

Factors Influencing the Choice of Religion Studies as a Subject in
the Further Education and Training Band: A Case Study of two
Schools within the Uitenhage District of the Eastern Cape
Province

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by

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31 January 2014

DECLARATION

“I hereby declare that this dissertation

*Factors Influencing the Choice of Religion Studies as a Subject in the
Further Education and Training Band: A Case Study of two Schools
within the Uitenhage District of the Eastern Cape Province*

represents my own work and that all the sources that I have used or
quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by means of complete
references.”

.....

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King Williams Town

31 January 2014

ABSTRACT

In 2006, a new subject, Religion Studies (RS), was introduced in Grade 10 as an optional subject. It represents a major paradigm shift in education of religion at the public school level. Minimal research has been conducted on the factors influencing the choice of RS in Grade 10 by the learners, subject advisors, principal and educators. This subject might constitute an “easy option” to boost the learner’s performance. Former or “recycled Biblical Studies” educators may be available or even volunteer to teach this subject or they may have to be absorbed within the system.

Ethics, morals, cross cultural respect and non-discrimination are critical for the development of the South African democracy. While RS is optional, it could play a critical role towards achieving these outcomes. This study restricted its focus to the Uitenhage District of the Province of the Eastern Cape. After careful consideration, the interpretive approach seemed to offer the best access to the kind of knowledge the researcher desired. A theoretical framework, that narrowly links rational choice with cultural reproduction theory, can prove to be inadequate. This study would be deficient if it was restricted to the family or home factors. Peer influence, self-efficacy or ability, utility value, motivation and teacher or school factors have to be included. The case study approach was used for this research. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain qualitative responses from learners, from principals and educators whose schools are offering Religion Studies, and from subject advisors with oversight of this subject.

This study discovered, *inter alia*, that learners did not have a *real* choice but were led to believe that RS was compulsory. The school has an influential role on a learner’s subject choice. Parental participation fluctuated from active to passive guidance. Learners saw RS as an easy subject and an aggregate booster. The school community both informs and influences the subject choice of learners. The peer influence of friends and fellow learners also featured in subject choice. RS teaches about religion and culture, respect, catalyses moral development, is enjoyable and easy to study but requires extensive reading. The limited diversity in RS classes did not allow for this respect to be tested. RS can catalyse the

development of moral values. Despite this subject being an aggregate booster, learners enjoyed RS and therefore do well.

After balancing the “costs and benefits,” according to rational choice theory, learners choose subjects with a utility value for their future career. RS opens the possibilities directly and indirectly. The majority of learners said that RS will assist them in their career path, not only narrowly in religious and pedagogical vocations but also more widely. RS could assist in careers with constituencies of religious diversity, in the medical field, human resources and journalism.

RS fosters citizenship, non-discrimination and the rounded development of the learner and these objectives have attracted educators to teach RS. Learners enjoy RS, have self-efficacy, their performance ranges from good to well. Educators have a positive view of RS and contend that RS fosters respect, analytical, critical, constructive and lateral thinking.

Principals were introduced to RS when it replaced Biblical Studies and much confusion between the two has ensued. RS is inclusive and also catalyses the development of morals. Principals emphasised the ongoing need for retraining of teachers through refresher courses, workshops and seminars and an involved role of the Department. Retraining would prevent the RS educator from being an “*ad hoc* teacher.” The Department has failed to act proactively in the introduction of RS as a new subject.

Challenges lie in the integration of learning, essay writing skills and developing good model assessment tasks. Understanding RS terminology, confusion of RS with Biblical Studies, a shortage of resources, the vast content and the subject related methodology of RS are other concerns. All the stakeholder groups confirm this misperception. Researchers also concur with this finding. Biblical Studies educators have no advantage in RS but rather also necessitate retraining.

RS, as a new subject with low intake, was not afforded all the requisite support. The number of schools offering RS is static. Provincial officials also reflect confusion of RS and Biblical Studies. The lack of staffing of the subject specialist at the National or Provincial level office is perturbing.

Based on this study of the factors influencing the choice of Religious Studies in the FET Band, the following recommendations were made:

- Steps should be taken to ensure that learners be given a *real* choice
- Sharing of detailed information about the unique nature and outcomes of RS including its critical engagement
- Informed stakeholder groupings e.g. parents, educators, principal, SGB, community, Provincial and National Department of Education should not abuse their influential role of support by overt or covert compulsion
- Clarity between spiritual formation and catalysing moral development
- Educators should continue to foster enjoyment of RS
- Steps to be taken to facilitate integration of learning, developing essay writing skills and encourage good assessment tasks
- Increase diversity in class so that respect can be tested
- More information be given about direct and indirect career pathing
- Need for continual re-training through refresher courses, workshops and seminars
- Steps to be taken to address inadequate resources of RS
- Despite the “flattering” results for RS, efforts need to be taken by all the stakeholder groupings to ensure that learner’s competencies become a means in which RS markets itself
- Concerted on-going effort be made to clarify the confusion between RS and Biblical Studies
- That the Department assumes a more engaged role in RS
- Steps be taken by all the stakeholder groupings to encourage religious diversity in the RS class
- The National Department of Education has to staff both the National and Provincial Offices with well-equipped and highly motivated leaders.

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DEDICATION

to my husband,

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ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

FET - Further Education and Training

RS - Religion Studies

NCS - National Curriculum Statement

CAPS - Curriculum Assessment Planning Statement

OBE - Outcomes Based Education

HRSC - Human Science Research Council

SAQA - South African Qualifications Authority

LACs - Learning Area Committees

CNE - Christian National Education

RCT - Rational Choice Theory

SGB - School Governing Body

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CHAPTER 1

1.0 INTRODUCTION

South Africa is experiencing important new developments in the field of education, in general, and in the sphere of education in religion, in particular. The emphasis on religious freedom as expressed in the South African Constitution, (Act No. 10 B of 1996, Section 15(2)) (Republic of South Africa 1996a) and the South African Schools Act (Act No.84 of 1996, Section 7) (Republic of South Africa 1996b) highlights the problem of a mono-religious education approach in public schools. There is always the possibility that tension may surface in school communities, where children from diverse religions, but with the same cultural background, attend the same school. The religious tradition of a community is regarded as a non-negotiable element in order to maintain specific values, religious education and belief systems. Despite our *apartheid* history a small number of schools in South Africa have accommodated some children from different cultures, languages and religions. These schools were a minority in the past. Now it can be safely stated that all of our provinces in South Africa have schools that are multicultural. It is therefore anticipated that in a multicultural South African society, religious tensions will become increasingly contentious (Roux, 2000:173).

In 2008 Religion Studies emerged as an optional subject for matriculation purposes. The issue of subject choice was the main focus of this study. This study investigated the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by the learners. Religion Studies as a subject has been phased in from Grade 10 in 2006, Grade 11 in 2007 and Grade 12 in 2008. Minimal research has been conducted on the factors influencing the choice of this subject in Grade 10 by the learners.

The researcher investigated why Religion Studies as a subject has been chosen by learners, educators, and principals/schools since the phasing in of this new subject in Grade 10. Was this choice of subject by the learners motivated by their vocational and career goals, or by other factors? Was Religion Studies chosen by educators as part of a deliberate career path? Was the choice of Religion Studies by principals influenced by their management goals? What was the rationale of

Religion Studies for the subject advisors? The issue of the learners' choice deserves some detailed explanation.

The issue of the learner's choice deserves some detailed explanation. In the National Curriculum Statement when the learner reaches Grade 10, four compulsory subjects must be offered: two official languages, Mathematics or Mathematics Literacy, and Life Orientation out of seven subjects. The learner has then to choose three optional subjects offered by the institution. Not every approved subject is offered by every school. Schools chose to offer subjects from an approved list which can include commercial, technical, humanities or specialist arts subjects. Religion Studies is one of these optional subjects.

This study may provide additional knowledge about the factors surrounding the choice of this subject. For instance, this subject may constitute an 'easy option' to boost a learner's performance. Former or 'recycled' Biblical Studies educators may be available, or even volunteer to teach this subject, or they may simply have to be absorbed within the system in the most 'suitable' way possible. The data will provide more accurate details on what is actually going on.

Religion was previously studied in the form of various subjects devoted to furthering the interests of different religions. Biblical Studies was introduced within the context of Christian National Education. During this period Islam, Hinduism and Judaism were also accommodated. After intense research, heated debates and consultation in the 1990s, consensus was achieved on an approach that would treat all religions impartially and for the common good. This consensus was not an easy feat. This issue of education in religion became a highly contested terrain. An influential sector shared strong views that state schools had to be secular and by definition, not teach any religion at all.

Apart from Christianity, other religions, especially African Religion, Judaism (Hebrew/Jewish Studies), Islam (Arabic Studies), Buddhism and Hinduism play a significant role in the lives of millions of South Africans, as they have done for centuries, and as they will in future (Prozesky & de Gruchy, 1995:1). The National

Policy on Religion and Education (2003) provided the policy framework for this new approach. The learning area Life Orientation, in the NCS Grade R to Grade 9 and the NCS Grades 10-12, developed the necessary platform. The new subject in the FET Band, Religion Studies, gives full expression to this novel approach (Learning Programme Guidelines: Religion Studies, 2008:7).

This study focussed specifically on the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies as a subject in the FET Band by the principals, educators and the learners.

1.1 BACKGROUND

1.1.1 The history of education in religion in South Africa

The history of education in religion in South Africa is usually traced back to Jan van Riebeeck, who employed a novel approach to coerce reluctant slaves to adopt the Christian religion. However, it should be borne in mind that the indigenous people also had a formal process of transmitting their own religious beliefs. This was generally from the elders and parents to the children, using an oral mode of transmission (Mbiti, 1988:5). The vicissitudes of the reception of Christianity in general and education in religion in particular, is intrinsically linked to the various transformations of education in religion in South Africa.

According to Tait (1995:1-2) the majority of histories of education in South Africa only deal with education in religion in a scanty fashion. They also focus on the tension between the home, the church and the state for the control of education. Such histories also mirror, *Apartheid*, the segregation of society by racial categorisation (Tait, 1995:2).

South Africa's educational history also reflects the tension between the two main groups of settlers, namely, the conservative Dutch, who espoused a Calvinist theology, and the English, who displayed a more liberal Anglican tradition. The Dutch settlers, who were dissatisfied with the 'neutrality' of education in religion in Holland, established denominational schools in South Africa. Abraham Kuyper, a

leading theologian, was one of the chief protagonists to re-establish education on a Christian basis (Tait, 1995:1-2).

In 1861, the 'Vereeniging voor Christelike Nationaal Skool Onderwys' was formed in South Africa (Holmes, 1962:25-26). This association requested that denominational schools be provided with state subsidies. This was eventually achieved in 1917, when state-subsidised church schools were permitted alongside the 'religiously neutral' state schools in South Africa.

The Education Act of 1870 in England put an end to the Anglican Church's domination at that time and a non-dogmatic syllabus was agreed upon by the main Christian denominations. Furthermore, a conscience clause afforded parents the leeway to withdraw their children from religious instruction if they so desired. This practice provided the framework for the South African system in the Education Act of 1944, in which 'Religious Education' replaced 'Religious Instruction' (Holmes, 1962:17, 19, 22).

The British influence on South African education helped to promote inclusivity and tolerance in the teaching of religion. The Dutch heritage, in contrast, is located in Christian National Education. This approach of the Dutch was more sectarian in philosophy, and sought to promote a Reformed protestant viewpoint.

Education in religion in South Africa has been designated in the past by a number of terms such as Religious Education, Religious Studies, Bible Instruction, Biblical Studies and Religion Studies. As was the case with the wider educational programme, Whites designed this religious facet of education for White learners during an era when Blacks were marginalised politically. The majority of the White population claimed a Christian affiliation. Given the fact that South Africa was then ruled by a White, Christian government, religious education in South Africa was restricted to 'education' in the Christian faith. Furthermore, since the majority of the 'ruling' White community subscribed to a reformed expression of Christianity, Religious Education quite predictably also took this reformed denominational bias. The English-speaking sector was uneasy about this emphasis. Coupled with definite philosophical presuppositions, Religious Education, in particular, bolstered the enigmatic Christian National Education programme (Chetty, 1995:57).

1.1.2 Tentative steps towards a new Religious Education

The *de facto* situation in South Africa is one of religious pluralism. Therefore, Chetty (1995:59-60) says that 'any Religious Education programme in public education has to have religious diversity as a starting point.' The planning, design, implementation and evaluation have to include all stakeholders, *inter alia*, parents, and learners, educators, governing bodies, media and religious leaders. Input should be as broadly based as possible (Chetty, 1995:59-60).

There is a dire need to draw a distinction between the goals of Religious Education in public education and that in religious institutions. The former has an educational role, while the latter seeks to foster and promote faith formation. Unfortunately, the Nationalist *Apartheid* government failed to distinguish between these two goals, and subverted the educational goals of Religious Education in public education to largely foster and promote a "reformed" version of Christianity (Chetty, 1995:59). The old "Religious Education" could not be retained because it did not satisfy educational goals. It is precisely, contends Chetty, because of this failure that the old "Religious Education" had to be withdrawn from public education and a new kind of Religious Education, with explicitly educational goals, had to be initiated (Chetty, 1995:60).

Furthermore, Chetty continues that "Religious Education" has been tarnished with the philosophical brush of *Apartheid*. Therefore it would have been short-sighted to adapt "Religious Education" to include other religions. Such attempts at co-option would be viewed with much suspicion (1995:60). The former government's 1993 document on education gives us a good example. It speaks of "accommodation of language, cultural, religious and other legitimate interests" (Educational Renewal Strategy, 1993:17). Because "Religious Education" was conceived with specific presuppositions and goals that were not commensurate with the aims of public education, it had, of necessity, to be set aside. But where do we go from here? During the middle of 1992 an important report entitled: Religion in Public Education: Policy Options for a New South Africa, was published by the Institute of Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA), based at the University of Cape

Town (Smart, 1992). This document identified three possible options for Religious Education in the public educational sphere:

- elimination of Religious Education from the public school curriculum,
- "parallel approach" which would involve separate religious programmes at schools for separate groups or
- "multi-tradition approach" (Smart, 1992:1)

The first response would be understandable, given the educational history of Religious Education in public schools. But we should not "throw the baby out with the bathwater". No student's education can be viewed as complete without a study of the major religions of the world. There is immense value in the knowledge that a student would acquire in such a study. The ICRSA report lists other skills that would accrue, such as "disciplined imagination, reading comprehension, writing ability, critical thinking and expanding understanding, increasing tolerance, and reducing prejudice" (Smart, 1992:10). The latter benefits are particularly desirable within our immediate context of nation building.

There are inherent dangers in the parallel approach. Our past experience with Religious Education has made us familiar with the demerits of this approach. "Religious Education" bred division and suspicion. We are presently in the process of building a new nation. The old "Religious Education" went against the grain of forging a new national unity. It accentuates the "we" and the "they." The "parallel approach" could possibly lead to a form of "religious *Apartheid*." We are also faced with the perplexing issue of deciding what denomination or stream of each of the different religions to recognise as orthodoxy. This would constitute a challenging hurdle which would require lateral thinking. Furthermore, the parallel approach has the potential to be hijacked by religious enthusiasts wishing to promote their own religion, or religious denomination. This will then also bring into question the use of public funds for the promotion of denominations and / or religions (Chetty, 1995:57-61).

The multi-tradition model entails a combined curriculum in the study of religion. In addition to satisfying educational goals, it would also foster a greater understanding of religious diversity in South Africa. At the launching of the ICRSA,

Smart (1992:11) also advocated this idea of an “open, plural, cross-cultural, and interdisciplinary study of religion”. A number of tertiary institutions, such as the Universities of Limpopo, KwaZulu-Natal, Stellenbosch, Walter Sisulu, Zululand and South Africa, have begun the journey and have included the study of other religions within their curricula.

Of course, the possibility of students being exposed to other religions by such a model would be likely to create a measure of apprehension in many parents. Public schools would probably be expected to adopt a position of neutrality. According to the Bill of Rights, which is enshrined in the SA Constitution of 1996, students should be free to explore the diversity of religion without any form of religious coercion. However, as Chetty (1995:61) warns, religions should not be whittled down to mere equivalent paths to the same goal. They should be appreciated as unique systems of belief and practice which can add value to any context.

1.1.3 A new direction for Religious Education in South Africa

After feedback from the different stakeholders, it was the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA: 1992) (that presented the three revised models which became the framework for the nation-wide discussion on the future of Religious Education in 1993, as South Africa prepared itself for a change in government. These were the:

- Single-tradition approach
- Multiple single-tradition approach
- Multi-tradition approach

The new government took office in April 1994, and in August 1994, the National Education and Training Forum (NETF) appointed Field and Phase Committees to make recommendations regarding curriculum under the new dispensation. The Field Review Sub-Committee: Religion drew up 13 principles, which were suggested to govern the curriculum for Religious Education in the future. Some of these are listed below:

- The education process in general shall aim at the development of a national democratic culture with respect for the value of our people's diverse cultural, religious and linguistic traditions.
- Education and formation of an adherent in a specific faith is primarily the responsibility of the family and the religious community.
- Religion in education shall contribute to both interfaith tolerance, understanding and the development of an appreciation of one's own faith.
- Values and ideas rooted in the various traditions are a resource and a vital component for nation building and in the restructuring of civil society in a new South Africa (ICRSA, 1992.)
- Particular faith practices and sensitivities shall be respected and accommodated in ways mutually agreed upon by the school and the various faith communities.
- While it is recognised that schools, together with the broader society, are responsible for culture formation and transmission, there shall be no overt or covert attempt to indoctrinate learners into any particular belief or religion.
- There shall be no overt or covert denigration of any religion.

(National Department of Education, 1999:22-23)

These principles provided a broad framework that gave added impetus to the discussion of Religious Education within public education.

1.1.4 The role of Religious Education

Since 1994, the need for a new and relevant curriculum which will address the needs of all learners in South Africa has been established in numerous documents and various publications of the National Department of Education. Eight different learning areas have been identified for the South African Education System by the South African Qualifications Authority (SAQA) (see National Department of Education, 1997a; 1997b). Learning Areas Committees (LACs) were established and have developed an Outcomes-based Education system for South Africa (Roux, 2000:173).

The learning areas are:

- Language, Literacy and Communication

- Mathematical Literacy, Mathematics and Mathematical Science
- Human and Social Sciences
- Natural Sciences
- Technology
- Arts and Culture
- Economic and Management Sciences
- Life Orientation

Outcomes-based Education can be defined as a learner-centred approach. It concentrates more on a learning process than a product of learning. From the above-mentioned outcomes, as well as the incorporation of Religious Education under the learning area Life Orientation, the focus on life skills and context is very important. Religious Education can no longer function within the previous, content-based paradigm, and it needs to address the needs of children living within a pluralistic society (Roux, 2000:173). Even if the school community stems from a mono-religious background, as in many societies and schools, the broader South African society reflects cultural pluralism. The focus on life skills, as one of the outcomes of the new education system, implies information on other cultures and religions in order to understand and promote respect and tolerance within a diverse South African society. To understand the new education system, a very brief summary on the meaning of three concepts: outcomes, assessment criteria and range statements, will be given (Roux, 2000:174).

