Exploring the Role of Religious Studies in Developing Moral Values among Secondary Schools Learners in the Northern Region of Lesotho

Lehlohonolo Kurata [a*]

[a] The National University of Lesotho, Lesotho.

Author's contribution

The sole author designed, analysed, interpreted and prepared the manuscript.

Original Research Article

ABSTRACT

Similar to many other countries, Lesotho has experienced growing concerns regarding moral decay among youth in recent years. This concern could be attributed to various factors, such as rapid socio-economic changes, advancements in technology, and shifting societal norms. Consequently, negative consequences have arisen, including drug abuse, disrespect for constituted authority, and disengagement from academics among learners. The study therefore intents to explore the efficacy of religious studies in addressing moral erosion and developing ethical behaviour to ensure its effective implementation and impact. This study adopts the Cognitive Dissonance Theory as a framework to investigate the potential of religious studies in secondary schools as a means to develop ethical behaviour and address the increase in moral decay among learners. Through purposive sampling, six teachers from six member schools of the religious studies association in the northern region of Lesotho were selected to participate in semi-structured interviews. The findings of the study indicate that moral decay among learners is primarily influenced by factors such as

_____

Corresponding author: Email: lehlohonolokurata1989@gmail.com;

poverty, lack of parental guidance, limited access to education, and dysfunctional family structures. Furthermore, the study reveals that religious studies content and various teaching approaches have the potential to cultivate moral values and counteract moral decadence among learners. The study recommends that teachers receive continuous professional development and support to enhance their pedagogical skills in effectively delivering moral education through religious studies. Moral instruction curriculum rather than religious studies curriculum should be introduced. The curriculum should accommodate all religions' moral precepts.

1. INTRODUCTION

In recent years, Lesotho has experienced rapid socio-economic changes, accompanied by growing concerns about deteriorating moral values among youth, particularly secondary school learners. The surge in technology and the dissemination of information, along with societal shifts, have been identified as some of the significant contributing factors to this moral decadence [1,2,3]. While technological progress brings indisputable benefits, it also raises concerns about the decay of moral values among youth, including secondary school learners, leading to consequences such as drug abuse, disrespect for teachers and academic disengagement [4].

Amidst these transformative changes, the education sector has emerged as a critical battleground in combating moral decay among youth. Schools have been entrusted with the responsibility of serving as vessels of knowledge and fostering morality to develop well-rounded learners [5,6]. This emphasis on fostering virtuous and responsible learners aligns with global goals for sustainable development, as illustrated by the United Nations' Agenda 2030 and its Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Goal 4 specifically emphasises the importance of "inclusive and equitable quality education" [7], which encompasses the development of life skills, values, attitudes, and moral values [8]. Similarly, Africa's Agenda 2063 and the Southern African Development Community's (SADC) Regional Indicative Strategic Development Plan (RISDP) 2020–2030 advocate for nurturing ethical youth as drivers of sustainable development (African Union, 2015) [9].

Lesotho, in response to these frameworks, has developed its Education Sector Plan (ESP) 2016–2026, which aims to provide quality learning opportunities while emphasising moral values [10]. Recognising the pivotal role of education in shaping character and responsible decision-making, the Curriculum and Assessment Policy of 2009 (CAP 2009) played a central role in addressing learners' holistic competencies. Within CAP 2009, the "Personal, Spiritual, and Social" learning area specifically aimed to inculcate ethical values [11]. Religious studies formed part of this learning area and was intended to develop moral values. Recently, the Lesotho Basic Education Curriculum Policy (LBECP) of 2021 was developed, which places emphasis on providing 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 [12]. Religious studies, with its inclusion of a spiritual dimension, aligns well with this aim, as spirituality goes beyond mere knowledge or skill acquisition and focuses on the inner regions of ethics and morals [13]. Thus, religious studies seem to possess the potential to be a mechanism for developing moral values and addressing the surge in moral decay among learners.

Despite the efforts made by Lesotho's education sector to address concerns regarding deteriorating moral values among youth, including learners, there continues to be a persistent surge in moral decadence [14,2,15]. Rapid socio-economic changes, technological advancements, and societal shifts have all contributed to this problem. The consequences of moral erosion, such as drug abuse, disrespect for teachers, and academic disengagement, are evident among learners in secondary schools, despite the fact that religious studies is taught in schools [1,2]. Therefore, it is crucial to explore the efficacy of religious studies in addressing moral erosion and developing ethical behaviour to ensure its effective implementation and impact. This study aims to contribute to the ongoing debate on learners' morality in schools, with the ultimate goal of influencing educational policies and practices in Lesotho and fostering a more virtuous youth generation.

This paper will explore the theoretical framework that underpins the argument for the potential of religious studies in fostering moral development, review the relevant literature on morality and moral decadence, examine the causes of moral erosion among youth, the impact of moral erosion, and discuss the challenges in implementing effective religious studies to combat moral decay among the youth. To achieve these objectives, the study will address the following:

1. What are the underlying causes of moral decay among the youth population in the Northern region of Lesotho?
2. How does religious studies in the Northern region of Lesotho's secondary schools contribute to reducing moral decay among learners?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Underlying Theory

The underlying theory that supports the argument for the potential of religious studies in fostering moral development is the Cognitive Dissonance Theory (CDT). Developed by Leon Festinger in 1957, CDT explores the interplay of perceptions, motivations, and thoughts within an individual. According to Yahya and Sukmayadi [16], "cognition" in this theory refers to an individual's knowledge about themselves or their environment. The theory suggests that two cognitions can be either relevant or irrelevant to each other. When they are relevant, they create consonance, while dissonance arises when there is a mismatch between cognitive elements, such as beliefs and behaviours, as explained by Tueanrat and Alamanos [17]. This dissonance can lead to psychological discomfort, stimulating individuals to resolve it by avoiding situations or information that exacerbate the dissonance.

