 2022). The experiential learning approach emphasises learning through learners' own experiences, providing them with opportunities to critically reflect on these experiences.

In the past, traditional teaching methods often involved teachers transmitting knowledge to passive learners who passively received it. Notably, Freire (1970) criticised this teaching approach, likening it to oppressive practices where teachers viewed learners as empty vessels to be filled with content and knowledge. Similarly, Raselimo and Mahao (2015) point out that John Dewey, an American educational philosopher, shared similar sentiments with Freire (1970) regarding the need for democratic schools. Dewey believed that schools should not

perpetuate injustices and oppressions but should instead be emancipatory in nature. According to Dewey (1963), education that neglects learners' everyday experiences as a starting point for learning is not in the best interest of learners. For Dewey, a learning process that aligns with learners' experiences enables them to relate their learning to their real-life experiences.

In Religious Studies, the experiential learning approach suggests teaching and learning that do not alienate learners from their own experiences. This approach implies that students should actively engage in analysing religious practices and their applicability in real-life settings. The potential benefit of this practice is that learners will realise that learning Religious Studies is not separate from their lives; they can use the competences developed in school to address real-life issues. Additionally, experiential learning encourages collaboration among learners in the classroom (Skrefsrud, 2022). Through this collaborative knowledge-creation process, learners can develop respect and collaboration skills, which are fundamental to social justice.

2.5   Summary

This chapter discussed a critical theory framework as a guide to investigating power structures that perpetuate injustices and inequities. The framework integrates Habermas and Freire's perspectives, emphasising their importance in understanding the impact of Religious Studies on the promotion of social justice competences. Critical theory, additionally, contributes to the quest for effective pedagogies that promote social justice competences through Religious Studies. The chapter also explored the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences, drawing on worldwide cases. In addition, challenges to promoting social justice competences, such as resistance to change, religious diversity, a lack of teacher preparation, and assessment issues, were highlighted in the reviewed literature. The chapter concluded by analysing the literature to examine teaching methodologies such as critical pedagogy, multicultural education, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning to foster social justice competences through Religious Studies. Despite a comprehensive literature assessment, there is a dearth of understanding regarding the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3. Introduction

This chapter discusses the research design and the methodologies employed in the study. The interpretivist paradigm and its associated philosophical assumptions are explored, as they serve as the foundation for this study. Additionally, the chapter focuses on the application of qualitative data collection methods, such as observations and interviews, to gather useful data that was analysed in response to the research questions. Ethical procedures and considerations in conducting empirical research are also thoroughly discussed in this section.

3.1   Study orientation

This study is situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which is primarily based on the notion that knowledge cannot be derived from a single objective reality (Research Methodology, 2016). In other words, it rejects the idea of an objective truth and instead asserts that individuals can interpret their world. Mokotso (2017) shares a similar perspective and concurs that interpretivists adhere to a relativist ontology, which posits that reality is subjective. Facts are rooted in individuals' perceptions. Building upon the concept of interpretivism as explained here, Creswell (2014) emphasises that the interpretivist paradigm provides researchers with an opportunity to gain a deeper understanding of a phenomenon within its context, allowing the findings to be generalised to a broader population. Therefore, this study has adopted the interpretivist paradigm as its foundation to explore the role of Religious Studies in the promotion of social justice competences.

The choice of the interpretivist paradigm in this study is grounded in the belief that it enables the researcher to delve into the lived experiences of teachers actively engaged in teaching Religious Studies. This exploration of teachers' experiences facilitated an examination of the potential effective teaching strategies that can promote social justice competences. Guided by the interpretivist paradigm, the study embraces ontological, epistemological, methodological, axiological, and rhetorical interpretivist assumptions, which are discussed further below.

3.1.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology is the study of the kind of world or the nature of reality the researchers are investigating (Wellington, 2000). It refers to the assumptions about the nature of reality that guide the research. Nyaphisi (2021) further stresses that ontological assumptions respond to the question: "What is there that can be known?" It is important to stress that under the interpretivist paradigm, the ontological assumption holds that various realities reflect people's experiences (Guba & Lincoln, 1994). People have divergent perceptions of the world. For that matter, my perception is that views about the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools differ from one participant to another, including my own assumptions.

3.1.2 Epistemological assumptions

The epistemological assumption of the study, according to Wellington (2000), refers to the manner of understanding and explaining how people know what they know. For the same reason, Bryman (2012) states that epistemology focuses on providing grounds for deciding the kind of knowledge that could be considered legitimate and how it could be acquired. One valuable point raised by Vanson (2014) is that epistemology has its roots in the interactions of people in a social context. As a result, the researcher in this study interacted with participants to construct knowledge.

3.1.3 Methodological assumptions

The assumptions of methodology incorporate the choices researchers make concerning the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques. The interpretivist paradigm emphasises the importance of understanding people's experiences. Even though there is more than one methodological assumption of the interpretivist paradigm, this current study has adopted the philosophical aspect of phenomenology that is concerned with how we know what we know (Mortari & Tarozzi, 2010). It seeks to understand reality at a deeper level of consciousness to understand their lived experiences. For that reason, in the current study, the views of the participants as well as their lived experiences were taken into consideration. Furthermore, interviews were employed since they enabled me to cooperate with the participants, who are the paramount creators of knowledge in this study.

3.1.4 Axiological assumptions

According to Mokotso (2017), axiology is more concerned with values and tries to understand how researchers' values and those of the participants could influence the research process. Mokotso (2017) further stresses that researchers must admit that their beliefs and values, along with those of participants, could shape the study's outcomes and implications. Therefore, it is proper that a researcher convey such values and beliefs to help readers interpret the findings based on the relevant context and to understand the potential biases of the study. For the current study, one assumes that social justice is a crucial goal for society and that it could be promoted through Religious Studies. Moreover, the researcher assumes that competences such as empathy, critical thinking, and inclusivity are essential for building a free world that is envisaged by all.

3.1.5 Rhetoric

Rhetoric refers to the language and communication used in research. It is the art of effective speaking and writing. Rhetoric encompasses how language is employed to organise and sustain social groups, construct meanings and identities, coordinate behaviour, mediate power dynamics, facilitate change, and create knowledge (San Diego State University, 2023). In the context of this research, as suggested by Mokotso (2017), rhetoric implies that the researcher may at times decide on the use of voice, such as the first, second, or third person, when presenting data. Furthermore, Mokotso (2017) points out that the researcher has the option to choose how the collected data is analysed, whether with words or numbers. In the current study, the researcher employed language tailored to influence stakeholders, such as teachers and the Ministry of Education and Training, in a manner that compels them to take action in advocating the promotion of social justice competences. Additionally, narratives were utilised to present data.

3.2 Research approach

In this study, a qualitative research approach was employed to investigate how the teaching and learning of Religious Studies can foster the development of social justice competences among learners in Lesotho secondary schools. The choice of this approach is rooted in Leedy and Ormrod's (2005) assertion that a qualitative research approach is well suited to answering

questions about the intricate nature of a phenomenon and to describing and comprehending that phenomenon from the participants' perspective.

What is noteworthy about Leedy and Ormrod's (2005) assertion is the emphasis placed on the participants' role in generating information for understanding a phenomenon. Given the importance of participants' input, the qualitative approach was deemed appropriate for this study as it enabled me to engage with participants in their natural settings, specifically in secondary schools within the Leribe district. Furthermore, the qualitative approach involves the use of multiple data collection methods (De Gialdino, 2009), which provides the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of how Religious Studies teachers teach to promote social justice competences.

Another advantage of the qualitative approach is that it facilitates studies in real contexts (Marguerite et al., 2006). This is beneficial as it allows the researcher to pose broad questions aimed at exploring, interpreting, and understanding participants' social context and lived experiences. Therefore, this approach assisted me to collaborate with participants to construct interviews that helped uncover the lived experiences of teachers regarding the teaching of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences.

3.3 Research design

A qualitative case study design was employed for this research. It is crucial to specify that this study utilise a qualitative case study, as clarified by Nieuwenhuis (2011), who emphasises that a case study can take either a quantitative or a qualitative form. According to Nieuwenhuis (2011), qualitative case study research is defined as a "systematic inquiry into an event or a set of related events which aims to describe and explain the phenomenon of interest" (p. 75). To comprehend what a case signifies, Simons (2009) highlights that a case represents a problem that requires investigation. In line with Simons' (2009) explanation, there is a need to understand how Religious Studies can contribute to the development of social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools.

There are two primary reasons supporting the selection of the case study design. First, the case study design is inherently descriptive. It allows the researcher to gather comprehensive data that facilitates deeper understanding of the phenomenon under investigation (Merriam, 2009). The aim in this study was to conduct a detailed examination of the problem as specified in

Chapter 1. Secondly, the case study design provides a platform for amplifying the voices of marginalised or disadvantaged groups (Selepe, 2016). In line with this perspective, the case study design appeared appropriate since this study focuses on empowering vulnerable learners who encounter injustices and inequalities both within and outside of schools. This design enabled the understanding of teachers' perspectives on how Religious Studies could be taught in a manner that promotes social justice competences.

3.4 Data collection procedures

3.4.1 Non-participatory observations

Observations can be structured or unstructured, participant or non-participant (Selepe, 2016). Despite the variation in observation methods, this study has opted for non-participatory observations, in which an observer enters the observation setting with clear objectives. In other words, the observer knows precisely what to observe and why it is essential to observe those aspects (Kaphe, 2017). For this study, the interactions between teachers and learners were observed to determine whether the classroom environment was conducive to promoting social justice competences.

Koul et al. (2016) make an interesting point that observations involve various recording techniques to document subject behaviour. These techniques encompass anecdotal records, narrative descriptions, checklists, interviewing, time sampling, frequency counts, and event sampling. This study primarily employed narrative descriptions, allowing the researcher to record continuously and in as much detail as possible, including non-verbal communication, non-verbal cues from the teacher, and non-verbal interactions throughout the session. Additionally, anecdotal records were used, where brief sentences were jotted down in a notebook to capture significant observations.

3.4.2 Semi-structured interviews

Semi-structured interviews were used to collect the data for this study. As Mokhetšengoane (2021) points out, a semi-structured interview centres on the notion that the researcher asks a few questions to the participants while the rest of the questions come unplanned. It is clear from Mokhetšengoane's (2021) remarks that semi-structured interviews use a combination of structured and unstructured interviews since, even though the majority of questions are

unplanned, it cannot be denied that some questions are predetermined. A semi-structured interview has several attractive features, thus making it a compatible method for this study. To start with, Leedy and Ormrod's (2005) maintain that semi-structured interviews develop the relationship between a researcher and the participants so that their experiences can be explored. Furthermore, semi-structured interviews provide spontaneous exploration of topics relevant to the main topic. Based on the benefits of semi-structured interviews highlighted here, teachers were interviewed to gain a deeper understanding of their perspectives on the promotion of social justice competences through Religious Studies.

3.5   Sampling

According to Ary et al. (2010), a sample is a group of individuals chosen to represent the greater population being studied. Researchers, including Boddy (2016), Khalema (2023), and Tutar (2023), believe that sampling in research studies is an important process that involves selecting individuals or items from a broader population to represent the population in question accurately. The sampling strategy used has a considerable impact on the validity of the study's conclusions. Furthermore, Mokati (2023) emphasises that different techniques for sampling are used in research, depending on the study questions and objectives. These techniques include convenience and purposive sampling, both of which are important to the current study's objectives. The study focused on three secondary schools in the Leribe district that offer Religious Studies courses. These schools were purposively selected for the research. Specifically, the sample included: School A, affiliated with the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa, with two participating teachers, School B, affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), with two participating teachers, and School C, also affiliated with the RCC, with two participating teachers. In total, the study involved six teacher participants across the three selected schools.

3.5.1 Sample size

Malterud et al. (2016) indicate that determining an adequate sample size is an essential step in the research's sampling process. In qualitative research, 'data saturation' is often employed to guide the choice of sample size (Mokotso, 2017). Data saturation occurs when no new information or themes emerge from the data, indicating that the sample size is adequate for efficiently answering the research question (Malterud et al., 2016). Researchers often strive for

saturation by conducting enough interviews or observations to capture the breadth and depth of the topic under research (Boddy, 2016). While there are no set guidelines regarding sample size in qualitative research, Tutar (2023) advises researchers to strike a careful balance between having a large enough sample to produce relevant results and avoiding an unmanageable number of participants who may introduce bias. The current study's sample size was set at six participants. This size was designed to guarantee that the data collected was deep and rich while remaining manageable in terms of the number of participants.

3.5.2 Site sampling

Convenience sampling was employed to collect site data. According to Cohen et al. (2007), convenience sampling is also known as incidental or opportunity sampling. In addition, the authors indicate that this sampling technique entails selecting the most nearby individuals to form a sample that would provide the essential data for the research. The researcher chooses participants based on ease of access. Following the detailed description of the convenience sampling technique, this study recognises that Lesotho is divided into ten districts that make up the population. Despite the number of districts, only Leribe was selected because it was easily accessible to the researcher. Living in Leribe meant I was able to access the individuals without incurring huge expenses.

Furthermore, since the research focuses on more than one institution, this study uses a multi-site case study approach (Nkanda, 2017). The study employed purposive sampling to select three church-owned secondary schools from the Leribe secondary school population, two of which are affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church (RCC) and one with the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa (LECSA).

Purposive sampling, as defined by Cohen et al. (2007), is a qualitative sampling method in which a researcher selects cases for the sample based on their suitable features. Purposive sampling, as the name implies, is employed when the researcher selects specific elements to include in the sample for a specific study purpose. Purposive sampling was used in this study for a variety of reasons, including the fact that Religious Studies is not commonly taught in non-denominational schools. Religious Studies is typically taught in church-owned schools, with some making it a compulsory subject. Furthermore, by selecting schools from various faith groups, the researcher made certain that the data acquired was rich. This is consistent with

Cohen et al.'s (2007) viewpoint that purposive sampling allows researchers to select examples from a varied population, increasing the depth and variety of the data collected. Below are the profiles of the schools, which are identified as School A, School B, and School C for confidentiality reasons.

School A

School A is located in Pitseng, which is 27 kilometres from Hlotse, a town in Leribe district. It is renowned for its commitment to delivering high-quality education that encompasses academic excellence and holistic development. Having been established under the Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa (LECSA), School A embraces the principles and values advocated by this religious affiliation. As a missionary school, School A emphasises morals and values alongside academic instruction. During data collection, the school had 700 learners and 26 teachers. Learners at School A choose between geography, biology, and Religious Studies.

School B

School B is also located in Pitseng in Leribe district. This school, being a missionary school established under the Roman Catholic Church (RCC), is well known for its commitment to learners' moral development since the school is administered by Sisters from the RCC. When data was collected, the school had 645 enrolled learners and 28 teachers. Learners in this school have to choose between Geography, Biology, Design, and Technology.

School C

School C is located in Mahobong, which is 17 kilometres from Hlotse. This school is affiliated with the Roman Catholic Church. It began as a junior secondary school; as a result, it is gradually developing and had 350 learners and 14 teachers when this study was carried out. In this school, learners have no subjects to choose from.

3.5.3   Participants' sampling

To select the participating teachers, purposive sampling was employed, targeting six religious studies teachers. While there were 10 Religious Studies teachers across the three selected schools, only two teachers from each school were eligible for inclusion in the sample. The focus on Religious Studies teachers was rooted in the assumption that they possess extensive

knowledge and insights into understanding the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences. As it was emphasised, the decision to have a sample size of six teachers aligned with the concept of data saturation as endorsed by Malterud et al. (2016) and Mokotso (2017). The rationale behind this approach was to select a small sample to extract comprehensive and rich data from these participants. Furthermore, the deliberate selection of teachers from different church denominations aimed to achieve maximum variation, as emphasised by Cohen et al. (2007), which ensures the richness of the data collected. Table 3.5 below presents the participants in the study.

Participants	School	Affiliation
Teacher 1	School A	Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa
Teacher 2	School A	Lesotho Evangelical Church of Southern Africa
Teacher 3	School B	Roman Catholic Church
Teacher 4	School B	Roman Catholic Church
Teacher 5	School C	Roman Catholic Church
Teacher 6	School C	Roman Catholic Church

TABLE 3.5: PARTICIPANTS, THEIR SCHOOLS AND CHURCH DENOMINATIONS

3.6 Data analysis procedures

According to Maslianko and Sielskyi (2021), data analysis is the systematic process of investigating, cleaning, transforming, and interpreting data in order to obtain relevant information and inform decision-making. Similarly, Richmond (2006) defines data analysis as the process of making sense of large amounts of data gathered through research methodologies, either qualitative or quantitative. Since this study employed qualitative data collection methods, qualitative data analysis techniques were also utilised. Creswell (2008) describes qualitative data analysis as a process of categorising, describing, and synthesising the data. Depending on the type of data, various qualitative data analysis techniques could be applied, such as qualitative analysis, model comparison, and thematic analysis (Vogel et al., 2021). Given the qualitative nature of the data collected in this study, thematic data analysis techniques were employed.

3.6.1 Thematic data analysis approach

This case study specifically employed the thematic analysis model developed by Braun and Clarke (2006). Thematic data analysis, as outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), involves a structured six-phase approach for analysing qualitative data (Zhang et al., 2023). These phases typically include familiarising oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and defining those themes, and finally producing a comprehensive report based on the identified themes. This analytical approach was chosen as it enabled me to gain a deeper understanding of the data, extract meaningful themes, and contribute valuable insights regarding the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences among secondary school learners.

3.6.2 Inductive (bottom-up) data analysis

Braun and Clarke (2006) emphasise that thematic analysis can be conducted using both deductive (top-down) and inductive (bottom-up) approaches. The researchers further indicate that the deductive approach is researcher-driven, allowing the analyst to examine the data through the lens of their theoretical interests in the issues being investigated. Supporting this view, Martinello et al. (2020) explain that in the top-down, deductive approach, the researcher typically begins the analysis with themes identified through a literature review. In contrast, Dawadi (2020) indicates that the inductive approach allows themes to emerge directly from the data itself, without the researcher being constrained by existing themes from other studies. For this study, the inductive data analysis approach was employed. This approach enabled me to gain a comprehensive and holistic perspective on the data regarding the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences among secondary school learners without being limited by preconceived themes.

3.6.3 Verbatim quotations

Verbatim quotations were included as a crucial component of the data analysis. According to Khalema (2023), the use of verbatim quotations in qualitative research enables researchers to directly capture participant voices and viewpoints, which improves the validity and authenticity of the research findings. The significance of verbatim citations is further emphasised by Yeter et al. (2023). Firstly, the authors observe that by using the participants' actual language,

researchers can capture the feelings and distinctive expressions that may be lost in translation. Secondly, by using exact quotes, it is possible to give a comprehensive and in-depth explanation of the data while also gaining greater knowledge of the context and significance of participants' comments. Finally, the quotes provide concrete evidence that maintains transparency and guarantees that the voices of the participants are accurately reflected in the study results. Verbatim quotations are used in the data analysis of the current study, according to Yeter et al.'s (2023) recommendation, to enhance the reliability and rigour of the research.