There are two types of outcomes: critical cross-field outcomes and specific outcomes. Critical cross-field outcomes are generic and cross-curricular. They underpin the learning process and are not restricted to any specific learning context. They inform the formulation of specific outcomes for all learners at all levels. Critical outcomes have a contribution to make regarding the development of basic knowledge, skills, understanding, abilities and values necessary for a changing society. In the National Department of Education (1997a, 10), discussion document Curriculum2005, it was proposed that the critical outcomes should include the following:

- identify and solve problems and make decisions using critical and creative thinking.

- work effectively with others as members of a team, group organisation and community.
- organise and manage themselves and their activities responsibly and effectively.
- collect, analyse, organise and critically evaluate information.
- communicate effectively using visual, symbolic, or language skills in various modes.
- use science and technology effectively and critically showing responsibility towards the environments and health of others.
- demonstrate an understanding of the world as a set of related systems by recognising that problem-solving contexts do not exist in isolation.

These critical cross-field outcomes provide a broad perspective on the educational principles involved. In analysing the outcomes it was clear that the traditional way of teaching or presenting especially Religious Education would no longer be effective. A new approach was necessary in which the child acquires the necessary knowledge and skills for life situations. 'The reality,' says Roux (2000:174-175), 'is that we are living in a multicultural and multireligious society and therefore have to empower our children to accommodate themselves effectively.'

Specific outcomes on the other hand refer to the specification of what the learners should be able to do at the end of the learning process. It directs teaching and the development of the learning programmes. Skills, knowledge and values contribute to the demonstration of an achievement of an outcome. These outcomes are context-specific and provide guidance to all educators in order to devise learning programmes and learning experiences (Roux, 2000:175). They are informed by the critical outcomes but are formulated within the context in which they are applied and describe what learners should be able to demonstrate in a specific context. They also serve as the basis for assessing the progress of learners and the effectiveness of the learning process. Learners do not have the same abilities and potential. Therefore they cannot be expected to attain the specific outcomes at the same time, in the same place or in the same way. In Religious Education,

however, contends Roux (2000:175), different peripheral influences have to be taken into account. Aspects such as their environment, religious development and specific developmental stage, age and subsequent learning experiences will influence what they will attain in the relevant specific outcomes.

1.1.5 The Learning Area ‘Life Orientation’

In order to understand the development of Religion Education as a subject within the national curriculum in South Africa, we need to see its origin in the context of the new outcomes-based curriculum framework which was ushered in during the years following 1997, even though that outcomes-based paradigm has now been roundly rejected by the Department of Education which introduced it.

At the time when OBE was introduced in SA, the evangelical, more conservative Christian denominations followed the lead of their counterparts in the USA, who tended to react against OBE for all the wrong reasons, mainly based on a blend of misinterpretation of what the concept ‘outcomes-based’ was all about pedagogically speaking, and a belief that OBE in itself was a threat to their monoreligious, ethnocentric assumptions that religious education should be Christian, and in line with their brand of Christianity at that. In the end their protests carried no weight in the decision-making, as Chetty has written (1995: 62).

In the discussion document Curriculum 2005 of the National Department of Education (April 1997), specific outcomes for Life Orientation within the school curriculum were outlined. The rationale for this learning area was stated as follows National Department of Education, 1997:

‘Life orientation is fundamental in empowering learners to live meaningful lives in a society that demands rapid transformation. To live meaningful lives in a changing and pluralistic society, skills to enhance positive values and to promote respect are needed. Within specific educational groups it is believed that religion and religious content can play a supportive and crucial role and can enhance the possibility of providing learners with the skills to understand values and to change their attitudes and behaviour towards other cultural and religious groups (219-220).

Not all educators and Religious Educationalists supported this viewpoint. They saw their ideal of Religious Education as a separate school subject, diminishing.

However, the specific outcome, “respect the rights of people to hold personal beliefs and values”, presents an opportunity for the implementation of a well-balanced Religious Education programme in public schools. Some communities were unhappy with this outcome and felt threatened by the new programme. The reasons may be the fear of a dogmatic, confessional or religious experiential approach, such as those that were mainly used in the monoreligious education approach of the previous dispensation (Summers and Waddington, 1996:57).

There is thus a persistent fear that these approaches will also be introduced in a multi-religious education programme. This problem can, however, be overcome if the RE curriculum is broadened to include a module on mono-religious education. Empirical research within the diverse South African school environment, from rural to metropolitan areas (Roux and Steenkamp, 1995:24; Roux, 1997:54) indicated the importance of a child understanding his/her own personal belief and value system, before introducing other belief and value systems. One can argue that a Life Orientation programme will only be successful when own beliefs and values are not threatened. Communities might then opt for a fully-fledged multi-religious programme, or another version” (Roux, 2000:175-176).

1.1.6 Consequences and implications of the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education

A Ministerial Committee was formed in August 1998 to look into the diverse ideas, approaches “out there”, and the outcry from religious communities, especially those Christians who wanted to retain the previously Christian evangelical approach in most of the mono-religious public schools. The Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education (1999) suggested therefore three options on the implementation of Religious Education: a mono-religious approach, a combination of a mono- and multi-religious approaches or a multi-religious approach. Diversity within the Committee precipitated two broad understandings of Religious Education in South African schools: Religious Education as educating learners to be religious, and Religious Education as educating learners *about* religion and religions (Ministerial Committee, 1999:3-12). Principles explaining the nature and purpose of Religious Education were agreed upon, and specific

outcomes, range statements and performance indicators were developed. An outline for Religious Education as a separate subject, with different options in the Further Education and Training (FET) phase of the secondary school (Grades 10-12), was also established. However, so far this phase within the education policy has not been developed.

In a number of discussion reports, many Provincial Departments of Education and Learning Area Committees rejected the idea that Religious Education may once again become a separate subject and not be seen as part of the Life Orientation learning area, as suggested in Curriculum 2005 (National Department of Education, 1997:2-35). This seems to be one of the main objections. Other previously separate subjects such as Guidance and Physical Education are incorporated in the Life Orientation learning area, so why should Religious Education be an exception? On the other hand, for the first time the outcomes and performance indicators that could give educators some guidelines on religion were formulated. Many church leaders from different cultures welcomed the different options as a breakthrough for Christian education. However, the debate on these issues is still continuing, and in 2000, Roux observed (176-177) that schools were still not changing their Religious Education programmes.

Considering the poor outcomes of Religious Education in our public schools in the past (cf. Braaf 1993; Summers and Waddington 1996; Roux 1997), there were still indications of more problems than successes. The majority of under-qualified educators, especially from deprived communities, were one of the main reasons for concern. It is thus an open question, given the proposals of the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education (1999), whether any new approach has a chance of success without a well-balanced in-service training programme to help educators understand the principles of outcomes-based education and Religious Education in Life Orientation programmes (Roux, 2000:179).

The first argument is that in the mono-religious education option, the confessional approach, as implemented in the past, regardless of new developments in didactics and teaching and learning outcomes, will still be used. The diversity within society or the school community will be ignored. Learners will not have the opportunity to gain knowledge of, or to develop skills to understand, the religious

diversity in the country. Parents, especially from a Christian background, still believe and are happy that the spiritual or Religious Education of their children is taken care of in schools. Religious communities and institutions tend to rely on the schools to educate their children spiritually, where different Christian denominations co-exist. Nurturing in one's faith sadly still remains a school issue. The disregard of, and failure to address, religious diversity within school communities and in the broader South African society, and to equip learners with skills to understand religious diversity, will remain an ongoing challenge. This problem will not be overcome by dealing with learners of different religions and cultures in separate groups when teaching belief and value systems, as advocated in the "parallel" option identified by the Report of the Ministerial Committee on Religious Education (1999).

An important aim in the Life Orientation learning area is to empower learners to live meaningful lives in a society that demands rapid transformation. This rationale can only be accomplished if Religious Education becomes what Life Orientation demands: truly educational, requiring critical and reflective thinking, and not only offering nurture in a particular faith (Roux, 2000:176).

Secondly, a substantial number of educators in the South African school system have limited or no knowledge of outcomes-based education (Carl *et al.*, 1999). With the announcement of this education model (National Department for Education, 1997b), a strong negative perception regarding the accountability of such an approach in South Africa persisted. The reported failures of outcomes-based education systems, the emotional reactions and the concerns about the process of delivery in other countries evoked strong negative responses. There was a need for redefining the role of educators within the new education system, and especially in Religious Education. Teachers were expected to change from *teaching* religious content to *facilitating* religious learning (Roux, 1999:101). This brought uncertainty to many educators. The educator's role as nurturer and Bible educator had never been to explore religion as a phenomenon or to change from an authoritative figure to a facilitator. There are not only fears involved in teaching the content of other religions than their own but also in studying these religions constructively (Roux and Steenkamp, 1997).

1.1.7 Redefining the role of Religious Education in South African multicultural public schools

The Human Sciences Research Council (HSRC) funded a research project to address the problem areas discussed above (Roux, 1997). There was a desire to assist educators to overcome fears and negative perceptions of the study of religions, and to make them aware of the diversity of religions in their school environment. The new outcomes-based education model also put pressure on educators to rethink the suggested outcomes and skills. The aim of this project was mainly to redefine the role of Religious Education in a multicultural school environment. The target group consisted of selected schools in the Western Cape, Gauteng and the North West Province. The educators were from both public and private schools in metropolitan and rural areas, from both economically advantaged and disadvantaged communities. The research was supported by qualitative and quantitative questionnaires (Roux, 2000:178). An experimental in-service training package for educators and a one-day workshop with seminar content was organised to address problem areas indicated by them (Roux, 1999:102-107). The workshops were of a theoretical as well as practical nature, with educators having the opportunity to practise their newly developed skills and to comment on their new roles as Religious Education facilitators.

The results of this empirical research indicated that there are many problems within the diverse South African school environment. More than 95% of the respondents had no knowledge of the different religions in South Africa, and only 30% of the educators had specific training in Religious Education at tertiary level. Little indication was found of professional didactic approaches, or the implementation of creative didactics. Teachers adopted a confessional approach, and the worshipping element seemed to be the main activity. Teachers from rural areas had no access to resource centres like libraries, which could provide extra information on Religious Education. The only source of information was the religious leaders in the community. In this sort of situation, the adoption of a confessional approach becomes an easy solution. Creative educational approaches are not even considered. Therefore, the need for training in educational approaches is clear (Roux, 2000:178).

It was also vital for educators to understand their own religiosity and frame of reference. Teachers who have established a sound religious base within their own religion can present multireligious content with confidence. From this research project, it is clear that fear can only be addressed through training programmes and workshops where knowledge of different religions is combined with practical sessions. Teachers who compiled their programmes according to the specific needs of their school environment were positive towards the implementation of a multireligious education.

Religious Education needs to be relevant to the life experiences of the learners and the context in which they live (Roux, 2000:178). It should be appropriate to the learners concerned. It should also promote those fundamental principles that are shared by the different religious traditions, such as equality, non-discrimination, justice, peace, tolerance and understanding. Religious Education should aim at contributing to the development of a democratic national culture (Roux, 2000:178). Specifically, it should help to develop both an inter-religious and intra-religious respect and understanding: an appreciation of the learner's own religion and the religions of others.

In the previous political dispensation of South Africa, education in religion was modelled on the Christian National Education policy. After the democratic elections in 1994, many public schools in South Africa became multicultural, at least in terms of learner intake. A new education model, outcomes-based education, was introduced in 1997/8. This influenced the position and curriculum of education in religion. Most of the educators did not have the skills to introduce any multi-religious content or to facilitate *education in religion* in multicultural situations (Roux, 1997:1-3). They had been largely trained in Biblical Studies. In contrast to the aims of the previous dispensation, the aims of an outcomes-based education curriculum included the development of skills to live meaningful lives and also to respect other individuals, different communities and cultures (National Department of Education, 1997a). Emphasis on communal values, in order to establish an understanding and knowledge of different behaviours, religions and cultures, thus became an important part of the new curriculum (Roux, 2000:173).

The subject “Life Orientation, which is now offered from Grade 4 to Grade 12 within the new curriculum, is fundamental in empowering learners to live meaningful lives in a society that demands rapid transformation. Within specific educational groups it is believed that some form of education in religion can enhance the possibility of providing learners with the skills to understand values and to change their attitudes and behaviour towards other cultural groups” (Core Syllabus for Life Orientation, 1994:2).

According to Summers and Waddington (1996:6), not all general educators and educators in religion supported the introduction of Life Orientation. Some of those who dissented shared an ideal of education in religion as a separate school subject. However, the specific outcome, ‘respect for the rights of people to hold personal beliefs and values,’ presented an opportunity for the implementation of a well-balanced programme of education in religion in public schools. Some communities were unhappy with this outcome, and felt threatened by the new programme. The reasons may have been the fear of a dogmatic, confessional or religious *experiential* approach. These approaches were the ones mainly used in the mono-religious education approach in the previous dispensation (Summers and Waddington, 1996:7). There was an understandable fear that these approaches would also be re-introduced in a multi-religious education programme. This problem could, however, have been overcome if the foci in the assessment standards had been broadened to include aspects on the problems associated with mono-religious education.

Empirical research within the diverse South African school environment, from rural to metropolitan areas (Roux and Steenkamp, 1995:73-95), indicates the importance of a child understanding his or her own personal belief and value system before introducing other belief and value systems. One can argue that a Life Orientation programme will only be successful when own beliefs and values are not threatened. Communities might then opt for a fully-fledged multi-religious programme or another permutation (Roux, 2000:176).

1.1.8 The emergence of Religion Studies

Interestingly, in 2006, a new subject, Religion Studies, was introduced in Grade 10 as an optional subject. It represents a major paradigm shift in the education of religion at the public school level. Before the emergence of this new subject, the study of religion was diverse and often furthered specific religious group interests. It has already been noted earlier that the subject, Biblical Studies, also functioned within the context of Christian National Education. After much research and consultation in the 1990s, a consensus was reached on a new curriculum. The National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) provided the policy framework for this new approach. The compulsory Learning Area, Life Orientation, and the optional subject Religion Studies emerged within this new context (Learning Programme Guidelines: Religion Studies, 2008:7). Religion Studies will still use NCS (National Curriculum Statement) instead of CAPS (Curriculum Assessment Planning Statement) due to the fact that it has not been introduced in the FET phase.

1.1.9 What is Religion Studies?

1.1.10 Definition

Religion Studies is the study of religion as a universal human phenomenon, and of religions found in a variety of cultures. Religion and religions are studied without favouring any or discriminating against any, whether in theory or in practice, and without promoting adherence to any particular religion. Religion Studies should lead to the recognition, understanding and appreciation of a variety of religions within a common humanity, in the context of a civic understanding of religion, with a view to developing religious literacy (National Department of Education, *Learning Programme Guidelines* 2008:7).

1.1.11 A new subject

When Religion Studies was introduced as a fully-fledged optional subject for matriculation purposes in 2006, it was an entirely new subject in the Grade 10-12 school curriculum. As such, it represented a major paradigm shift as far as the study of religion in the FET Phase was concerned. Prior to the introduction of

Religion Studies, religion was studied in the form of various subjects devoted to furthering the interests of specific religions. Biblical Studies was introduced in the early 1960s, in the context of Christian National Education. The 1990s saw intense research and consultation, resulting in an emerging consensus regarding the educational desirability of an approach that would treat all religions on an equal footing, in one academically impartial context, and for the common good. The National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) provided the policy framework for this new approach. Life Orientation in the NCS Grades R-9 and the NCS Grades 10-12 developed a necessary minimum structure, but it is in the subject Religion Studies that the new approach finds full expression (Learning Programme Guidelines, 2008:7).

The Learning Outcomes for Religion Studies form a clear, simple and coherent matrix of study. The four Learning Outcomes for Religion Studies in the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2008: 11) are:

1. The learner is able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a variety of religions and how they relate to one another.
2. The learner is able to analyse, relate and systematise universal dimensions of religion.
3. The learner is able to reflect critically and constructively on topical issues in society from a Religion Studies perspective and apply such insights.
4. The learner is able to apply skills of research into religion as a social phenomenon and across religions.

1.1.12 Principles structuring the attainment of understanding in Religion Studies

Important principles underlie the attainment of understanding in Religion Studies. These need to be taken into account in helping learners to achieve the Learning Outcomes, and approached in an interrelated manner. At all stages, and in all four Learning Outcomes, these ten principles are activated, even if they function in various ways in the different Learning Outcomes (National Department of Education, 2008:8).

Religion Studies:

- a) studies religion as part of culture and civic life;
- b) is constructed in accordance with accepted academic procedures;
- c) educates learners as members of the human family and citizens of the world;
- d) is situated in the South African and African context;
- e) affirms the learners' own religions, as well as those to which they do not belong by developing appreciation and respect for their own practices and those of fellow citizens;
- f) facilitates inclusive historical understanding;
- g) develops high order skills of discovering relationships and dealing with complexity;
- h) is socially relevant and transformative;
- i) is critical;
- j) is creative (National Department of Education, 2008: 8).

a) Studies religion as part of culture and civic life

The subject deals strictly with religion as a human phenomenon. Religion is therefore studied as constructed and experienced by humans. The subject is about humans and how they construct the world. Religion Studies is situated in the civic context. It is about how humans live together, and the role that religion plays in that context.

b) Is constructed in accordance with accepted academic procedures

Religion Studies is a member of the family of subjects making up the Learning Field of Human and Social Sciences, and is conducted according to the same general rules of scholarship. Its knowledge is therefore constructed in accordance with accepted academic procedures. It does not present final, unchallengeable truth, nor expect the mere reception of established opinion, or subscription to any academic or religious dogma. At every stage each Learning Outcome is to be achieved by way of drawing learners into, and empowering them to participate with confidence in active investigation and discovery.

c) Educates learners as members of the human family and citizens of the world

All four Learning Outcomes presuppose and promote the understanding that South African learners live in a wide human context. The Learning Outcomes are achieved by educating the learners to exist in that large human horizon with confidence and sophistication. They are educated to develop a mental map of the entire world of religions, to discern features common to all religions and to investigate and communicate across religions (National Department of Education, 2008).

d) Is situated in the South African and African context

All four Learning Outcomes are achieved to the extent that Religion Studies is rooted in South Africa and Africa, in which African religion and tradition is affirmed. When studying the variety of religions, the unique position of African religions will receive attention. Features common to all religions will include manifestations in Africa. Topics of social concern and research focus on South Africa.

e) Affirms the learners' own religions, as well as those to which they do not belong by developing appreciation and respect for their own practices and those of fellow citizens

This implies that learners appreciate and respect their own traditions and the traditions of their fellow citizens. One imperative cannot be achieved without the other. Self-respect demands respect for others. This principle requires that Religion Studies educate learners to communicate meaningfully, constructively and effectively across religions (National Department of Education, 2008).

f) Facilitates inclusive historical understanding

Religion Studies develops the ability to locate religious phenomena on the field of human development. Training to discern, understand and use the concepts of change and continuity is central. This orientation in time concerns the past, present and future. It also relates to different religions existing at the same time. The Learning Outcomes will be achieved to the extent that learners are

encouraged and empowered to interrogate religions across the barriers of time (National Department of Education, 2008).

g) Develops high order skills of discovering relationships and dealing with complexity

Religion Studies promotes the ability to discover relationships in a variety of ways, with respect to a variety of phenomena. The subject is about discovering correlations, analysing complex configurations, systematising seemingly unrelated things, organising information and constructing coherent arguments.

h) Is socially relevant and transformative

Religion Studies is designed to improve the quality of life of people as individuals, members of the human family and the family of all living beings. It has a practical orientation, aiming at empowering learners to apply their insights to changing and problematic conditions in life.

i) Is critical

Religion Studies is question rather than answer oriented. Learning Outcomes are achieved when learners ask critical questions rather than repeat prescribed answers. All conclusions are treated as provisional and questionable. In addition to social relevance and transformation, the critical dimension extends to the practical side of life, including the questioning of behaviour and social structures. The subject therefore develops the learners' confidence in raising questions (National Department of Education, 2008).

j) Is creative

Religion Studies is an open-ended journey in which the powers of imagination and creative thinking are encouraged to emerge. This includes the ability to elicit new information from written or oral sources and to interpret material in new ways.