The relevance of CDT becomes evident when considering the impact of religious studies on addressing moral erosion among the youth in the Northern Region of Lesotho. This theory helps us understand the psychological processes that may occur when learners encounter moral teachings in religious studies that challenge their existing beliefs and actions related to moral decadence. To illustrate the significance of this theory, let us consider a scenario where students of religious studies confront moral and ethical teachings that conflict with their personal beliefs. In such instances, Tueanrat and Alamanos [17]

agree with Cooper and Carlsmith [18] in suggesting that learners seek to reduce dissonance by eliminating factors that contribute to it. This implies that students may strive for coherence between their beliefs and actions by reassessing their attitudes and behaviours and aligning them with the moral lessons presented in religious studies. Furthermore, in a multi-religious country like Lesotho, religious differences could create biases and create room for what one Religion could regard as morally okay while the other Religion could adjudge it wrong.

2.1.1 The concepts of morality and moral decadence

The concepts of morality and moral decadence have been subject to various interpretations by scholars in fields such as Philosophy, Sociolgy and Psychology. Morality, in simple terms, involves the evaluation of right and wrong actions by individuals or societies (National Open University of Nigeria [NOUN], 2006). Khanam (2008) further explains that morality is based on principles that differentiate between "good" and "wrong" actions. Carr [19] associates the concept of the "highest good" with Aristotle's eudaimonia, which encompasses human happiness. Carr [19] emphasises that Aristotle's moral inquiry revolves around the question, "What kind of person should I be?" This inquiry goes beyond mere actions and highlights the importance of virtues and positive character traits that lead to positive outcomes and discourage negative ones. Notably, Khanam (2008) and Carr [19] provide illumination on the notion of morality, emphasising its foundation in distinguishing between "good" and "wrong" activities, as well as its relationship to human satisfaction and virtue. Carr's [19] important point about Aristotle's moral inquiry is contrasted with modern perspectives by Andy-Philip and Zhiya [20], who emphasise the cultural and sociological basis of morality. This comparison focuses on the evolution of moral philosophy and its application in various circumstances.

A crucial aspect is Aristotle's belief that morality is derived from cultural and societal values, suggesting that moral principles are acquired rather than self-constructed. Across different cultures, Andy-Philip and Zhiya [20] emphasise that morality includes attitudes and behaviours such as respect, honesty, responsibility, and fairness. These foundational values play a significant role in defining morality and guiding

interactions to ensure harmonious coexistence within societies. This perspective aligns with Nucci's [21] view, which distinguishes morality from etiquette, law, and religion. Social psychologists highlight the inclusion of etiquette within morality and the integration of religion with moral conduct. This perspective emphasises that morally aware individuals uphold etiquette, obey the law, and adhere to religious principles. Furthermore, Nucci's [21] division between morality, etiquette, law, and religion is set against Dewey's [22] focus on the function of education in creating moral character. This contrast highlights morality's multifaceted nature and the different components that shape it.

Considering the collaborative nature of morality, Dewey [22] stresses the crucial role of education in shaping character and instilling ethical and moral values, particularly among young people. In a different context, Dick, Ede, and Chiaghanam [23] define moral decay as the erosion or weakening of established moral standards. This refers to a decline in the principles and values that guide ethical behaviour within society. Similarly, Muraino and Ugwumba [24] explore moral decay as the emergence of diminished moral values among individuals or societal groups. Importantly, this decline in moral values is particularly evident in educational settings like schools, which is also reflected in the situation in Lesotho [25]. When examining the issue of moral decline, the literature review considers the definition provided by Dick, Ede, and Chiaghanam [23] and explores the various manifestations of moral decay as discussed by Muraino and Ugwumba [24]. By combining these perspectives with the insights shared by Uche, Uche, and Ngozi [25] regarding moral erosion in educational environments, a comprehensive understanding of the difficulties arising from diminishing moral values is achieved. Ultimately, the prevalence of moral erosion demonstrates a societal shift towards weakened moral and intellectual discipline, creating an atmosphere characterised by negativity and hostility, even within the specific context of the Northern Region of Lesotho.

2.2 Causes of Moral Erosion among Learners in Lesotho

2.2.1 Urbanisation in lesotho

Urbanisation refers to the physical expansion of cities, resulting from the movement of people from rural areas and suburbs into urban areas, particularly larger cities [4]. In Lesotho, the growth of urban areas is primarily driven by rural migrants who relocate to cities in search of improved living conditions [26]. It has been argued that due to the competition for limited resources in urban areas, young people including secondary school learners often engage in immoral activities [20]. There is now a consensus among researchers, including Ezeh (2015), that urbanisation has a negative impact on human morality and in particular learners living in urban areas. It is indeed evident that various social problems such as gangsterism, human exploitation, alcohol and drug abuse, are more prevalent among learners schooling in urban areas. These issues are also present in urban areas in the Northern Region of Lesotho, where schools located in urban areas including Maseru, Maputsoe and Hlotse frequently experience crime and drug abuse [2]. It is therefore crucial to explore the potential of religious in curbing the moral decay triggered by urbanisation.

2.2.2 Poverty in Lesotho

Lesotho has made limited advancements in improving the living conditions of its population [27,28]. The country's ranking of 153 out of 188 nations on the UNDP Index indicates the harsh realities faced by its people [28]. These economic challenges drive individuals to engage in illegal activities, such as illicit mining in South Africa, which leads to arrests, accidents, and violence within Basotho music groups (Africa News, 2022) [29]. Recently, there has been an increase in the migration of women to South Africa to work as domestic helpers due to poverty, exposing some to human trafficking and causing others to abandon their families and disappear [29]. This desperate migration of Basotho individuals to South Africa contributes to disreputable practices within communities and schools, as highlighted by Kali [28]. The pervasive issue of poverty in Lesotho may trigger moral decay among secondary school students in the Northern Region of Lesotho, further compounded by migrant labourers and individuals who abandon their families for reckless living in South Africa.