3.6.4 The six phases of thematic data analysis

First phase: familiarisation with the data obtained

In the first stage of the thematic data analysis process outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006), researchers are advised to thoroughly review and engage with the collected data. This involves closely examining the data to identify underlying patterns, important points, and potential themes. For this study, a mobile phone was used to record interviews, and an observation sheet to note key details during data collection. The data from these sources was then transcribed to allow for deeper analysis. This phase of engagement with the data is an important first step in the thematic analysis process. It enabled me to obtain an extensive understanding of the information gathered and begin to discover potential themes that could be further investigated.

Second phase: Generating codes obtained

The second phase of thematic data analysis is to generate initial codes from the acquired data (Braun & Clarke, 2006). This process of developing codes allows the researcher to begin arranging and categorising the information, laying the groundwork for the subsequent stages of thematic analysis. The researcher employs labels or codes for portions of data according to their content and meaning (Nowell et al., 2017). These codes serve as the foundation for discovering patterns, themes, and correlations in the dataset. Concerning this study, the interview and observation data was coded, and this was data that related to the research topics. The data was coded using different coloured highlighters and the codes were organised.

Third phase: searching for themes

According to Vaismoradi et al. (2013), this phase of data analysis involves a comprehensive exploration of the dataset to reveal recurring themes. As indicated by Vaismoradi and

Snelgrove (2019), the identified themes are the key outcome of the data analysis process, as they constitute repeated ideas and enable the researcher to address research questions effectively. As outlined by Doğusan and Koçak (2021), the process of recognising themes necessitates a systematic approach to identify similarities and disparities within the data. The primary objective is to uncover the fundamental essence of the overarching themes that portray the important content in the dataset. In this particular study, the researcher meticulously reviewed the transcripts of interviews and observations multiple times to gain a comprehensive understanding of teachers' viewpoints and teaching strategies employed in teaching religious studies for fostering social justice competence. Themes were then formulated and data was presented in line with those themes.

Fourth phase: reviewing themes

According to McCarron et al. (2021), the next step involves the researcher closely evaluating the themes that have been identified to ensure they appropriately reflect the material's details and content. In this phase, researchers evaluate each theme's consistency and relevance, considering how well it reflects the research objectives. According to Mador et al. (2019), this stage also enables researchers to ensure the themes are based on the data and supported, ensuring credibility and dependability of the general analysis. In order to conduct the current investigation, the researcher went over the themes identified in the earlier stage and made necessary modifications and developments. Then I checked whether the themes made sense and how well they related to the coded data extracts. I also read the data associated with each theme to confirm that the themes were supported by evidence. This review and refinement of the themes was a crucial step in ensuring the analysis accurately represents the insights captured in the data. It helped the researcher develop a robust and well-supported set of themes to address the research objectives.

Fifth phase: naming and defining the themes obtained

According to Caulfield (2019), the fifth phase involves naming and defining the themes that have emerged from the data analysis. This stage requires the researcher to carefully review the identified themes, provide clear and concise labels for each one, and precisely define the essence of each theme based on the content and patterns observed in the data. Murray et al. (2023) further explain that by naming and defining the themes, researchers establish a coherent

structure for organising and interpreting the data. This allows for a deeper understanding of the underlying concepts and insights captured within the themes. For this study, the researcher specified and named the particular themes that had been identified through the analysis process. This helped create a clear and structured way to present and interpret the key findings from the data. This theme naming and definition stage is essential for communicating the research outcomes in a meaningful and well-organised manner. It supports the researcher's ability to effectively convey the insights gained from the data.

Sixth phase: Generating a report

According to Nurhalimah et al. (2022), the final stage of the process involves the researcher generating a report based on the themes identified through the qualitative data analysis. Jahangir et al. (2022) further explain that during this phase, researchers organise and structure the themes in a coherent manner, often supported by illustrative quotes or examples from the data. This helps enhance the credibility and richness of the report. For this study, the researcher engaged with the data collected through interviews and observations to generate the key themes. Codes were used to identify interesting features within the data. The themes were then cross-referenced against the original research questions to ensure the data corresponded with the study's focus. This reporting stage allowed me to present the findings in a structured and evidence-based way, drawing on the thematic analysis to communicate the insights gained from the qualitative data. Supporting the themes with relevant examples from the data strengthened the overall quality and trustworthiness of the research report. A summary of the six phases of thematic data analysis employed in the study is illustrated in Table 3.6 below.

Phase	Tasks
Familiarisation with the data obtained	- Transcribe data from interviews and observations. - Identify underlying patterns, important points, and potential themes.
Generating codes	- Develop initial codes. - Label and categorise portions of data according to content and meaning. - Organise coded data using different coloured highlighters.
Searching for themes	- Explore the dataset.

	- Identify similarities and disparities.
	- Formulate themes.
Reviewing themes	- Evaluate themes.
	- Check consistency and relevance.
	- Refine themes.
Naming and defining the themes	- Label themes.
	- Define themes.
Generating a report	- Organise themes.
	- Support themes with quotes/examples.
	- Present findings coherently.

TABLE 3.6: SIX PHASES OF THEMATIC DATA ANALYSIS

3.7   Study rigour

Trustworthiness is a crucial aspect of research as it guarantees the credibility, dependability, confirmability, and transferability of the study's findings (Thobi, 2018). To ensure trustworthiness, the researcher addressed the following aspects: credibility, dependability, conformability, and transferability.

a) Credibility

Credibility refers to "the confidence of the researcher about the findings" (Thobi, 2018, p. 56). Furthermore, credibility plays a vital role in substantiating the authenticity and applicability of research results, guaranteeing their suitability for guiding decisions, formulating policies, and stimulating additional research endeavours (Soderberg et al., 2020). To attain credibility, triangulation was employed, as multiple sources of data were utilised, including non-participatory observations and semi-structured interviews.

b) Conformability

According to Ho et al. (2007) and Thobi (2018), conformability in research refers to the degree of transparency, consistency, and impartiality in the research procedures. Claidière and Whiten (2012) maintain that conformability ensures that the outcomes and analysis of a research study are firmly grounded in the data collected and analysed, rather than being influenced by the researchers' own preconceptions or biases. To ensure the conformability of the study, the

researcher provided a robust methodology that enables any reader to assess the level of conformability.

c) Dependability

Dependability in research refers to the stability and consistency of the data and findings over time. It is associated with the degree to which the research procedures are thoroughly documented, allowing another researcher to replicate the study and obtain similar results (Thobi, 2018). In other words, dependability ensures that the research process is logical, traceable, and well-documented. This means that if the study were to be repeated under similar conditions, it would yield consistent and reliable results (Zagel & Lohmann, 2020). To ensure the dependability of this study, the researcher meticulously documented the steps in data collection with the primary intent of enabling any researcher to achieve similar results should they wish to replicate the investigation.

d) Transferability

According to Maxwell (2021), transferability refers to the ability of research findings, methodologies, and conclusions to be applied in multiple contexts, populations, or locations. In this case, the researcher extensively documented the approach, allowing future researchers to use and contextualise the findings in a variety of settings. This strategy broadens the research's applicability and effect by allowing knowledge to be applied to similar concerns or challenges in different situations. Table 3.7 below summarises the process of ensuring trustworthiness in this study.

Rigour criteria	Description	The research contribution
Credibility	The researcher's confidence in the findings, and the authenticity and applicability of research results are important.	Employed triangulation, using multiple sources of data including non-participatory observations and semi-structured interviews.
Conformability	The degree of transparency, consistency, and impartiality in the research procedures.	Provided a rich methodology that enables readers to assess the level of conformability.

Dependability	The stability and consistency of the data and findings over time.	The data collection steps were documented.
Transferability	The extent to which the research findings, methods, and conclusions can be applied or generalised to different contexts.	Provided a detailed account of the methodology to allow future scholars to adopt the findings and contextualise them in different settings.

TABLE 3.7: TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

3.8 Ethical considerations

Studies of this nature are expected to adhere to a set of ethical principles. The current study, therefore, was guided by several ethical requirements as outlined below.

a) **The Principle of Informed Consent and Voluntary Participation**

An informed consent form was developed for participants to sign before their engagement in the research. This form ensures the protection of participants' rights during data generation. The consent form includes the following elements, as proposed by Creswell (2009):

- Identification of the researcher
- Identification of the sponsoring institution
- Explanation of how participants were selected
- Identification of the research's purpose
- Explanation of the benefits of participation
- Clarification of the level and type of participant involvement
- Notation of potential risks to participants
- Assurance of confidentiality
- Confirmation that participants can withdraw at any time
- Provision of contact information for any questions or concerns.

I also obtained a consent letter from the Ministry of Education and Training in Leribe district after informing them of the intended research initiative in the three respective schools.

Furthermore, separate letters were directed to the principals of the selected schools to seek permission to conduct the study.

b) The Principle of Confidentiality and Anonymity

The confidentiality of school and individual names was ensured by using descriptive labels such as "School A" and "Teacher 1". This practice aligns with Creswell's (2009) recommendation to protect the anonymity of individuals by dissociating names, roles, and places from responses during the coding process.

c) Addressing anxiety and distress

To mitigate anxiety and distress, the researcher sent permission-seeking letters promptly to the respective participants. These letters provided comprehensive information about the study, including its purpose, the time allocated for data collection, and the dates involved.

d) Prevention of exploitation

Participants were asked for their consent before the data collection process began. Both the researcher and participants should benefit from the research, as emphasised by Creswell (2009). To prevent exploitation, participants were involved as co-researchers throughout the research process.

e) Protection of intellectual property

To safeguard intellectual property, the researcher gave proper credit to original works and avoided duplicating other researchers' work. This was ensured through effective paraphrasing, summarising, and proper citation.

f) Avoiding data misrepresentation and deception

Deception, as defined by Cohen et al. (2007), refers to not informing people that they are being researched. To avoid deception, transcripts of data collected from research instruments were shared with participants before publication to allow for corrections.

g) Consideration of communitarianism

The researcher respected the cultural backgrounds and denominational cultures of each church denomination involved in the study.

h) Care theory

The study is focused on fostering social justice competences through Religious Studies, benefiting both the government's promotion of inclusive policies and social cohesion.

i) Inclusive language

The language used throughout the research is inclusive and takes into account the diverse nature of groups, including marginalised communities.

j) Avoidance of disruption

Following Creswell's (2009) advice, I accorded due respect to the research sites by minimising disruption. Interviews and observations were conducted efficiently to ensure minimal disruption to the schools' normal operations.

3.9 Summary

The current study employed a qualitative case study approach to investigate the topic as the chapter described. The chapter presented the processes used in the investigation, such as the study's rigour, population, data collection tools, and ethical considerations. The research methodologies discussed here are also informed by the critical theory derived from the literature review.

Chapter 4: Data Presentation, Interpretation and Analysis

4. Introduction

This chapter presents and analyses the study's findings, which emerged from classroom observations and semi-structured interviews with six participants identified as teachers from three schools - School A, School B, and School C - ensuring confidentiality. Critical theory guides the interpretation and analysis process, allowing for an in-depth examination of teaching and learning techniques in Religious Studies to accomplish the objectives of the research. Thematic data analysis has been used, which entails finding emerging themes and patterns to provide an integrated interpretation of data that aligns with the study objectives. The chapter begins by describing the demographics of the study participants. The subsequent section emphasises findings based on the following two research questions (RQs):

1. What is the role of Religious Studies in the promotion of social justice competences in Lesotho?

2. What are the relevant Religious Studies teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences in Lesotho?

4.1 Biographical information of the participants

Label	Sex	Age	Years of experience	Qualification	School	Specialisation
T1	F	50	26	B. Ed. Hon	A	Religious Studies & English
T2	F	39	17	B. Ed.	A	Religious Studies & English
T3	M	38	15	B. Ed.	B	Religious Studies & English
T4	M	29	2	B. Ed.	B	Religious Studies & Sesotho
T5	F	43	20	Dip Ed.	C	Religious Studies & Sesotho

T6	M	30	7	Dip Ed.	C	Religious Studies & Sesotho

TABLE 4.1: BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 4.1 presents a description of the participants who took part in both observations and interviews. The descriptions include participants' gender, age, experience level, qualifications and subject specialisation. Each row in the table corresponds to a different participant, designated by a label (T1 to T6, Teacher 1, Teacher 2, and so on). Table 4.1 shows that there were three male and three female participants in the study. These individuals had varied levels of teaching experience, ranging from 2 to 26 years. The observations were carried out on the same interview days for each participant. The two processes ran from January 30 to February 13, 2024. Teachers participated in 40-minute observations throughout the project, whereas the interview sessions lasted 15 to 20 minutes at participants' workplaces.

4.2   RQ1: The role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences in Lesotho

This section investigated the possible role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences in secondary school learners. To examine the relationship between Religious Studies and social justice, I observed and conducted semi-structured interviews with six Religious Studies teachers. The findings from both classroom observations and interviews were thoroughly investigated and assessed to ensure reliability and dependability. The data was triangulated by comparing responses from different data collection methods, resulting in a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences in Lesotho. The succeeding section of this chapter presents the findings from interviews and observations performed in three schools, which provide insight into the views and practices surrounding the integration of social justice components within Religious Studies.

4.2.1   Classroom atmosphere and interactions

This observation section presents the overall social and relational factors within the Religious Studies classroom setting, looking at both the nature of the teacher-learner relationship as well as the interactions and cooperation among the learners themselves. That is, the observation

looked into the inclusiveness, and cooperative atmosphere, which is crucial for facilitating effective learning for fostering social justice competences.

4.2.2 Lesson observations at School A

Teachers 1 and 2 represented school A. During the observation of Teacher 1's Grade 10a class, several practices were perceived that promoted equality, fairness, and respect in the classroom. When introducing a lesson on Matthias replacing Judas, the teacher initiated a stimulating discussion on the concepts of leadership and authority. This discussion method encouraged the majority of learners to participate actively. Notably, the teacher acknowledged the learners' responses by writing them on the board and discussing them further. Additionally, the teacher was noticed randomly calling on learners from different parts of the classroom. This motivated them to raise their hands, knowing they had an equal chance of being chosen. This impartial method of selecting participants created a supportive and respectful environment where every learner's viewpoint was valued.

During the lesson, the teacher organised the class into groups to investigate different forms of authority. This group work approach promoted mutual respect and cooperation as learners worked together. The observer noted a commendable moment when the teacher moved between groups, offering guidance and support. This action promoted active teacher-learner interaction, which helped learners feel encouraged in their learning process. Upon completion of the assigned task, all the groups reported their results to the class. This activity of presentations enhanced learners' engagement and peer support in completing the assigned task. Another remarkable incident observed was when Teacher 1 concluded the lesson. The teacher summarised the key ideas by asking learners: *"What have we learned today?"* This approach used by the T1 to summarise the lesson seemed to instil in learners a sense of ownership and responsibility for their learning, as reflected by their eagerness to respond.

 In conclusion, Teacher 1's Grade 10a class in School A proved to be an excellent example of how to create a supportive and engaging learning atmosphere in the classroom. The active teacher-learner interaction was evident when the teacher initiated a discussion on leadership and authority. The discussion encouraged active participation among learners, promoting a sense of equality and fairness. Additionally, the teacher's engagement with learners' movement between groups to provide guidance further enhanced the teacher-learner interaction, thus

fostering a supportive learning environment. Regarding learner interactions, the division of the class into groups encouraged respect and collaboration between learners, which helped them work together productively to finish assignments. Working in groups promoted participation and peer assistance, which improved the educational process as a whole. In brief, Teacher 1's methods effectively promoted equality, fairness, and respect, cultivating a cooperative and inclusive classroom atmosphere conducive to the development of social justice competences among learners.

Turning now to the observation of Teacher 2's Grade 10b class, the lesson centred on the parable of the widow's son from Luke 7:11–17. It was impressive to see how active the teacher was in fostering a respectful and cooperative learning environment. For example, the decision to use discussion as a teaching approach, as shown in Figure 4.1, promoted open discussion and dialogue in the classroom.

FIGURE 1: VALUE-BASED TEACHING OBJECTIVE

The discussion approach employed in the lesson stimulated reflection on the marginalised status of widows in both the historical context of Jesus and the contemporary context of Lesotho. The observer recognised that by getting learners involved in the discussions, the teacher helped them develop empathy and compassion. As one learner put it, *"It was unfortunate to be a widow, but people could be the ones helping widows since they did not*

choose to be widows.'' These responses demonstrated the teacher's success in helping learners develop social justice awareness.

Furthermore, the teacher told learners to collaborate in their respective groups and discuss how Jesus' treatment of widows can teach them how to coexist peacefully with widows in their societies. The assessment criterion of assessment objective two (AO), which was written on the board illustrated in Figure 4.2, guided learners in applying Biblical lessons to real-life situations when they presented their responses in groups. The observer saw that the learners were motivated to collaborate on this exercise.
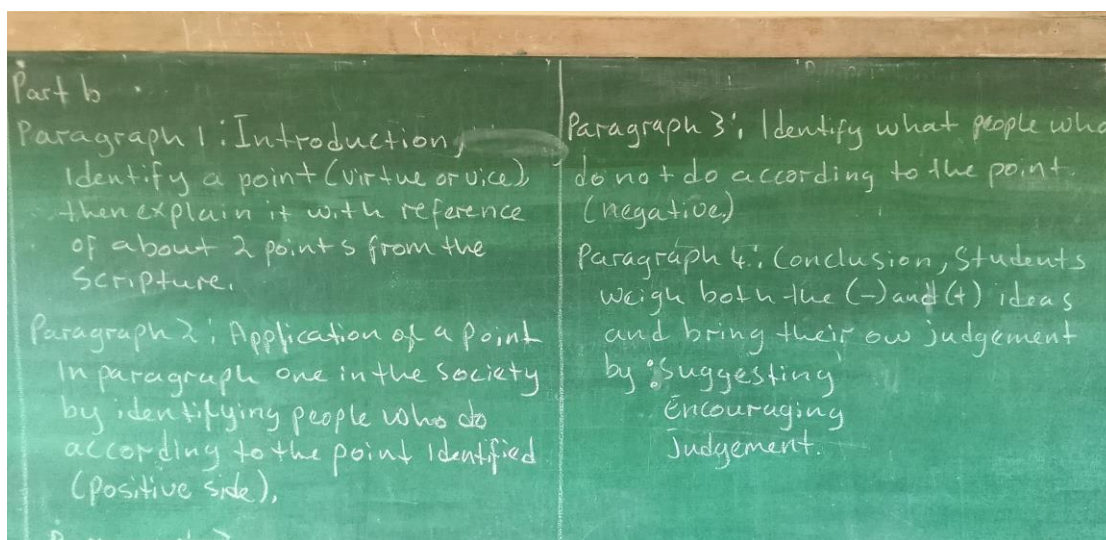
FIGURE 2: ANSWERING CRITERIA FOR ASSESSMENT OBJECTIVE (AO2)

Even though the role-play methodology was included in the lesson plan, the teacher did not involve learners in it. This omission may have hindered learners' participation in the lesson and jeopardised their ability to develop social justice competences.