1.1.13 What is the purpose of Religion Studies?

Religion Studies enhances the constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination and freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion. Religion Studies aims at the holistic development of the intellectual, physical, social, emotional and spiritual aspects of the learner. The purpose is the enhancement of knowledge, skills and values necessary for the enrichment of each learner, interpersonal relationships and an open and democratic society (National Department of Education, 2008:10).

Religion Studies enriches and empowers the learner by:

- increasing knowledge and understanding about a variety of religions, each being unique;
- contributing to an understanding of religions as historically interrelated with each other, and as interrelated with social, economic and political aspects of life;
- encouraging analytical, critical and constructive thinking and debate;
- fostering creative thinking about the enduring concerns of humanity;
- stimulating reflection on values, morals and norms;
- encouraging informed and responsible personal choices (National Department of Education, 2008).

Religion Studies enhances the interpersonal relationships of the learner by:

- cultivating sensitivity and respect across a range of religions;
- building confidence to deal positively with differing views;
- exploring the range of symbolic, conceptual, linguistic and other means of communication;
- encouraging the ability of individuals and communities to co-exist and collaborate with people of various religious persuasions in a variety of ways.

Religion Studies contributes to an open and democratic society by:

- allowing the voices of all religions to be heard in the public domain on the basis of equality and non-discrimination;
- respecting and promoting the human rights and responsibilities of people of all religions in South Africa, Africa and the world;

- stimulating the positive acceptance and appreciation of religious diversity in South African society;
- developing the skills to communicate meaningfully and constructively across religions in a diverse society;
- reflecting on and critiquing the contributions of religions to the moral, social, economic and political aspects of society.

In 2008 the first cohort of Grade 12 learners completed the FET Phase programme in this subject. More comprehensive and detailed feedback is critical for the evaluation of this new subject. This study focuses on one aspect of such needed research, that is, the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in the FET Band by principals, educators, parents and learners.

At the time of writing, this is the sixth year that Religion Studies has been offered at the Grade 12 level. There is still an acute deficit in both national and international research regarding the factors that influence the choice of Religion Studies as a school subject.

1.2 STATEMENT OF THE RESEARCH PROBLEM

This study focussed on the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies as an optional subject. The issue of the choice of specific subjects for study deserves some preliminary discussion. A recent study conducted by Adeyemi (2009) in Africa on the factors influencing the choice of geography as an optional subject in a senior secondary school highlighted a relationship between subject choice and career intention. A remarkable ninety-five percent of the respondents chose geography over other subjects because it was related to their intended career.

This current study investigated why Religion Studies as a subject has been chosen by learners, educators, parents and principals/schools since the phasing in of this new subject in Grade 10. Was this choice of subject by the learners motivated by their vocational and career goals? For instance, this subject may constitute an 'easy option' to boost a learner's performance. Was Religion Studies chosen by educators as part of a deliberate career path for specialisation or were

they formerly teachers of Biblical Studies? Former or 'recycled' Biblical Studies educators may be available, or even volunteer to teach this subject, or they may simply have to be absorbed within the system in the most 'suitable' way possible. Were parents favourably disposed to RS as a subject because of their career aspirations for their children or because RS was construed as an aggregate booster. Was the choice of Religion Studies by principals influenced by their management goals or by the value and career openings of RS for the learners? What was the rationale of Religion Studies for the subject advisers?

The issue of the learners' choice deserves some detailed explanation. According to the National Curriculum Statement, when the learner reaches Grade 10, four compulsory subjects must be offered: two official languages, Mathematics or Mathematics Literacy, and Life Orientation, out of seven subjects. The learner has then to choose three optional subjects offered by the institution. Not every approved subject is offered by every school. Schools choose to offer subjects from an approved list which can include commercial, technical, humanities or specialist arts subjects. Religion Studies is one of these optional subjects.

This study sought to find out the factors surrounding the choice of this subject.

1.3 PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The purpose of this study was to investigate the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by learners, educators and principals. This subject has been introduced from Grade 10 in 2006, Grade 11 in 2007 and Grade 12 in 2008. Minimal research has been conducted on the goals of the learners, educators, parents and schools that choose to study, teach or offer this subject.

1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The research attempted to answer the following main research question:

- What factors influence the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by principals, educators, parents and learners?

Sub-questions were:

- What are the factors influencing principals to offer this subject at their particular school?

- What are the factors influencing educators to choose to teach this particular subject?
- Why do parents choose Religion Studies as a subject for their children?
- What are the factors influencing learners to choose to study this subject?
- What are the views of subject advisors regarding the choice of RS as a school subject?
- In what ways does the Department of Education support Religion Studies educators?

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Ethics, morals, and cross-cultural issues are critical for the development of our new democracy. While Religion Studies is currently an optional subject, it can play a critical role towards achieving these ethical and moral goals. Subject advisors will be encouraged if principals, educators and learners are aware of and are committed to the goals of the subject Religion Studies. A sharper understanding of these goals would also better inform the key stakeholders of the perceived merits of this subject. More specifically, this study may illuminate the complex reasons behind the choice of the subject by principals, educators and learners. Furthermore, religious leaders would also be interested in the success of this new subject. Both the provincial and national departments of education would also be keenly interested in the role of Religion Studies in assisting to develop the moral fibre of our society among our learners. Finally, since Religion Studies has been implemented to the Grade 12 level only since 2008, the researcher wished to know what goals informed the choice of this subject.

1.6 RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

In 2006 Religion Studies, as a fully-fledged optional subject for matriculation purposes, was phased in with the Grade 10 cohort. The first cohort of Grade 12 learners emerged in 2008. This represents a major paradigm shift as far as the study of religion within the sphere of public education is concerned. Therefore, a study with a focus on the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies will prove very beneficial to subject advisors, principals of secondary schools, and

educators. This study may provide additional knowledge about the factors surrounding the choice of this subject. For instance, this subject may constitute an 'easy option' to boost a learner's performance. Former or 'recycled' Biblical Studies educators may be available, or even volunteer to teach this subject, or they may simply have to be absorbed within the system in the most 'suitable' way possible. The data will provide more accurate details on what is actually going on.

1.7 DELIMITATION OF THE STUDY

This study investigated the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by learners, educators, parents and principals. Concerns about whether the goals of this new subject Religion Studies are being met are outside the focus of this study. This subject has been phased in from Grade 10 in 2006, Grade 11 in 2007 and Grade 12 in 2008. Minimal research has been conducted on the factors influencing the choice of RS by learners, educators, parents and schools. The participants of this study were restricted to learners, educators, principals and subject advisors.

1.8 DEFINITION OF TERMS

These definitions were not developed by the researcher, but the choice to adopt them is because they capture most closely the sense which has been attached to these terms throughout this study.

1.8.1 Religion Studies

Religion Studies is the study of religion as a universal human phenomenon, and of religions found in a variety of cultures. Religions are studied without favouring any or discriminating against any, whether in theory or in practice, and without promoting adherence to any particular religion. Religion Studies leads to the recognition, understanding and appreciation of a variety of religions within a common humanity, in the context of a civic understanding of religion, with a view to developing religious literacy (Learning Programme Guidelines: Religion Studies, 2008:7).

1.8.2 Religion

Religion is understood to be the universal human quest for ultimate truth or ultimate being. This quest manifests itself in various systems in which the dimensions of values, beliefs, experiences and actions are integrated, and in which the phenomena of doctrine, ethics and ritual form a cohesive unit (Core Syllabus Committee for Life Orientation, 1994:1).

According to Streng (1985:2), religion is a means to ultimate transformation. Religion incorporates two basic elements: ultimacy and effective power. In the context of religious awareness, ultimacy means the most comprehensive resource and deepest necessity of which a person can be aware. It is one's sense of superlative value that motivates and structures one's life. A common assumption of religious people is that 'the fullest life calls on the highest sensitivities to be put into the service of the most comprehensive reality, such as God's will, the Buddha-nature, or the Tao' (Streng, 1985:2). A religious awareness incites one to act from a view of life that transcends cultural habits or mere short-term gain. When people are sensitive to living in the ultimate context of existence, they seek the deepest comprehension of life. They then feel compelled to try to live in the framework of that awareness (Streng, 1985:2).

1.8.3 Multi-cultural education

This can be best defined with reference to a discussion of the debates surrounding multicultural education. Different people view multicultural education from different perspectives. Therefore, in order to attempt to define multicultural education it is useful to examine a few of these views and to trace the historical development of the concept.

According to Suzuki (1984:305), multicultural education is 'a multiple education programme that provides multiple learning environments matching the needs of the student.' In his definition, Suzuki stresses the aim of imparting necessary knowledge and skills which will enable the student and hence society to move toward greater equality and freedom. In Hessari and Hill's (1989:3) definition of

multicultural education, the anti-racist component is emphasised and is defined as 'that [education] which enables children to develop the ability to recognise inequality, injustice, racism, stereotyping, prejudice and bias, and which equips them with the skills and knowledge to help them challenge and combat these manifestations.' Baker (1983:4) defines multicultural education in broad terms as a 'process through which individuals become aware of themselves and their place in the world at large.' Ramsey (1987:6) supports the notion of multicultural education as a process in her definition, which states that 'multicultural education is not a set curriculum, but a perspective that is reflected in all decisions about every phase and aspect of teaching.'

One of the most comprehensive definitions of multicultural education is that provided by the National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (USA), which states that multicultural education is preparation for culturally diverse and complex human encounters. This preparation provides a process by which an individual develops competencies of perceiving, believing, evaluating and behaving in differential cultural settings. Thus, multicultural education is viewed as an intervention and on-going assessment process to help institutions and individuals become more responsive to the human condition, individual cultural integrity and cultural pluralism in society (Benavides, 1985:134).

1.9 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

This study restricts its focus to two schools within one district in the province of the Eastern Cape. Any generalisations that may be extrapolated nationally should be made cautiously, given the limitations of the case study approach. While case studies have been formerly deemed to be limited in the generalisability of their findings, more recently they have gained in acceptability in this regard, especially in the light of the richness of the in-depth information which may emerge in such studies (Cohen *et al.*, 2009:253)

1.10 CHAPTER OUTLINE

This study is divided into five distinctive components.

Chapter one deals with the introduction and background of the study.

Chapter two reviews the existing literature.

Chapter three provides details of the research methodology.

Chapter four focuses on the findings of the research.

Chapter five provides a summary of the study, conclusion and recommendations on how the findings of the study can be utilised.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.0 INTRODUCTION

According to Neuman (1997:89), "Scientific research is not an activity of isolated hermits who ignore others' findings. Rather, it is a collective effort of many researchers who share their results with one another and who pursue knowledge as a community." The aim of this chapter is to offer a literature review and also focus on the theories that have informed the issue of choice generally but that of subject choice in particular.

2.1 LITERATURE ON RELIGION STUDIES IN SOUTH AFRICA

As mentioned in Chapter 1, Religion Studies (RS) is a new subject that has been offered as an option since 2006 for FET Phase learners only. The first cohort of Grade 12 learners materialised in 2008. The fact that little has been written with a focused study on this area is the rationale for this research. The collaborative research of Smit and Chetty entitled "Advancing Religion in Southern Africa" (2009) is one of only two specific studies that have emerged on the subject Religion Studies since its introduction. The other study by Rajbansi (2009) is entitled "Prospects and Challenges in the Implementation of Religion Studies in the School Curriculum."

Smit and Chetty (2006) highlight the issues of religious diversity, learner recruitment, educator competence and career pathing as factors influencing learners' choice of RS as a subject, as both possibility and threat. South Africa offers the ideal case for analysing the shifting paradigm from a religion-specific curriculum to a more inclusive curriculum representing the religious diversity present in the country (Smit and Chetty 2009:340). Religion Studies is still perceived by many as Biblical Studies, Religious Instruction or some other religion-specific subject. It is also misconstrued as an easy subject (Smit and Chetty 2009:346). There is also a negative perception construed by parents: that if their children opt for Religion Studies, it will inevitably affect their spiritual

grounding in their specific religious tradition. These issues have had a negative impact on recruitment. Many teachers who are currently teaching Religion Studies do not have the necessary skills and the knowledge of Religion Studies needed to fulfil the curriculum requirements (Smit and Chetty 2009:347). There needs to be a change of focus from regurgitation of facts to critical engagement.

Rajbansi (2009:4) examines some of the fundamental issues related to the inclusion of Religion Studies in the school curriculum in the FET phase. He also explores the many prospects and advantages Religion Studies will provide for learners as well as for educators. Finally, he examines models of Religion Studies that can be used to help with its implementation. Rajbansi (2009: 5) offers the following recommendations: the resource materials must be more accessible and well-balanced; and educators need to be trained and be unbiased.

Both these studies do not consider the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies. The main concern of the researcher was to investigate why Religion Studies, as a subject, has been chosen by learners. The factors that influenced educators to choose this subject to teach; as well as factors that have swayed principals to offer this subject as part of their school's curriculum; were investigated.

All of these questions revolve around choice, so it is appropriate to explore theories that attempt to help us understand human choice and what influences it. One of these theories is a body of theory that has developed chiefly within the realm of economics: rational choice theory (RCT). RCT is just one of several theories that may be used to shed light on the choice of RS as a school subject.

2.2 RATIONAL CHOICE THEORY

Rational choice theory has been used by some social scientists to explain human behaviour. The approach has been widely used in the field of economics, but more recently has also been used in the disciplines of sociology, political science, anthropology, religion and education (Becker, 1976; Radnitzky and Bernholz, 1987; Hogarth and Reder, 1987; Swedberg; 1990; and Green and Shapiro, 1996).

According to Green (2002:4), rational choice theory commences with an analysis of the “choice behaviour of one or more individual decision-making units.” In this study these “units” are learners, educators and principals. Once the elements of individual behaviour are established, the exploration moves on to scrutinize how individual choices act together to produce outcomes (Swedberg, 1990). Green further contends that rational choice analysis presumes that some agent is “maximizing utility” and that “another important element of the choice process is the presence of constraints” (2002:7). The presence of constraints makes choice necessary, and one feature of rational choice theory is that it makes the “trade-offs” between alternative choices very explicit. In this study, one of the constraints is the limited choice of subjects in the FET band that are offered at schools.

In rational choice theory, Green (2002:13) asserts that “behaviour follows from the pursuit of objectives, so preference specification is crucial.” Frank (1997:18) describes two general approaches. The “self-interest” standard of rationality “says rational people consider only costs and benefits that accrue directly to themselves.” The “present-aim” standard of rationality, on the other hand, says that “rational people act efficiently in pursuit of whatever objectives they hold at the moment of choice.” Frank (1997:19) contends that neither approach is obviously satisfactory. Many people would seem to care about more than just their own material well-being. According to Green (2002:14), the “present-aim” standard has also been used in rational choice models, but not as widely as the use of the “self-interest” standard. Three reasons are advanced by Bergstrom (2003) which account for this. In the words of Green (2002):

“‘self-interest’ standard has often been successful in generating predictions that are consistent with experience. Second, there is no convincing way to postulate preferences when the only measure is ‘more than self-interest matters.’ People may care about others, but are they either jealous, or altruistic? Thirdly, ‘self-interest’ standard models can be analysed, compared to ‘present-aim’ models, in terms of specific observable predictions” (14).

In particular, models in which agents care about each other in some way are likely to have multiple equilibriums. Frank (1987) contends that preferences should include concerns for others.

According to Musgrave (1974) as cited in Green (2002:18), rational choice methodology is gaining in ascendancy,

“not only because it tends to generate an abundance of observable predictions, but also because it tends to also generate novel predictions. Novel confirmation embodies the sentiment expressed by Descartes (1644): that we know hypotheses are correct “only when we see that we can explain in terms of them, not merely the effects we originally had in mind, but also all other phenomena which we did not previously think.”

2.2.1 Critiques of Rational Choice Theory

According to Green (2002:46), “rational’ in rational choice theory... means only that an agent’s choices reflect the most preferred feasible alternative...that is, choices reflect utility maximization.” Also, a “rational” choice has, of necessity, to be grounded on reason or rationality.

According to Green (2002:56), “much of the criticism of rational choice theory would seem to be that the assumptions of the theory are not literally and completely true. No model can pass such a test, as all theories abstract from reality in some way.” For instance, one of the basic assumptions of rational choice theory “is that the primary unit of analysis is the individual decision-maker” (Green 2002:56). This supposition has been challenged by Marxists and others who assert that groups are central.

This section has presented a brief introduction to rational choice theory, and as noted that it is also making significant inroads into a number of disciplines in the social science, religion and education. Rational choice theory has also elicited criticism, which has to be anticipated of any theory.

The theory which has the greatest potential to explain the factors affecting the choice of Religion Studies as a subject on the FET Band is that of subject choice theory.

2.3 SOME THEORIES RELATED TO CHOICE

The literature on subject choice tends to focus on stakeholder influences on learners’ decisions. This section will concentrate on aspects of peer influence; self-

efficacy; utility value; motivation; teacher-related factors; cultural capital; economic and cultural capital and cultural reproduction theory.

2.3.1 Peer Influence

Studies have demonstrated that a learner's self-esteem, self-awareness and self-concept play a critical role in the degree of impact of peer influence (Owoyele and Toyolo, 2008; Marsh and O.Mara, 2008). A learner with low self-esteem would usually find it challenging to resist the derision of peers should the former not perform adequately in a subject (Ormrod, 2008). Learners are also pressurised to fit in with group rules, even if they disagree. This state of affairs is intensified in circumstances where the learner has a low self-concept (Schunk and Pajares, 2002; Kiemanesh, 1998). Boaler *et al.* (2000) contend that learners view belonging to a group as bestowing a "sense of self" and that they may also develop self-esteem from this "fitting in". A peer group may create either a positive or a negative social influence (Boaler *et al.*, 2000). This influence of peers with reference to subject choice is a virtual certainty for learners. Peer views on Religion Studies would be likely to play a decisive role in the choice of this subject. If peers considered Religion Studies in a negative light, this would dissuade many learners from taking this option. A positive peer estimation, on the other hand, would open the way for this subject choice.