2.2.3 The family system

According to Odeh [30], the family requires social control mechanisms to ensure that its members adhere to cultural guidelines. This emphasises the important role of the family in shaping children's characters to align with society's

fundamental norms and values. Interestingly, the Basotho people recognise that raising morally upright children is a collective responsibility of the entire society. These perspectives align with Adebisi's [31] view that a child's character is influenced by parental interactions and how parents nurture them.

However, in Lesotho, the traditional role of the family in parenting children looks to be fading. Parents are abandoning their responsibilities to guide their children's values [30]. According to Ezeh (2015), economic constraints that force parents to work away from home for extended periods intensify some cases of moral decay prohibiting them from performing their parental duties. This has resulted in a moral decline crisis among young people in secondary schools in Lesotho's Northern Region, as they lack, due to constant absence of parents, the home grown moral strength to resist the temptations of immoral and illegal behaviours.

2.3 Impact of Moral Erosion on Lesotho's Learners

2.3.1 Socio-economic life

The consequences of moral decline have significant implications, hindering a nation's progress. According to Omali (2016), this deterioration impedes the country's development as young people increasingly adopt a morally corrupt lifestyle within educational institutions. Adetayo [32] supports this view, pointing out a disturbing increase in criminal incidents involving young people. Furthermore, the increase in criminal incidents involving young people, as reported by the police, has raised concerns. Estimates from the United States suggest that more than half of young people under 18 years have witnessed or been victims of violence, with young people being twice as likely to be victims of serious violent crime compared to those over 18 years [33]. In Lesotho, Mosia [15] and Moea [2] concur that moral decay is widespread among youth in schools and communities. Consequently, Badmus [34] argues that the pervasive moral decline often discourages foreign investors due to the prevailing unethical climate. This concern is reinforced by the establishment of a youth boot camp by the Lesotho Defence Force (LDF) aimed at restoring security, highlighting the apprehension that high rates of business robberies associated with moral decay threaten peace and deter potential investors, thereby negatively impacting Lesotho's economy (South African Broadcasting Services [SABC], 2023).

2.3.2 Moral decay in academic life

The educational sector has been infiltrated by moral decay, tarnishing the very institutions that are meant to cultivate students' moral values. According to Hagan [35], there is an increasing prevalence of violence and drug abuse within school environments. As a result of this moral decline, schools can no longer guarantee the safety and well-being of students. Similarly, Harris and Associates (1995) conducted a survey that shed light on the impact of immorality on teachers and students in specific school districts. The survey revealed a connection between moral decay and students' academic performance, demonstrated by a decline in academic achievements, an increase in student dropouts, and frequent transfers due to fear of violence. This situation is relevant in Lesotho, where Mohlouoa (2014) highlights that there are rising socio-economic pressures, which encompass factors like increasing poverty rates and unemployment. The escalating poverty that affect students may lead learners to moral decay including excessive absence from school.

2.4 Challenges of using Religious Studies for Effectively Curbing Moral Decadence

2.4.1 Religious pluralism and inclusivity

Religious studies in Lesotho face unique challenges when it comes to effectively addressing moral decay. The primary goal of religious studies is to cultivate skills that can address contemporary issues, including moral decadence among students [12]. However, the curriculum encounters obstacles due to religious pluralism. Lesotho is a diverse country with various religions such as Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and indigenous religions. This diversity poses a challenge in teaching religious studies in an inclusive manner. Mokotso [5] and Kurata [36] argue that the current religious studies curriculum is not inclusive enough, as moral values are derived exclusively from Biblical texts. This disparity highlights the need that instead of one religion's precepts taking preeminence and thereby causing disaffection among students and citizenry, introduce moral instruction curriculum that accommodates all Religions. Failure to address this limitation could impede the effective implementation of religious studies for moral growth.

2.4.2 Evolving societal norms

Another challenge lies in the changing dynamics of the contemporary world, particularly with technological advancements that have led to shifts in societal norms [37]. The religious studies curriculum may struggle to effectively address emerging moral dilemmas such as cyberbullying and modern behavioural issues in schools. It is posited by Ayanwale, Sanusi, Molefi and Otunla [38] that there are discrepancies in the curriculum in addressing these newly emerging issues including the advancement of technology such as artificial intelligence. Adapting the curriculum to address these contemporary challenges and creating authentic assessments to monitor students' moral growth may prove complex tasks for teachers, as highlighted by Kurata [39], who emphasises the constant need for revision and innovation.

2.4.2 Discrepancies in curriculum

Furthermore, Tinto (2006) highlight the concern that viewing religious studies as a mandatory subject rather than a genuine pursuit of spiritual and moral growth can hinder the effectiveness of religious studies. The gap between theory and practice could hinder the possibility of real moral transformation since students might prioritise meeting academic demands instead of actively engaging in moral development. When students view religious studies simply as an academic requirement, the potential for genuine moral transformation may be limited. This can result in cases where students obtain excellent grades in religious studies but lack true moral development since the focus is on achieving good grades rather than personal engagement for authentic transformation.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1 Research Design

This study adopts a qualitative case study research design. According to Mokati and Kurata [40], a qualitative approach allows a researcher to make an in-depth collection, examination, and presentation of data about a particular incident with the purpose of learning more about it. Due to the nature of a qualitative study, it enables the researcher to gather in-depth information about teachers' experiences and views regarding the role of religious studies in addressing moral decay among secondary school learners in the Northern Region of Lesotho.