In conclusion, Teacher 2's Grade 10b class highlighted the teacher's dedication to creating an inclusive and cooperative classroom environment conducive to promoting social justice competencies. The teacher's emphasis on mutual respect and cooperation was evident through the choice of teaching methods, such as discussion and role-play, aimed at encouraging open dialogue and reflection. While the discussion method effectively prompted learners to engage with social justice themes, such as empathy and compassion, through reflection on the conditions of widows, the omission of role-play from the lesson plan may have limited learners'

active participation and engagement. Despite this shortfall, the teacher successfully fostered a cooperative learning environment by organising group discussions on applying Biblical teachings to real-life situations. This collaborative task facilitated peer interaction, shared perspectives, and knowledge co-construction among learners, aligning with the promotion of social justice competences. Generally, while there were some missed opportunities for maximising learner engagement, Teacher 2's efforts in creating a cooperative classroom atmosphere demonstrate a commitment to developing social justice awareness and fostering inclusive learning experiences among learners.

Summary of observation findings in School A

Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2's observations reflect their proactive engagement with learners, fostering an inclusive atmosphere where every learner's opinion is valued. Both teachers effectively facilitated discussions and group activities, encouraging active participation and contribution from learners. Furthermore, both teachers promoted mutual respect and cooperation among learners through organising group work and collaborative tasks. By working together to investigate and discuss various topics, learners shared ideas, engaged in meaningful dialogue, and co-constructed knowledge, thereby enhancing their understanding of social justice principles.

However, differences were noted in the teachers' approaches to learners' engagement and reflection. While Teacher 1 effectively utilised summarisation techniques to encourage learner reflection, Teacher 2 missed opportunities for maximising learner engagement, such as omitting a role-play activity from the lesson plan. Overall, the teacher's approaches to facilitating thoughtful discussions and using random selection helped foster a classroom atmosphere characterised by equality, fairness, and mutual respect. Despite these differences, both teachers demonstrated a commitment to developing social justice competences and fostering inclusive learning experiences among learners through proactive engagement, collaborative learning activities, and opportunities for reflection.

4.2.3 Lesson observations at School B

Teachers represented in School B are Teachers 3 and 4. In the classroom observation of Teacher 3 in Grade 10a, the teacher began the lesson with a recap of the previous lesson through this question: *"Can you provide reasons why Jesus taught through parables?"* This question

encouraged learners to participate and share their thoughts, setting the tone for a classroom atmosphere where every learner's opinion was valued. This demonstrated the teacher's commitment to promoting equality and respect by ensuring all learners had an opportunity to contribute to the discussion.

During the lesson, the teacher engaged learners in a discussion on the moral value of the parable of the prodigal son. The classroom was characterised by eager participation from learners while responding. The platform of discussion created by the teacher provided learners with opportunities to engage with values related to social justice, including compassion, empathy, and forgiveness, which were identified by learners during the discussion. This could be proved by learners' responses that *"the parable teaches us not to be greedy"* and *"it teaches us to forgive others."* This active participation of learners underlined the teacher's success in fostering an environment where learners felt comfortable expressing their thoughts and reflecting on important moral values. The interaction between the teacher and the learners, as well as among the learners themselves, displayed a classroom atmosphere that emphasised respect and fairness.

Before concluding the lesson, Teacher 3 assigned learners to discuss the lessons they could learn about God's justice against sinners. The observation noted some aspects of classroom interaction and cooperation. For instance, learners were seen working together in groups, discussing and sharing viewpoints. They were noticed listening to each other's viewpoints and building on them, demonstrating a collective effort to understand and apply the lesson. These social and relational factors within the classroom setting were instrumental in promoting an environment conducive to the development of social justice competences. One interesting point was that the teacher was moving between groups and guiding group members. This approach by the teacher further promoted an inclusive and supportive classroom environment.

In conclusion, observing Teacher 3 revealed a cohesive and inclusive learning environment characterised by strong teacher-learner relationships, positive interactions among learners, and effective cooperation in completing assigned tasks. The teacher's emphasis on initiating discussions and valuing every learner's opinion created a sense of mutual respect and active engagement, ensuring that all voices were heard and valued. Learners demonstrated empathy and understanding, engaging with social justice principles such as compassion and forgiveness, which facilitated cooperative learning experiences. Additionally, the collaborative nature of

assigned tasks further fostered a supportive classroom atmosphere, with learners working together to analyse lesson content and share perspectives. Generally, Teacher 3's class exemplified the importance of fostering respectful interactions and cooperative learning environments to nurture social justice competences and promote inclusivity in secondary school education.

With Teacher 4, the lesson was introduced by asking learners to name several types of parables, and learners provided responses such as *"parables of the kingdom," "prayer," "riches,"* and *"love and forgiveness."* This initial activity set a tone of inclusivity, encouraging all learners to participate and share their thoughts. The teacher's approach promoted equality by valuing each learner's contribution and ensuring that everyone had an opportunity to engage from the outset.

During the lesson, it was noteworthy that some learners lacked access to Bibles. Even though the inadequacy of Bibles seemed to hamper learners' participation, the teacher intervened by noting the responses on the board, thus facilitating note-taking among learners. Moreover, the teacher's open-ended question about parables encouraged broad participation. By asking, *"Can you name several types of parables?"* the teacher ensured that all learners could share their insights, fostering a sense of equality and respect. This practice allowed every learner to feel that their opinion was valued, hence promoting an inclusive atmosphere.

During the discussion of the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), the teacher posed thought-provoking questions that engaged the entire class. One notable question was about the central lesson of the parable. Responses such as *"The parable teaches that one must not put trust in riches"* highlighted the learners' engagement with values like compassion and wealth distribution, which are crucial to social justice. The respectful exchange of ideas during this discussion demonstrated a classroom environment where learners listened attentively and responded thoughtfully to each other's contributions. The teacher further facilitated cooperation by organising group discussions on the parable's lessons. Each group was tasked with exploring the moral implications of the parable and presenting their findings. This setup encouraged learners to share perspectives and support each other in the learning process. Learners actively participated in the discussions, reflecting on the values of the parable and how they apply to real-life situations. In addition, the respectful and attentive interactions

among learners during group work highlighted a cooperative and inclusive classroom atmosphere.

In conclusion, the observation of Teacher 4's class demonstrated a clear commitment to inclusivity and equality, with the teacher actively engaging all learners and valuing their contributions from the outset. Despite challenges, such as limited access to Bibles for some learners, the teacher effectively facilitated participation and ensured that every learner had an opportunity to engage. The discussion of the parable of the rich fool displayed a respectful exchange of ideas among the learners, with thought-provoking questions encouraging engagement with social justice values. Furthermore, the teacher's organisation of group discussions promoted cooperation and collaboration, allowing learners to share views and support each other in the learning process. In general, Teacher 4's approach emphasised the importance of fostering positive relationships, promoting inclusivity, and encouraging cooperative learning environments to develop social justice competences and create an inclusive classroom atmosphere.

Summary of observation findings in School B

In summarising the observations at School B, both Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 exhibited effective practices in fostering an inclusive and respectful classroom environment, although their approaches differed in some ways. Both teachers emphasised the importance of initiating discussions and valuing every learner's opinion, which promoted mutual respect and active engagement among the learners. Learners in both classes demonstrated empathy and understanding, engaging with social justice principles such as compassion and forgiveness. Additionally, both teachers facilitated cooperative learning experiences through group discussions, allowing learners to share perspectives and support each other in understanding and applying the lesson content. However, Teacher 4 faced the challenge of limited access to Bibles among some learners, which required intervention to ensure inclusivity. Despite these differences, both teachers successfully created an environment conducive to the development of social justice competences and promoted inclusivity in education through their approaches to teacher-learner relationships, learner interactions, and cooperation in completing assigned tasks.

4.2.4 Lesson observations at School C

Teachers 5 and 6 were in School C. The subsequent observation of Teacher 5 in Grade 9b concentrated on the annunciation of Jesus' birth in Luke 1:26-38. One of the vital foci was the teacher-learner relationship. Concerning this focus, Teacher 6 directed a learner to read from Luke 1:26-38 while others listened intently. This practice ensured that learners were engaged and paying attention, which reflected the teacher's dedication to involving learners in the lesson. However, the use of affirming statements such as *"yes, sir"* and leading questions such as *"But Mary showed obedience and humility to the angel's message; what did she say?"* indicated a more directive approach rather than fostering open-ended discussion. This approach might limit the opportunity for learners to critically engage with the material and express their own interpretations.

Concerning learner interactions, the teacher initiated a discussion among learners on the concept of virginity, emphasising the necessity of keeping virginity as shown in Mary. The teacher stressed Mary's obedience and humility in accepting the angel's message. The observation highlighted that learners were responsive to the teacher's affirmations, often mimicking the teacher's statements. Figure 4.3 illustrates the responses of learners as the teacher noted them, while learners mimicked the teacher and confirmed.
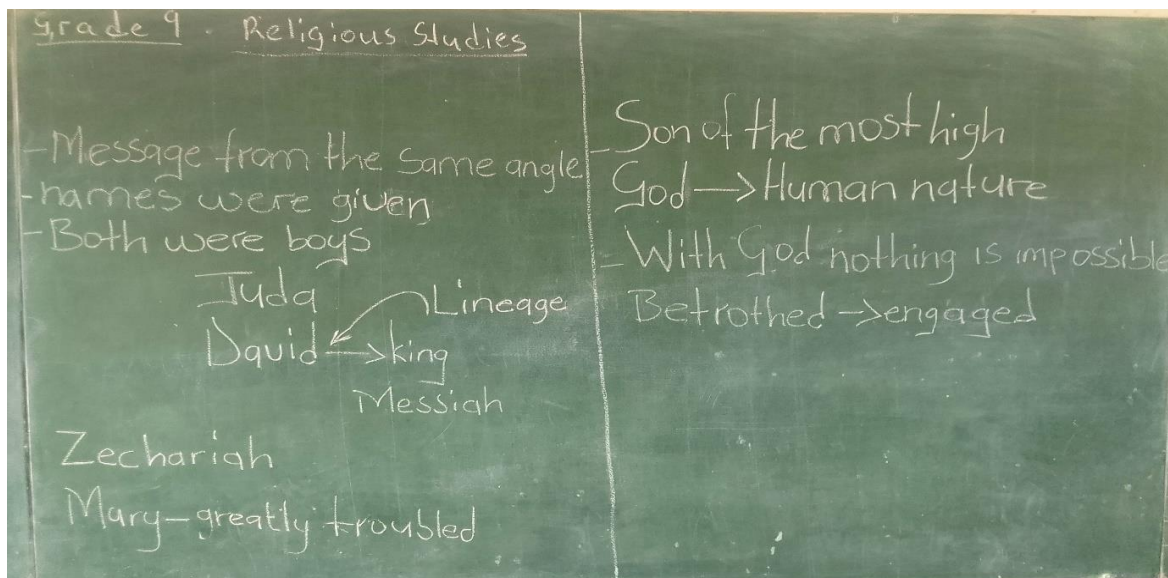
FIGURE 3: RESPONSES OF LEARNERS AS THEY MIMIC THE TEACHER

In conclusion, the observations in Teacher 5's classroom indicate respect and attentiveness. They also suggest a potential lack of independent learner engagement and reflection. The classroom dynamics did not fully support a platform for learners to question, debate, or delve into the topic independently, which are crucial elements for fostering genuine respect and equality in discussions.

In examining Teacher 6's class observation focusing on the annunciation of Jesus' birth, several key findings emerged regarding the teacher-learner relationship, learner interactions, and cooperative engagement. The teacher demonstrated dedication to involving learners in the lesson by directing a learner to read from the scripture, ensuring engagement and attentiveness. However, the use of affirming statements and leading questions may have limited opportunities for learners to critically engage and express their own interpretations.

The teacher-led discussion on the concept of virginity emphasised obedience and humility, with learners responsive to the teacher's affirmations. While this demonstrated respect and attentiveness, it also hinted at a lack of learner engagement and reflection. The classroom dynamics did not fully support independent exploration and discussion, hindering the fostering of respect and equality in discussions. Encouraging learners to question and debate independently would likely promote a more inclusive and cooperative classroom atmosphere.

Summary of observation findings in School C
The observations at School C revealed that Teachers 5 and 6 employed unique approaches and faced distinct challenges in fostering an inclusive, cooperative classroom environment. In Teacher 5's Grade 11a class, there was a strong emphasis on inclusivity and respect, with a focus on encouraging all learners to participate and share their thoughts. The organisation of group activities further promoted cooperation, allowing for thoughtful discussion and engagement. Conversely, in Teacher 6's Grade 9b class, while there was dedication to involving learners through directed readings and discussions, the use of affirmative statements and leading questions potentially limited critical engagement. The teacher-led discussion on virginity highlighted responsive learners but suggested a lack of independent exploration and reflection. Despite these differences, both teachers aimed to create an environment conducive to developing social justice competences, though with varying degrees of success in promoting respect, equality, and cooperative engagement among learners.

4.2.5   Summary of findings from observations

The observations indicate a generally positive and supportive relationship between teachers and learners, particularly for Teachers 1, 3, 4, and 5. These teachers emphasise creating classrooms where all learners' opinions are valued, thus fostering an inclusive and respectful environment. They actively engaged learners in discussions, ensured equal participation, and promoted mutual respect. These teachers also organised group activities to encourage cooperation, hence providing opportunities for learners to collaborate, share perspectives, and collectively explore lesson content. Moreover, Teachers 1, 3, 4, and 5 encouraged active student participation through discussions, open-ended questions, and facilitating group work. This implies that the level of cooperation in doing assigned tasks was high among learners in the classrooms of Teachers 1, 3, 4, and 5. This created platforms for learners to engage with the material and contribute to meaningful dialogue. The observations also noted that these teachers actively participated in and guided classroom activities, maintaining a supportive environment and ensuring all learners received equal support.

In contrast, Teachers 2 and 6 faced challenges related to learners' engagement and critical thinking, despite their dedication to involving learners. They encountered difficulties in fostering independent exploration and reflection among learners. Moreover, there was a lack of enhanced interactions among learners in the classrooms of Teachers 2 and 6, which compromised learners' engagement in critical thinking and peer support. A summary of the observation findings is illustrated in Table 4.2 below.

Observation focus	Specific findings	Teachers involved
Teacher-learner relationship	Positive and supportive relationship	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Challenges with engagement	Teachers 2, 6
Classroom environment	Inclusive and respectful environment	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Promoted mutual respect	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
Learner engagement	Active engagement in discussions	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Ensured equal participation	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Encouraged cooperation through group work	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5

	Lack of learners interactions	Teachers 2, 6
Cooperation in tasks	High level of cooperation in tasks	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Effective group work and collaboration	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Lower level of cooperation in tasks	Teachers 2, 6
	Did not consistently engage learners	Teachers 2, 6

TABLE 4.2: SUMMARY OF OBSERVATION FINDINGS FOR RQ1

4.3   Findings from interviews with Religious Studies teachers

This section presents perspectives and experiences of Religious Studies teachers regarding how their subject contributes to promoting social justice competences among learners. The findings provide information about the approaches, challenges, and successes encountered by Religious Studies teachers in incorporating social justice principles into their teaching practices.

4.3.1   Teachers' understanding of social justice and Religious Studies

The section presents findings on teachers' perspectives on the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences, including how they define social justice, its relevance to religious teachings, and their strategies for integrating social justice competences into their classroom practices.

4.3.2   Interviews at School A

In the first question, teachers were asked to elaborate on their understanding of social justice competence in the context of education. The most striking result to emerge from the teachers' interviews with regard to the first question is that their understanding of social justice in education revolved around ensuring the well-being of all members of society and fostering peace, stability, and unity. For instance, Teacher 1 from School A stated that,

Social justice has to do with the welfare of all members of society. People living together have to have peace and stability. That togetherness among themselves, sharing skills and knowledge, makes school a community, which is important. We have to share what we have in life—knowledge, resources, and values. We have to work together as a school to achieve a goal. Hence, we have to share whatever could help all learners prosper.

From Teacher 1's articulation, it could be understood that the teacher's standpoint on social justice in education is consistent with the idea that education should not only focus on learners' academic achievement but also promote equity and fairness for all learners. Teacher 1's understanding suggests that the subjects, including Religious Studies, have a mandate not only to impart knowledge of religious doctrines but also to develop a sense of communal responsibility and empathy among learners.

Another interviewee, T2, when asked a similar question on the meaning of social justice in education, put it this way:

> *It is about treating learners fairly at school. Even though the school did not communicate with me on how to deal with them, we believe that a school has to treat learners equally.*

The teacher's position that all learners should be treated equally, regardless of their particular characteristics or backgrounds, aligns with the social justice principles of justice for all. The response of T2 implies that education may assist in creating equality in this situation.

Question 2 required participants to define "competence." T1 and T2 emphasised that competence goes beyond having the necessary skills and values; it also involves applying them in practical tasks or activities. For instance, T1 commented that,

> *It has to do with being able to do something outstanding. Skill, values work together to form competence.*

By emphasising practical application, the two teachers highlighted the importance of transferring knowledge and skills to real-world contexts, where individuals can demonstrate their competence through successful performance of tasks. This response shared by T1 and T2 reflects their deeper understanding of the concept of 'competence.'

Summary of interview findings in School A

Combined together, the viewpoints of teachers from School A depict that Teachers 1 and 2 emphasised that social justice in education is about ensuring the well-being and fair treatment of all members of the school community. Their responses suggest that education should promote equity, communal responsibility, and empathy among learners. Concerning the

definition of the concept of 'competence,' both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 defined competence as going beyond just having the necessary skills and values; it also involves the ability to apply them effectively in practical tasks and real-world contexts. This demonstrates the teachers' deeper understanding of the concept of competence. These findings imply the importance of integrating social justice principles into subject curricula for promoting social justice competences.

4.3.3 Interviews at School B

The initial question directed at the teachers concerned their understanding of social justice competence in education. Two discrete responses emerged from this question. First, T3 articulated that,

> *In the context of school, social justice is associated with issues like when one has lost a parent and others contribute to showing empathy. We also have a subject buddy; a learner with less knowledge should be helped by someone with more knowledge.*

What emerges from T3's response is that the teacher gives emphasis to empathy and support for learners as key components of social justice in education. This emphasis on the highlighted values expresses a necessity for subjects including Religious Studies to promote empathy and unity competences and within the school setting.

On a similar question regarding teachers' understanding of social justice in education, T4 pointed out the principles of non-discrimination and equality as key aspects of social justice in education. The teacher made a comment:

> *It is about treating people equally and not discriminating against them according to their background.*

An analysis of T4's comments reveals the teacher's emphasis on non-discrimination and equality. T4 points out the significance of treating all individuals equally, regardless of background, which religious studies has to contribute to its accomplishment.

 When the participants were asked to define 'competence,' Both T3 and T4 reflected a similar understanding of the concept as they related it to practical abilities and competency in performing tasks. For instance, T3 indicated that

It is associated with being able to perform a certain task because of the skills one has acquired.