2.3.2 Self-efficacy

According to Bandura (in Pintrich and Schunk, 1996:161), self-efficacy is seen as people's judgement of their competence to organise and implement courses of action in order to achieve chosen levels of performance. People act in a certain manner because of anticipated results (Bandura *et al.*, 1996). When people become convinced that they are self-efficacious, they act eagerly. This is particularly pertinent in the school situation, as it would mean that learners would become cooperative and actively involved when performing activities that they both enjoyed and about which they were certain of positive results. This fact could

help learners to achieve better results in Religion Studies if they could come to believe that they were self-efficacious.

Schunk (in Zimmerman, Bandura and Martinez-Pons, 1992:665) assert that students with a high degree of self-efficacy show perseverance, determination and an inherent interest in learning. The performance level of self-efficacious learners is therefore high. Notwithstanding the fact that Religion Studies as a new subject would be approached with a degree of uncertainty, learners with high self-efficacy will be likely to do well as they will tend to persevere, even if they feel that things are becoming difficult.

Parents may have high goals for their children, but without consideration of their children's aptitudes. In some cases parents want their children to follow in their paths, or in the paths that they did not manage to follow themselves. On the other hand some parents who have a more realistic view of their children's academic ability may opt to encourage choices that would ensure success at the Matriculation level. RS is not perceived to be a challenging or difficult or even an abstract subject. Many see it, perhaps erroneously by association with the old Religious Education or Biblical Studies as a "soft option" compared with mathematics, physical science, or accountancy (which is widely perceived as having higher utility value). If Religion Studies is considered a 'soft option' then parents would support such a choice. Meece (in Schunk and Pajares, 2002:5) contend that "Parents who provide a warm, responsive and supportive home environment, who encourage exploration and stimulate curiosity, and who provide play and learning materials, accelerate their children's intellectual development". Parents have a very significant role to play in their children's learning as the home may be a source of persuasive information.

Peer groups promote motivational socialisation (Schunk and Pajares, 2002:6). This social motivation will be influenced by the type of group with which a learner is associated. If learners are affiliated with highly motivated groups, they tend to act in a positive way and this will continue throughout their school careers (Schunk and Pajares, 2002). When learners with good grades go to high school and they associate with highly academically orientated learners, they usually achieve better results than learners who associate with less academically orientated peers

(Schunk and Pajares, 2002). Despite this sense of group-belonging, learners also need autonomy so as to enable them to make their own decisions.

2.3.3 Utility Value

If a person believes that a direct benefit will ensue from the task he/she is performing, there is a good chance that he/she will attempt to execute the task well. Even at primary school level, learners are happy when they are involved in activities which they enjoy. Utility value refers to the degree of perceived helpfulness of the current task to the achievement of future goals. Learners will assign a high value to certain activities if these activities are a means to preferred goals. Utility value is, thus, determined by “how well a task relates to current and future goals” (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002:12).

A task may have positive value for an individual because that task enables the realisation of important goals such as career objectives. This may be true even if the individual is not interested in the activity for its own sake and does not experience intrinsic fulfilment in performing the task (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

Utility value is also a predictor of academic achievement (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). Weiner in (Eccles and Wigfield, 1992:7) argues that expectations of long-term success greatly influence an individual's choice of achievement. This may play a role in the selection of Religion Studies as a subject. For instance, Wigfield, Anderman, and Eccles (2000) found that children's overall task values are significantly related to adopting a mastery orientation (i.e. trying to master the task) and to holding a performance-approach orientation (i.e. maximising favourable evaluations of one's competence compared with others). This implies that the perceptions of learners about RS, and the manner in which they behave towards this subject, may often be linked to the utility value of RS.

Since learners' expectations of success are correlated to their performance in their subject choice, it is therefore essential that learners be informed of the usefulness of any subject, inclusive of Religion Studies to enable them to shrug off any perceived difficulty of the subject. The utility value of a subject will influence high school learners to continue to take that subject (Wigfield and Eccles, 1992).

Teachers have a pivotal role to play in respect of learning. This is borne out by Moos (in Eccles and Wigfield, 2000:220) when he states that “a quality teacher-student relationship provides the effective underpinnings of academic motivation and success.” The role of the teacher thus affects the future ambitions of learners and the way in which they perceive education. When teachers have high expectations of their learners and the learners in turn perceive these expectations, these learners tend to achieve more and also to develop a greater sense of competence (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). This is surely applicable to RS. Furthermore, if a teacher has a good command of his/her subject, it will be relatively easy to be passionate, and this passion will spark the learner’s own passion. A high sense of teacher efficacy will enhance the belief of the learners in their ability to master the subject while, conversely, low teacher efficacy will result in feelings of incompetence on the part of the learners (Eccles and Wigfield, 2000).

2.3.4 Motivation

Reiss (2004:179) states that motives refer to the reasons people have for initiating and performing voluntary behaviour. According to Pintrich and Schunk (1996:5), motivation is the process whereby goal-directed activity is prompted and continued. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) argue that it is not possible to observe motivation directly, but that motivation may be inferred from such behaviours as choice of tasks, labours and perseverance in terms of the work being done. Aristotle (in Reiss, 2004) divided the motives for performing a task into two entities, that is, ends (intrinsic motivation) and means (extrinsic motivation). These two types of motivation as well as self-determination theory will be discussed below.

Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation to participate in an activity for its own sake (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996). Hunt (in Pintrich and Schunk, 1996:248) argues that intrinsic motivation gives rise to exploratory behaviour and curiosity. Ryan and Deci (in Bateman and Crant, 2002:3) further adduce that intrinsic motivation, which derives from within a person or from the activity itself, has a positive effect on behaviour, performance, and well-being. Intrinsically motivated people demonstrate greater interest, excitement, and confidence, which, in turn, manifests

as enhanced performance, persistence and creativity (Ryan and Deci, 1991). Learners who are intrinsically motivated work on tasks because they find these tasks enjoyable. Thus intrinsically motivated Religion Studies or other learners would enjoy performing given tasks in the subject provided that they were perceived as meaningful and the learners could see the sense of doing them.

Reiss (2004:182) concurs with the general argument above when stating that people are motivated to engage in activities which they expect to experience as enjoyable. Deci and Ryan (in Reiss, 2004:182) are in agreement when they state that “when people are intrinsically motivated, they experience interest and enjoyment, they feel competent and self-determining, they perceive the locus of causality for their behaviour to be internal, and, in some instances, they experience flow”. Weiner (in Reiss, 2004:182) shares the same sentiment when defining intrinsic motivation as a source of motivation arising from the enjoyment of an activity. Ryan and Deci (2000:70) suggest that choice, acknowledgement of feelings, and opportunities for self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater sense of autonomy. If learners were given autonomy of this sort in a Religion Studies class then the chances are they would fare better in this subject.

Extrinsic motivation is demonstrated when an individual embarks on a task in order to gain a reward or to avoid punishment (Yang, Zhang and Wang, 2009). When students study Religion Studies merely in order to obtain high marks, they may be said to be extrinsically motivated. Ryan and Deci (2000:71) concur as they define extrinsic motivation as the performance of an activity in order to attain some separable outcome. Pintrich and Schunk (1996:245) describe extrinsic motivation in terms of a person engaging in an activity as a means to an end. If learners study hard in order to avoid reprimand or in order to receive either a reward or praise from the teacher, they may be said to be extrinsically driven (Yang *et al.*, 2009). It may happen that learners could be studying a subject in order to follow a certain career, although they might not be interested in the subject *per se*.

Deci (in Pintrich and Schunk, 1996:257) defines self-determination as the process of using one’s will. Shroff and Vogel (2009) explain self-determination as the capacity to choose and to have choices. Reeve *et al.* (2003) classify a self-

determined person as a person who acts out of choice rather than obligation or coercion. If learners choose Religion Studies without any coercion, under their own volition, the chances are they will fare better than if they had been coerced into taking RS.

Ryan and Deci (2000:70) suggest that feelings of proficiency or self-efficacy would not augment intrinsic motivation unless attended by a sense of autonomy. Ryan and Deci (2000:70) further state people must not only experience feelings of competence or efficacy, but that they must also experience their behaviour as self-determined if intrinsic motivation is to be in evidence. Self-determination requires people to accept their strengths and limitations, to be cognisant of forces acting on them, to make choices, and to determine ways to satisfy needs (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996:257). Shroff and Vogel (2009:61) maintain that, in terms of self-determination theory, individuals have a psychological need to feel competent and self-determined.

2.3.5 Teacher-related factors

As with the influence of teachers and parents on learners to choose science subjects, some learners chose Religion Studies because they are advised to do so by their teachers and parents (Fennema, 1990; Hoffmann-Barthes *et al.*, 1998).

The influences emanating from society play a pivotal role in learners' choice of certain subjects at school. Fennema (1990) suggests that it is relatively easier to identify differential teacher interaction with boys than it is with girls. Boys, it seems, are both praised and scolded more than girls, and boys are called on more than girls to answer questions in class.

Kiefer (2004:1) reports that learners choose certain subjects because their teachers make it interesting and their teachers put a lot of effort into teaching. In Kiefer's report on science subjects, one learner commented: "I have a very good teacher who makes it fun, and he helps to explain problems to the students individually and works with them until they understand" (2004:1).

In view of the fact that learners regard their teachers as role models, it is not startling that teacher attitudes impact on learner preferences for a particular subject.

Piaget states that there are four stages of child development, with the ultimate stage being the formal operational stage (in Nieman, Kamper and Pienaar, 2008:93). Although all these stages are important it is necessary that learners, as they study further, reach the formal operation stage at which it is stated that they are able to use abstract reasoning. Learners at secondary school level, especially in the higher grades, should be at the formal operation stage, which would, in turn, be extremely helpful in terms of studying Religion Studies. Nevertheless, Mwamwenda (in Nieman, Kamper and Pienaar, 2008:93) disagrees that all high school learners are at the formal operation stage when he states, “many secondary school learners in Africa are possibly still at the concrete operational level, instead of the formal operational level.” It therefore follows that Religion Studies should concretise the study of religious systems so as to enhance the understanding of learners and thus enable them to move to the abstract level of formal operation. When learners are given a problem, teachers should encourage them to solve the problem by themselves, as this will encourage discovery learning (Nieman, Kamper and Pienaar, 2008). As learners are busy solving problems, they will be thinking at different levels.

RS teachers must ensure that they facilitate their learners’ critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills and problem-solving skills.

More often than not, RS, like some other subjects, is still teacher-centred, with formal pencil-and-paper testing as the principal method of assessment, mainly at secondary school level (Boaler *et al.*, 2000). This evidence reflects negatively on the style of teaching of the teachers concerned. In South Africa, despite the fact that provision was made in the OBE curriculum over almost a decade and a half for a learner-centred approach to teaching, there are still schools in which a teacher-centred approach, which is also often characterised by rote learning in South Africa, is the norm (Gaigher *et al.*, 2006).

Fenemma (1990) believes it is desirable for teachers to use cooperative learning because most learners thrive during shared activities. Fraser (2006:7) concurs

with Fenemma's point of view when he states that "Conceptual growth comes from the negotiation of meaning, the sharing of multiple perspectives, and the changing of our internal presentation through collaborative learning." A cooperative learning strategy would allow learners to engage in meaningful debates about concepts, and thus enhance their understanding. Hirsch (2001) suggests that the promotion of learner autonomy is one way in which to encourage interest in the subject.

There are different approaches to, or styles of, teaching in RS. Gagne (in Watts, 1991:7), in the context of science subjects, argues that problem-solving is one such approach. Problem-solving allows learners to discover things for themselves and to engage in the solving of problems (Mahaye and Jacobs, 2004:199). This, in turn, may be a source of motivation for learners (Jacobs, 2004).

Watts (1991) suggests that problem-solving may prompt an interest in a subject in that, during a problem-solving activity, learners learn through self-activity. Problem-solving enables learners to take ownership of their learning, and it provides a real life context, encourages decision-making and enhances communication (Watts, 1991). The main idea behind problem-solving is to make learners solve the problems given to them logically and be able to explain their solutions with persuasion. A lack of opportunities for problem-solving will thus be likely to discourage a learner from taking a specific subject (Gaigher *et al.*, 2006).

Cooperative learning is another teaching strategy which is associated with the generating of a high level of interest among learners in a particular subject. In terms of cooperative learning, learners work in small groups in order to realise a common goal (Ormrod, 2008:437). Their interaction is characterised by positive goal interdependence, with individual accountability (Johnson and Johnson, 1988). Gawe (2004:211) asserts that, in cooperative learning, learners construct their own knowledge through social negotiation. Cooperative learning, as a teaching strategy, would contribute substantially to motivating learners.

After 1994 a concerted effort was made by the South African government to decrease the number of unqualified and under-qualified teachers (Shiendler, 2008). Before 1994, just over a third of all teachers were either unqualified or under-qualified. But by 2002, this figure had been reduced to 16 percent (Shiendler, 2008). A qualified teacher is not automatically an expert, or someone

who is able to produce good results. In many cases educators in South Africa may be the victims of their own education, and they may teach in the manner in which they were taught (James, Naidoo and Benson, 2008:2).

In order for teachers to know how to teach Religion Studies, it is essential that they undergo professional development in the form of in-service training. Quality Religion Studies educators will result in more students entering the field of RS at a tertiary level. Teacher professional development may take various forms, including individual development, continuing education, peer coaching and mentoring. During professional development, teachers may be given the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques in line with the new curriculum (the NCS).

Learners learn better in a warm, conducive environment. It is mandatory for teachers to create this type of environment, as effective learning under duress is not possible. Midgley, Feldlaufer and Eccles (1989) state that students at high school level perceive high school teachers as less friendly than the teachers at the primary school level. Despite the fact that this may affect all learners, according to Osborne (2003), girls are usually the most affected as, more than boys, they need love and support which they seldom receive at high school.

To summarise, there are various factors that influence the decisions of learners to opt for RS. Peer influence, self-efficacy, utility value, motivation and teacher factors also have an effect on the learner's subject choices, especially in respect of RS.

2.3.6 Economic and cultural capital

Van De Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung (2003:41-62), using a framework that integrates rational choice perspectives and cultural reproduction theory, contend that "children take their parents' social position as a reference for their own choices, and are guided mainly by the amount of economic and cultural capital that is available within the family." In support of this assertion, Van De Werfhorst *et al.* (2003:41) show that "children from higher social class backgrounds achieved a higher standard in both humanities and scientific subjects in primary and secondary school. Furthermore, children of the professional class were relatively

likely to choose the prestigious subjects of medicine and law in university, independent of ability". Subject choice is thus influenced and "reproduced" by economic and cultural factors.

Significant research that explores the extent to which children are likely to choose subjects that are associated with their parents' characteristics has also been carried out in Norway (Hansen, 1997), the Netherlands (Van de Werfhorst et al., 2001), Sweden (Dryler, 1998) and the USA (Davies and Guppy, 1997). This research claims that "parents' interests are communicated to children, and the children are therefore likely to choose subjects that correspond to their parents' interests" (Van De Werfhorst *et al.*, 2003:42). Furthermore, Hansen (1997), Davies and Guppy (1997) and Van de Werfhorst *et al.* (2001) aver that students' choice of subject has to be viewed "within the system of both economic and cultural stratification, as children choose subjects that correspond to their parents' positions in both the economic and the cultural hierarchy" (Van De Werfhorst *et al.*, 2003:43). This finding corroborates the earlier findings of Van De Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung (2001).

The present study notes the relevance of this line of research on the impact of parental background, i.e. social class, economic and cultural capital, on the choice of subject in secondary school education. The shortcoming of this theoretical framework for studying subject choice is that it only links rational choice perspectives with cultural reproduction theory. It is also essential to expand the discussion to examine other factors, inclusive of peer influence, self-efficacy or ability, utility value, motivation and teacher factors on subject choice. Prior attainment is likely to influence the choice of subjects. From previous studies examining family background influences on subject choice, only that of Davies and Guppy (1997) incorporates consideration of students' ability. As ability is associated with social class, one must ask whether the effect of parental background on students' choice of subject found in previous research is in fact due to the transmission of tastes and interests from parents to children.

Furthermore, it is possible that students' abilities in different subjects vary according to the type of resources (cultural or economic) that their parents have.

Though we refer to individual students' choices, we acknowledge that these choices are, to varying degrees, family rather than individual decisions. Previous research suggests that students from homes where reading (fiction and non-fiction) and other forms of literary participation are encouraged may have a comparative advantage over students from homes where reading is not encouraged (Uerz *et al.*, 1999). Cultural participation may also lead some students to enjoy the social sciences and humanities subjects and Religion Studies more than scientific and technical subjects, as the former subjects are more closely connected with the cultural and leisure pursuits they might have engaged in with their families. For example, those who read both fiction and non-fiction at home, for pleasure, can be expected to gain the most enjoyment from the study of both literature and science. Students from homes lacking in 'cultural capital' may find it harder to compete with those coming from homes with 'cultural capital' in all the disciplines, where they do not face the same comparative advantage. The influence of family background may be important for subject choice and success in school, but educators may have a greater impact on subject choice and attainment in the sciences (Shaycroft, 1967; Coleman, 1975; Postlethwaite, 1975; Brimer *et al.*, 1977; Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Brandsma and Knuver, 1989). The aspect of peer influence has to be added to establish the triangle of the critical factors of family, peer and educator influence in the subject choice of learners.

Explanations of educational choices do not rest on assumptions regarding students' knowledge of the labour market returns to the various curricula on offer. The assumption that teenage decision-makers have knowledge of the labour market returns on education has been criticised (Manski, 1993). Students faced with a choice of subjects may focus largely on their chances of success in, and associated enjoyment of, the fields of study on offer (Rochat and De Meulemeester, 2001). The vocational possibilities are far removed from their thinking at this juncture.

For Boudon (1974), the costs and benefits associated with each educational choice vary with social class because ambition is relative to the social starting point of an individual. So, a working-class child who wants to be a lawyer must be more ambitious than a middle-class child who wants to be a lawyer. Therefore,

high prestige educational options may be essential in avoiding social demotion for middle-class pupils, whereas working-class pupils can avoid social demotion without pursuing such options. Following Boudon's analysis, this leads to middle-class learners being more likely to pursue such high prestige options than working-class learners. For Boudon's argument to work, the assumption must be made that people's main concern is to avoid downward mobility, rather than to pursue upward mobility (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). Otherwise, prestigious educational options might be more attractive to students from working-class backgrounds than to students from middle-class backgrounds, since the social distance likely to be travelled as a result of successful completion of a prestigious course will be far greater for the working-class student. Breen and Goldthorpe term this desire to avoid downward mobility "relative risk aversion". In line with the rational choice framework, we start from the assumption that children of the various social classes make conscious educational decisions. However, the models formulated by Boudon, Breen and Goldthorpe aim to explain class differences in levels of educational participation (e.g. continuing in education or dropping out, or choosing between a prestigious academic track and a less prestigious vocational track), rather than the impact of class background on subject choice.