3.2 Participants

It is worth mentioning that there are three religious studies associations in different regions of Lesotho: the northern region, the central region, and the southern region. In the sampling process, purposive sampling was utilised to select an association from the Northern region.

Purposive sampling involves intentionally selecting participants based on the researcher's judgment in order to gather information-rich cases relevant to the phenomenon being studied [41]. This method allows researchers to choose individuals who are most likely to provide valuable and relevant information, making efficient use of limited research resources [42]. The decision to select the Northern Religious Studies Association as the sample population was influenced by the reason that the association have participants who can provide valuable insights into the research topic. Notably, the Northern Association consists of schools from six districts. As a result, purposive sampling was employed to select twelve religious studies teachers from diverse secondary schools, each representing one district. It is important to note that the participants vary in terms of sex, age, qualification, religious affiliation, area of specialization and experience, as illustrated in Table 1. These variations align with Cohen et al.'s [43] suggestion that diverse populations contribute to the richness of data.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were carried out with twelve participants selected from Table 1. According to Leavy [44], semi-structured interviews provide participants with the opportunity to express themselves in their own words, share detailed responses if they wish, and explore various directions in response to the questions. These interviews were particularly suitable for gaining insights into teachers' perspectives and experiences regarding the impact of religious studies on reducing moral decay among learners and the challenges associated with its implementation. With participants' consent, the interviews were recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Table 1. Participants' biographical description

Label	Age	Sex	Qualification	Area of specialization	Religious affiliation	Experience	District	Geographic location
P1	34	M	Dip. Ed.	Religious studies & Sesotho	Christian	7 years	Leribe	Lowlands
P2	41	F	B. Ed.	Religious studies & English	Christian	16	Leribe	Highlands
P3	29	M	B. Ed.	Religious studies & English	Christian	5	Butha-Buthe	Highlands
P4	51	F	B. Ed.	Religious studies & Sesotho	Christian	21	Butha-Buthe	Lowlands
P5	40	F	B. Ed.	Religious studies & Sesotho	Christian	15	Mokhotlong	Highlands
P6	36	M	Dip. Ed.	Religious studies & Sesotho	Christian	7	Mokhotlong	Highlands
P7	42	F	B. Ed.	Religious studies & English	Christian	16	Thaba-Tseka	Highlands
P8	46	M	Dip. Ed.	Religious studies & Sesotho	Christian	17	Thaba-Tseka	Highlands
P9	32	M	Dip Ed.	Religious studies & Sesotho	Christian	5	Maseru	Lowlands
P10	32	F	B. Ed.	Religious studies & English	Christian	7	Maseru	Highlands
P11	50	F	B. Ed.	Religious studies & English	Christian	20	Berea	Lowlands
P12	56	M	Dip. Ed.	Religious studies & English	Christian	23	Berea	Highlands

3.4.2 Interview guide

The semi-structured interview guide consisted of open-ended questions designed to explore teachers' viewpoints on various aspects of religious studies, including curriculum content, teaching methods, student engagement, and challenges in addressing moral decay. Sample questions from the interview guide included:

(a) What, in your view, are some of the root causes contributing to the observed moral decay among learners in the Northern Region of Lesotho secondary schools?
(b) How would you describe the relevance of religious studies content in addressing moral decay among students?
(c) What teaching methods do you use in religious studies classes to promote moral development among students?
(d) What are the main challenges you face in utilising religious studies to combat moral decay among learners?

3.5 Data Analysis

The collected data was subjected to thematic data analysis. Thematic data analysis, as described by Creswell (2008), is a process that involves categorising, describing, and synthesising data. The process of analysing thematic data typically involves several steps, such as becoming familiar with the data, creating initial codes, identifying themes, reviewing and refining themes, assigning names to themes, coding the themes, and producing a final report [45]. Thematic analysis is particularly useful for uncovering topics within verbal or written interviews, making it a valuable approach for this current study as it involves interviews. Furthermore, thematic analysis provides a qualitative and detailed account of the data, allowing for a thorough exploration of the collected information [46]. This approach therefore assisted the researcher in finding detailed information regarding the role of religious studies in developing moral values. Furthermore, this method allows for the identification and analysis of emerging codes, enabling a detailed examination of participants' opinions, perceptions, and behaviours without imposing preconceived notions onto the coding scheme [47]. In this regard, the researcher identified emerging codes from the interview data that were interpreted.

4. RESULTS

This section of the study presents the findings and discussions obtained from the semi-structured interviews that were conducted with six secondary religious studies teachers. The findings of the study align with the three research questions as follows: (1) What are the underlying causes of moral decay among secondary school learners in the Northern Region of Lesotho? (2) How does religious studies in Lesotho's secondary schools contribute to reducing moral decay among learners? (3) What are the obstacles and prospects of using religious studies to address moral erosion among learners?

4.1 Research Question 1: What are the Underlying Causes of Moral Decay among Secondary School Learners in in the Northern Region of Lesotho?

The first question to be posed to participants was about some root causes contributing to the observed moral decay among learners. In response to the question, participants 1 and 4 noted the influence of poverty on moral decay. In particular, P1 said,

> *Some learners are from families not having enough money; they get involved in immoral deeds in search of money.*

Participants indicate that learners from families with financial constraints may engage in immoral activities in search of money. Their sentiments suggest that economic constraints can push individuals to disregard their moral values in order to improve their financial challenges [48].

On the other hand, P2, P7 and P9 emphasise the lack of parental mentorship in shaping moral decision-making. The interviewee puts it,

> *If a learner is from a family where the parents do not mentor children, this may leave young people vulnerable to negative peer influences and societal pressures and end up ill-informed moral decision-makers.*

Being a mentor implies not only providing guidance but also serving as positive role models for ethical behaviour. P2's emphasis on the lack of parental guidance suggests that parents play a central role in instilling moral values and principles in their children [49].