T3 and T4 both suggest a practical understanding of competence, with emphasis on the ability to do tasks effectively by applying learned skills. Their responses depict a practical view of competence, emphasising the importance of practical skills and task performance, especially in education.

Summary of interview findings in School B

The interviews with teachers from School A revealed diverse perspectives on social justice competence in education. Teacher 1 emphasised that social justice is about the welfare and unity of all members of the school community. T1 believes education should develop a sense of communal responsibility and empathy among learners. In contrast, Teacher 2 focused on the importance of treating all learners fairly and equally, regardless of their backgrounds. This aligns with the principle of justice for all. Both T1 and T2 shared a practical understanding of competence, highlighting the importance of applying skills and values effectively to real-world tasks and activities. Taken as a whole, the teachers' responses underline the value of empathy, support, fairness, and practical skills in creating an inclusive learning environment, which subjects including Religious Studies should contribute to.

4.3.4 Interviews at School C

Teachers at this school presented two separate opinions when they were asked about their understanding of social justice competence in education. First, Teacher 5 expressed the importance of treating learners equally, with no discrimination based on socio-economic background, gender, or other characteristics that individuals possess. The teacher stated:

I believe it is about treating learners in the same way without discriminating against them. I should not treat them based on poverty or gender. Make the boys sweep!

Teacher 5 points out the concept of equality and non-discrimination as essential components of social justice in education, a point that was also noted by T4 in School A. The emphasis on equal treatment endorses the significance of having an inclusive and supportive learning environment conducive to developing social justice competences among learners.

On the other hand, T6 defined social justice competence in education by focusing on addressing inequalities and ensuring that every learner feels valued and included in the classroom. The quotation below indicates T6's response:

> *One person in the class will not be free to answer in the class because of their appearance. Therefore, as a teacher, I try to give her attention so she has a sense of belonging. So talking to a teacher may be a blessing. Even when choosing learners, I try to balance the selection.*

The viewpoint of T6 reflects the importance of addressing inequality in the classroom to promote social justice competence. The teacher's commitment to establishing an inclusive environment where every learner is respected is especially meaningful in their response, as this aligns with the intended purpose of Religious Studies.

Summary of interview findings in School C

The interviews at School C revealed two distinct teacher perspectives on the definition of social justice competence. Teacher 5 defined it as treating all learners equally, without discrimination. This emphasises equality and non-discrimination as essential. In contrast, Teacher 6 defined it in terms of addressing inequalities and ensuring every learner feels valued and included. This highlights the importance of inclusivity and addressing disparities.

These different views underscore the multifaceted nature of social justice competence. While one teacher highlighted equality, the other focused on inclusion and addressing inequalities. Together, these perspectives illustrate how social justice competence can be understood through the lenses of equal treatment and creating an environment where all learners feel respected and valued.

4.4 Teachers' understanding of the integration of social justice in Religious Studies curriculum

This section examines teachers' beliefs and attitudes regarding social justice topics integrated into the Religious Studies curriculum, with the aim of fostering social justice competences. Additionally, the section explores teachers' objective of engaging learners in discussions surrounding societal issues within the framework of Religious Studies.

4.4.1 Interviews at School A

When asked what the role of Religious Studies is in enhancing learners' understanding of social justice principles of fairness and equity, Teacher 1 expressed support for the profound influence of Religious Studies in addressing social justice concerns. The teacher acknowledged that,

> *Religious Studies rightfully address social justice. In Religious Studies, we teach students about who they are, about God, why they exist, and that they co-exist with others. Therefore, they need to know how to live in harmony with others. Religious Studies, they learn about God, who is a virtuous person, so students learn and develop virtues related to social justice. The content in Religious Studies teaches about Jesus, whom we have to model.*

Teacher 1's response, which seems to place emphasis on the teachings of religious figures such as Jesus as one who advocates for social justice, indicates the teacher's unshakable belief in the potential of Religious Studies in strengthening learners' values and guiding them for the promotion of social justice competences.

Teacher 2's views in response to a similar question were captured in this reply:

> *Definitely, Religious Studies has the potential to promote values. It is a subject in which learners learn virtues such as knowing how to live with others and accepting people regardless of their backgrounds. Furthermore, this subject has topics, especially in Grades 8, 9, and 10 that specifically address social injustices.*

This response highlights the importance of understanding how to live peacefully with others and accepting people from diverse backgrounds. This emphasises the role of Religious Studies in fostering inclusivity and tolerance. The teacher's remarks mirror a deeper understanding of social justice that goes beyond the classroom, where values are taught to shape learners' attitudes and behaviours towards others. This response demonstrates how Religious Studies can promote social justice competences to address societal inequalities.

In response to the second question regarding topics that directly contribute to the advancement of social justice, T1 and T2 offered their insights. Specifically, T1 expressed the following viewpoint:

I want to take this story of when the Israelites left Egypt for Canaan and people complained. Moses prayed. God told Moses to tell the people to stand firm. This teaches that as leaders, being a monitor, one has to stand still like Moses. This topic resonates with topics such as the qualities of a good leader, where one of the qualities is that a leader has to be fair, which is related to social justice.

On a similar question, T2 mentioned the story of the blind man of Jericho as a lesson that promotes social justice competences among learners. The teacher expressed that,

In the story of a blind man in Jericho, people around him do not help the man but try to silence him. It teaches learners how to treat others with disabilities. Learners identify the vices portrayed and suggest how they could have done better to help the man. In this way, we promote social justice competences among learners.

T2 cites the story of the blind man of Jericho to illustrate lessons about compassion and inclusivity towards individuals with disabilities. By encouraging learners to reflect on the actions of those in the narrative and suggest alternative approaches, T2 fosters critical thinking and empathy, essential components of social justice competences.

Summary of interview findings in School A

In summary, the teachers from School A emphasised the influential role of Religious Studies in enhancing learners' understanding of social justice principles. Both Teacher 1 and Teacher 2 expressed strong support for how this subject teaches learners about their identity, relationship with God, and the importance of living harmoniously with others, aligning with the principles of social justice. The teachers also cited specific religious narratives, such as the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt and the story of the blind man of Jericho, to demonstrate how the content of Religious Studies can directly contribute to the advancement of social justice competences. These examples highlight lessons about fair leadership, compassion, and inclusivity towards marginalised groups. In general, the responses from School A teachers underline the significant potential of Religious Studies in shaping learners' attitudes, behaviours, and abilities to address societal inequalities and promote fairness, equity, and inclusivity.

4.4.2 Interviews at School B

During the conversation with School B teachers about the first question on the influence of religious studies on deepening learners' comprehension of social justice, fairness, and equity, T3 expressed support for the vital role of Religious Studies in introducing learners to subjects pertaining to social justice. The teacher specified:

> *Yes, Religious Studies introduces learners to topics such as justice in Grade 10. Topics such as this one sensitise learners about the type of justice and how people can peacefully coexist.*

The most interesting aspect T3 recognised is the importance of religious studies in exposing learners to social justice topics. This recognition suggests the teacher's deep understanding of Religious Studies' capacity to increase learners' awareness and engagement with challenges of justice, therefore enhancing the possibility of teaching the subject for promoting social justice competences.

In response to a similar question on the influence of Religious Studies in deepening learners' comprehension of social justice, fairness, and equity, the teacher commented that,

> *It really has; learners are able to identify values and lessons from the Biblical texts. In addition, learners are requested to apply the stories in real life to solve issues related to discrimination, poverty, and health issues.*

Drawing from T4's response, there is emphasis on the importance of Religious Studies in teaching moral concepts, which are necessary for understanding social justice. Additionally, the teacher stated that the assessment criteria for Religious Studies encourage learners to use religious texts to address real-world challenges such as the following: discrimination, poverty, and health. This practical approach to teaching and assessing Religious Studies contributes to problem-solving skills and reflection that align with social justice's purpose of empowering learners to challenge social injustices.

The second question focused on topics that directly contribute to the advancement of social justice. T3 referenced the story of the Good Samaritan and asserted that,

The topic of a Good Samaritan teaches about love and compassion for people despite their differences. These topics are related to social justice as they promote equality and fairness.

By presenting the Good Samaritan story as a topic that directly contributes to the development of social justice, T3 conveys an unshakable awareness of how some stories can serve as powerful platforms for conveying social justice. According to T3, what renders this topic highly pertinent is its focus on showing love and compassion towards others, irrespective of differences, which holds great relevance to the concept of social justice.

On the contrary, T4 felt that the topic of the seven works of charity is important for developing social justice competences. The teacher disclosed:

The topic of the seven works of charity is a topic I find profound for developing social justice competences. It teaches us how we could be of service to other people.

T4 identified the topic of the seven works of charity as suitable for fostering social justice competences due to its emphasis on serving others. This suggests that T4 perceives a direct connection between acts of charity and social justice. Furthermore, T4's response indicates an acknowledgment of the values inherent in the topic of the seven works of charity, such as empathy and solidarity, which are closely associated with social justice. This recognition of topics related to social justice implies that teachers will intentionally teach Religious Studies for promoting social justice competences.

Summary of interview findings in School B

The interviews with teachers from School B reveal a consensus on the significant role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences, though with some variation in focus areas. Both Teacher 3 and Teacher 4 agree on the importance of Religious Studies in enhancing learners' understanding of social justice, fairness, and equity. T3 highlights how Grade 10 topics such as 'justice' teach learners about different forms of justice and peaceful coexistence. Similarly, T4 points out that Religious Studies helps learners identify values from Biblical texts and apply them to real-life issues, fostering practical problem-solving skills and reflective thinking. While both teachers recognise the relevance of specific topics, their focal points differ. T3 cites the story of the Good Samaritan, emphasising its role in showing love and compassion towards others, which promotes equality and fairness. On the other hand, T4

highlights the seven works of charity, noting its importance in developing social justice competences through the emphasis on serving others. This suggests that T4 perceives a direct connection between charitable acts and social justice, emphasising values such as empathy and solidarity. This demonstrates the potential of Religious Studies to equip learners with the knowledge and values necessary to challenge societal inequalities and promote a just and equitable society.

4.4.3 Interviews at School C

When responding to the first question on the role of Religious Studies in fostering understanding of social justice, fairness, and equity, T5 stipulated:

> *Yes! Religious Studies has the potential to promote fairness. It could teach them not to discriminate against each other but to do things together.*

T5's response, affirming the potential of Religious Studies to promote social justice, suggests that Religious Studies could challenge discrimination and promote inclusivity. Furthermore, the response also implicitly mirrors the importance of values such as tolerance, cooperation, and equality, which are central to social justice principles and can be actively promoted through Religious Studies.

Responding to a similar question on the role of religious studies in fostering understanding of social justice, T6 also echoed this sentiment:

> *Learners are engaged in identifying values, attitudes, and lessons that deal with how people should live with others in multi-cultural societies.*

The second question posed to teachers focused on the specific topics that contribute directly to promoting social justice. In response, T5 pointed out that,

> *In the book of the Acts of the Apostles, believers broke apart; they had all things in common. This means it teaches learners to be equal so that no one is left needy.*

The selection of this topic, which is found in the book of the Acts of the Apostles, specifies the teacher's recognition of the relevance of Biblical texts in addressing contemporary social issues. The text cited by T5 stresses communal sharing and mutual support among believers, which are related to social justice. By teaching these values, Religious Studies could empower

learners to take action to address inequality and support marginalised individuals in their communities. Similarly, T6 stressed that,

> *The story of John's preaching teaches an important topic about sharing. That is, when one has, one must share with the one who has none. This topic instils caring for one another, even at school. It is common that the Grade 11 learners, after writing their final examinations, voluntarily donate some uniforms to those who are at lower levels. The story of Tabitha also has the potential to promote charity and good works. Learners develop social justice competences.*

T6's response to the question mirrors the relevance of specific Biblical topics in promoting social justice. The teacher mentions the story of John's preaching, which teaches the importance of sharing and caring for others. The teacher further provides an example from their own school, where Grade 11 learners voluntarily donate uniforms to those in the lower grades after completing their final exams. This real-life demonstration of sharing aligns with the values taught in the story of John's preaching. Additionally, T6 mentions the story of Tabitha, which has the potential to promote charity and good works. By teaching these topics, Religious Studies could encourage learners to actively engage in acts of kindness and support for others.

Summary of interview findings in School C

When taken together, the interviews with teachers from School C highlight a shared belief in the potential of Religious Studies to foster understanding of social justice, fairness, and equity, though with some differences in the specific areas of focus. Both Teacher 5 and Teacher 6 agree on the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice by challenging discrimination and fostering inclusivity. T5 underscores the subject's potential to teach fairness and cooperation, highlighting values such as tolerance, cooperation, and equality. Similarly, T6 emphasises the engagement of learners in identifying values and lessons pertinent to living harmoniously in multicultural societies. While both teachers recognised the importance of specific topics, their chosen examples differed. T5 refers to the book of the Acts of the Apostles, which illustrates communal sharing and mutual support, teaching learners about equality.

4.4.4 Summary of findings from interviews

In summary, the teachers across the three schools all showed a shared commitment to using Religious Studies to promote social justice, fairness, and equity. However, they each emphasised different aspects of this approach. Some teachers, including Teacher 1 from School A and Teachers 3 and 4 from School B, draw attention to how religious figures and stories could foster important virtues related to social justice. For example, Teacher 1 used the story of the Israelites leaving Egypt to talk about fair leadership and resilience. Teachers 3 and 4 focused on the Parable of the Good Samaritan and the seven works of charity to discuss equality, fairness, and caring for others.

In contrast, other teachers, including Teacher 2 from School A and Teacher 5 from School C, emphasised using different religious stories, such as the Blind Man of Jericho and the life among believers in the Acts of the Apostles, to foster compassion, inclusivity, and a sense of community. This was also seen in the examples given by Teacher 6 from School C, who talked about learners doing acts of sharing and charity, such as donating uniforms, to show caring for others. Overall, the teachers demonstrated powerful and varied ways that Religious Studies could shape learners' values and behaviour to promote social justice. Their shared belief in the transformative potential of this subject shows its continuing importance. The interview findings are summarised in the table below. The first research question (Q1) asks how Religious Studies influences learners' understanding of social justice. The second question (Q2) asks what specific Religious Studies methods contribute directly to promoting social justice.

Questions	Teachers' responses	Emerging Theme	Teachers
Q1	Religious Studies can foster tolerance, cooperation, and inclusivity by teaching learners to live harmoniously with others, respect diverse backgrounds, and work together towards a more just and equitable society.	Promotion of social justice, fairness, and equity, tolerance, cooperation and inclusivity	Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
Q2	Teachers employ religious narratives including the Israelites' escape, the Good Samaritan's seven acts of charity,	Use of specific religious stories to	Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

	the blind Jericho, and the Acts of the Apostles to teach social justice concepts.	illustrate social justice concepts	
	Practical applications and real-life examples, such as real-world issues and charitable acts, reinforce social justice principles through practical applications and real-world examples.	Practical applications and real-life examples	Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6
	Religious studies foster empathy and solidarity by teaching learners to understand and support marginalised groups and promote acts of kindness and charity.	Development of empathy and solidarity	Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6

TABLE 4.3: SUMMARY OF INTERVIEW FINDINGS FOR RQ1

4.4.5 Integration of findings from observations and interviews

The integration of findings from observations and interviews reveals how Religious Studies promotes social justice competences. Notably, both observations and interviews highlight the role of Religious Studies in fostering an environment where social justice, fairness, and equity are promoted through inclusive and respectful classroom settings. Teachers create inclusive classrooms where all learners' opinions are valued. They actively engage learners in discussions, ensure equal participation, and promote mutual respect. Group activities encouraged cooperation and collaboration, consistent with the interview findings. Furthermore, a key theme from interviews and observations is the use of specific Biblical stories to illustrate social justice concepts. This aligns with observed practices for fostering an inclusive environment. Teachers use narratives such as the Israelites' escape and the Good Samaritan to teach social justice virtues. In contrast, some teachers face challenges in engaging learners and promoting critical thinking, affecting their ability to effectively promote these values. Interviews emphasise the use of specific Biblical stories to illustrate social justice concepts, which aligns with the observed practices of fostering an inclusive environment.

Moreover, both data sources emphasise practical applications and real-life examples, with Teachers 1, 3, 4, and 5 organising activities that connect theoretical concepts to real-life situations, enhancing understanding and commitment to social justice. In conclusion, Religious Studies teachers in the participating schools use diverse strategies to promote social justice, fairness, and equity. Themes such as fostering tolerance, cooperation, inclusivity, practical applications, and developing empathy and solidarity are consistent across both observations and interviews. While some teachers excel at creating supportive environments, others face challenges that need addressing to ensure consistent promotion of social justice competences. Table 4.4 below illustrates the integration of findings from both interviews and observations.

Emergent Themes	Source	Emerging Findings	Teachers
Promotion of social justice, tolerance fairness, equity, cooperation and inclusivity	Observations	Created inclusive and respectful environments, promoting social justice competences.	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Interviews	The teachers demonstrated how specific religious stories, figures, and principles could be leveraged to cultivate values, attitudes, and behaviours aligned with social justice, fairness, and equity.	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
Practical applications and real-life examples	Observations	Actively involved students in group activities and discussions, providing real-life applications.	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5
	Interviews	Emphasise practical applications and real-life examples to promote social justice.	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6

Use of specific religious stories to illustrate social justice concepts	Observations	Taught topics that aligned with the promotion of social justice	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5,
	Interviews	Teachers use specific religious narratives (e.g. Israelites leaving Egypt, Good Samaritan) to teach social justice.	Teachers 1, 3, 4, 5, 6
Challenges in promoting social justice competences	Observations	Struggled with learner engagement, critical thinking, and fostering independent exploration and reflection.	Teachers 2, 6
	Interviews	Encounter difficulties in effectively promoting social justice due to lack of engagement and critical thinking among learners.	Teachers 2, 6

TABLE 4.4: INTEGRATION OF FINDINGS FOR RQ1

4.6 RQ2: Relevant Religious Studies teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences in Lesotho

This section examines the unique teaching strategies used in Religious Studies classes in the selected secondary schools to promote social justice competences among learners. It examines how Religious Studies as a subject influences the development of social justice-related skills, knowledge, and attitudes among secondary school learners in the participating schools. To respond to research question 2, observations were conducted with six Religious Studies teachers. The findings from observations were presented and analysed. The following section provides the findings obtained from observations undertaken across the three schools.

4.6.1 Teaching methods and approaches that correspond with social justice ideas

This observation ventures into the teaching methods and approaches Religious Studies teachers use to develop social justice competences in learners. I concentrated specifically on methods such as group work, critical pedagogy and multi-cultural pedagogy to enhance learners' understanding of the principles of social justice and their application in actual-life situations.

4.6.2 Lessons observations at School A

The observed lesson with T1 demonstrates a range of effective teaching strategies to promote critical thinking and connect Biblical concepts to real-life applications. T1 began the lesson by asking learners, "*What do you understand by these concepts of leadership and authority?"* This question sparked a class discussion where learners shared their ideas, which were recorded on the board for further exploration. This interactive approach aligns with critical pedagogy, as it encourages learners to engage deeply with the concepts and exercise their critical thinking skills.