2.3.7 Cultural reproduction theory

According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu, 1984; Bourdieu and Passeron, 1990), the explanation for social class inequalities in educational attainment lies in the social distribution of "cultural capital". Bourdieu states that cultural capital consists of familiarity with the dominant culture in a society. The possession of cultural capital varies with social class, yet the education system assumes the possession of cultural capital. This makes it very difficult for working-class pupils to succeed in the education system. Moreover, according to Bourdieu, educational reproduction leads to social reproduction, and the crucial role played by the education system in allocating occupational positions legitimates social inequalities. During the twentieth century, educational credentials have become a key mechanism for allocating occupational positions. This has led to an increase in the importance of cultural, as opposed to economic, capital in the transmission of privilege. On the other hand, the direct transmission of economic capital has

remained extremely important. This can be seen as resulting in a two-dimensional space of social status; one based on economic capital and one based on cultural capital. It can be argued that two distinct elites have emerged, one that is strong on cultural capital but not on economic capital (e.g. journalists, scientists, public sector employees, artists and vocations aligned with Religion Studies), the other strong on social class, ability and choice of subject which focuses on economic capital but not on cultural capital (e.g. managers in private companies, executives).

2.4 INTEGRATING RATIONAL CHOICE AND CULTURAL REPRODUCTION THEORIES

The two approaches should be seen as complementary rather than competitive with regard to the question of subject choice. The rational choices which people make in pursuit of social mobility (or stability) may be recognised without neglecting the cultural influences that help to form people's preferences. If we want to know what is really going on in students' educational decision-making, both perspectives need to be addressed.

Bourdieu's ranking of society on two dimensions (cultural and economic) can be taken as a starting point in bridging the rational choice and cultural reproduction perspectives. Once we acknowledge that the two types of resources (economic and cultural) are unequally distributed among the members of a society, and that they lead to inequalities in life chances, we can evaluate to what extent economic and cultural capital are reproduced across generations through choices of different fields of study. While we assume that people make conscious educational decisions based on the costs and benefits associated with each option, the two-dimensional social space proposed by Bourdieu may give additional insight into the various factors that shape both students' preferences and the costs and benefits facing them. Cultural capital is likely to increase students' probabilities of success within cultural fields of study for various reasons, including parental help and guidance (Erikson and Jonsson, 1996). Students from backgrounds with an abundance of cultural capital may also perceive the benefits of certain fields of study as being particularly high, since they value certain occupations and

participation highly. Certain fields of study may even enhance the enjoyment that is gained from participation.

Finally, the unlikelihood of students with lesser cultural capital choosing certain subjects may be rendered even less likely by the desire not to be in a minority, as minority status can be seen as imposing a cost to the individual (Jonsson, 1999). The choice of Religion Studies by learners would thus be more likely to emanate from families with a greater measure of cultural capital. Comparable arguments can be applied to the children of the economic elite. Their choice of subject is mainly guided by their parents' position in the economic hierarchy. To either maintain class status, or to achieve upward mobility on the economic ladder, the economic elite's children are likely to enter fields that develop commercial and financial skills, or other fields that yield high financial returns on the labour market. Children of working-class origin possess relatively little of either type of capital, and therefore cannot be seen as choosing economically-oriented fields in order to reproduce their family's type of capital. Therefore they are likely to select technical subjects because of the proximity to the parents' manual job experiences and because these fields are perceived as leading to secure labour market prospects (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972).

Within the post-*Apartheid* context, some parents with social and economic capital, in keeping with the notion of relative risk aversion (Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997), have opted to send their children either to private or former Model C Schools. Their main concern is to avoid social demotion or downward mobility. A unique feature in South Africa among some families with very little or no economic and social capital is that they have also made the ambitious and giant leap, to sacrificially follow those families with social and economic capital and enrol their children in either private or former Model C Schools (Smit and Chetty, 2009; Rajbansi, 2009). These families from the working-class have dared to span the huge social distance to be travelled with the successful completion of a prestigious course. They have weighed the costs of such a move against the benefits of the eventual potential gains of their children in terms of cultural and economic capital. The theory that best explains this action of parents and students, which form a minority, is perhaps rational choice theory (Green, 2002).

Nonetheless, it is quite well-known that disproportionately high numbers of African learners in South Africa (many of whom represent working class or other underclass backgrounds) tend to enrol for social sciences and humanities subjects like history and languages in their degree programmes. It is widely argued that not nearly enough gravitate to technical learning paths (Smit and Chetty, 2009). Biblical Studies was also chosen as a 'soft' option' in the past. We have already noted at the outset of this chapter that a misperceived association with Biblical Studies has negatively impacted on learner recruitment into Religion Studies (Smit and Chetty, 2009). Furthermore, the issue of limited career options associated with Religion Studies has been identified by Rajbansi (2009). According to Adey and Biddulph (2001), both the subjects Geography and History suffer a similar plight to that of RS. Many learners in their study believe that there is relatively little purpose in pursuing the subjects Geography and History at tertiary level. Their understanding of the relative "usefulness" of both History and Geography in their future lives is limited to direct and naïve reference to forms of employment. Their understanding of the wider contribution each can make to their future lives is disappointingly uninformed. Adey and Biddulph (2001) aver that this "limited understanding has an impact upon option decisions: if pupils cannot perceive any short term and longer term appreciation of the value of each subject, then they are unlikely to want to pursue it in further study."

Similarly, the range of career pathings that Religion Studies could open should be made explicit to expand learner recruitment.

2.5 SUMMARY

This chapter has considered numerous factors that influence subject choice. In addition to the "stakeholder triangle" of peer, family and educator influences on subject choice, this study also used the integration of rational choice and cultural reproduction theories to analyse the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies on the FET Band in Chapter 4.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 INTRODUCTION

A plan for selecting subjects, research sites and data collecting procedures to answer the research questions is known as research methodology (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997:162). This chapter provides an outline of the research design and methodological approaches which were used to investigate the research problem addressed in this study. Central to chapter three, therefore, is an exposition of the study sample and measures taken to access participants, data collection and analysis procedures. The method of research shows which individuals were studied and when and where, and under which circumstances, they were studied. This study required a qualitative design, and an interpretive, constructivist paradigm was adopted. Accordingly, the data collection included semi-structured interviews. The study was guided by strict ethical measures which are outlined in this chapter. This chapter covers the following issues: the research paradigm, the research approach, the research design, population, sampling, data-gathering, semi-structured interviews, document analysis, data analysis, ensuring trustworthiness, disciplined subjectivity, ethical considerations and finally offers a summary.

3.2 RESEARCH PARADIGM

The purpose of this study was to explore the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in the FET Band by learners, the inclusion of Religion Studies as an elective subject in their school curricula by principals, and the choice of Religion Studies as a teaching subject by educators.

A qualitative case study approach was used. Semi-structured interviews were used to obtain qualitative responses from learners, from principals and educators whose schools are offering Religion Studies, and from subject advisors with oversight of this subject. The semi-structured interview, which is a flexible tool for data collection, enabled multi-sensory channels to be used: verbal, non-verbal, spoken and heard. These interviews enabled participants to discuss their

interpretations of the world in which they live, and to express how they regarded situations from their own point of view.

3.2.1 INTERPRETIVE APPROACH

A research paradigm refers to the philosophy behind the research process (Fouché and De Vos in De Vos, Strydom, Fouché, Poggenpoel, Schurink and Schurink, 1998:130). It provides the researcher with the necessary framework to interpret the research findings (Van der Mescht 2004:10).

The research paradigm includes both the assumptions and values that serve as a rationale for the research in question, as well as the criteria that the researcher uses for interpreting the data and for reaching conclusions (Saunders *et al.*, 2003:340). According to de Vos *et al.* (1998:12) it is essential that the research paradigm suit the knowledge-interest and purpose of the research. Bearing the above-mentioned conventions in mind, the researcher deemed the interpretive paradigm to be the most suitable paradigm for this research. The reason for this choice stemmed from the fact that a central knowledge interest of the research was to understand the factors influencing learners' choice of Religion Studies as an optional subject in Grade 10. At the same time the study also sought to explore and understand the reactions of Grade 10 teachers, principals and subject advisors in respect of the issues of subject choice.

After careful consideration, the interpretive approach was deemed to offer the best access to the kind of knowledge the researcher was seeking. Interpretivists argue that social reality is inherently meaningful (Du Plooy *et al.*, 2003:26). In other words, people have the ability to interpret a situation and decide how to act in response to this situation. Meaning is constructed through human beings interacting with each other, and playing a central role in defining a situation to make sense of it. According to Sarantakos (1998:36) "Patterns and regularities in behaviour emerge from the social conventions established by purposefully interacting human beings."

The central endeavour in the context of interpretative paradigm is to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen *et al.*, 2007:21). However,

interpretivists and constructionists argue that there is no *external* social reality. They insist that meaning and actions need to be understood from *within*, that is, by studying how social reality is experienced, interpreted and understood. In line with this observation, Brandon (2008) concurs that interpretive research aims to investigate the meanings constructed by social actors in specific situations. To sum up, the key elements of the interpretivist paradigm are as follows: it assumes that reality is constructed through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially. It accepts that both the investigator and the object of investigation are interpreters of reality, are linked and not separated, and that truth is negotiated through dialogue. Typically interpretive approaches rely heavily on naturalistic methods of data collection, interviewing, observing and analysis of existing texts), hence qualitative methods are preferred.

3.3 RESEARCH APPROACH

The type of research approach that was used in this study was the qualitative approach. Qualitative studies use spoken or written accounts of events to describe situations (Drew 2008:19). The goal of qualitative research is to perceive processes, experiences and meanings people give to things (Kalof 2008:78). Qualitative method aims at finding causes of phenomenon; and understanding people in the way they make use of their settings and experience. Actually this involves observing natural occurrences in their natural setting. Unlike quantitative research which aims at numbers, qualitative research emphasizes words (Bryman 2004:19-20). The qualitative approach was suitable for this study because it unravelled experiences and meanings regarding choice of Religion Studies.

3.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design used in this study is a case study. According to Nisbet and Watt (1984:72), a case study is often designed to illustrate a general principle. Case studies can also penetrate situations that are not susceptible to numerical analysis. Robson (2002:183) contends that case studies favour analytical generalization, which assists researchers to understand other similar cases, phenomena and contexts. Since contexts are unique and dynamic, case studies in

particular delve into the complex interactions of events, human relationships, and other factors. There is a resonance between case studies and the interpretative paradigm that has been utilised for this study. Furthermore, case studies have two hallmarks that are very pertinent to this study (Hitchcock and Hughes (1995:317)). They focus on individual actors or groups of actors, and seek to understand their perception of events. Also, an attempt is often made in case studies to reflect the richness of the case through “thick description” of the case when the report is written. This approach allows the actors to speak for themselves.

The use of case studies can be seen as beneficial particularly when it is an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real life context” (Yin, 2009:18). As a research strategy the use of case studies is valuable as it allows multiple foci on understanding the dynamics found in particular settings (Eisenhardt, 1989). Numerous levels of analysis can thus be performed within the same study (Yin, 2009). The use of the case study approach thus allows the researcher to gather data from many sources or individuals within the particular case to build up the research into a central review, resulting in conclusions and recommendations drawn from the data (Bailey, 2011).

In planning a case study in the interpretive paradigm, Nisbet and Watt (1984:320) aver that researchers tend to use, *inter alia*, structured, semi-structured and open-ended interviews, observation, narrative accounts, diaries and documents as means of data collection. This study used semi-structured interviews (and subsequent further interviews as warranted) to obtain qualitative responses from all the participants relevant to the questions of subject choice regarding Religion Studies. Individual semi-structured interviews were additionally conducted with the subject advisors, principals and educators.

The next normal sequence is the use of a series of interviews with the selected participants using a specific participant focused sampling method. The interview is one of the most, if not the most, commonly used research tool in social and political science (King, 2004). According to Holstein and Gubrium, (1995:1) “In fact, it is estimated that 90% of all social science investigations use interviews of some sort” A large amount of knowledge is gained through the use of interview,

therefore it is important to get it right (Morris, 2009). “The published account is not an objective rendering of ‘reality’, but it is the researcher’s interpretation of the facts that is published for public view” avers Morris (2009:214). There can also be a tendency for self-serving bias and recall error by the interviewer (Patton, 1990:245).

Within the structure of the case study approach, it is especially important to define the research questions clearly as a primary objective to building a sustainable theory. The rationale for defining the research question is the same as in hypothesis-testing research: it is pivotal to all aspects of the study, especially the crucial stage of data analysis. According to Eisenhardt (1989:536), without a research focus, it is easy to become overwhelmed by the volume of data. This study was thus driven at every stage by a carefully focused set of research questions.

The case study approach has a number of strengths and weaknesses according to Nisbet and Watt (1984:318). A single researcher can build on unanticipated variables in a simplistic portrayal of the results which appeals to a larger working audience. Participants are able to speak for themselves. Unique features that are firm on the reality of a situation remain key to understanding the circumstance and similar cases allow further understanding of the study results.

All the learners participating in Religion Studies in the district formed the population of this study. Such a volume and geographical spread would present challenges with regard to time, accessibility and expense. In the light of such constraints this study has opted for the case study approach, which is equally valid as a research method in eliciting rich qualitative data.

Since there was little reason for employing other data-gathering methods beyond interviewing participants, and analysing documents, and since the study was thus heavily dependent on interviews for its data, it was therefore “important to get these right” (Morris, 2009). The research design consequently included a pilot study to test the validity and efficacy of the interview questions and technique. Testing the research questions on a selected number of participants first can be seen as a useful tool in assessing the potential outcomes of the interview

schedule, to see if the questions meet the overall requirements of the study (Bailey, 2011).

3.5 POPULATION AND SAMPLING

This study adopted the purposive sampling method. "Sampling processes are viewed by researchers as dynamic, *ad hoc* and phasic rather than static or *a priori* parameters of populations," according to McMillan and Schumacher (1997:401). While there are statistical rules for probability sampling and sample size, there are no guidelines for purposive sample size, and samples can range from one to forty (Morse and Field, 1996:45). Purposive sampling is most commonly used in qualitative research. Bless and Higson-Smith (1995:95) describe purposive sampling as "selecting information-rich cases for study in depth" when one wants to understand something about cases without needing or desiring to generalise to all such cases. In purposive sampling the researcher searches for information-rich key-informants, groups, places or events to study. The main sample for this study was a broadly representative selection of twenty one Grade 10 learners studying Religion Studies in two Eastern Cape secondary schools. In other words, these samples were chosen because they were likely to be knowledgeable and informative about the phenomenon the researcher is investigating (Mouton, 1996:67).

This study focused on two schools within one of the districts in the Eastern Cape. This choice was made purposively. The schools offered Religion Studies to male and female students from a low- to middle-income population. An attempt was made to obtain an information-rich, representative sampling of responses from these two schools. Special measures were taken to be inclusive with regard to gender. Class lists were stratified according to gender, and five learners each from both the males and the females were randomly selected. Such a sampling procedure also increased the external validity of this study. One set of interviews were conducted with ten learners from each of the two schools. In school A five males and five females were selected and in school B five males and six females were chosen. This study therefore elicited the responses of a total of twenty one learners.

Separate interviews were additionally conducted with the subject advisor for Religion Studies from the Eastern Cape Department of Education, the principals of the two schools studied, and the Religion Studies educators from each of the selected schools.

Religion Studies is offered in five schools spread across three districts in the Eastern Cape. The researcher chose to study the two high schools in the Uitenhage District because of the unusually large number of students enrolled at these two schools for Religion Studies, as compared to the remaining three schools in the district.

3.6 DATA-GATHERING

3.6.1 SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS

In this study semi-structured interviews (Annexure 2) were conducted with learners, educators and principals whose schools offered Religion Studies, and with subject advisors. Interviews were recorded with an audio recorder which was checked and tested prior to the commencement of the interviews with the individuals.

The main purpose of this study was to investigate why learners have chosen Religion Studies as an optional subject, and why educators and principals “chose” to teach the subject or offer it at their schools. The aspects taken into consideration by the researcher in the selection of this interview strategy were that it:

- was descriptive
- was specific
- was presuppositionless
- focused on certain themes
- was open for ambiguities and changes
- depended on the sensitivity of the interviewer

- took place in an interpersonal interaction (Morse and Field, 1996:27).

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted between the researcher and interviewees in this study to collect the necessary information (data) concerning the choice of Religion Studies as an optional subject. Semi-structured interviews were seen as the most appropriate method for eliciting attitudes and opinions in this context as they allow the researcher to delve deep into the apparently simple but in practice complex social phenomena of subject choice. The researcher in this study used both open-ended and closed questions (McMillan and Schumacher, 1997:502) in the interviews.

It is often said that the primary research instrument in this sort of research is the interviewer, who plays a significant role in the collection, management and analysis of the data. This was certainly the case in this study. The researcher was very conscious of McMillan and Schumacher's statement (1997:163) that the personal characteristics of the interviewer, such as age, experience in interviewing, educational level and gender, may influence the responses of the interviewee. According to these authors, the empathy, sensitivity, humour and sincerity of the interviewer also play an important role in interviews.

Deciding at what stage the collected data will be sufficient is also an important factor to consider in conducting interviews. According to Mouton (1996:164), the following criteria may indicate that enough data was obtained: resources were exhausted, the data collected did not provide any new information, data began to show similarities and saturation was reached (no more relevant information was likely to emerge). Similarly, in this study the researcher continued with the interview process until she felt that the information obtained had reached a point of saturation.

3.6.2 DOCUMENT ANALYSIS

According to Maree (2007), document analysis means focusing on all types of written material that could shed light on the studied phenomenon. Borg, Gall, M. and Gall, J. (2003) posit that qualitative researchers often study written communication found on natural settings as data sources. Document analysis is

unobtrusive and non-reactive and can yield a lot of data about the values and beliefs of participants in their natural surrounding (Marshall & Rossman, 1999). Yin (2003:79) views the following as documents: letters, memoranda, and other communiqués, agendas, announcements and minutes of meetings, and other written reports of events, administrative documents, proposal progress reports, and other internal documents, formal studies or evaluations of the same “site” under study and new clippings and other articles appearing in the mass media.

The following key documents were analysed:

- National Department of Education, (1999). *New Curriculum for Religious Education*.
- National Department of Education, (2003). *National policy on Religion and Education*.
- Smit, J.A. & Chetty, D. (2009). *Advancing Religion in Southern Africa*

3.7 DATA ANALYSIS

Qualitative data analysis ideally finds strength in occurring simultaneously with data collection, and ideally the researcher can generate an emerging understanding about research questions, which may inform further probing into the questions being posed. According to McMillan and Schumacher (1997:502), qualitative analysis is a systematic process of selecting, categorising, comparing, synthesising and interpreting to provide the explanations of the phenomenon under investigation. Therefore, qualitative data analysis varies widely because of the different research foci, purposes and data collection techniques.

All the data from the interviews with the purposively selected Grade10 learners was transcribed and then analysed. In conducting the analysis, the researcher gave consideration to the following factors concerning the data obtained during the interviews: the words, the context, the internal consistency, the frequency or extensiveness of comments, the intensity of comments, and the specificity of responses (Creswell, 1998:143).