In a similar question, P3 and P5 draw attention to the relationship between education and morality. In particular, P5 said,

> *When one is not educated, they may lack opportunities for moral development, exacerbating moral decay.*

Participants indicate the crucial role education plays in shaping individuals' moral values. Their emphasis implies that if a learner lacks quality education, they may likely indulge in moral deeds due to a lack of ethical principles that can guide their behaviour and moral reasoning [50,51].

P6, P11 and P12 highlights the impact of dysfunctional families on moral decay. P6 noted,

> *The other problem comes from the family structure. Some families are not in a bond, and this leaves children with a feeling of isolation and disconnectedness, contributing to moral decay.*

The participant's responses indicate that strong family bonds are essential for instilling values that are crucial in fostering moral development among learners [52,53].

On the other hand, P10 noted,

> *When kids start using drugs or drinking early, it can mess with their thinking and make them do things they wouldn't normally do.*

Participant 10's statement "make them do things they would not normally do" suggests that substance abuse can cause individuals to deviate from their typical moral behavior. This highlights the significant impact that drugs and alcohol can have on altering people's conduct and ethical decision-making abilities [54,55].

In summary, the interview presentations reveal that moral decay among secondary school learners in Lesotho is influenced by poverty, lack of parental guidance, limited education access, and dysfunctional family structures, which were identified as key contributors to moral decay.

The second question to be posed to participants was about the perceived significant societal changes that may have influenced the moral values of learners in recent years. In response, P1, 6, 7, 8 and 11 have similar viewpoints, and in particular, P1 said,

> *I believe one significant change is how much time kids spend on social media and the internet. They're exposed to all kinds of stuff that can shape their views on what's right and wrong.*

Participants 1, 6, 7, 8 and 11 point out the negative influence of technology on learners' moral values and behaviours. Their assertion implies that the proliferation of the internet sources exposes them to potentially harmful content that persuades them to discard their traditional moral norms.

Participant 2, on the other hand, notes,

> *What I have seen is that most of these immoral deeds are more popular in town. In villages, there are no extreme cases since learners are still connected to traditional values and social bonds.*

Participant's response indicates that traditional values and social bonds are stronger in rural communities. This indicates that urbanisation and modernisation may be associated with a decline in traditional moral values.

Furthermore, participants 3 and 4 point out that societies today are prioritising financial gain over the moral development of children. This shift indicates socio-economic changes that may influence learners' perceptions of success and morality. The following quotation is P3's assertion:

> *People these days are not concerned about how one behaves; as long as they make money, it is okay. These also affect learners who live in communities where the priority is on making money rather than developing morality.*

The last participants, P5 and P12, highlights the normalisation of unethical behaviour in public spaces as a cause of the trend. He noted P5,

> *These days, the public does not care about exposing unethical behaviour. They drink, smoke, fight, and insult in public. These may influence young people to accept moral responsibilities.*

The normalisation of unethical behaviour in public, as noted by P5 and P12, has detrimental effects on learners' moral development. Learners

consider these unethical behaviours of adults as socially unacceptable.

In conclusion, the responses indicate that learners in secondary school in Lesotho are influenced by various societal changes and trends that affect their moral values and behaviours. These include technology, urbanisation, shifting societal priorities, and the normalisation of unethical behaviour. It is crucial to understand these influences so as to analyse whether religious studies are compatible with addressing them.

4.2 Research question 2: How does Religious Studies in in the Northern Region of Lesotho's Secondary Schools Contribute to Reducing Moral Decay among Learners?

Participants were asked about their perception of the current curriculum content of religious studies in imparting moral values for mitigating moral decadence among learners. Participant 1, 7 and 12 emphasise the role of religious studies in teaching students about living a moral life. According to P7,

> *Religious studies teach students about living a moral life. Learners are exposed to Biblical teaching where they learn about Jesus, who is virtuous. This helps them understand right and wrong better.*

According to him, religious studies teach students about living a moral life by exposing them to Biblical teachings, particularly focusing on the virtuous character of Jesus. This exposure helps students understand the concepts of right and wrong more effectively.

Participants 2, 3 and 8 agreed that religious studies encourage learners to identify values and apply them in real life. This approach encourages students to identify and apply moral lessons from scripture in real-life situations, promoting active moral engagement. Participant emphasised that,

> *Religious studies are not like in the past. This time, students are encouraged to identify lessons and values in the scriptures and apply them in everyday life.*

On the other hand, P4 and 11 indicate that religious studies promote respect for diversity and interfaith understanding by introducing

students to other religions and fostering respect and tolerance for different belief systems. Accordingly,

> *Religious studies teach students respect for other people since they are introduced to other religions.*

According to P4 and P11, religious studies can provide a platform for students to learn about various religious traditions, beliefs, and practices. Through this exposure, students can develop a broader understanding of different religious perspectives and gain insights into the values, customs, and rituals associated with diverse faiths.

Lastly, P5 and 6 averred that religious studies could promote fairness, compassion, and social justice, serving as moral lessons that encourage students to act ethically. According to P5,

> *Religious studies teach students to be fair and help others. We have stories such as the Good Samaritan.*

In conclusion, what emerges from participants' responses is that all participants agree that religious studies' content could impart values aimed at mitigating moral decay in schools. They highlighted that the subject encourages practical application of moral values, promotion of interfaith understanding, and encouragement of ethical behavior

The last question posed to participants was based on any specific teaching methods or approaches within religious studies classes that are particularly effective in instilling moral values among learners. In response to the question, P1 and 8 shared similar view and P1 emphasised that,

> *I sometimes use role play to help students understand the moral challenges depicted in the biblical stories.*

According to him, role play helps students understand moral challenges depicted in Biblical stories. By using role play, students are given the opportunity to immerse themselves in the moral dilemmas presented in Biblical stories, which helps them develop moral values.