T1 then facilitated a discussion on the process of selecting leaders, which allowed learners to actively participate and contribute their diverse perspectives. This reflects the principles of equity pedagogy, which emphasises an inclusive environment that values diverse viewpoints. Furthermore, T1 divided the learners into groups to discuss different types of authority: charismatic, traditional, and rational-legal. This experiential approach to learning, where learners learn through experience and collaboration, was evident in the group work activity. T1 moved between groups, guiding their conversations and offering support, creating a supportive learning environment where learners felt comfortable and encouraged to learn from each other.

In conclusion, T1 demonstrated effective teaching methods, including engaging discussions, promoting critical thinking, and facilitating group work. These strategies align with the principles of critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning. To further enhance these approaches, future lessons could include discussions on contemporary values such as fairness and empathy, ensuring a more comprehensive development of social justice competences among learners.

Moving to the other observation, the lesson observed with T2 demonstrates a range of effective teaching strategies that align with the principles of critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and

experiential learning. T2 began the lesson by providing a brief contextual analysis of the passage from Luke 7:11-17. This analysis helped enhance the learners' understanding of the societal inequalities and discrimination faced by widows during Jesus' time. This approach aligns with equity pedagogy, as it ensures that learners understand the historical and social contexts that influence people's lives, fostering deeper awareness of societal inequalities. T2 then initiated a discussion by asking, *"Can you explain the lesson learned about Jesus' attitude towards widows?"* This question aligns with critical pedagogy by encouraging learners to think critically about Jesus' actions, promoting a deeper understanding of empathy and its role in social justice.

Before the class was dismissed, T2 assigned learners an application-based assignment. This assignment demanded that learners identify the values learned from the miracle of raising the widow's son and apply these values to real-life situations, as illustrated in Figure 4.3.
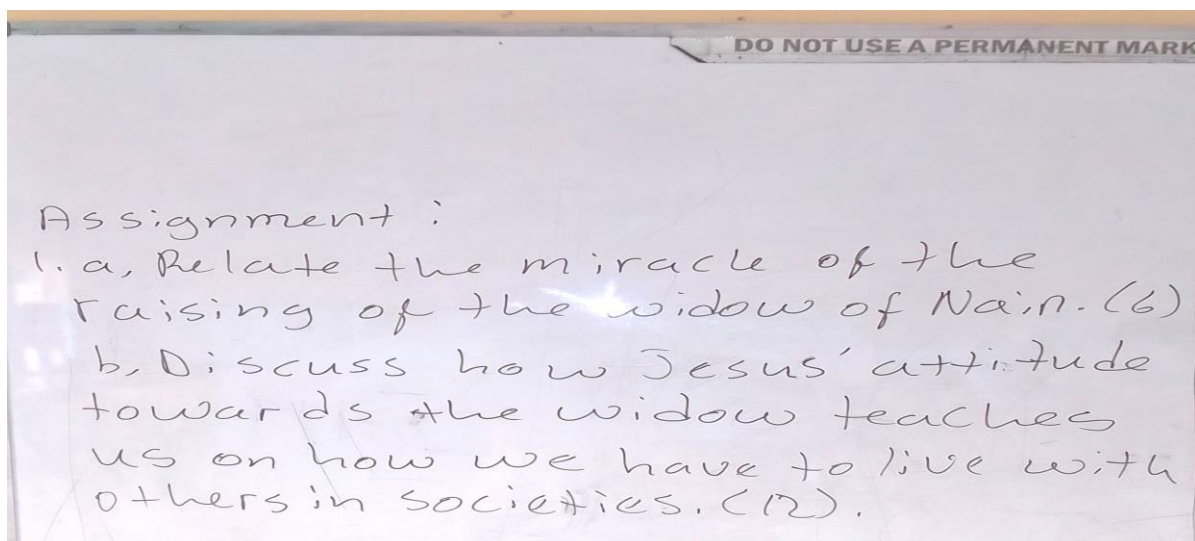
FIGURE 4: AN APPLICATION-BASED ASSIGNMENT

This assignment encouraged learners to connect the Biblical account to contemporary issues, promoting the application of social justice principles in real-world contexts. This approach exemplifies the experiential approach to learning, which emphasises learning through practical application and reflection on real-life situations.

In conclusion, T2 employed effective teaching methods, including interactive questioning, contextual analysis, reflective discussions, and application-based assignments. These methods align with the principles of critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning. To

further enhance the development of social justice competences, future lessons could continue to integrate these approaches, ensuring that learners gain a comprehensive understanding of social justice and its practical implications.

Summary of observation findings in School A

The observations at School A reveal the consistent application of effective teaching strategies aligned with critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning. These strategies foster an inclusive and reflective environment that promotes the development of social justice competences. Teacher 1 effectively promoted critical thinking and the application of lessons to real-life contexts. This was achieved through initiating discussions as well as facilitating group work on different types of authority. This interactive approach encouraged deep engagement and consideration of diverse perspectives. Teacher 2 employed detailed contextual analysis, fostering an understanding of social inequalities. Reflective questioning and application-based assignments encouraged critical thinking and the application of Biblical principles to modern issues. In brief, both T1 and T2 used engaging discussions, contextual analysis, group work, and application-based assignments to create a supportive learning environment. These methods promoted critical thinking, inclusivity, and the practical application of social justice principles.

4.6.3 Lesson observations at School B

T3 introduced the lesson with an inquiry-based approach by asking learners why Jesus taught in parables. This question encouraged participation and critical thinking among learners, as evidenced by their eagerness to raise their hands and respond. Notably, T3 selected learners from various positions within the class, ensuring a diverse range of views. This approach aligns with critical pedagogy, as it promotes an inclusive learning environment where all learners' voices are valued and acknowledged.

T3 then instructed a volunteer to read from Luke 15:11–32 on the parable of the prodigal son, facilitating active participation and auditory learning. This instruction seemed crucial for deepening learners' understanding of the text. Following the reading, T3 initiated a discussion by asking questions related to the parable, including an interesting task where learners were asked to reflect on the overarching lessons of the parable. The emphasis on the values of unconditional love and forgiveness, as depicted in the parable, encouraged learners to internalise these values and apply them in practical situations, exemplifying experiential

learning. During the lesson, the observer noticed that some learners lacked Bibles. T3 addressed this issue by allowing learners to form groups around those who had Bibles. This group formation aligns with equity pedagogy, ensuring that all learners have equal opportunities to participate and learn.

In conclusion, observing T3's class revealed several effective teaching methods, including inquiry-based questioning, auditory learning, inclusive group formation, and the application of Biblical texts to real-life contexts. These methods align with the principles of critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning. To further enhance the development of social justice competences, T3 could continue to integrate these approaches, ensuring that learners gain a comprehensive understanding of social justice and its practical implications.

In the other observation session, T4 began the lesson by asking learners to identify different types of parables. Although few learners initially participated, T4 ensured inclusivity by randomly selecting learners from different parts of the class to answer. This approach encouraged participation from a diverse range of learners, fostering an inclusive environment. By prompting learners to think about the types of parables, T4 promoted critical pedagogy, encouraging learners to engage deeply with the material and think critically about the topic.

After introducing the lesson on the parable of the rich fool (Luke 12:13–21), T4 then asked, "*What is the central message of the parable?*" This question triggered a class discussion, which encouraged learners to reflect on the parable. This aligns with critical pedagogy by fostering reflective thinking and engaging learners in meaningful dialogue.

Similar to T3's class, not all learners in T4's class had Bibles. The teacher promoted inclusivity by encouraging group discussions and noting answers on the board for everyone to see. This group method aligns with equity pedagogy by ensuring that all learners could actively participate, regardless of their resources, creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment, which is essential for promoting social justice competences.

In conclusion, observing T4's class revealed several effective teaching methods, including engaging discussions, promoting critical thinking, ensuring inclusivity through random selection and group discussions, and assigning application-based tasks. These methods align with the principles of critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning. To further enhance the development of social justice competences, T4 could continue to integrate these

approaches, ensuring that learners gain a comprehensive understanding of social justice and its practical implications.

Summary of observation findings in School B

The observations conducted in School B revealed significant findings regarding the congruence between teaching methods and approaches and the advancement of social justice competences. Teacher 3 used inquiry-based questioning, inclusive group formation, and discussions on Biblical parables to encourage critical thinking and active participation. T3 ensured inclusivity by forming groups around available resources. Teacher 4 also promoted critical thinking and inclusivity by having learners identify and discuss the central messages in parables. T4 used group discussions and board notes to facilitate active participation, despite resource limitations. Both T3 and T4 employed engaging discussions, inclusive group work, and application-based tasks, creating supportive learning environments. Future lessons should continue these approaches to further enhance learners' understanding of social justice and its practical implications.

4.6.4   Lesson observations at School C

T5 employed thought-provoking questions and discussion in the class, which were meant to foster critical thinking and reflection among learners. This aligns with the promotion of social justice competences. The teacher also grouped learners to promote inclusiveness, ensuring that all of them could actively participate. Lastly, T5 encouraged the application of Biblical lessons to a real-life context, promoting experiential learning. All these teaching approaches created a supportive learning environment conducive to the development of social justice competences. There was also an interesting question that demanded learners to compare the early church with contemporary churches. This question used by T5 promoted critical pedagogy by encouraging critical thinking and reflection. Additionally, the question encouraged learners to apply the principles discussed in the lesson to real-life situations, promoting experiential learning.

In conclusion, observing T5's class revealed several effective teaching methods, including engaging discussions, promoting critical thinking, ensuring inclusivity through group discussions, and connecting Biblical lessons to real-life contexts. These methods align with the principles of critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning. To further enhance the development of social justice competences, T5 could continue to integrate these

approaches, ensuring that students gain a comprehensive understanding of social justice and its practical implications.

In the subsequent lesson, T6 began by asking a volunteer to read from the Bible. During the reading, T6 and other learners assisted with pronouncing difficult words such as *"betrothed,"* *"hail,"* and *"womb."* This approach ensured that learners understood the text, thus promoting experiential learning. Additionally, the teacher's facilitation ensured that everyone understood the text, creating an inclusive learning environment. This approach aligns with equity pedagogy, ensuring that all learners, regardless of their reading abilities, could participate in the lesson.

During the observation, I noted that T6 encouraged learners to respond to questions with simple confirmations, such as *"Yes sir,"* and wrote the answers on the board. This method confirmed learners' retention and understanding of the information. However, it did not fully engage learners in critical thinking or deeper analysis, which are essential for developing social justice competences. Encouraging learners to merely recall information without deeper analysis limits their opportunities to develop skills such as empathy, critical thinking, and the ability to analyse social justice issues.

In conclusion, T6 effectively facilitated learners' understanding and retention through reading assistance and recall-based responses. However, to enhance the development of social justice competences, T6 should incorporate additional strategies that encourage active participation, empathy, and critical analysis. These strategies might include discussion and reflection, exploration of the implications for social justice, group work, and application-based tasks. By integrating these approaches, T6 can create a learning environment that fosters the development of the comprehensive set of skills and competences necessary for promoting social justice.

Summary of observation findings in School C

In investigating Religious Studies teaching techniques aimed at promoting social justice competences in Lesotho secondary schools, observations in the participating schools revealed a variety of teaching methods and approaches used by teachers in the classroom. For instance, Teacher 5 fostered critical thinking and inclusivity through thought-provoking questions, group discussions, and real-life connections. These approaches created a supportive learning environment conducive to developing social justice competences. In contrast, Teacher 6

facilitated understanding through reading assistance but could further enhance the development of social justice competences by incorporating strategies that promote deeper analysis and critical thinking.

4.6.5 Summary of findings from observations

The investigation of Religious Studies teaching strategies in the participating schools further revealed effective methods for fostering social justice competences. Teachers 1, 3, 4, and 5 demonstrated commitment to inclusive and engaging pedagogies, emphasising critical thinking, diverse perspectives, and practical application. Teacher 1 facilitated interactive discussions and group work, promoting critical thinking and diverse viewpoints. Similarly, Teachers 3 and 4 employed inquiry-based approaches and group discussions, encouraging active participation and reflective thinking. Teacher 5 utilised thought-provoking questions and real-life connections, enhancing critical thinking and inclusivity.

In contrast, Teachers 2 and 6 faced challenges in fully engaging learners and promoting critical analysis, despite their dedication. Teacher 2's contextual analysis and reflective discussions laid the groundwork for understanding social justice, requiring further integration. While Teacher 6 facilitated understanding through reading assistance, additional strategies promoting active participation and critical analysis are needed for comprehensive social justice competence development. The findings underscore the necessity of varied teaching methods to effectively nurture social justice competences, including engaging discussions, group work, critical thinking, and practical application in inclusive and supportive learning environments. Table 4.5 below illustrates the observation findings on RQ2.

Teaching methods	Observation finding	Teachers
Interactive discussions and group work	Facilitated critical thinking and embraced diverse viewpoints through interactive discussions and group activities.	Teacher 1, 3, 4, 5
Critical pedagogy	Facilitated critical thinking and inquiry-based approaches for understanding social justice principles.	Teacher 1, 2, 3, 4, 5

Reflective approach and questions	Fostered critical thinking and inclusivity through reflective questioning and group discussions.	Teacher 2, 3, 4, 5
Reading assistance and contextual analysis	Provided contextual analysis for understanding social justice principles. Facilitated understanding through reading assistance but could enhance critical analysis skills.	Teacher 2, 6
Challenge in maintaining consistent learners engagement	Could further enhance the development of social justice competences by incorporating strategies that promote deeper analysis and critical thinking.	Teacher 2, 6

TABLE 4.5: SUMMARY OF OBSERVATION FINDINGS FOR RQ2

4.7 Summary

Chapter 4 provided biographical information on the participants and presented data obtained through observations and interviews conducted at three schools. The chapter summarised the findings derived from both observations, addressing the two research questions. It highlighted emerging themes for each research question. Based on this chapter, several conclusions can be drawn. Firstly, the Religious Studies teachers make efforts to teach the subject in order to promote social justice competences. They use diverse strategies to establish a supportive learning environment for the promotion of social justice, fairness, and equity.

Themes such as fostering tolerance, cooperation, inclusivity, and practical applications are consistent across both observations and interviews. Secondly, the teaching methods employed in religious studies could create a conducive atmosphere for learners to enhance the development of social justice competences. These methods include interactive discussions and group work, critical pedagogy, reflective approaches and questions, contextual analysis, and reading assistance, which are consistent with critical pedagogy, equity pedagogy, and experiential learning.

Lastly, despite the positive indications for the development of social justice competences, challenges persist in terms of limited resources and some teachers' challenges in maintaining consistent learner engagement. A comprehensive discussion of these findings is addressed in the next chapter the findings are discussed.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

5. Introduction

This chapter discusses the findings from the data analysis in the preceding chapter. The study aimed to determine if the Lesotho's Religious Studies teaching and learning aligns with promoting social justice competences in secondary schools, using three schools as case studies. The study sought to illuminate how Religious Studies contributes to learners' understanding and practice of social justice principles, and to identify the specific competences fostered through such educational experiences. To conduct this research, the following research questions (RQs) were developed:

- RQ1: What is the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences in Lesotho?
- RQ2: What are the relevant Religious Studies teaching strategies aimed at promoting social justice competences in Lesotho?

This chapter first presents the major findings from interviews and observations, which address the two research questions. These findings are then critically analysed and discussed in light of the existing literature and the theoretical framework adopted for the study.

5.1 Major findings of the study

The study was guided by two research questions. For the first RQ, the data revealed that teachers employ various strategies to establish a supportive learning environment that promotes social justice competences. Key themes include: (a) promotion of social justice, tolerance, fairness, equity, cooperation, and inclusivity; (b) practical applications and real-life examples; and (c) use of specific religious stories to illustrate social justice concepts. For the second RQ, the data revealed that the teaching methods employed in Religious Studies significantly contribute to creating a conducive atmosphere for developing social justice competences. The observed methods included: (a) interactive discussions and group work; (b) critical pedagogy; (c) reflective approaches and questioning; (d) reading assistance and contextual analysis. However, the data also indicated that challenges persist, such as limited resources and inconsistencies in some teachers' engagement with learners. Therefore, the last theme discussed in the previous chapter was (e) the challenges of consistently developing social

justice competences through Religious Studies. It is important to note that in the discussion, the themes developed from the data analysis are highlighted in italics.

5.2 The role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences

The first research question investigated how teachers create a supportive learning environment that promotes social justice competences. The data analysis revealed that teachers use various approaches to instil values and skills relevant to social justice in the learners they teach. Three major themes emerged from the research, and are presented in this section.

5.2.1 Promotion of social justice, tolerance, fairness, equity, cooperation, and inclusivity

The current study found that Religious Studies is crucial for establishing an environment that promotes social justice, fairness, equity, cooperation, and inclusivity. Developing a conducive learning environment was accomplished through respectful and equitable educational settings. To dig deeper into this finding, the discussion has been organised into several sub-sections as presented below.

5.2.1.1 Inclusive and respectful classroom settings

The *inclusive* and *respectful classroom setting*, facilitated by teaching and learning in Religious Studies, aligns with the principles of dialogic pedagogy, as advocated by Freire (1970). Orner (2024) indicates that the dialogic approach encourages the expression of multiple viewpoints, fostering learning environment where social justice, fairness, and equity can be promoted. The findings further support the ideas of Arévalo and García (2023), who emphasised that dialogic pedagogy, characterised by the *co-construction of meanings* and *multiple interpretations of texts*, not only promotes literacy skills and reasoning but also contributes to creating inclusive spaces where diverse perspectives are valued. These findings suggest that the discussions facilitated by Religious Studies teachers are crucial in fostering social justice competences.

5.2.1.2 Equal participation

The data revealed that *teachers actively encouraged every learner to participate in lessons through discussions, open-ended questions, and facilitating group work*, to remove barriers that could hinder disadvantaged learners from fully participating. This pedagogical approach

aligns with the suggestions of researchers such as Banks and Banks (2007) and Romanyshyn et al. (2023), that it is vital to incorporate various learner perspectives into the curriculum to cultivate social justice competences. The emphasis on creating *platforms for learners to engage with meaningful dialogue* further aligns with the principles of multicultural education, which emphasise the importance of incorporating various voices and experiences in the learning process to foster understanding and respect for differences (Byrd, 2021). In line with Byrd's (2021) view, Kimainen (2022) also endorses the multicultural teaching approach, illustrating how Religious Studies can address issues of oppression and inequalities to develop social justice competences. The *integration of diverse perspectives* and *experiences of learners*, as evident in the results, has important implications for developing an inclusive learning environment that nurtures social justice competences and equips learners to navigate a diverse and interconnected world.