Although the process of qualitative data analysis varies, several general principles

and common practices guide most researchers. The following general rules in qualitative data analysis were taken into account by the researcher in this study, and are highlighted below (Creswell, 1998:143; Merriam, 1998:183).

Data analysis in fact tends to begin as soon as the first set of data is gathered, and runs parallel to data collection because each activity (data collection and interim analysis) informs and drives the other activities. Data analysis, like data collection, proceeds in a relatively orderly manner and requires self-discipline, an organised mind and perseverance. Attending to data is a reflective activity that usually produces a set of analytical notes or memoranda that guide the analysis process (Creswell, 1998:143; Merriam, 1998:183).

It is difficult to process large amounts of diverse data all at once, and the analyst concentrates on sets of smaller and similar data at any one time. Data segments are categorised according to an organising system of topics predominantly derived from the data themselves. The categories are preliminary and tentative in the beginning, and they remain flexible, not rigid schemes (Creswell, 1998:143; Merriam, 1998:183)

The main intellectual tool is comparison. The technique of comparing and contrasting is used in practically all intellectual tasks during analysis; identifying data segments, naming a category (theme), and grouping each data segment into a topical category. The goal is to identify similarities and distinctions between categories to discover patterns (Creswell, 1998:143; Merriam, 1998:183).

3.8 ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS

Reliability in qualitative methodology cannot be established as in quantitative research method, therefore alternate approaches to test authenticity or trustworthiness of a study have to be adopted. The alternative standards of trustworthiness include credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Credibility implies internal validity, transferability refers to external validity, dependability or consistency of data is similar to replication and reliability of the data, and conformability implies the objectivity of the observer (Miller and Cannell, 1997:365).

Reliability and validity were established in the thematic analysis of the study by using three independent education professionals to assist in monitoring the analysis process. The re-distribution and re-coding of data which occurred when discrepancies arose in the coded themes, also aided in enhancing the validity of the study.

3.9 VALIDITY

Validity refers to the degree to which explanations of phenomena match the realities of the world (Merriam, 1998:91). According to Schumacher and McMillan (1997:404), validity addresses these questions:

Do researchers actually observe what they think they observe? Do researchers usually hear the meanings that they think they hear?

The validity of qualitative analysis is therefore the degree to which interpretations and concepts have *mutual meanings* between the participants and the researcher. The researcher and participants should agree on the meanings that events have *for the participants*, as interpreted by the researcher.

According to Cohen, Manion and Morrison, (2007:150) the most practical way of achieving greater validity is to minimise the amount of bias as much as possible. The sources of bias are the characteristics of the interviewer, the characteristics of the respondent and the substantive content of the questions.

In qualitative research, claims for validity rest on the data collection and analysis techniques (Berg, 1995:5). Qualitative researchers commonly use a combination of any of nine possible strategies to enhance design validity: prolonged field work, recording and quoting participants' verbatim language, low-inference descriptors, multiple research visits, mechanically recorded data, participant research, member checking, participant review and negative cases. This study used verbatim accounts of participants' language, mechanically recorded data, and low-inference descriptors.

3.10 DISCIPLINED SUBJECTIVITY

Disciplined subjectivity refers to the researcher's rigorous self-monitoring, that is, continuous self-questioning and re-evaluation of all phases of the research process (Morse and Field, 1996:66). Emotions in field work are essential in data collection activities because the face-to-face interaction and feelings also serve several useful functions throughout the research process (Neuman, 1997:123). According to Mouton (1996:109), rigorous researchers combine any of five possible strategies to monitor and evaluate the impact of their subjectivity and perspective. In this study the researcher aimed to minimise researcher bias by employing or paying attention to the five strategies identified by McMillan and Schumacher (1997:409):

- Peer debriefer
- Field tag
- Keeping a reflexive field journal
- Ethical considerations (see below)
- Formal corroboration of initial findings

3.11 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

The researcher abided by the ethical considerations as contained in the Faculty of Education Handbook of Post-Graduate Qualification Policies and Procedures 2010. All the participants were fully briefed so that informed consent could be obtained (Hofstee, 2006). No-one was forced to participate in research. Participation was voluntary, and therefore all participants had the freedom to decline or withdraw after the study has started. Permission was sought in each case to record the interviews on audio tapes. Participants were provided with clear, detailed and factual information about the study, its methods, risks and benefits (informed consent). Confidentiality and anonymity were strictly adhered to.

Permission from the Eastern Cape Department of Education was obtained so that all the relevant participants could participate in the research project. After receiving consent from the Eastern Cape Department of Education, appointments were arranged for conducting the interviews. These interviews were conducted outside teaching hours. This avoided infringing on the schools' learning programme.

3.12 SUMMARY

In this chapter the various aspects of the research methodology of this study were discussed. The research design was explored, and the data collection process, analysis and methodological dimensions of achieving rigour were carefully explained. The following chapter will offer an analysis of the data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA ANALYSIS, DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This study focused on two schools within one of the districts in the Eastern Cape. This choice was made purposively. The schools offered Religion Studies to both male and female students. The learner profile reflected a range from low to middle income demographics. An attempt was made to obtain an information-rich, representative sampling of responses from these two schools on the main research question which is: What factors influence the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by principals, educators and learners? Special measures were taken to be inclusive with regard to gender. The class lists were stratified according to gender, and five learners each from both the males and the females were randomly selected. In-depth, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten learners from one school and with eleven learners from the other school (Annexure C). Also in-depth interviews were conducted with three RS educators (Annexure D), two principals (Annexure E) and the subject advisor of the Uitenhage District (Annexure F). The respondents have been coded and identified as follows: Learners (L1 to L21); Educators (E1 to E3); Principals (P1 to P2) and Subject Advisor (SA1).

4.1 DATA ANALYSIS

The qualitative research methodology that was employed in this study was explained and justified in Chapter 3. In this chapter, the data that was collected, through documents and interviews, was analysed and the results discussed.

The analysis of data warrants the breakdown of the whole into its constituent elements, that is, themes, sub-themes and categories or concepts, so that the hierarchy of ideas is clarified, and/or relations between ideas are expressed more explicitly. The systematic exposure of the connection and interconnection between these ideas, and the arrangement and structure which holds the whole together has been explored.

In this chapter both a document analysis of especially the “Thematic Representation of Religion Studies in the South African National Curriculum Statement” (Annexure G) and the transcription of the interviews were analysed to identify concepts, categories, themes and tendencies across the interviews. Analysis of the above-mentioned curriculum document was triangulated with transcriptions of the interviews, wherever possible, to achieve even more credibility. Selected quotations from the interviewees' responses were used to illustrate these concepts, categories and themes. Then these concepts, categories, themes and tendencies were formulated into a coherent, unified account of the factors that have influenced the subject choice of RS.

After the data from transcription of the interviews with learners, educators, principals and subject advisor was analysed, it was presented below with discussion of the findings reflected in themes.

4.2 DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION FROM LEARNERS

4.2.1 The opportunity of subject choice for learners in Grade 10

The main concern of the researcher was to investigate why Religion Studies, as a subject, has been chosen by learners. Also, what factors have inclined educators to choose this subject to teach; what are the factors that have swayed principals to offer this subject as part of their school's curriculum.

Most of the learners interviewed said that they had been given a list of subjects at the end of Grade 9 to choose their subjects for Grades 10, 11 and 12.

This is captured succinctly by the statements of learners:

L12: Yes, when I passed Grade 9 we were given a list to choose our subjects.

L15, 16: Yes, they give us opportunity. They give us a letter and list to choose what subjects.

L3, 4, 5: Yes, they give a list of subjects, the principal and the teachers.

It is therefore apparent that the procedure of informing learners and parents was followed but the comment of one of the learners is highly problematic when the

learner (L20) states: *“Yes, we got opportunity to choose our subjects. They gave us a list to choose, but Religion Studies is compulsory.”*

Some of the other learners who were *‘given a list’* also indicated that RS was compulsory. According to the letter that was given to learners at the end of Grade 9 (refer to Annexure B), apart from four compulsory subjects, learners have a choice of three subjects from a list of nine possibilities (Life Science, History, Geography, Accountancy, Religion Studies, Economics, Business Studies, Tourism, Physical Science). According to this list, Religion Studies was not compulsory.

This was clearly an attempt at coercion by creating the impression to learners that RS was compulsory. Learners were very clear about this issue. The educators and the principal contributed to the overall impression of learners that RS was compulsory. Almost half of the learners indicated that their teacher influenced the choice of RS. One of the learners (L7) stated that *“The teachers chose it for me because the other classes were full.”* This confirms the role of school factors as one of the three critical role players in the influence of subject choice. This teacher influence also functioned when ‘spaces’ to offer other subjects were full: (L7) *“The teachers chose it for me because the other classes were full.”* This indicates that the subject choice of RS was further compromised. The response of another learner (L13) was *“There was no choice. It is compulsory. Otherwise I would not choose it”* corroborates my perceptions of the lack of full choice of RS as a subject. The principals conveyed the impression that learners had a real choice of RS, among other options with no hint of any coercion. This notion of the principal does not corroborate with the experience of learners of the furtive impression by the school that RS is compulsory. These discrepancies speak to the issue of transparency and accountability in subject choice within the FET Band.

The researcher was aware of ‘loose talk’ that this manipulative practice occurs in some schools but suspended any bias for the purpose of this research. The purpose of boosting grade twelve pass rates is understandably a temptation to educators and principals. So while listing it as an option but then creating the

impression to learners that RS was compulsory at a school would help them through surreptitious means to achieve a better grade twelve pass rate.

From the previous history of our country, when Biblical Studies was offered as a matriculation subject, it became common knowledge that schools often saw Biblical Studies as a 'soft option' to boost the matriculation or now grade twelve pass rate of the school and improve the aggregate pass of the learners. The creation of the impression that RS was compulsory at these schools would have been motivated by similar objectives. This notion of RS as a soft option corroborates with the majority of learners who regard RS as an easier subject "*to swot and pass.*" This notion will be taken up in detail later.

This possible practice of purveying misinformation about RS being compulsory also highlights the influential role of the school in subject choice, as was mentioned in the literature review of chapter two as teacher-related factors (2.3.5). In view of the fact that learners regard their teachers as role models, it is not startling that teacher attitudes impact on learner preferences for a particular subject. Kiefer (2004:1) reports that learners choose certain subjects because their teachers make it exciting and their teachers introduce substantial innovation and creativity into their teaching. In Kiefer's report on science subjects, one learner commented: "I have a very good teacher who makes it fun, and he helps to explain problems to the students individually and works with us until they understand" (2004:1). Enthusiasm and commitment of educators play an influential role in the subject preference of learners.

As the source of the notion of RS as a compulsory subject emanated from within the ranks of the educators and the principal, it further illustrates their critical role, even in the face of a violation of learners' rights, in influencing subject choice. The learners interviewed displayed trust that this information about RS being compulsory was true to the extent of not even challenging it: (L19, 20) "*They gave us a list but Religion Studies is compulsory at our school*").

Fellow learners, as a source of peer influence, could have also been co-responsible for enhancing this notion, or even being instrumental in its

perpetuation. The advantages of choosing RS, by improving the aggregate pass of the learners, would have influenced these learners not to challenge this undemocratic practice of indicating that RS was compulsory. These questions bring the perception of RS as an easier subject to “*swot and pass*” again to the forefront. This perception will be explored further in consideration of the theme of Religion Studies as an easier subject to “*swot and pass*.”

This alone is a very significant finding for this study that there was, despite the presence of a letter to the contrary clearly indicating an opportunity for choice of nine subjects inclusive of RS, an attempt to persuade learners surreptitiously that RS was compulsory.

This study revolves around choice, so it was appropriate, in chapter two, to explore theories that attempt to help us understand human choice and what influences it. One of these theories, which were discussed in chapter two, is a body of theory that has developed chiefly within the realm of economics: rational choice theory (RCT). RCT is just one of several theories that may be used to shed light on the choice of RS as a school subject (Green 2002:4).

Rational choice theory is also making substantial inroads into a number of disciplines in the social science, religion and education (Becker, 1976; Radnitzky and Bernholz, 1987; Hogarth and Reder, 1987; Swedberg, 1990; and Green and Shapiro, 1996). As was indicated in chapter two on the literature review, rational choice theory has also prompted criticism.

The theory which has the highest potential to elucidate the factors affecting the choice of Religion Studies as a subject in Grade 10 is that of subject choice theory. The literature on subject choice tends to focus on stakeholder influences on learners’ decisions. Chapter two concentrated on aspects of peer influence; self-efficacy; utility value; motivation; teacher-related or school factors; cultural capital; economic and cultural capital and cultural reproduction theory. The latter three aspects could also be collectively termed home factors.

4.2.2 The role played by parent(s) or guardian(s) in the choice of subjects for Grades 10

The majority of learners said that parents “helped (them)” to choose, and some parents also told learners (L2) that “*They told me to choose Religion Studies because they said it is easy (mother).*” This theme of RS as a subject “being easier” has already surfaced before. It will be considered in some detail later when focus is given to the theme of “Religion Studies as an easier subject to “*swot and pass.*” The issue of home factors of parental influence in their children’s choice of RS is abundantly clear.

Some of the learners (L2, 14, 18) indicated that they chose RS by themselves, with some other learners adding that “*Yes, my parents supported me in choosing my subjects.*” Other learners (L10, 11) stated it more strongly: “*Yes, they helped me to select my subjects.*” The nature and extent of these home factors of parental influence is critical for the focus of this study.

Reference has been made in Chapter two to cultural reproduction theory (2.3.7). This theory can assist us in our understanding of home factors of the role of parents in the subject choice of their children. According to Van Der Werfhorst *et al.* (2003), children may use their parents’ social position as a yardstick for their choice of subjects. In this, the amount of economic and cultural capital possessed by the family serves as the guide. It was noted that children of the professional class tended to choose medicine and law, regardless of their ability. Their subject choice was influenced by economic and cultural factors. Children also chose subjects that corresponded to their parents’ interests.

In Chapter two, the shortcoming of a theoretical framework for subject choice that narrowly links rational choice perspectives with cultural reproduction theory only, has been already noted. Rational choice theory would try to identify an individual decision unit. This parameter would be too narrow for our study of subject choice, if it was restricted to the family or home factors. This discussion needs to include other factors, such as peer influence, self-efficacy or ability, utility value, motivation and teacher influence (school factors) on subject choice.

For instance, self-efficacy or ability also influences learners' choice of subjects. Davies and Guppy (1997) pay attention to the issue of students' ability. Ability is linked with social class, but the influence of parental background on students' choice of subject may be due to the diffusion of tastes and interests from parents to children. We refer to individual students' choices, but these choices are often family rather than individual decisions.

The influence of home factors of family background may be important for subject choice and success in school, but educators (school factors) also have an influence on subject choice and attainment (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Brandsma and Knuver, 1989). The aspect of peer influence has to be added to establish the triangle of critical factors of home (family), peer and educator (school) factors which influence the subject choice of learners.

Learners' indications that their parents "helped" reflects a range of possibilities, from active engagement to a more passive role. Some parents tried to actively influence the choice of RS. According to L2, 5, 9, 10 *"My mother was kind in helping me choose it- it was easy"*, *"Yes, they helped me to select my subjects"*, *"Yes, my parents help me to choose it because it can help me"*, *"My parents support me to choose this subject."* The term "supported" seems to reflect a less active role compared with "helped me." This would seem to indicate that learners shared their reasons for favouring RS as an option to their parents, who then expressed their affirmation for this choice. Other parents insisted that their children chose RS: (L1) *"They told me to choose religion studies because they said it is easy (mother)."*

An interrogation of the motivation of parents whose children said: (L1) *"They told me to choose religion studies because they said it is easy (mother)"* will shed more light on this issue. These parents influenced their children's choice by implying that they too will pass because it was easy? In chapter two, reference was made to the intrinsic and extrinsic motivations of Aristotle (2.3.4). From the parental concern with their children passing (*"...they too will pass because it was easy"*) the focus is clearly extrinsic. It is understandable that parents consider a good grade twelve as a means to an end. According to Ryan and Deci, (2000) a task may

have positive value for an individual because that task enables the realisation of important goals such as career objectives. This may be true even if the individual is not interested in the activity for its own sake and does not experience intrinsic fulfilment in performing the task.

Some parents are concerned about avoiding downward mobility or “relative risk aversion” (Boudon, 1974; Breen and Goldthorpe, 1997). Clearly, such an easy pass could positively impact on the overall results or aggregate of results. This would invariably goad parents to influence the choice of RS among learners. Parent’s main aim would be to obtain the best aggregate pass and avoid downward mobility.

The larger issue of home factors on subject choice was also covered in the literature survey in Chapter two. Parents may have higher goals for their children, but generally without consideration of their children’s aptitudes. In some cases parents want their children to follow in their paths. It may be beneficial for Religion Studies if parents were able to motivate their children positively while factoring in their aptitudes and aspirations. Meece (in Schunk and Pajares, 2002:5) contend that “Parents who provide a warm, responsive and supportive home environment, who encourage exploration and stimulate curiosity, and who provide play and learning materials, accelerate their children’s intellectual development.” Parents thus have a very significant role to play in their children’s learning, as the home may be a source of persuasive information to supplement other influences of peer and school factors.

Based on this range of involvement by parents, from an active one to a more passive engagement, all the parents did reflect some degree of influence on their children concerning the subject choice of RS. The extrinsic motivation was that of boosting the grade twelve aggregate pass of their children as the means to better career prospects.

4.2.3 Source of information on Religion Studies as a Subject

Concerning their source of information about RS, some of the learners heard from outside school: (L1) *"I hear it from outside"* and others from outside friends: (L3) *"I was told by my friends it's very easy to do Religion Studies."* Most of the learners heard about RS from the school. This would include the principal, educators and learners as sources of information about RS. A substantial number specifically heard from teachers: (L10, 15, 21) *"Teachers explain to us the subjects about different religions," Mr... explains to us about other religions. I heard about it before Grade 10."*

Both in chapter two and earlier on in this chapter, teacher-related factors (2.3.5) were highlighted as being very influential in the subject choice (Eccles and Wigfield, 2000). This influence on subject choice seems to have also occurred in these two schools offering RS. From the interviews with the educators (E1, 2) teaching RS, they all were very positive about the value of RS and would have promoted it:

It enhances the value of citizenship, freedom from discrimination of religion and opinions.

It also contributes to the holistic development of the intellectual, spiritual and emotional of the learner.

Because it is not too demanding and currently, Religion is a volatile subject worldwide.

Yes, it is useful because it encourages analytical, critical and constructive thinking.

Yes, because of the world focus on fundamentalism and terrorism.

Other learners (L8, 14, 20) heard about RS from fellow learners: *"Other learners told me about Religion Studies," "I heard from other learners," "I hear from...School students."* Peer influence has been already identified as one of the three factors which influence subject choice. A peer group may create either a positive or a negative social influence (Boaler et al., 2000). This influence of peers with reference to subject choice is a virtual certainty for learners. Peer views on Religion Studies would be likely to play a decisive role in the choice of this subject.