On the other hand, Participants 2, 4, 7 and 12 emphasise discussions as a key method for

identifying values and applying them to real-life situations. P2 noted,

> *In religious studies, after reading the text, we discuss and identify the values in the story. We also apply these values in real life.*

The participant mentions that after reading religious texts, they engage learners while they identify the values present in the stories, followed by the application of these values in real life. The discussion provides a valuable opportunity for students to actively engage with the content and concepts presented in religious studies classes. Additionally, students can share their perspectives, challenge assumptions, and deepen their understanding of moral values within the context of religious teachings.

Furthermore, participants according to participant 3,

> *I also encourage my learners to not only get good results but to practice doing good things in the community.*

Participant 3 encourages the application of moral values in real-life contexts. This approach goes beyond classroom discussions and academic knowledge by providing students with opportunities to develop empathy, compassion, and a sense of responsibility towards others. By actively participating in community activities, students can witness the positive outcomes of their actions and experience the fulfilment that comes from making a difference in the lives of others.

Lastly, Participants 4, 6, 8 and 10 prefer group discussions and assignments to promote collaboration and peer learning. For P4,

> *I usually use the assembly, where learners present stories on a daily basis. After one learner reads the story, another interprets the text and discusses any lesson or value identified. This process takes the form of identifying a virtue and supporting it with a biblical text. Then applying the virtue in a real-life context to show how some people practice the values and how others do not. Then a learner gives suggestions and encouragement.*

Participants 4, 6, 8 and 10 enjoyed the use of group discussions and assignments as effective methods to promote moral values within religious studies classes. In particular, Participant 4 specifically mentioned the use of assemblies, where learners present stories on a daily basis, followed by interpretations, discussions, and the application of identified values. The use of assemblies creates a platform for learners to present stories and engage in discussions. This format allows for the sharing of different interpretations and insights related to moral values and lessons derived from religious texts. Additionally, group discussions provide opportunities for learners to share diverse perspectives and collective wisdom, enhancing their understanding of moral values and their practical applications. Notably, the assignment offered to students allows for the sharing of different interpretations and insights related to moral values and lessons derived from religious texts. The process of identifying virtues, supporting them with Biblical texts, and applying them to real-life contexts helps students connect theoretical knowledge with practical examples, fostering a deeper understanding of moral values and their significance.

In conclusion, the respondents highlighted various teaching methods and approaches within religious studies classes that could be effective in instilling moral values among learners. They mentioned the following: role play, identifying values from Biblical scripture, encouraging learners to practice the values in real life, group discussions, assignments, and the use of assemblies. These approaches could provide a comprehensive and holistic approach to instilling moral values among learners in religious studies classes and address the moral decay among learners.

5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the study provide insight into the nature of declining moral values among secondary school students in in the Northern Region of Lesotho, as well as the role of religious studies in mitigating this challenge. The participants' responses revealed several key themes that bring to light the causes of moral decay, the societal factors influencing moral values, and the effectiveness of religious studies in addressing these challenges.

The study identified that economic challenges, lack of parental guidance, limited access to quality education, and dysfunctional family structures are significant factors contributing to moral decay among students. These results are

consistent with those of Adebisi [31], who found that moral decadence is caused by several factors, including poor family structures. A possible explanation for these findings might be that the family serves as a primary socialising agent for children, shaping their values, beliefs, and behaviours. When families lack cohesion and support, children may not receive the necessary guidance and moral instruction needed for healthy development. As a result, they may be more vulnerable to negative influences from peers and society at large. The conclusion that could be drawn in this study, is that, moral decay among secondary school learners in Lesotho is influenced by a mix of economic, family, and social issues. Addressing these factors requires religious education that targets the development of moral values associated with these factors.

Furthermore, participants noted various societal changes that influence moral values among students, including the impact of technology, urbanisation, shifting societal priorities, and the normalisation of unethical behaviour in public spaces. The harm caused by internet contents corroborate the ideas that, inasmuch as the benefits of technology are apparent, we cannot deny the influence it has on learners' moral values. The urbanisation and normalisation of unethical behaviour align with the sentiments that they pose a threat to children's morals and contribute to moral decay. This study has been able to demonstrate that societal trends, including urbanisation and shifting societal priorities, have much influence on students' ethical behaviour. Understanding these trends is crucial for developing religious studies curricula to address moral decay and promote ethical behaviour among students.

In addressing these challenges, religious studies emerged as a crucial component of moral education in the Northern Region of Lesotho's secondary schools. Participants emphasised the role of religious studies in imparting moral values through teachings from the Bible, promoting practical application of these values, fostering understanding among different faiths, and encouraging ethical behaviour. A possible explanation for this perceived potential of religious studies content to develop moral virtues aligns with the LBECP of 2021's basic education aim of providing 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). From this study, one could safely conclude that religious studies serve as a valuable tool for moral development mitigates the surge of moral decadence among learners in the Northern Region of Lesotho's secondary schools.