5.2.1.3 Group activities and cooperation

Observations and interviews consistently demonstrated that *teachers actively engage learners in group discussions,* ensuring that *their opinions are appreciated and respected.* This *inclusive* and *considerate classroom environment*, promoted by religious studies, corresponds to the dialogic pedagogy ideas proposed by scholars including Leung (2020) and Freire (1970). According to Orner (2024), the dialogic method facilitates the expression of several views, resulting in situations promoting social justice, fairness, and equity. The findings support Arévalo and García's (2023) argument that dialogic pedagogy promotes literacy skills, reasoning, and inclusive spaces that value different points of view. This indicates that discussions fostered by Religious Studies teachers are essential for developing social justice competences.

5.3 Practical applications of Biblical lessons and use of real-life examples

Another key finding was that *religious studies curriculum in Lesotho incorporate the practical application of Biblical narratives and real-world examples* to cultivate learners' social justice competences. This finding stresses the importance of connecting abstract concepts with concrete experiences derived from daily life. The following subsections explore the significance of this emergent theme in greater depth.

5.3.1 Establishing principles of social justice within the context

The findings revealed that *teachers encouraged the practical applications and real-life examples, such as real-world issues and charitable acts* to reinforce social justice principles. The practical applications of Biblical lessons to real-life situations corresponds to Freire's (1973) argument of education as a transforming process that connects theory and practice, developing a deeper understanding of social justice principles (Hailes et al., 2021). This approach, as evident in the results, *enables learners to relate abstract concepts to their personal experiences*, resulting in a greater understanding of social justice principles in their communities. Furthermore, *using Biblical stories to address practical issues* aligns with Beukes' (2023) perspective on promoting social justice through religious contexts. This approach emphasises recognising Biblical principles and taking firm stances on contemporary social issues.

5.3.2 Enhancing understanding and commitment

The findings revealed that using practical applications of Biblical teachings to real-life situations in Religious Studies assists learners to develop greater understanding of and dedication to social justice principles. The findings indicated that Religious Studies *promote empathy and solidarity* which was evidenced by *learners' acts of kindness to others and solidarity*. This finding suggests that when learners observe how complex social issues emerge in their own or others' lives, they are more inclined to interact with the issues at a more profound level. This seems to be consistent with the concepts of experiential learning, which emphasises the relevance of hands-on experiences in developing deep learning (Dewey 1963). Teachers enhance learners' understanding of social justice principles and foster personal engagement by involving them in activities that apply these values directly. When learners *see how social justice principles are implemented in real-world situations, they are better able to internalise these values*. This teaching approach, which was apparent in Religious Studies classrooms, emphasises the subject's ability to foster awareness and commitment to achieving social justice, fairness, equity, tolerance, collaboration, and inclusion.

5.3.3 Learners' empowerment for social action

The study discovered that *using practical applications and real-life examples not only improves learners' understanding of social justice principles, but also empowers them to take action to rectify injustices*. The findings indicate that Religious Studies goes beyond memorising religious texts to *investigating how religious teachings might be applied to contemporary societal challenges*. This approach corroborates Freire's (1970) problem-posing education paradigm, which emphasises critical reflection and action as key components of learning. Freire (1973) emphasises education as an instrument for emancipation, enabling people to critically investigate and alter their social circumstances. This paradigm of contextualising abstract concepts, improving knowledge, and empowering learners for social action offers the foundation for developing social justice competences through Religious Studies.

5.4 Use of specific religious stories to illustrate social justice principles

Another interesting finding was that the use of specific religious stories to illustrate social justice principles within Religious Studies classrooms serves as a powerful tool for promoting social justice competences among learners. This pedagogical approach, as supported by both observations and interviews, aligns with the principles advocated by educational scholars such as Kimanen (2022), Sporre (2020) and Carmody (2022) in the field of Religious Studies. The current theme is analysed in the sections below to enable deeper understanding of it.

5.4.1 Developing values and attitudes aligned with social justice

The findings demonstrated that teachers *use Biblical stories including the Israelites' escape and the Good Samaritan to teach social justice virtues*. This finding validates a need to employ specific Biblical stories to promote social justice competences among learners. Stories such as the ones highlighted often *convey significant moral and ethical messages* that apply to contemporary social justice challenges. Using these stories, teachers allow learners to *relate religious teachings to social justice principles*. This method is in line with Freire's (1973) appeal for education that includes learners' personal experiences and points of view, making knowledge relevant and meaningful.

Kimanen (2022) emphasises the potential of Biblical stories for developing social justice competences, pointing out that the recent revision of Religious Studies curricula in Finland addressed concerns of oppression and injustice. Similarly, Sporre (2020) found that many countries are incorporating social justice-related topics into their curricula, ensuring that learners engage with issues such as equality, human rights, and the fight against discrimination. This inclusion of social justice-related topics demonstrates how Religious Studies advocate for these principles to foster a more inclusive and empathetic approach to addressing societal challenges. Furthermore, Balkaya-Ince et al. (2020) argue that Religious Studies promotes community engagement and allows learners to share their opinions on oppression and injustice. The findings of the study demonstrate how teachers explain how *religious teachings may inspire empathy, compassion, and cooperation with marginalised people* by using Biblical stories such as the Israelites' escape or the parable of the Good Samaritan.

It is important to point out that, within Lesotho's educational system, the LBECP 2021 emphasises the development of 21st-century competences, especially social justice skills. This emphasis corresponds with the overarching goal of basic education in Lesotho, which is to "provide learners with a moral and religious or spiritual foundation for developing a character that is socially and culturally inclusive and capable of embracing diversity and the values essential for national unity" (MoET, 2021, p. 8). In this context, Religious Studies, with its spiritual focus, is well-suited to promoting social justice competences. By using stories from the Bible, teachers can help learners connect religious teachings to modern social justice issues, strengthening their understanding and involvement with these crucial concepts.

5.4.2 Encouraging critical reflection and analysis

The findings indicated that *teachers who include specific religious stories in social justice discussions* employ an educational approach that promotes critical thinking. This approach *encouraged learners to participate in critical thinking and analysis of complicated societal issues*. This approach aligns with Freire's (1973) educational philosophy that advocates for education as a transforming instrument that supports encouraging learners to critically explore Biblical stories. In corroboration, Hannam and May (2022) describe how studying stories from religion through a social justice lens encourages learners to critically examine power relations, confront injustices, and advocate for positive change in their communities.

An interesting factor, as the findings indicated, is the fact that *teachers include specific religious stories in social justice discussions, which is consistent with the wider aims of social justice education*, as reflected by the cited scholars. This seeks to improve learners' critical consciousness and ability to detect and solve inequality in societies. The *inclusion of unique religious stories into social justice discussions*, as revealed by the findings, enables learners to interact with complicated social issues in a contextualised and approachable way, resulting in a deeper understanding of social justice principles and how they can be applied in real-world circumstances. By applying this approach of including specific religious stories, Religious Studies teachers encourage critical reflection and analysis of Biblical stories to enable them to be used as agents of good change in societies.

5.5 Religious Studies teaching strategies for promoting social justice competences

The second research question examined how the teaching methods employed in Religious Studies contribute to fostering a conducive atmosphere for developing social justice competences. The data revealed a range of effective pedagogical methods utilised. Key methods identified included the ones discussed below.

5.5.1 Interactive discussions and group work

The incorporation of *interactive discussions and group activities in Religious Studies fosters social justice competences among learners*. Teachers use these methods to encourage critical thinking and embrace diverse viewpoints. This approach helps learners engage with social power structures. According to Tjabane (2010), teachers create inclusive learning environments by promoting active participation in discussions and group work, allowing learners to explore social justice issues from multiple perspectives. The *participatory aspect* of these discussions, as revealed by the findings, is in line with critical theory's emphasis on elevating marginalised voices, as emphasised by Hannam and May (2022).

Furthermore, interactive discussions and collaborative tasks not only encourage *human agency* and *empowerment of learners* as reflected by the findings, but also teach learners how to *critically engage with social justice problems* and *take action to effect good change*. This method is further supported by equity pedagogy principles, which guarantee that every learner has an equal opportunity to engage and learn, as emphasised by Hannam and May (2022). Furthermore, these activities correlate with multicultural education and equitable pedagogy,

emphasising the significance of inclusive teaching practices that include learners' different cultural origins, as mentioned by Hackman (2005). These methods of teaching foster inclusive learning environments in which learners may critically examine social power systems, welcome multiple viewpoints, and therefore fostering social justice competences.

5.5.2 Critical pedagogy

The findings indicated that the majority of teachers regularly employed critical pedagogy in their teaching of Religious Studies. This method entailed *posing critical questions and facilitating provocative discussions* to enable learners to reflect on religious teachings and their implications for social justice. Teachers deployed critical pedagogy to shift away from the conventional "banking model" of education, in which learners passively receive knowledge, and towards a more participatory and empowering paradigm espoused by Freire (1973).

Furthermore, the findings of the study indicated that *teachers' application of critical questioning* encouraged learners to *engage proactively and freely*. This experienced benefit of critical pedagogy is consistent with democratic teaching and learning practices that are corroborated by Lesaoana (2018) and Tjabane (2010).

Additionally, the findings indicated that teachers' *inquiry-based methods and reflective discussions* encouraged learners to engage with issues of injustice, gain a greater knowledge of societal disparities, and explore options for achieving social change. The finding was also visible as *teachers gave questions and randomly chose learners, ensuring that every learner had an equal chance of being selected.* This finding is in agreement with Tjabane's (2010) findings that showed that critical pedagogy also fosters inclusive learning settings in which all of the learners are appreciated and recognised, regardless of their background or viewpoints. These findings may help in understanding the role of Religious Studies teachers in providing inclusive learning environments in which learners foster social justice competences by using inquiry-based methods and reflective practices.

5.5.3 Reflective approaches and questioning

The study's findings demonstrate that reflective methods and questioning were predominantly employed by teachers to promote critical thinking and inclusion in Religious Studies classes. The findings indicated that *teachers employed reflective methods and questioning methods*

successfully to engage learners in relevant discussions while developing greater awareness of social justice principles. Notably, reflective methods correspond to the ideas of critical pedagogy. In accordance with the present result, a study by Lesaoana (2018) has demonstrated that reflective methods enable learners to critically analyse their views, assumptions, and values, as well as those of others, in connection to social justice issues.

The teachers' use of *thought-provoking questions* and *introspective discussions* enabled learners to investigate the depths of social justice principles and apply social justice ideas to real-life circumstances. This benefit of using thought-provoking questions and supporting introspective discussions mirrors those of the previous studies, including those of Morrissey (2023) and Olave et al. (2023), that have found that learners are encouraged to analyse the root causes of social inequalities and explore their own responsibilities in addressing them. This method is also consistent with the experiential learning espoused by Dewey and Freire (Morrow & Torres, 2003), which emphasises the importance of learning from learners' own experiences. In general, the current findings demonstrate that reflective methods and questioning methods, which are consistent with experiential learning and critical pedagogy, engage learners in meaningful discussion and foster self-reflection, which are essential for the development of social justice competences.

5.5.4 Contextual analysis and reading assistance

Another notable result was that some teachers employed contextual analysis and reading assistance to teach the basic parts of Religious Studies, notably social justice. In terms of contextual analysis, *teacher provided a brief contextual analysis of the passage* to provide a deeper understanding of the historical, cultural, and social circumstances that form religious teachings and their consequences for current situations. By contextualising Biblical passages within their historical and social contexts, learners were able to recognise the relevance of Christian teachings to contemporary social justice issues. This approach resonates with multicultural teaching practices that value various cultures to foster respect, acceptance, and tolerance (Hackman, 2005). Furthermore, contextual analysis fosters tolerance by recognising the many cultural and historical perspectives that shape religious interpretations (Dahlgren, 2022; Hailes et al., 2021). Teachers' focus on contextual awareness assisted learners in understanding the complex meaning of religious teachings and recognising the significance of

working towards social justice issues with cultural sensitivity and humility, as recommended by Freire (1970).

Similarly, the data indicated that *reading assistance is essential in Religious Studies learning*, specifically when learning complicated material, including Biblical texts. This technique ensured that all learners, regardless of their reading ability, understood what was being studied. The *teacher assisted with pronouncing difficult words* to ensure that learners understood the text relates to the concept of human agency. While illuminating this concept, Hannam & May (2022) indicate that it supports the need for learners to understand complex texts to promote social justice competences, implying that individuals should be equipped with the knowledge to take action and make decisions that affect their lives and the larger community. While contextual analysis deepens learners' understanding of the socio-historical contexts of religious teachings, reading assistance ensures that all learners can access and understand these texts. In general, therefore, it seems that both strategies promote critical thinking, empathy, and inclusivity, thus preparing students to address social justice issues in a thoughtful and informed manner.

5.6 Identified challenges in cultivating social justice competences

The findings revealed that while Religious Studies teachers successfully created an appropriate atmosphere for building social justice competences, they also encountered other hurdles. Because of the limits in their techniques, the teachers struggled to retain the involvement of learners, encourage critical thinking, and promote social justice. In a similar vein, some of the teaching methods employed by Religious Studies teachers were ineffective in developing social justice competences since they could not foster active participation, critical analysis, and independent exploration; elements required for the development of these competences. These challenges are discussed in further detail below.

5.6.1 Limited school resources

Despite the majority of teachers' attempts at encouraging the development of social justice competences, insufficient school resources were a substantial barrier to teaching Religious Studies for social justice competences. The data revealed that the *majority of learners in various classrooms lacked Bibles*, which limited their participation in the lesson. This source of concern corresponds with Archer (2022) and Jenkins et al. (2020), who argue that a lack of

fundamental school resources might influence the quality of education delivered to learners. In Religious Studies lessons, where access to Bibles and additional material is extremely important, resource constraints have a significant impact on the depth and breadth of learning opportunities. To affirm the criticality of school resource constraints, Naz and Afzal (2023) state that the breadth and depth of learning experiences are critical for competency development. The reason for this limited number of Bibles is not clear, but it may have something to do with the hiccups of the government book rental scheme, for which Mohoebi (2013) indicated there is a delay in distributing textbooks, which seems to hinder effective delivery of the subject matter. There is a need for proactive initiatives to address this issue and establish more favourable learning settings for learners.

5.6.2 Recognised challenges in sustaining consistent learner engagement

Despite these positive outcomes of the majority of Religious Studies teachers engaging learners, the findings also reveal that not all teachers have fully embraced critical pedagogy. There is evidence of a few teachers who *did not consistently engage learners.* For instance, *even though the role-play methodology was included in the lesson plan, the teacher did not involve learners in it*. Furthermore, the other *teacher used affirming statements* and *leading questions* which relied on memorisation teaching method rather than encouraging learners to analyse Biblical texts critically and make reasoned judgments. This memorisation approach aligns with Freire's (1973) concept of the "banking model" of education, where teachers act as depositors of knowledge and skills, resulting in passive learners who merely receive and later retrieve information. This inconsistency in engaging learners in critical thinking could hamper the effective development of social justice competences.

There are several possible explanations for these results. One possible explanation for the inconsistencies in some teachers' engagement with learners could be teachers' resistance to change. It is common that teachers may continue to *employ traditional teaching methods* that prioritise rote memory and passive learning over active involvement and inquiry. This situation is in agreement with Gallo-Gómez's (2023) finding that teachers' resistance to change is a major obstacle that may hamper effective teaching. Another possible explanation for this finding is *a lack of teacher training*. This is backed by Selepe's (2016) findings that the scarcity of training programmes for curriculum implementation in Lesotho jeopardises its successful

implementation. Cownie and Bradney's (2013) research further supports this, noting that a lack of training often results in teachers defaulting to teacher-centred methods of teaching.

5.7 Summary

The chapter presented and discussed the main findings of the study. Based on the findings, the discussion revealed that Religious Studies teachers strive to create a learning environment conducive to the promotion of social justice competences. They employ effective teaching methods compatible with the promotion of these competences. However, despite these efforts to create a suitable learning atmosphere and use effective teaching methods, challenges exist that may undermine the efforts of Lesotho's government to use Religious Studies to foster social justice competences to address social issues.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

6. Introduction

This chapter presents the conclusion and recommendations. The conclusion provides a concise summary of the main research findings, confirming that the study has successfully answered the research questions posed at the beginning. It discusses the implications of these findings, explaining how they contribute to the existing body of knowledge, their practical applications, and their relevance to the field of study. Additionally, it reflects on the limitations of the study, suggesting areas for improvement in future research. The recommendations section draws from the research findings to suggest specific actions and strategies that all stakeholders in education can implement to address the issues of developing social justice competences through the teaching and learning of Religious Studies.

6.1 Conclusion

This study explored the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences among secondary school learners in Lesotho using the case of three schools in Leribe district. The development of social justice competences is a key topic in 21st-century education. The research was motivated by reports of social justice issues in Lesotho, such as exclusive Religious Studies, bullying, violence, discrimination, weakened moral values in schools, and democratic instability. However, there has been little effort to scrutinise whether Religious Studies, given its position in the curriculum and inherent features, is still fulfilling its mandate to contribute positively to addressing these social injustices.

To set the stage for exploring the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences among secondary school learners in Lesotho, the study addressed two key research questions: 1. examining how Religious Studies contribute to the understanding and practice of social justice principles; and 2. identifying effective teaching strategies for promoting social justice competences. The study engaged critical theory as a framework to guide this exploration and furthermore involved participants, particularly Religious Studies teachers from three church-owned secondary schools in Leribe. The findings provided important insights into the educational landscape in Lesotho, offering a valuable contribution

to the ongoing discussions and debates around the potential of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences among secondary school learners.

Through data solicitation and analysis, the study concluded that Religious Studies teachers integrate a variety of strategies for promoting social justice, fairness, and equity, characterising a supportive learning environment conducive to promoting social justice competences. These strategies, which seemed to dominate teachers' classrooms, included their effective use of specific religious stories to illustrate social justice principles. This strategy proved to be a powerful pedagogical tool, aiding in the development of values and attitudes aligned with social justice, encouraging critical reflection, and fostering deep engagement with social issues. Furthermore, teachers effectively used practical applications of Biblical lessons and real-life examples to set social justice principles in context. This strategy also seemed to enhance understanding and empower learners for social action.

The study also revealed that the teaching strategies employed by Religious Studies teachers, such as interactive discussions, critical pedagogy, reflective approaches, and contextual analysis, contribute to creating an atmosphere where social justice competences can flourish. These interactive and intellectually stimulating learning experiences enable learners to grapple with complex social justice issues, challenge their assumptions, and develop the necessary knowledge, skills, and dispositions to become agents of positive change.

However, the research also identifies significant challenges that may hinder the full realisation of Religious Studies' potential in promoting social justice competences. Limited school resources, particularly the lack of access to Bibles and other teaching materials, pose a significant obstacle to effective teaching and learning. Furthermore, the study found inconsistencies in some teachers' engagement with learners, as well as reliance on traditional, non-interactive teaching methods in certain classrooms. These factors limit the effective development of critical thinking and active participation among learners, ultimately constraining the cultivation of social justice competences.