Various teaching approaches such as role-playing, discussions, integration of moral values, collaborative learning, and assembly presentations were identified in this study as effective methods for instilling moral values among students. These approaches cater to different learning styles and preferences, providing students with diverse opportunities to engage with moral education. They highlight the importance of employing diverse teaching approaches in moral education to cater to the varied needs and preferences of students. The use of diverse approaches aligns with CAP 2009 and LBECP 2021, which advocate for the use of diverse learner-centred approaches. Thus, religious studies teachers strive to employ diverse approaches to teaching religious studies to instil moral values and promote ethical behaviour among students in the Northern Region of Lesotho's secondary schools.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The government could improve access to quality education for all students to provide moral instruction and critical thinking skills.
- The curriculum could incorporate technology awareness and ethics education into the curriculum to address ethical dilemmas in the digital age.
- Religious studies could integrate community engagement and service-learning activities to encourage the practical application of moral values.
- The Religious studies associations may provide continuous professional development and support for teachers delivering effective moral education through religious studies.
- Moral Instruction Curriculum rather than Religious Studies Curriculum should be introduced.

- The Curriculum should accommodate all religions' moral precepts.

7. LIMITATIONS

However, it is important to acknowledge the limitations of the study. Although efforts were

made to ensure diversity among the participants, it is possible that the findings may not fully represent the perspectives of all teachers in Lesotho's secondary schools.

ETHICAL APPROVAL AND CONSENT

Ethical considerations were taken into account during the research process. All participants provided informed consent, and measures were implemented to maintain their confidentiality. Participants were also made aware of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without facing any negative consequences.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

COMPETING INTERESTS

Author has declared that no competing interests exist.

REFERENCES

1. Ime NG, Unwanaobong DU. Youth and moral values in a changing society. IOSR Journal of Humanities; 2014.
2. Moea KS. Emotional intelligence in the hour of moral decadence: An analysis of literature in english syllabus. Eastern Journal of Languages, Linguistics and Literatures (EJLLL). 2023;4(2): 37-48.
3. Selialia M, Kurata L. Practical challenges of integrating technology within Lesotho's secondary geography education: A conceptual analysis. International Journal of Science and Research Archive. 2023;10(2):1016-1022.
Available:https://doi.org/10.30574/ijsra.2023.10.2.1079
4. Ogueche OA, Awoshiri WP, Joseph Umar Bibinu JU, Katuka H. Relevance of christian teaching as a panacea for moral decadence among the Nigerian youths. Sapientia Global Journal of Arts, Humanities and Development Studies (SGOJAHDS). 2021;4(2):208–224.
5. Mokotso RI. Enhancing religious education teaching and learning for sustainable development in Lesotho. HTS Teologiese Studies/Theological Studies. 2024;80(1):a9151.
https://doi.org/10.4102/hts.v80i1.9151
6. Ngussa BM, Makewa LN. The role of christian religious education on secondary school student discipline in Lake Zone. Tanzania Journal of Research Innovations, and Implications in Education. 2018;2(1):1-7.
7. United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization. Unpacking SDG4-Education 2030. UNESCO; 2017.
8. Stabback P. What makes a quality curriculum? In-progress reflection no. 2 on current and critical issues in curriculum and learning. UNESCO International Bureau of Education; 2016. Available:https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000243975.
9. Southern African Development Community Secretariat. SADC regional indicative strategic development plan (RISDP) 2020-2030. Southern African Development Community (SADC) Secretariat; 2020.
10. Ministry of Education and Training. Education sector plan 2016-2026. MoET; 2016.
11. Ministry of Education and Training. Curriculum and assessment policy: Education for individual and social development. Maseru: MoET; 2009.
12. Ministry of Education and Training. Grade 11 religious studies syllabus. MoET; 2020.
13. Miller R. Making connections to the world: Some thoughts on holistic curriculum. Encounter: Education for Meaning and Social Justice. 2006;19(4):19-24.
14. De Wet C. School violence in Lesotho: The perceptions, experiences and observations of a group of learners. South African Journal of Education. 2007;27:673-689.
15. Mosia PA. Framing school bullying as a reflection of deteriorating Basotho moral principles. Nova Science Publishers, Inc; 2019.
16. Yahya AH, Sukmayadi V. A Review of cognitive dissonance theory and Its relevance to current social Issues. MIMBAR Jurnal Sosial dan Pembangunan. 2020;36(2):480-488.
Available:https://doi.org/10.29313/mimbar.v36i2.6652
17. Tueanrat Y, Alamanos E. Cognitive dissonance theory: A review. In S. Papagiannidis (Ed.), TheoryHub Book; 2023.
18. Cooper J, Carlsmith KM. Cognitive dissonance. In international encyclopedia of the social & behavioral sciences (pp. 76–78). Elsevier; 2015.

Available:https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-0-08-097086-8.24045-2

19. Carr D. Time, narrative, and history. Indiana University Press; 1991.
20. Andy-Philip N, Zhiya SJD. The shema. Nnadiebube Journal of Moral Education in Africa. 2017;2(1).
21. Nucci LP. Education in the moral domain. Cambridge University Press; 2001.
22. Dewey J. Having an experience; 1934.
23. Dick CJ, Ede VI, Chiaghanam OF. Addressing moral decadence in contemporary Nigerian Society: The Religious Option. Discovery. 2020;56 (293):273-280
24. Muraino M, Ugwumba E. Moral misconduct among students of higher institutions in Nigeria: A case of selected higher institutions in Imo State, Nigeria. International Journal of education foundations and management. 2014;2(1):63-70.
25. Uche OOC, Uche MC, Ngozi NJ. Moral decadence: A setback of moral education in Nigeria. Journal of Moral Education in Africa. 2017;3:160-184.
26. Lukman J. Prevalence of moral decadence among youths in kaduna north local government Area, Kaduna State. KIU Journal of Social Humanities. 2021;(1):161-169.
27. Dhemba J, Nhapi T. Social work and poverty reduction in Southern Africa: The case of Eswatini, Lesotho, and Zimbabwe. Social Work & Society. 2020;18(2).
28. Kali M. Causes and solutions of poverty in lesotho. European Journal of Behavioral Sciences. 2020;3(2):23-38.
29. Botea I, Chakravarty S, Compernolle N. Female migration in lesotho determinants and opportunities. World Bank Group; 2018.
30. Odeh JC. Moral decadence among Catholic youths in Abakaliki Diocese [Unpublished M.E.D Thesis of EBSU]. Nigeria; 2013.
31. Adebisi KS. Moral decadence among Nigerian youths as future leaders: A socio-cultural regeneration. Advances in Social Sciences Research Journal. 2018;5(2). Available:https://doi.org/10.14738/assrj.52.3179
32. Adetayo JO. Moral decadence in Nigerian tertiary institutions: An Evaluator Perspective. Journal of Educational Sciences. 2022;6(1):1-10.
33. Whitten T, Green M, Tzoumakis S, Laurens KR, Harris F, Carr VJ, Dean K. Children's contact with police as a victim, person of interest and witness in new south wales, australia. Australian &Amp; New Zealand Journal of Criminology. 2020;53(3):387-410. Available:https://doi.org/10.1177/00048658 19890894
34. Badmus KI. "Moral decadence and his remedies for effective national development." Journals by Several Educations. 2014;1(1).
35. Hagan FY. Moral decadence in second cycle public schools in Asante kyem North [Unpublished Master Thesis University of Cape Coast] and Social Science. 2010;19(6):40-44.
36. Kurata L. Religious diversity in lesotho's secondary religious education syllabus: Genuine inclusion or superficial tokenism? International Journal of Trend in Scientific Research and Development (ijtsrd). 2023a;7(4):414-422.
37. Ayanwale MA. Can experience determine the adoption of industrial revolution 4.0 Skills in 21st century mathematics education? Researchin Social Sciences and Technology. 2023;8(1):74-91. Available:https://doi.org/10.46303/ressat.2 023.6
38. Ayanwale MA, Sanusi IT, Molefi RR, Otunla AO. A structural equation approach and modelling of Pre-service teachers' perspectives of cybersecurity education. Education and Information Technologies. 2023;1-29. Available:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10639-023-11973-5
39. Kurata L. Assessing the authenticity of assessment methods in lesotho secondary religious education: To what extent Are 21st century skills integrated? International Journal of Research Publication and Reviews. 2023b;4(6):4271-4277. Available:https://doi.org/10.55248/gengpi.4 .623.42714277
40. Mokati M, Kurata L. Exploring the impact of grade 11 boot camp implementation: A teacher-centric perspective in a secondary school at mahobong, Lesotho. International Journal of Research and Innovation in Social Science. 2023;7(12):1568-1579. Available:https://dx.doi.org/10.47772/IJRIS S.2023.7012122

41. Palinkas LA, Horwitz SM, Green CA, Wisdom JP, Duan N, Hoagwood K. Purposeful sampling for qualitative data collection and analysis in mixed method implementation research. Administration and Policy in Mental Health and Mental Health Services Research. 2013;42(5): 533-544.
Available:https://doi.org/10.1007/s10488-013-0528-y

42. Campbell S, Greenwood M, Prior S, Shearer T, Walkem K, Young S, Walker K. Purposive sampling: Complex or simple? Research case examples. Journal of Research in Nursing. 2020;25(8):652-661.
Available:https://doi.org/10.1177/17449871 20927206

43. Cohen L, Manion L, Morrison K. Research methods in education. Routledge; 2011.

44. Leavy P. Research design: Quantitative, qualitative, mixed methods, arts-based, and community-based Participatory Research Approaches. Guilford Press; 2017.

45. Filia K, Jackson H, Cotton S, Gardner A, Killackey E. What is social inclusion? A thematic analysis of professional opinion. Psychiatric Rehabilitation Journal. 2018;41(3):183-195.
Available:https://doi.org/10.1037/prj000030 4

46. Vaismoradi M, Turunen H, Bondas T. Content analysis and thematic analysis: implications for conducting a qualitative descriptive study. Nursing &Amp; Health Sciences. 2013;15(3):398-405.
Available:https://doi.org/10.1111/nhs.1204 8

47. Choudrie J, Zamani ED. Understanding individual user resistance and workarounds of enterprise social networks: the case of service ltd. Journal of Information Technology. 2016;31(2): 130-151.
Available:https://doi.org/10.1057/jit.2016.9

48. Africa-Press. Teens get a taste of military life; 2022-07-13.
Available:https://www.africa-press.net/lesotho/all-news/teens-get-taste-of-military-life

49. Eze TI. "Examination malpractice. Implication for teachers' education' A paper presented at the National Conference of N.C.E. Teachers in Education, Kano; 2015.

50. Festinger L. A theory of social cognitive dissonance (1st Edition). Row, Peterson and Company; 1957.

51. Harris WC, Hancock PA, Arthur EJ, Caird JK. Performance, workload, and fatigue changes associated with automation. The International Journal of Aviation Psychology. 1995;5(2):169-185.

52. Kurata L, Mokhet'sengoane SJ, Selialia M. Content analysis of LGCSE religious studies syllabus: To what extend does It address the 21st century skills? European Journal of Education and Pedagogy. 2022;3(6):1-7.
Available:https://dx.doi.org/10.24018/ejedu .2022.3.6.495

53. Mokotso RI. Religious pluralism for inclusive education in Lesotho secondary schools [Unpublished Doctorate Dissertation, University of the Free State]; 2017.

54. Mokotso RI. New Lesotho integrated curriculum: The missed but not lost opportunity for decoloniality of religious education. Pharos Journal of Theology. 2020;101(1):1–9.
Available:http//:www.pharosjot.com

55. South African Broadcasting Services. Lesotho tackles crime, lack of patriotism with Defence Force Youth Development boot camp. YouTube; 2023-06-4.
Available:https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=3ygc_TndMpI,