6.2 The recommendations of the study

This section provides practical recommendations to promote the development of social justice competences through Religious Studies in Lesotho secondary schools. The recommendations are based on the findings from the study. The paramount aim of these recommendations is to

address the identified challenges and build upon the effective strategies observed during the research. The recommendations are directed towards various stakeholders in Lesotho's education sector. These include the government, the teachers, learners, communities, school proprietors, and researchers in the field of education, more specifically, Religious Studies. These groups were already identified in Chapter 1 (Section 1.5).

6.2.1 Recommendations for the government

6.2.1.1 Reliable school learning materials supply

The study identified a need for more school materials, particularly Bibles and textbooks for the teaching and learning of Religious Studies. This shortage directly affects the quality of education and makes teaching and learning more difficult. It is, therefore recommended that the Ministry of Education and Training should ensure consistent provision of teaching and learning materials for Religious Studies. The materials include Bibles, textbooks, and digital resources. It is proposed that Religious Studies materials, more specifically the Bibles, be included in the government's existing book rental scheme, similar to how resources for other subjects are provided. This approach would normalise the availability of Religious Studies materials and make them equivalent to other subjects. The Ministry needs to recognise that without equal access to Religious Studies materials, the goal of promoting social justice competences could hardly be achieved.

6.2.1.2 Equitable resource distribution

The research also revealed significant issues with how available resources are distributed (Section 5.6.1). Beyond the shortage of Bibles in schools, it is concerning that Religious Studies textbooks are only available to ninth-grade learners, and their distribution to schools is frequently delayed. This intermittent approach, along with administrative ineffectiveness, exacerbates educational inequities and undermines learning continuity for learners as they go across the grades. To address this issue, the government needs to develop a durable, structured, and equitable distribution process. This process should ensure that all schools access Religious Studies resources on time. It is also important to extend textbook distribution to Grades 10 and 11, where present shortages are serious as well. By adopting all of these measures, the Ministry of Education and Training can ensure that educational resources are distributed equitably to all

learners. Neglecting these concerns will keep undermining educational objectives and expand the gap between learners who have access to resources and those who do not.

6.2.2 Recommendations for the teachers

6.2.2.1 Continuous professional development for teachers

The study found that while many teachers use effective teaching methods, there were discrepancies in maintaining consistent engagement in some teachers' classrooms (Section 5.2.2). This inconsistency undermines the delivery of Religious Studies and the development of important social justice skills in learners. To address this, it is recommended that teachers get additional training and professional development. This could involve attending workshops, courses, and programmes focused on innovative teaching approaches and social justice education. By participating in these continuous learning opportunities, teachers can stay up-to-date on effective teaching methods and improve their ability to consistently engage learners. Without this intervention, the differences in teaching effectiveness across Religious Studies will likely continue, hence negatively impacting learners' outcomes and perpetuating educational inequalities.

6.2.2.2 Peer collaboration

The study also found that some teachers struggle to maintain consistent engagement with learners, which is crucial for effective teaching and learning (Section 5.2.2). To address this, it is important to multiply efforts to encourage more collaboration among teachers. Creating regular opportunities for collaboration, such as observations, joint planning, and professional learning communities, is essential. These collaborative practices allow teachers to benefit from shared expertise and support each other in teaching Religious Studies more effectively and promoting social justice competences. Implementing these collaborative practices could lead to a more united and supportive teaching community, ultimately helping learners through better engagement and learning. Neglecting these opportunities for professional growth and collaboration could result in ongoing struggles of teachers to maintain consistent engagement with learners. Therefore, it is crucial for teachers to prioritise collaboration to enhance their teaching practices and support the development of social justice competences in their learners.

6.2.3   Recommendations for the learners

6.2.3.1   *Extracurricular activities*

The study found that extracurricular activities provided learners with practical experiences related to social justice. The findings revealed that learners were involved in social justice clubs at school, which helped them apply the theoretical knowledge from their Religious Studies classes to real-world situations (Section 5.2.3.1). This allowed them to understand the practical applications of social justice principles and develop skills including empathy, leadership, and civic responsibility. Based on these findings, the recommendation is that efforts should be increased to help learners engage with these practical issues beyond just the school environment. This could include having learners undertake community service projects that provide practical opportunities for them to apply what they learn in Religious Studies to real-world situations.

6.2.3.2   *Learners' feedback*

The study found that incorporating learners' feedback into the teaching and learning process significantly improved the relevance and effectiveness of the lessons. The findings revealed that learners felt more engaged and valued when their perspectives were taken into account (Section 5.2.3.1). Based on this, the recommendation is to have increased regular feedback mechanisms where learners can share their views through dedicated feedback sessions and class discussions reflecting on the teaching and learning experience. By creating structured opportunities for learners to provide feedback, teachers can gain insights into their strengths and areas of improvement in their teaching approaches. Enhanced regular feedback mechanisms can also help build stronger relationships between teachers and learners, as learners feel heard and valued.

6.2.4   Recommendations for communities

6.2.4.1   *Resource sharing*

The findings highlight that limited school resources significantly hinder the teaching of Religious Studies for social justice competences, with many students lacking access to Bibles, thus limiting their participation (Section 5.2.4.2). To address this challenge, it is crucial for communities to boost their strengths in mobilising their own resources to support schools.

Communities can contribute by donating religious texts, educational materials, and volunteer time to assist in various school activities. Ensuring that all learners have access to essential resources, such as Bibles, will enable equal participation in discussions and promote a more inclusive educational environment. Without more community support, resource limitations will continue to undermine the effectiveness of Religious Studies. Therefore, community involvement is essential to overcoming these barriers and providing all learners with equal opportunities to engage and learn.

6.2.5 Recommendations for school proprietors

6.2.5.1 Facility enhancement

The study concluded that limited resources, including inadequate school facilities, severely hinder the effective teaching of Religious Studies (Section 5.6.1). To address this, it is crucial to multiply investing in improving school infrastructure to create conducive learning environments that support interactive and engaging teaching methods. Improving school facilities and ensuring access to essential materials will enable teaching that is more effective and learning of Religious Studies. Without this investment, the quality of education will continue to suffer, limiting learners' ability to fully engage with and understand religious and social justice concepts. Therefore, enhanced investment in school infrastructure is essential to overcoming these barriers and enhancing the educational experience for all learners.

6.2.5.2 Anti-discrimination policies

The findings indicate that despite teachers' efforts, some learners struggle to fully engage with the curriculum due to resistance to change and inadequate training among teachers (Section 5.6.2). To address this, more energy should be exerted to develop and implement policies that promote inclusivity, respect, and non-discrimination, ensuring all learners feel valued and supported. These policies must establish clear guidelines and expectations for respectful and equitable treatment of all learners, regardless of their background, identity, or beliefs. Consistently upholding such anti-discrimination policies is essential for mitigating resistance to change and fostering an environment where all learners can actively participate in discussions around social justice issues. Failure to implement these policies will perpetuate exclusion and hinder the development of social justice competences among learners. Therefore,

immediate action is necessary to ensure an inclusive and supportive learning environment for all.

6.2.6   Recommendations for future research

The study highlighted the effectiveness of different teaching methods, such as interactive discussions, critical pedagogy, and reflective approaches, in fostering social justice competences (Section 5.5). The research findings indicated that while the employed teaching methods have proven effective, there were also some challenges, including limited resources and difficulties in maintaining consistent learner engagement. These discrepancies suggest the need for comparative studies to further explore the effectiveness of different teaching methods and curricula in promoting social justice competences across various factors such as geographical location, socio-economic conditions, cultural dynamics, and educational policies. By examining the relative effectiveness of different teaching approaches in diverse settings, researchers can identify best practices and strategies that can be adapted and replicated to enhance learners' social justice competences.

Furthermore, the researcher acknowledges that while this study aimed to provide comprehensive insights, the findings are based on a specific sample of schools and teachers. As a result, the study may not have provided a more comprehensive understanding of the role of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences. Future research, with a more diverse sample, could capture a broader range of perspectives and experiences. Additionally, the study was conducted within a limited timeframe, which may not have fully captured the long-term impact of religious studies on social justice competences. Long-term follow-up studies could provide more robust insights into the sustained effects of Religious Studies on learners' attitudes and behaviours.

Furthermore, the effectiveness of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences may be influenced by various external factors beyond the scope of this study, such as societal norms, cultural values, and political dynamics. Future research should consider these factors to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the impact of Religious Studies in promoting social justice competences.

6.3 Final remarks

This study has been a revelation on how Religious Studies can assist learners in developing social justice competences. By examining the perspectives and experiences of teachers, I have gained a better understanding of the prospects and challenges of teaching Religious Studies for promoting social justice competences. Religious Studies can cultivate critical thinking, empathy, and civic engagement in learners. To realise this potential, teachers need to possess the necessary skills and provide adequate and relevant support. Additionally, communities must collaborate with schools and religious organisations, and learners must be encouraged to take an active role in their education. If the limitations identified in this study could be addressed, further investigation into more creative methods to foster a more equitable and inclusive society would empower all learners to contribute to positive social change.

6.4 Summary

This study investigated the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences among learners in three secondary schools in the Leribe district. In this chapter, the conclusions were presented. Notably, these conclusions were based on the findings discussed in Chapter 5. The recommendations pointed towards various areas of significance which all the key stakeholders - including government, teachers, learners, communities, school proprietors, and future researchers - could explore in the quest to promote social justice competences appropriate for the 21st century.

REFERENCES

Andrei, C. (2023). The training of the religion teacher. *Technium Social Sciences Journal, 40,* 409-415. doi: 10.47577/tssj.v40i1.8304

Archer, A. (2022). A multimodal approach to English for academic purposes in contexts of diversity. *World Englishes, 41*(4), 545-553. https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12600

Arévalo, Y. and García, M. (2023). Scientific production on dialogical pedagogy: a bibliometric analysis. Data & Metadata. https://doi.org/10.56294/dm20237

Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Sorenson, C., & Razavieh, A. (2010*). Introduction to Research in Education*. 8th Ed. Australia: WARDSWORTH CENAGE Learning.

Balkaya-Ince, M., Cheah, C. S., Kiang, L., & Tahseen, M. (2020). Exploring daily mediating pathways of religious identity in the associations between maternal religious socialization and Muslim American adolescents' civic engagement. *Developmental Psychology, 56*(8), 1446-1457. https://doi.org/10.1037/dev0000856

Banks, J. & Banks, C. (2007). *Multicultural Education: Issues and Perspectives*. John Wiley and Sons, Inc.

Bobbert, M. (2017). Religious Education towards Justice: What Kind of Justice Is to Be Taught in a Christian Context? *Education Sciences, 7*(1), 30. https://doi.org/10.3390/educsci7010030

Boddy, C. (2016). Sample size for qualitative research. *Qualitative Market Research an International Journal, 19*(4), 426-432. https://doi.org/10.1108/qmr-06-2016-0053

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3*(2), 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Bridier, N. (2021). Describing populations and samples in doctoral student research. *International Journal of Doctoral Studies, 16*, 339-362. https://doi.org/10.28945/4766

Bryman, A. (2012). *Social Research Methods* (4th ed.)*. Oxford University Press Inc.

Beukes, J. (2023). Proposing a social justice approach to diaconia for a South African context. *Religions, 14*(5), 668. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14050668

Byrd, M. (2021). The diverse voices conference: a model of diversity and social justice education beyond the classroom. *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 24*(1), 69-72. https://doi.org/10.1177/15234223211057326

Carmody, B. (2022). Religious Education in Zambia: Social justice. *Journal of Religious Education, 71*(1), 49-61.

Castron, A. J. (2010). Themes in the research on preservice teachers' views of cultural diversity: Implications for researching millennial preservice teachers. *Educational Researcher, 39*(3), 198-210.

Caulfield, J. (2019). *How to do thematic analysis.* https://www.scribbr.com/methodology/thematic-analysis/

Claidière, N., & Whiten, A. (2012). Integrating the study of conformity and culture in humans and nonhuman animals. *Psychological Bulletin, 138*(1), 126-145. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0025868

Cochran-Smith, M. (2003). The multiple meanings of multicultural teacher education: a conceptual framework. *Teacher Education Quarterly*, 7–26.

Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2007). *Research methods in education* (6th ed.). Routledge.

Cownie, F., & Bradney, A. (2013). Socio-legal studies: a challenge to the doctrinal approach. *In Research methods in law* (pp. 42-62). Routledge.

Creswell, J. W. (2008). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed methods Approaches.* Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Methods Approaches. Third Edition.* Sage Publications.

Creswell, J. W. (2014). *Research Design*. Sage

Creswell, J. W. (2015). *Educational Research Planning, Conducting, and Evaluating Quantitative and Qualitative Research*. Pearson.

Creswell, J. W. (2016). *Essential Skills for the Qualitative Researcher*. SAGE Publications.

Crossman, A. (2020). *Understanding Critical Theory*. Retrieved from https://www.thoughtco.com/critical-theory-3026623

Dahlgren, R. (2022). Freire's dialogic process as a means of facilitating the teaching of controversial public policy issues. *Urbana: Urban Affairs and Public Policy, 23*, 102-115. https://doi.org/10.47785/urbana.1.2022.7Davie, G. (2022). The role of religious diversity in social progress. *Ethnicities, 22*(4), 559- 572.

Davis, D., & Miroshnikova, E. (Eds.). (2013). *The Routledge international handbook of religious education.* Routledge.

Dawadi, S. (2021). Thematic analysis approach: A step by step guide for ELT research practitioners. *Journal of NELTA, 25*(1-2), 62-71.

De Gialdino, I. V. (2009). *Ontological and epistemological foundations of qualitative* http://www.qualitativeresearch.net/index.php/fqs/article/view/1299/3163

DeMink-Carthew, J. (2018). Learning to teach in a "World Not Yet Finished": Social justice education in the middle level preservice teacher classroom. *Middle School Journal, 49*(4), 24-34.

Dewey, J. (1963). Experience and Education. Simon & Schuster

De Wet, C. (2007). School violence in Lesotho: The perceptions, experiences and observations of a group of learners. *South African Journal of Education, 27*: 673-689.

Dickson, K. (2013). *Empowerment of the Poor Agenda in Developing Countries. The Legal Empowerment Agenda: Poverty, Labour and the Informal Economy in Africa, 131*. Ashgate Publishing.

Doğusan, S., & Koçak, F. (2021). Standing on the ice: experiences of women national ice hockey players in turkey. *Physical Culture and Sport Studies and Research, 89*(1), 45-54. https://doi.org/10.2478/pcssr-2021-0005

Edibgo, M. N. (2023). Factors hindering effective teaching and learning of Christian religious studies in school: a case study of some selected secondary school in Ezza north local government area. *Ebonyi State College of Education, Ikwo Journal of Educational Research, 8*(1), 1-8.

Freire, P. (1970). *Pedagogy of the oppressed*. Seabury.

Freire, P. (1973). *Education for Critical Consciousness*. Seabury.

Gallo-Gómez, J. C. (2023). *Re-thinking Democracy in Resistance: A Theoretical Approach to Social movements, Collective Action, Social Transformation and Political Subjects* [Doctoral dissertation, Justus-Liebig-Universität Gießen].

Garner, P. W., & Middleton, K. V. (2023). Preservice Teachers' Social Justice Teaching Beliefs and Attributions of Black Boys' Classroom Behavior. *Early Education and Development, 34*(8), 1761-1778.

Guba, E. G., & Lincoln, Y. S. (1994). *Completing paradigms in qualitative research*. Sage.

Hackman, H. (2005). Five essential components of social justice education. *Equity and Excellence in Education, 38*:103-109.

Hage, S. M., Ring, E. E., & Lantz, M. M. (2011). Social justice theory. *Differences, 15*, 11-23.

Hailes, H., Ceccolini, C., Gutowski, E., & Liang, B. (2021). Ethical guidelines for social justice in psychology. *Professional Psychology Research and Practice, 52*(1), 1-11. https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000291

Hannam, P., & May, C. (2022). Religious education and social justice: reflections on an approach to teaching religious education. *Journal of Religious Education, 70*:249–260

https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-022-00188-4

Horkheimer, M. (1972). *Critical theory: Selected essays* (Vol. 1). A&C Black.

Ho, R., Ng, S., & Ho, D. (2007). The sage handbook of qualitative research. *Asian Journal of Social Psychology, 10*(4), 277-279. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-839x.2007.00237.x

Ilechukwu, L. C. (2014). Assessment for the improvement of teaching and learning of C ristian Religious Knowledge in secondary schools in Awgu education zone, Enugu State, Nigeria. *Journal of Education and Practice, 5*(32), 35-44.

Jenkins, J., Sánchez, L., Schraedley, M., Hannans, J., Navick, N., & Young, J. (2020). Textbook broke: textbook affordability as a social justice issue. *Journal of Interactive Media in Education,* (1), 3. https://doi.org/10.5334/jime.549

Johnston, A. (2023). *Assessment in Religious Education*. https://www.sadlier.com/religion/blog/assessment-in-catholic-religious-education

Kaphe, K. G. (2017). *Managing curriculum change: A study of six secondary schools in Maseru* [Masters Thesis, University of South Africa].

https://uir.unisa/handle/dissertation/kaphe/g.pdf

Khalema, T. (2023). *Impact of code switching in Lesotho Geography Education: Learners' and Teachers' Perspective* [Masters Thesis, The National University of Lesotho].

Kimanen, A. (2022). Privileged and non-privileged agencies – education about, into and with social justice in religious education classrooms, *British Journal of Religious Education*, DOI: 10.1080/01416200.2022.2086103

Klaasen, J. (2023). Practical Theology and Social Just Pedagogies as Decoloniality Space. *Religions 14*: 675. https://doi.org/ 10.3390/rel14050675

Knoblauch, C. (2023). Cultural and Religious Diversity in Early Childhood Education Implications of Socialization and Education for the Geographies of Childhood. *Religions, 14*(4), 555. https://doi.org/10.3390/rel14040555

Koul, L., Kumar, H., Chawla, D., & Sondi, N. (2016). *Methodology of Educational Research*. Vikas Publishing House. PVT, LTD

Kozol, J. (2005). *The shame of the nation: The restoration of apartheid schooling in America*. Crown.

Kūkea Shultz, P., & Englert, K. (2023). The Promise of Assessments That Advance Social Justice: An Indigenous Example. *Applied Measurement in Education, 36(3), 255-268.*

Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2005). *Practical research: planning and design*. Upper Saddle River. Prentice Hall.

Lephoi, S. R. (2021). *Exploring the effects of neo-colonialism on the implementation of learner-centred pedagogy: the case of French in the Lesotho Junior Certificate (JC) curriculum* [Masters Dissertation, The National University of Lesotho].

Lesaoana, M. (2018*). Teachers' perspectives of a transformative history curriculum in Lesotho high schools* [Doctoral dissertation, University of the Free State].

Leung, A. (2020). Boundary crossing pedagogy in stem education. *International Journal of Stem Education, 7*(1). https://doi.org/10.1186/s40594-020-00212-9

Lipiäinen, T., Ubani, M., Viinikka, K., & Kallioniemi, A. (2020). What does "new learning" require from religious education teachers? A study of Finnish RE teachers' perceptions. *Journal of Religious Education*, 68, 213-231. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-020-00098-3

Mador, B., Kim, M. J., White, J., Harris, I. B., & Tekian, A. (2019). Development of a novel conceptual framework for curriculum design in Canadian postgraduate trauma training. *Canadian Medical Education Journal.* https://doi.org/10.36834/cmej.68621

Mąkosa, P. (2020). St. John Paul II and Catholic education. A review of his teachings: an essay to inspire Catholic educators internationally. *International Studies in Catholic Education, 12*(2), 218-235.

Malterud, K., Siersma, V., & Guassora, A. (2016). Sample size in qualitative interview studies. *Qualitative Health Research, 26*(13), 1753-1760. https://doi.org/10.1177/1049732315617444

Martinello, F., Snoj, N., Skitek, M., & Jerin, A. (2020). The top-down approach to measurement uncertainty. *Biochemia Medica, 30*(2), 187-195. https://doi.org/10.11613/bm.2020.020101

Marguerite, G. L., Dean, T. S., & Katherine, H. V. (2006*). Methods in educational research: From theory to practice*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Martin, M. Y. (2015). *Performing Social Justice in South African Education: How teachers negotiate the complexity of teaching in an unequal world* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of KwaZulu-Natal].

Masengwe, G., & Dube, B. (2020). Postcolonial Trends of Decolonising The Religious Education Curriculum In Zimbabwe And South Africa. *Multicultural Education, 6*(5).

Maslianko, P., & Sielskyi, Y. (2021). Data science — definition and structural representation. *System Research and Information Technologies, (1)*, 61-78. https://doi.org/10.20535/srit.2308-8893.2021.1.05

Maxwell, J. (2021). Why qualitative methods are necessary for generalization. *Qualitative Psychology, 8*(1), 111-118. https://doi.org/10.1037/qup0000173

McCarron, T. L., Clement, F., Rasiah, J., Moran, C., Moffat, K. A., González, A., & Santana, M. (2021). Patients as partners in health research: a scoping review. *Health Expectations, 24*(4), 1378-1390. https://doi.org/10.1111/hex.13272

Miller, R. (2006). Making Connections to the World: Some Thoughts on Holistic Curriculum. *Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice, 19*(4)19-24.

Miller, R. L., & Guerrero, D. (2022). Resistance to Social Change. Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780367198459-REPRW84-1

Ministry of Education and Training. (2016). Education Sector Plan 2016 – 2026. MoET.

Ministry of Education and Training. (2009). *Curriculum and Assessment Policy: Education for Individual and Social Development.* MoET.

Ministry of Education and Training. (2020). *Grade 11 Religious Studies Syllabus*. MoET.

Ministry of Education and Training. (2021). *Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy*. MoET.

Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative Research: A Guide to Design and Implementation*. John Wiley & Sons, Inc.

Mohoebi, M. A. (2013). *An Assessment of the Lesotho Government Assistance Programmes in Addressing the Financial Implications of Education for All at Secondary School Level: A Case Study of Two Secondary Schools* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Witwatersrand].

Mokati, M. (2023). *Exploring teachers' pedagogical content knowledge in teaching quadratic equations using algebraic methods: the case of three high schools in Lesotho* [Unpublished Masters dissertation, The National University of Lesotho].

Mokhetšengoane, S. J. (2021). *Effective teaching practices in higher education with special reference to the 21st century: a case of Tezpur University* [Masters Dissertation, Tezpur University, India].

Mokotso, R. I. (2017*). Religious Pluralism for Inclusive Education in Lesotho Secondary Schools* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of the Free State]. http://scholar.ufs.ac.za:8080/xmlui/bitstream/handle/MokotsoRI.pdf.

Mokotso, R., & Ntombana, L. (2018). "God is not Christian": A case for decolonising of Religious Education for inclusive Education in Lesotho schools. *Pharos Journal of Theology, 99*, 1-13.

Molelle, H. K. (2006). *Global policy discourse and local implementation dynamics: A case study of Lesotho's Junior Certificate Religious and Moral Education Syllabus* [Masters Dissertation, University of Cape Town].

Morrissey, R. (2023). *What do religious education teachers need to successfully lead the integration of Catholic social teaching across the years 9 and 10 curriculum?* [Master's Thesis, Australian Catholic University).

Mortari, L., & Tarozzi, M. (2010). *Phenomenology as Philosophy of Research: An Introductory Essay*. Zeta Books.

Morrow, R., & Torres, C. (2002). *Reading Freire and Habermas: Critical pedagogy and transformative action*. New York: Teacher's College Press.

Mosia, P. A. (2019). *Framing school bullying as reflection of deteriorating Basotho moral principles.* Nova Science Publishers, Inc.

Murray, S., Gale, F., Adams, D., & Dalton, L. (2023). A scoping review of the conceptualisations of food justice. *Public Health Nutrition, 26*(4), 725-737. https://doi.org/10.1017/s1368980023000101

Mustahiqurrahman, M., Nurwahidah, N., Rahmawati, R., & Adnia, R. M. (2023). Implementation and Strengthening of Multicultural Islamic Education in Public Schools. *JURNAL PENDIDIKAN IPS, 13*(1), 158-168.

Naz, F. L, Afzal, A., & Khan, M. H. N. (2023). Challenges and Benefits of Multicultural Education for Promoting Equality in Diverse Classrooms. *Journal of Social Sciences Review, 3*(2), 511-522. https://doi.org/10.54183/jssr.v3i2.291

Nieuwenhuis, J. (2011). Social justice in education today. *Acta Academica, 43*(1): 189-209. http://www.ufs.ac.za/ActaAcademica

Nkanda, N. D. (2017). *The influence of school proprietors on the roles and responsibilities of school governing bodies in Church-owned schools in Lesotho* [Masters Thesis, University of   South Africa]

Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic Analysis: Striving to Meet the Trustworthiness Criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods, 16* (1), 1-13.

Nyaphisi, M. B. (2021). *Exploring the influence of socioeconomic status on equitable access to secondary education in Lesotho: A case study* [Doctoral Thesis, National University of Lesotho].

Orner, A., Netz, H., & Lefstein, A. (2024). Reifying, disorienting and restoring gender binaries in dialogic literature discussions. *Reading Research Quarterly, 59*(2), 155-172. https://doi.org/10.1002/rrq.528

Pietersen, D. (2023). A Critical Analysis of Affirmative Action in South Africa: Theological and Educational Perspectives. *Pharos Journal of Theology, 104*(4), 1-11. Doi: https://doi.org/10.46222/pharosjot.104.48Power, S. (2008). How should we respond to the continuing failure of compensatory education? *Orbis Scholae, 2*(2), 19-37.

Pollefeyt, D. (2020). Religious education as opening the hermeneutical space. *Journal of Religious Education, 68*:115–124. https://doi.org/10.1007/s40839-020-00105-7

Raselimo, M., & Mahao, M. (2015). The Lesotho curriculum and assessment policy: Opportunities and Threats. *South African Journal of Education, 35*(1), 1–12. https://doi.org/10.15700/201503070025

Research Methodology in Education. (2016). *Qualitative Data Analysis*. Online: http://research-methodology.net/researchmethods/data-analysis/qualitative accessed 08/12/2016

Richmond, B. (2006). Introduction to Data Analysis Handbook. Academy for Educational Development, Durham.

Romanyshyn, I., Yatsiv, S., & Demchuk, Y. (2023). The method of ensuring equal participation of students during group work in the crisis of the covid-19 pandemic. *Journal of Vasyl Stefanyk Precarpathian National University, 10*(1), 61-75. https://doi.org/10.15330/jpnu.10.1.61-75

San Diego State University. (2023). Rhetoric & writing studies. https://rhetoric.sdsu.edu/about/what-is-rhetoric

Schmidt, A. F., Groenwold, R. H. H., Delden, J. J. M. v., Does, Y. v. d., Klungel, O. H., Roes, K. C. B., … & Graaf, R. v. d. (2014). Justification of exclusion criteria was underreported in a review of cardiovascular trials. *Journal of Clinical Epidemiology, 67*(6), 635-644. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jclinepi.2013.12.005

Selepe, C. (2016). *Curriculum Reform in Lesotho: Teachers' Conceptions and Challenges* [Masters Thesis, University of the Witwatersrand]. http://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/jspui/bitstream.

Sibbett, L. A. (2016). Toward a transformative criticality for democratic citizenship education. *Democracy and Education, 24*(2), 1-11.

Simon, H. (2009). *Case study research in Practice*. Sage

Skrefsrud, T. (2022). A Proposal to Incorporate Experiential Education in Non-Confessional, Intercultural Religious Education: Reflections from and on the Norwegian Context. *Religions 13*: 727. https://doi.org/ 10.3390/rel13080727

Soderberg, C., Errington, T., & Nosek, B. (2020). *Credibility of preprints: an interdisciplinary survey of researchers.* https://doi.org/10.31222/osf.io/kabux

Solberg, V. S., Howard, K. A., Blustein, D. L., & Close, W. (2002). Career development in the schools: Connecting school-to-work-to-life. *The Counseling Psychologist, 30*(5), 705-725.

Southern African Development Community Secretariat. (2020). *SADC Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020-2030.* Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat.

Sporre, K. (2020). "Ethics in Compulsory Education – Human Dignity, Rights and Social Justice in Five Contexts." *HTS Teologiese Studies/ Theological Studies 76* (1), a5821

Stabback, P. (2016). *What Makes a Quality Curriculum? In-Progress Reflection No. 2 on Current and Critical Issues in Curriculum and Learning.* UNESCO International Bureau of Education. https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243975

Strhan, A., & Shillitoe, R. (2019). The stickiness of non-religion? Intergenerational transmission and the formation of non-religious identities in childhood. *Sociology, 53*(6), 1094-1110.

Stromquist, N. P. (2014). *Critical Theory: Its Meaning and Its Application to Social Action through Education*. Paper presented at the Comparative Education Society in Europe, Freiburg, Germany, 10-13 June 2014.

Tjabane, M. (2010). *Education policy and social justice in higher education: a South African case study* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Pretoria].

Thobi, G. J. (2020). *Types of composition writing-based subject-verb agreement errors by ESL high school learners in three selected schools in Botha-Bothe* [Masters Thesis, National University of Lesotho].

Olave, B. T., Tolbert, S., & Aceves, A. F. (2023). Reflecting on Freire: a praxis of radical love and critical hope for science education. *Cultural Studies of Science Education, 18*(1), 1-20. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11422-023-10168-1

Tutar, H. (2023). Problem areas of determining the sample size in qualitative research: a model proposal. *Qualitative Research Journal, 24*(3), 315-336. https://doi.org/10.1108/qrj-06-2023-0099

United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation. (2017). *Education.* Online: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/

Utami, P. T. (2022). Raising religious inherency: The role of interreligious competence in achieving religious education equality in multireligious public schools in Indonesia. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, 9*(1), 1-12. https://doi.org/10.1057/s41599-022-01298-y

Vaismoradi, M., Turunen, H., & Bondas, T. (2013). Content analysis and thematic analysis: implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. *Nursing and Health Sciences, 15*(3), 398-405. https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.12048

Vaismoradi, M., & Snelgrove, S. (2019). Theme in Qualitative Content Analysis and Thematic Analysis [25 paragraphs]. Forum Qualitative Sozialforschung / Forum: Qualitative Social Research, 20(3), Art. 23, http://dx.doi.org/10.17169/fqs-20.3.3376.

Vanson, S. (2014). *What on Earth are Ontology and Epistemology*? Online:

https://theperformancesolution.com/earth-ontology-epistemology

Vogel, T., Top, K., Karatzios, C., Hilmers, D., Tapia, L., Moceri, P. & Muñoz, F. (2021). Multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children and adults (mis-c/a): case definition & guidelines for data collection, analysis, and presentation of immunization safety data. *Vaccine, 39*(22), 3037-3049. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.vaccine.2021.01.054

Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Harvard University Press.

Walidin, W., & Widyanto, A. (2023). Social Responsibilities of Islamic Religious Education Teachers To The Community of Gayo Lues, Aceh, Indonesia. *DAYAH: Journal of Islamic Education, 6*(2), 216-232. DOI: 10.22373/jie.v6i2.18243

Wanjau, R. (2019). An Investigation of the Influence of Christian Religious Education on Student's Ethical Formation in Secondary Schools in Thika West Sub-County, Kenya. *International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science (IJRISS), |Volume III*, Issue VI, 381- 390

Wellington, J. (2000). *Educational Research: Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. Continuum.

Zagel, H., & Lohmann, H. (2020). Conceptualising state-market-family relationships in comparative research: a conceptual goodness view on defamilization. *Journal of Social Policy, 50*(4), 852-870. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0047279420000549

Zhang, R., You, C., Wang, L., Jiang, Y., He, L., Chen, F. & Han, H. (2023). A practice-based nursing emergency management system model for public health emergencies: a descriptive qualitative study. *Nursing Open, 10*(6), 3774-3786. https://doi.org/10.1002/nop2.1635

APPENDICES

Appendix A: Introductory letter from the university

The National University of Lesotho

Telephone: +266
22340601/3631

Fax: +266 22340000
http://www.nul.ls

P.O. Roma 180
Lesotho

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

13/11/2023

Senior Education Officer
Ministry of Education & Training
P.O. Box 12
Leribe 100

Dear Sir/Madam

A letter of introduction to undertake research

This letter serves to introduce Lehlohonolo Kurata (student number 201500449) – a masters student in the Faculty of Education at the National University of Lesotho (NUL). He is undertaking research on "The role of religious education in the development of social justice competences: A case of three Leribe secondary schools." The study requires her to interview the relevant participants in three schools of Leribe District, which are ▬▬▬ High School, ▬▬▬ High School and ▬▬▬ High School. Other data collection methods may also be used as the study dictates. Kindly accord the student the necessary assistance to enable her to conduct this study which has the potential to generate useful data and information in the field of education.

Your cooperation and assistance are most highly appreciated.

Sincerely

M. Makumane (PhD)

Head of Department

Language and Social Education

Appendix B: Introductory letter from the Ministry of Education and Training

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION AND TRAINING LESOTHO

LERIBE DISTRICT

20 November 2023

The Principals
Post-Primary Schools
Leribe District

Dear Principals

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH STUDY

Permission is granted to Lehlohonolo Kurata to collect research data at your school on the title: THE ROLE OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF LANGUAGES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMPETENCES: A CASE OF THREE SCHOOLS IN LERIBE DISTRICT.

You are kindly requested to provide him with the information he may require and your usual cooperation is highly appreciated.

Yours faithfully

'Mampaqa Hlojeng

District Education Inspector - Leribe

MINISTRY OF EDUCATION &
TRAINING
EDUCATION OFFICE
Hlojeng
2 0 NOV 2023
P.O. BOX 12, LERIBE 300
TEL: 2240 0210 / 2240 1360
FAX: 2240 0022

Appendix C: Introductory letter from the researcher

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY ON RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND SOCIAL JUSTICE COMPETENCES

I am writing to seek your valuable participation in a research study as part of my Master's program at the National University of Lesotho. The study focuses on "The Role of Religious Studies in the Development of Social Justice Competences: A Case Study of Three Secondary Schools in Leribe District." The primary aim of this research is to investigate how Religious Studies influences the development of social justice competences among secondary school learners. I am requesting your participation in this study, which will require 40 minutes of observation and about 30 minutes of semi-structured interview of your time. Your insights and experiences as teachers are crucial to the success of this research. I assure you that all information provided during the interview will be kept strictly confidential. Your name and identity will remain anonymous in the final research report.

Your participation will contribute to our understanding of how Religious Studies impacts students' social justice awareness. The findings may help inform curriculum development and teaching strategies aimed at fostering social justice values among our learners. I am flexible with scheduling the interview at your convenience. Please let me know your preferred date and time, I will do my best to accommodate your schedule.

If you are willing to participate or have any questions, please feel free to contact me at lehlohonolokurata1989@gmail.com or at 59027978 or 63523486. Attached herewith is a document from my institution confirming that the study is primarily for academic purposes.

Thank you for considering this request, and I hope to hear from you soon.

Sincerely,

……………………………..

 Mr. Lehlohonolo Kurata [student number: 201500449]

Appendix D: Teachers' consent form

Dear teacher

Please fill in and return the reply slip below indicating your willingness to be a participant.

Introduction:

I, …………………………………………. employed as a teacher at,
……………………. ……………………………………... , have been approached by
Lehlohonolo Kurata, a Master's candidate at the National University of Lesotho, to
participate in a research study on the role of Religious Studies in the development of social
justice competences.

Research Activities

(a) I will be asked to participate in a semi-structured interview or observation conducted.
(b) I agree to be audio-taped during the interview or observation lesson

Confidentiality:

(a) I understand that any data collected will be used solely for research purposes.
(b) I know that my name and identity will remain anonymous in the final research report.

Voluntary Participation:

(a) I acknowledge that my participation in this research is voluntary.
(b) I understand that I have the right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at
    any time without facing any negative consequences.

Consent:

I have read and understood the information provided in this consent form. I voluntarily agree
to participate in the research study described above. I understand that I can withdraw my
consent at any time without penalty.

Signature: _____ Date: _____

Appendix E: Non-participatory observation form

Participant information   **Session information**

Participant's ID   Subject majors

Years of experience in teaching   Grade observed

School's name   Observation date

School's affiliation   Duration of Class

Objective	Focus	Details	Observations made
1: To examine the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences among learners in Lesotho.	**1**: Teacher-learner relationship	Aims to understand the quality of the interactions and the teaching strategies employed to create a positive learning atmosphere	
	2. Classroom environment	Aims to understand the learning space and their impact on learners,' engagement and learning.	

	3. Learner engagement	Aims to understand the level of active, cognitive, and emotional involvement of the learners	
	4. Cooperation in tasks	Aims to understand the learners' abilities to work collaboratively, and complete the assigned tasks	
2: To identify relevant teaching strategies employed in Religious Studies classes for the promotion of social justice competences.	**1**: Group work, critical pedagogy and multi-cultural pedagogy group work	Concentrated on methods that enhance learners' understanding of social justice principles	

Observer's signature

…………………………………

Appendix F: Semi-structured interview guide

Personal information

Teacher's names (pseudonyms):   School's name (pseudonyms):

School affiliation (pseudonyms):

Introductory questions

1.   How many years of experience do you have in teaching Religious Studies?

2.   What are your academic qualifications?

3.   What subjects did you major in?

Session information

Observation date: Duration:

Main objectives

Objective 1: To examine the role of Religious Studies in developing social justice competences among learners in Lesotho.

Focus 1: Assessment of teachers' understanding of how Religious Studies integrates social justice themes.

(a) Teacher's understanding of social justice and Religious Studies:
  (i)   Can you elaborate on your understanding of "social justice" in the context of education?
  (ii)   How would you define "competence"?
(b) Teacher's understanding of the integration of social justice in Religious Studies Curriculum:
  (i) What do you think Religious Studies does to help learners in Lesotho understand social justice, fairness, and equity better?
  (ii) Can you name any topics or lessons that you believe contribute directly to the promotion of social justice?

Appendix G: Similarity index (turnitin plagiarism checker)

117