Judging from the positive peer responses of learners to RS as a subject, this would open the way for this subject choice.

The majority of learners heard about RS from within the school environment. This is significant for this study. Earlier on in this chapter the triangle of factors influencing the choice of RS was identified as home, peer and school factors. Apart from merely hearing about RS as an optional subject from persons connected with the school, learners also heard it was an “easier subject.” The influence of these school factors would have echoed the ‘loose talk’ of RS as an aggregate booster. The principal, educators, fellow learners, and friends from school had positive regard towards RS as a subject. They were more than merely favourably disposed towards RS. They would have gone further and influenced learners to choose this subject. From our earlier discussion the impression that was created was that RS was compulsory. Learners were influenced by this misinformation to choose this subject. Their own motivation that RS could increase their pass rate and be an aggregate booster also influenced their choice.

Friends from within the school and outside formed a sizeable sector of the sources for information regarding RS. We have already commented on the role of peer influence in Chapter two. A peer group may create either a positive or a negative social influence (Boaler *et al.*, 2000). This influence of peers with reference to subject choice is a reality for learners. Their views on Religion Studies would have almost certainly played a decisive role on this subject choice. If they had considered Religion Studies in a negative light, this would have dissuaded most learners from this option. Positive peer estimation, on the other hand, would have played a decisive role for this subject choice. Apart from the enjoyment factor and value for future career choices, the perception of RS as an ‘easier subject’ played an important role in peers influencing each other to choose RS.

4.2.4 The Reasons for choosing Religion Studies as an optional subject

For the learners who earlier indicated that their understanding was that RS was compulsory, any response to this question would be strictly contradictory. But we have suggested that on the basis of the list of possible subjects to choose from

(Annexure B), which was circulated to all grade 9 learners, an impression was furtively created by the school that RS was compulsory.

More than half of the learners said that they wanted to learn about religion and culture, learn respect for others, develop moral values and grow spiritually. Those wanting to learn about other religions and culture were emphatically clear: (L1, 3, 5, 11, 14, 21) *"I chose it because I want to know about other religions, cultures and traditions."*

There are four Learning Outcomes for Religion Studies in the National Curriculum Statement (Department of Education, 2008: 11). The first one has been stated as: The learner is able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of a variety of religions and how they relate to one another. As was indicated in chapter one in the background to this study and especially given the *Apartheid* past of South Africa, there is a dire need for knowledge about each others' religions. Although South Africa is now almost 20 years into the new democracy, citizens of this country still have a long way to go in order to know and understand each other. As such there is still a utility value for RS as a subject in terms of the larger national project of nation-building.

Learners also expressed a desire to learn respect for others: (L4, 10, 11) *"My teacher helped me and encouraged me to choose it because it helps to respect others."* RS as a subject affirms the learners' own religions, as well as those to which they do not belong by developing appreciation and respect for their own practices and those of fellow citizens.

Almost half of the learners indicated that their teacher, in tandem to our earlier discussion on the role of parents, influenced the choice of RS: (L7) *"The teachers chose it for me because the other classes were full."* This confirms the role of home and school factors as two of the three critical role players in the influence of subject choice. This teacher influence came as was mentioned earlier in the stealthy impression that RS was compulsory but also when 'spaces' to offer other subjects were full: (L7) *"The teachers chose it for me because the other classes were full."* This indicates that the subject choice of RS was further compromised.

The response of another learner: (L13) *"There was no choice. It is compulsory. Otherwise I would not choose it"* corroborates our perceptions of the lack of full choice of RS as a subject.

Yet other learners saw RS as a vehicle to develop moral values and grow spiritually: (L18) *"Because it helps with moral values, also to grow spiritually."* These moral value outcomes of RS have provided some level of enjoyment and satisfaction to learners. This issue was also identified in our discussion of intrinsic value and enjoyment of a subject.

Other interviewees expressed a desire that RS *"help with moral values"* and *"respect."* This call resonates with the larger call within South Africa. The South African government has also openly acknowledged a need for morality to be restored across all sectors of society. Has the actions of government officials advanced the moral call by its own behaviour? While this would be an interesting issue to probe further, the focus of this study is on factors affecting the choice of RS.

The aspiration of one learner to *"grow spiritually"* through a school subject is problematic. Chetty (1995) has cautioned against the dangers of education in religion at schools being reduced to exercises in spiritual formation. These are the concerns of the family and religious formations. But here we have the expressed desire of a learner explicitly yearning to grow spiritually. If the quest for spiritual growth is viewed in a broad sense it will undoubtedly add immense value to the lives of learners.

Some of the learners interviewed did *not* in fact *choose* RS, but enrolled for the subject only because classes for other subjects were already full, or *because no real choice* of subjects was on offer at their school. The issue of possible coercion of learners into RS has been discussed already. So far mention has been made of two kinds of "coercion", or ways in which learners are *forced* to take RS (though these may overlap): one is by *telling* the learners (incorrectly) that the subject is compulsory; the other is to *make* it in effect compulsory by simply not offering any other subjects to choose from (L13, 15, 19) *"There was no choice. It is*

compulsory. Otherwise I would not choose it“), that is, by offering only the number of subjects that learners have to successfully offer in order to pass Grade 12.

The answers to this question challenge both the presumptions of rational choice theory and its appropriateness with respect to RS as a subject choice. Ordinarily Grade 10 to Grade 12 subjects are chosen to assist learners in their career path. However, the very essence of RS and the rationale for its introduction in the FET band are not necessarily directly linked to career paths. On the other hand, from some of the learners' responses, it would seem that RS may help to develop learners in the area of some of the critical cross-field outcomes, thus assisting them to function optimally across a number of career options in a multi-religious South African context. Apart from religious vocations and teaching, RS learners could find this subject helpful in Human Resource career paths, or in any career that warrants dealing with people from diverse religious backgrounds e.g. medical, journalism and tourism. According to rational choice theory, subject choice must be influenced by the utility value in terms of future career paths (Green, 2002). In the case of RS, because of its contribution to the achievement of some of the critical cross-field outcomes, in addition to its being directly linked to religious and teaching careers, other indirectly linked career paths will give RS additional utility value. In fact, RS provides a very good example of “utility maximization” as far as future career pathing is concerned (Green, 2002).

4.2.5 Other possible subject choices

Apart from the four compulsory subjects consisting of two languages, Life Orientation and either Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy, three subjects have to be chosen from the following options:

Life Sciences
History
Geography
Accountancy
Religion Studies
Economics
Business Studies
Tourism
Physical Science (Refer to Annexure B)

A learner in Grades 10-12 must study seven subjects. So there is a simple choice for the remaining three subjects from this list. The only prerequisite is that Accounting and Science require Mathematics, and so will not be options for those who achieve less than 50% in Mathematics in Grade 9. Mathematical Literacy is not considered for acceptance into Accounting and Science. If these learners did not satisfy the requirement for entry into Accounting and Science this would have restricted their choice further.

Almost half of the learners could have chosen Accounting, with a few learners being interested in Economics and History, Geography (but the class was full in both of the schools where this research was conducted), Business Studies, Mathematics and Tourism. According to some of the learners, Tourism was no longer available although it was on the list of available subjects (Annexure B). In a different manner to RS here the subject of Tourism was not a real choice that learners could exercise. These discrepancies speak to the issue of transparency and accountability in subject choice within the FET Band.

4.2.6 Religion Studies as an easy subject to “swot and pass”

The majority of learners regarded RS as an easy subject: (L2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 13, 15, 20, 21) *“It is very easy to study and pass.”* This perception of RS being an *“easier subject to swot and pass”* has already surfaced before and corroborates well with these responses. These Grade 10 learners confirm that this perception is indeed a correct one. The earlier study of Smith and Chetty (2009:346) also supports this notion as a “soft option.” RS is also seen as both easy to study and easy to pass with good results. As one learner has phrased it (L6) *“Religion Studies is easy to pass. My result is good. I obtained a level C.”* The impression that RS is easy would understandably play a major role in influencing this subject choice.

While viewing RS as an easier subject, some of the learners (L14, 16) also indicated that with RS *“There are lots of theory that one must know about Religion Studies,”* *“It is really not very easy, but if you read and understand it is good.”* A

few learners considered RS as not easy because of the extensive scope: *“lots of theory,” “lots of theory,”* and *“lots of reading.”*

According to the educator (E1), *“The learners did not understand really what Religion Studies is. It is not as easy as learners said.”* This is in contrast of the perceptions of learners who regarded RS as an “easier subject to swot and pass.” The subject advisor also confirms the results were very good (60% and above).

The picture that emerges of RS being perceived as an *“easier subject to swot and pass”* also relates to the issue of self-efficacy that was discussed in chapter two. When people become convinced that they are self-efficacious, they act eagerly (Bandura *et al.*, 1996). This is particularly pertinent in the school situation, as it would mean that learners would become cooperative and actively involved when performing activities that they enjoyed, and about which they were certain of positive results. This fact could help learners to achieve better results in Religion Studies if they could come to believe that they were able to succeed in it.

4.2.7 Value of Religion Studies to career pathing

The majority expressed the view that RS was going to help with their career, in some cases directly and in others, indirectly. However, a few of the learners (L6, 7, 10, 13) indicated that RS was *“not going to help me,”* with some being *“unsure.”* One learner (L15) considered RS to be helpful with a career in *“journalism,”* a few (L1, 2) with a *“teaching”* vocation and some with a *“medical career”* path. A fair number (L14, 16, 18, 19) expressed the value of RS to engender *“respect”* and *“values”* again, which would play some role in their career. Some learners (L17, 20, 21) confirmed that RS would *“assist”* in their career but did not specify the career path.

Rajbansi (2009) also identifies the lack of adequate information about career paths for RS. Therefore, the uncertainty of some as to how RS was going to help with their future careers could have been the result of a lack of sufficient information. Learners could have also had a limited understanding of the phrase *“having value*

for a career path” as meaning only a direct value for that path. This comment would also apply to those who said that RS “*was not going to help me.*”

Notwithstanding the majority of learners indicating that RS would assist them in their career paths, it has been highlighted that this should not be seen narrowly to include only religious and pedagogical vocations. RS could also be of value for a number of careers dealing with diverse populations. Careers in the medical field, human resources and journalism would provide good examples of some of the options. Smit and Chetty (2009:350) add marketing, business, customer relations, company and market management, governance, work in non-profit organisations, counselling and social work, law, and tourism to the list of career options for learners of RS.

The integration of rational choice and cultural reproduction theories was advocated in chapter two. These two approaches are used in a complementary way in this study rather than contradictory postures concerning subject choice. Studies of the rational choices people make for social mobility should not neglect the cultural influences that also inform people's preferences. To understand learners' subject choices, both perspectives are needed.

Learners' subject choices are based, according to rational choice theory, on the costs and benefits of each option. According to Erikson and Jonsson (1996), learners' cultural capital increases their chances of success in cultural fields because of parental help and guidance. Cultural capital may influence learners' and parents' views of the benefits of certain subject choices because certain occupations are considered more esteemed. Certain subject choices may even be enjoyable. The choice of Religion Studies by learners would emanate from families with limited cultural capital. Similar arguments can be applied to the children of the economic elite. Subject choice is contingent on the ranking of learners' parents on the economic ladder. For upward mobility on the economic ladder, children choose commercial and financial subjects or subject choices that will generate high financial rewards. The working-class have little cultural or economic capital and choose technical subjects because of their parents' manual jobs and secure job prospects (Kelsall *et al.*, 1972). As already noted earlier, one of the motivating

factors in the choice of RS by learners was the aggregate boosting effect that it would have on Grade 12 results. It was envisaged that a more favourable Grade 12 result would open up more career possibilities.

The issue of limited, directly linked, career options for Religion Studies has been identified by Rajbansi (2009). According to Adey and Biddulph (2001), both the subjects Geography and History suffer a similar plight to that of RS. The relative future “usefulness” of both History and Geography is restricted to direct job opportunities. There is a lack of insight of indirect or wider possible job prospects. To Adey and Biddulph (2001), this “limited understanding has an impact upon option decisions: if pupils cannot perceive any short term and longer term appreciation of the value of each subject, then they are unlikely to want to pursue it in further study.” Likewise, the range of career pathings that Religion Studies can benefit, both directly and indirectly, would positively influence learner recruitment.

4.2.8 Respect for other religions at school

The entire sample of twenty-one learners expressed an affirmation of the practice of respect at school:

L6 Yes, I respect other religions. Religion Studies tell us about Hinduism and other religions.

L10 Yes, we respect each other's religions. We must not discriminate against each other.

L19 Yes, there is [respect] also on the school grounds and class.

It would clearly indicate the prevalence of respect for other religions. Earlier on concerning the reason for the choice of RS as an optional subject, some learners indicated that they would learn to respect others. This aspect of respect also surfaces in the next theme of Religion Studies inculcating good moral values. Taken together this recurring theme corroborates the notion that RS contributes substantially towards fostering respect at school.

Learners also expressed a desire to learn respect for others: (L4) *“My teacher helped me and encouraged me to choose it because it helps to respect others.”*

Respect is one of the principles on attainment of understanding in RS. The outcome of RS is to affirm the learners' own religions, as well as those to which they do not belong by developing appreciation and respect for their own practices and those of fellow citizens.

This implies that learners appreciate and respect their own traditions and the traditions of their fellow citizens. One imperative cannot be achieved without the other. Self-respect demands respect for others. This principle requires that Religion Studies educate learners to communicate meaningfully, constructively and effectively across religions (Learning Programme Guidelines: 2008).

The lack of diversity in these two RS classes, and in these two schools also, has to be taken into account. According to both the principals, limited access to other cultures and religions can be something of a barrier to understanding other religions. Therefore the prevalence of respect would have been unassailed. The very limited religious diversity in these two schools would have placed few challenges to the respect of other religions. The demographics of rural South Africa have not changed substantially from the *Apartheid* population distribution. Therefore in both rural and peri-urban locales a limited range of different religious adherents would proliferate.

The prevalence of a lack of discrimination is clearly expressed by learners:

L4 I respect other religions. I don't discriminate against them.

L10 Yes, we respect each other's religions. We must not discriminate against each other.

Earlier in our definition of RS it was adduced that RS is the study of religion as a universal human phenomenon, and of religions found in a variety of cultures. Religions are to be studied without favouring any or discriminating against any, whether in theory or in practice, and without promoting adherence to any particular religion. Religion Studies should lead to the recognition, understanding and appreciation of a variety of religions within a common humanity, in the context of a civic understanding of religion, with a view to developing religious literacy

(Learning Programme Guidelines, 2008:7). This very insightfully calls for caution even against being in support of any religion. This would amount to passive discrimination of other religions. All religions warrant equal recognition, understanding and appreciation as adding value to its respective communities. This would leave no room for active or passive discrimination.

Furthermore, the purpose of RS is to enhance the constitutional values of citizenship, human rights, equality, freedom from discrimination and freedom of conscience, religion, thought, belief and opinion (Learning Programme Guidelines 2008:10). RS should also promote those fundamental principles that are shared by the different religious traditions, such as equality, non-discrimination, justice, peace, tolerance and understanding. RS should aim at contributing to the development of a democratic national culture. RS should enhance the interpersonal relationships of the learner by cultivating sensitivity and respect across a range of religions. RS can also contribute to an open and democratic society by allowing the voices of all religions to be heard in the public domain on the basis of equality and non-discrimination.

Also from the interviews with the educators teaching RS, they all were very positive about the value of RS and would have actively promoted it:

E1 It enhances the value of citizenship, freedom from discrimination of religion and opinions.

Rajbansi (2009:4) affirms that RS has many prospects and advantages for learners and also educators.

4.2.9 Religion Studies inculcating good moral values

Here again, the responses were overwhelmingly positive. All of the learners indicated that RS would inculcate good moral values: (L2, 17) *“Yes, it does inculcate good moral values in learners,” “It teaches us to be honest.”* RS could also assist in refraining from stealing or robbing: (L3, 4) *“It helps me to choose from right or wrong, not to steal or rob. It helps us to respect other people.”* RS is seen helpful against (L5) *“alcohol abuse” and “teenage pregnancy.”*

Such optimism by learners of RS as a subject is too ambitious. Knowledge does not easily translate into commensurate behaviour. Attitudes have to be challenged first. Rajbansi (2009: 92) has also noted some of these “social ills that are currently plaguing the society,” and he envisions RS as challenging learners to make sound judgements. This is a more realistic expectation of RS.

Some learners (L3, 4, 9, 11, 13, 16, 17, 21) expressed the view that RS will also engender “*respect*,” “*honesty*,” *teach them “right from wrong,”* and boost “*self-esteem*” and *confidence*.” Religion Studies can enrich and empower the learner by stimulating reflection on values, morals and norms and also encouraging informed and responsible personal choices (Learning Programme Guidelines: 2008).

According to Rajbansi (2009:116), this subject “could be one of the main building blocks to construct a society wherein all the people of our rainbow nation can live together in peace and harmony.”

Rajbansi (2009:105) sees morality as a by-product of religion. To him the practice of religion must lead to the development of a moral person and accordingly, to a more moral society. For others, the moral aspect of religion is regarded as more important than the doctrinal aspect. Religion Studies provides a thorough basis for a study in religion, with the added benefit of a platform to assist in the development of sound morals and values in a critically engaged environment. Numerous calls continue to be made for the development of sound ethics in our national context of corruption. RS can play an important role in contributing to the ethical and moral fibre of our nation.

A principal (P1) commented: “...*Religion Studies deals with moral regeneration and opens learners to other people’s religions...*” Apart from reiterating the replacement of Biblical Studies with RS, this subject also deals with morals and values. These ‘moral regenerating’ advantage of RS motivated the principals interviewed to offer this new subject. This corroborates the theme of the value of RS for the fostering of moral values. The notion of exposing the learners to other religions was corroborated by both the learners and educators.

4.2.10 Religion Studies as a useful subject

Learners (L2, 5) chose RS as it teaches them about *“teenage pregnancy and drug abuse,” and promotes “respect” and a non-judgmental attitude*: (L13) *“It is useful to others but not to me. But it is there not to judge other people.”* This moral goal again surfaces as a utility value of RS. One learner (L13) expresses an interesting view of a lack of the usefulness of RS and also reflects on the possibility of RS fostering a judgmental attitude.

This issue of RS as a useful subject relates to the content of this subject. An abridged version of the themes for RS in the South African National Curriculum Statement will assist in this discussion.

Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Clusters of religions	History of religions	Conceptual distinctions between identity, uniqueness, unity, similarity, difference and comparability
Origins of religions (History)	Interdependence of religion and social issues	Internal differentiations in some religions
World Statistics on religions	Mutual influence and adaptation of religions	Uniqueness of some religions in wider religious context
Concepts on religious interaction	Approaches to inter-religious dialogue	History and present dynamics of inter-religious relationships in SA, Africa and internationally
Various definitions of religion	Significance of religious symbolism	The roles of teaching in a variety of religions
Religion and related concepts	Theories about religion	The central teachings of one religion
Adherents' and learner's Perspectives on religion	Significance of Narrative/ myth in religions	Oral, written and contemporary sources in several religions
Major dimensions common to all religions, e.g. narrative, ritual, etc.	Religious rituals and their role in religions	Ways of interpreting normative sources or traditions in one religion
Variety of how religions originated	Concepts: worship, mysticism, prayer, faith, spirituality, aesthetics, etc.	The understanding of selected part(s) from normative source(s) in one religion
Variety of social organisation, institutions and roles in religions	Relationship between state and religion	Analysis of any one secular worldview
Some topical issues relating to Religion in South Africa, Africa and the	Relationship between religion and politics	The notions of religious freedom, human rights and responsibilities in different religions

world		
Public life and religiously founded ethical principles	The interdependence of religions and the natural environment	The development of a strategy for seeking a solution to a major social problem
<i>The relationship between religions and economics</i>	<i>Co-responsibility and co-operation of religions in the improvement of quality of life</i>	<i>The role of the media in presenting and influencing public opinion and attitudes with reference to religion</i>
The principles of research into and across religions	<i>Research: gender issues as experienced</i>	<i>Research into the involvement of religion in areas of conflict in South Africa, Africa and the world</i>
Research through observation: Ritual	<i>Research: ethics of leisure related to relaxation, recreation, advertising, sponsorships, etc.</i>	Research into the relationship between religion and the natural sciences
<i>Research through interview: Inter-religious relationships</i>		

Annexure G: Thematic Representation: Religion Studies in the South African National Curriculum Statement (Abridged Version)

Themes that have been italicised and in placed in bold font indicate the moral and ethical foci of RS. They include the following themes for Grade 10:

- ***Some topical issues relating to Religion in South Africa, Africa and the world***
- ***Public life and religiously founded ethical principles***
- ***The relationship between religions and economics***
- ***Research through interview: Inter-religious relationships***

They include the following themes for Grade 11:

- ***Co-responsibility and co-operation of religions in the improvement of quality of life***
- ***Research: gender issues as experienced***
- ***Leisure related to relaxation, recreation, advertising, sponsorships, etc.***

They include the following themes for Grade 12:

- ***The notions of religious freedom, human rights and responsibilities in different religions***
- ***The development of a strategy for seeking a solution to a major social problem***
- ***The role of the media in presenting and influencing public opinion and attitudes with reference to religion***
- ***Research into the involvement of religion in areas of conflict in South Africa, Africa and the world***

All these are exciting themes to explore with innovative teaching and learning modalities which would be extremely enjoyable to RS learners. Mention has been already made of utility maximization as the main goal of choices according to rational choice theory (Green, 2002). Reference has also been made to the concept of utility value in Chapter two. If a direct benefit will result, people will perform the undertaking with vigour. Learners are content when they are engaged in enjoyable actions. Utility value denotes the value of the present task to prospective objectives and is closely related to “how well a task relates to current and future goals” (Pintrich and Schunk, 1996; Eccles and Wigfield, 2002:12). People allocate great worth to certain actions if they are a means to desired ends. Thus learners will find learning activities worthwhile and valuable if they feel that the activities will benefit them in some clear way.

4.2.11 Concerns surrounding Religion Studies

The majority of learners said they had no concerns and were happy about RS:

L1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11 I have no concerns. I am very happy to do this subject.

L16 I am happy to learn what is outside our world.

L19 Yes, learners must know about other religions.

This does confirm some level of learner enjoyment and satisfaction with this subject. One learner (L17), however, clearly indicated that RS was not going to help in any future career, *“No, because I have no choice. It is not going to help me in the future.”* Again the issue of a narrow understanding of the value of RS for career paths is reflected by this negative view. The point has already been made of the value of RS for many career paths if it is viewed in a broad manner.

Reiss (2004:182) contends that people are motivated to engage in activities which they expect to experience as enjoyable. Deci and Ryan (in Reiss, 2004:182) agree and state that “when people are intrinsically motivated, they experience interest and enjoyment, they feel competent and self-determining, they perceive the locus of causality for their behaviour to be internal, and, in some instances, they experience flow”. Weiner (in Reiss, 2004:182) concurs and defines intrinsic motivation as arising from the enjoyment of an activity. Ryan and Deci (2000:70) further suggest that choice, acknowledgement of feelings and opportunities for self-direction enhance intrinsic motivation because they allow people a greater sense of autonomy. If autonomy is encouraged in the Religion Studies class, learners would be happy, enjoy the experience and also perform better in this subject.

4.2.12 Summary of emerging trends from the learners’ interviews

Perhaps a summary of the emerging trends might be helpful here. Concerning the issue of subject choice, from all the corroborating information it would seem that the learners did not have a *real* choice. School factors play an influential role in the subject choice of learners. Mention has already been made of RS as an aggregate booster for Grade 12 results. This motivation was behind the misinformation that RS is compulsory. This was a covert strategy to goad learners into choosing RS.

Reference has been made in Chapter two to cultural reproduction theory. This theory can assist us in our understanding of home factors in the role of parents in

the subject choice of their children. Children tend to use their parents' social position as a scale for their choice (van De Werfhorst *et al.*, 2003). The amount of economic and cultural capital serves as the guide. It was noted that children of the professional class tended to choose medicine and law irrespective of their ability. Their subject choice was influenced by economic and cultural factors. Children also choose subjects that correspond to their parents' interests.

In Chapter two the shortcoming of a theoretical framework for subject choice that narrowly links rational choice perspectives with cultural reproduction theory only, has been already noted. Rational choice theory identifies an individual decision-making unit. This parameter would be too narrow for our study of subject choice, if it was restricted to home factors or the family. This discussion needs to include other factors, inclusive of peer influence, self-efficacy or ability, utility value, motivation and teacher or school factors on subject choice. Self-efficacy or ability also influences the choice of subjects. Davies and Guppy (1997) also focus on the issue of students' ability. Ability is linked with social class but the influence of parental background on students' choice of subject may be due to the transference of interests to children. We refer to individual students' choices but these choices are often family or home factors rather than individual decisions.

The influence of home factors or family background may be important for subject choice and success in school, but educators or school factors also have an influence on subject choice (Mortimore *et al.*, 1988; Brandsma and Knuver, 1989). The aspect of peer factors has to be added to establish a triangle of critical factors of home or family, peer and school or educator in the influence of subject choice of learners.

Home factors of parental involvement ranged from active to passive forms of influence. Parents perceived RS as an easy subject, which could boost the aggregate of their children's results. Learners heard about RS mainly through the school. The entire school community, comprising the principal, educators, and peer-learners, are a major influence on the subject choice of learners. The peer influence of friends and fellow learners was also seen as important in shaping subject choice. The reason for choosing RS as an optional subject is to learn

about religion and culture, respect and develop moral values. All these aspects do not necessarily have the potential to make this subject enjoyable. Also RS was deemed to be an easy to study and pass, but one which warranted extensive reading.

Concerning career opportunities, according to rational choice theory learners would, after weighing the “costs and benefits,” choose subjects that would have a utility value for their career path. To learners, RS opens up possibilities directly and indirectly. Notwithstanding the majority of learners indicating that RS will assist them in their career path, we have highlighted that this should not be seen narrowly to include only religious and pedagogical vocations. RS could also be of value in careers which involve relating to varied constituencies with religious diversity. Careers in the medical field, human resources and journalism would provide good examples of some of the options. Smit and Chetty (2009:350) add marketing, business, customer relations, company and market management, governance, non-profit organisations, counseling and social work service, law, and tourism to the list of career options for learners of RS.

There is respect in the class and outside the class. The limited religious diversity within the schools where the interviews were conducted does not allow for this respect to be tested. Also, through its critical approach RS assists in catalyzing the formation of moral values.

It would seem that apart from RS being an aggregate booster, learners do enjoy this subject and therefore perform well. We have already commented on the linkage between enjoyment and self-efficacy. In keeping with the goals of RS as a school subject it can also be a catalyst in the development of morals. This would be the value of RS in assisting in the formation of sound morals that are in short supply in the post-*Apartheid* South Africa.

4.3 DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION FROM EDUCATORS

After the data from educators was analysed, it is presented below with discussion of the findings reflected in themes. Special attention has been given to triangulate themes if warranted.

4.3.1 General Teaching and Religion Studies Teaching Experience

The minimum teaching experience of these RS educators was eight years; in other words, they were not novices when interviewed. Their general teaching skills would ordinarily have stood them in good stead, but the nature and content of the new RS curriculum demands unique skills. Kiefer (2004:1) notes the impact on the subject choice of learners of the educator who “puts in great effort” and makes the subject “interesting”. Thus teacher attitude will influence learner preference for a subject. It is unlikely that educators would be impartial in their views. In any consideration of school factors the role of the teacher is critical.

All three of the educators that were interviewed had been teaching RS since its inception in 2006. These educators would therefore have had three years of experience with the new subject RS. Smit and Chetty (2009:348) have outlined the special skills that the new RS demands, namely, “appropriate skills to create a conducive environment for reflexive engagement.”

4.3.2 Reasons for the choice of Religion Studies as a teaching subject

Two of the educators (E1, 2) had a background in RS (“*I did it at university,*” and “*It is my major,*”) with one educator (E3) having been trained in Philosophy and Christian Theology (“*Because of background in Philosophy and Theology*”). The latter educator would have had to make the transition from a uniquely Christian theology to the inclusive teaching of RS within a context of religious diversity. If this movement was not made, the perception that would have been created among learners would have been one of the superiority of Christianity.

4.3.3 Educator training for Religion Studies

The educators that were interviewed all came from a Christian background. They needed to be re-skilled in order to function as educators in RS. This is no mean task, as subjectivity consequent on one's faith and religious experience has a tendency to creep in. Such educators have to exercise extreme diligence to hold this propensity in check in the RS class.

The three educators in the two schools studied were in an advantageous position concerning their training in RS. Except for one educator, who only had a single tertiary level credit rather than a full major in RS (in addition to a degree in Christian Theology) the others all had full majors in Religion Studies. This is specialized training in RS that assists them to effectively meet the unique goals of the new RS. Additionally, they would have had, at the very least, some orientation from the relevant Subject Advisor before the initial implementation of RS in 2006. However, there would be an ongoing need for retraining in the light of the specific challenges facing RS educators. This requirement has been identified by Rajbansi (2009), Smit and Chetty (2009), and also by both the principals and the Subject Advisor interviewed for this study.

4.3.4 Previous teaching of Biblical Studies

Only one educator had taught Biblical Studies, while the others taught or had taught, *inter alia*, Mathematics and Economics. They all would have had to make the transition from teaching these subjects to teaching RS. Experience in teaching Biblical Studies, rather than translating into an advantage, possibly renders itself as a handicap, since the new RS represents a paradigm shift from the old Biblical Studies. One of the other rumours that the researcher was aware of was the recycling of Biblical Studies teachers for RS. This has materialised even with our small sampling.

In order for teachers to know how to teach Religion Studies, it is essential that they undergo professional development in the form of in-service training. Quality Religion Studies educators will result in more students entering the field of RS at a tertiary level. Teacher professional development may take various forms, including individual development, continuing education, peer coaching and mentoring. During professional development, teachers may be given the opportunity to learn new teaching techniques in line with the new curriculum (the NCS).

4.3.5 Educators' perceptions of the value of Religion Studies

According to an educator (E1), *"The learners did not understand really what Religion Studies is. It is not as easy as learners said."* This is in stark contrast of the perceptions of learners who regarded RS as an "easier subject to swot and pass." The subject advisor also confirms the results were very good (60% and above).

An educator (E2) also said that: *"It enhances the value of citizenship, freedom from discrimination of religion and opinions. It also contributes to the holistic development of the intellectual, spiritual and emotional of the learner."* Learners have already raised the issue of non-discrimination. These are some of the explicit outcomes of RS.

Furthermore, one educator (E3) contended that: *"Because it is not too demanding and currently Religion is a volatile subject worldwide."* The first part of this educator's response corroborates the overwhelming learner perception of RS as an "easier subject to swot and pass." The latter comment of religion as a volatile subject worldwide is a very well-versed one, especially with the rise of Islamic and Christian fundamentalism. All these educators chose to teach RS from very informed points of view. They wanted to contribute to the holistic development of the learners.

4.3.6 The teachers' perceptions of the learners' performance in Religion Studies

The performance of learners in RS is positive: (E1, 2, 3) *"Well," "Quite well," "They do very good in class if they understand it."* The latter proviso *"if they understand it"* reflects some skepticism from the educator whether learners have fully grasped the essence of RS.

Teachers have a pivotal role to play in respect of learning. This is borne out by Moos (in Eccles and Wigfield, 2000:220) when he states that "a quality teacher-student relationship provides the effective underpinnings of academic motivation

and success.” The role of the teacher thus affects the future ambitions of learners and the way in which they perceive education. When teachers have high expectations of their learners and the learners in turn perceive these expectations, these learners tend to achieve more and also to develop a greater sense of competence (Eccles and Wigfield, 2002). This is surely applicable to RS. Furthermore, if a teacher has a good command of his/her subject, it will be relatively easy to be passionate, and this passion will spark the learner’s own passion. A high sense of teacher efficacy will enhance the belief of the learners in their ability to master the subject while, conversely, low teacher efficacy will result in feelings of incompetence on the part of the learners (Eccles and Wigfield, 2000).

4.3.7 Educator’s views on Religion Studies

Educators reflect a positive view on RS (E1) *“Map Studies are also important. Students also need life skills. It needs people who need to think broader. It is a subject that tolerates respect.”*

RS as a subject has to stretch the minds of learners because of the biases of the past. Three critical stages are necessary: knowledge, understanding and then respect. In the words of an educator: (E2) *“Yes, it is useful because it encourages analytical, critical and constructive thinking.”* As an academic discipline RS has to engage with its context analytically, critically and constructively. One educator views it as helpful: (E3) *“Yes, because of the world focus on fundamentalism and terrorism.”* Here again is the utility value of RS from a broader perspective than a narrow career path. This emergent theme corroborates with learners’ perceptions of there being respect and non-discrimination in the school and especially in the RS classroom.

All the educators have a positive view on the value of RS. If these outcomes for RS are achieved, this subject will definitely add value to many career paths outside of obvious religious and teaching vocations.

4.3.8 Resources for teaching Religion Studies

The challenge of inadequate resources for RS surfaces (E1) *“No, I do not have enough resources to teach learners”* and confirms the finding of Rajbansi (2009), and Smit and Chetty (2009). If this need is met, the learners’ performance in RS will improve. Educators cannot function effectively if resources are in short supply or unavailable. If this situation is remedied, educator satisfaction will also increase.

4.3.9 Information from the school to the parents concerning Religion Studies

The responses (E1, 2, 3) *“not telling the parents deeply about the subjects”*; *“Yes, they do inform the parents”*; *“do not know”* were not consistent. It is evident that there is a need for more information to be made available to parents. Properly briefed parents will prove to be an invaluable ally in their support of RS. This would also have a positive knock-on effect on their children. In contrast, uninformed parents might display apprehension, mistrust and suspicion about the imagined destabilizing effect of the new RS on their children’s faith. Smit and Chetty (2009) have also identified this perception as being counter-productive to the advancement of RS.

4.3.10 Role of the community in Religion Studies

It would seem from the educator responses (E1, 2, 3): *“minimal”*; *“is good because they are involved in the Council of Churches, that is religious tolerance”*; *“our community does not understand each other’s religion – Islam, African and African Tradition”*) that the community plays a minor role. The positive role of the Council of Churches is commendable. This role of the community needs to be fostered as their input will increase the impact of RS. Both parents and learners will also benefit from an understanding of the value of RS within their community. A starting point would be keeping the community well informed of the nature, content and outcomes of the new RS.

4.3.11 Stance of the School Governing Body on Religion Studies

The ambiguous response of educators (E1, 2, 3): *“Not telling the parents deeply of the subjects”; “good”; “unknown to me”* nevertheless calls for adequate information to both School Governing Body and educators. Informed stakeholders can only advance the impact of RS within our multi-religious context. Furthermore, the room for ambiguity and misconception will be eliminated if all stakeholders are well informed.

4.3.12 Concerns about Religion Studies

Educators (E1, 2, 3) are concerned that: *“Our community does not understand each other’s Religion- Islam, African, and African Tradition”; “No”; “Its value is underestimated prior to age 18/19. South African learners lack world perspective. Religion Studies might be a subject of deep future concern.”*

The lack of an understanding of other religions, including the African traditional Religion is worrying. Given the fact that the earth is now considered as a global village any lack of a “world perspective” would be very limiting to a learner. One educator avers that “Religion Studies might be a subject of deep future concern.” Despite these concerns the role of RS is very crucial for a meaningful future for humankind. A convenient starting point would be that all the religions of South Africa begin to assume their legitimate public space.

4.3.13 Summary of Emerging Trends from the Educators’ Interviews

RS educators have substantial teaching experience with a minimum of eight years. The attitude of the educator has a significant influence on the subject choice of the learner. These educators from our sampling have been teaching RS since 2006 and have three years of experience with the new subject. This is good starting point. RS educators have a background in Religion Studies and one educator in Christian Theology. The latter would have had to transition to a more inclusive approach of Religion Studies. The educators have been trained to teach RS. This training will assist them to meet the unique goals of RS. Additionally, the subject advisors have given them some orientation to the new RS educators. However,

there is a need for continual retraining in the form of refresher courses. One educator had taught Biblical Studies with the others Mathematics and Economics. All of them would have to transition to the new RS.

According to the educators the learners do not fully understand RS and do not find it such an easy subject. This is contrary to the perception of learners. RS promotes citizenship, non-discrimination and the holistic development of the learner. This objective of the rounded development of learners seems to have attracted a number of educators to choose to teach RS.

The learners' performance in RS is positive. Therefore, it can be deduced that learners enjoy the subject, believe in their self-efficacy and see some utility value in it for their future career path.

The educators had a positive view of RS, and contended that RS fosters respect, and analytical, critical, constructive and lateral thinking. These outcomes for RS will open up many career paths outside of religion and education. Against the global threat of fundamentalism and terrorism, RS would prove to be informative and unifying.

Inadequate resources are one of the challenges for RS. Also parents, the community and the SGB are not well informed about the nature and content of RS. Fully informed stakeholders can only advance the impact of RS within our multi-religious context. Ambiguity and misconceptions based on a lack of information leads to suspicion and mistrust. Educators are concerned at the lack of understanding of African traditional religion in the community and the absence of a global perspective on religion.

The "hangover" from the dominance of Christianity has not passed. All religions are yet to assume their legitimate public space.

4.4 DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION FROM SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

After the data from principals was analysed, it is presented below with discussion of the findings reflected in themes. Special attention has been given to triangulate themes if warranted.

4.4.1 Source of knowledge about Religion Studies

The school principals (P1, 2) said that: *“We hear it from the department of education. There was a subject before called Biblical Studies”; “When Religion Studies became listed.”* The department was the source of information when RS became listed as a Grade 12 option. Biblical Studies had been phased out and RS was introduced as a new optional subject in its place. It is therefore understandable that there would be a measure of confusion between the two subjects. The blurring of RS by the shadow cast by Biblical Studies has been one of the underlying themes of this study.

Religion was previously studied in the form of various subjects devoted to furthering the interests of different religions. Biblical Studies was introduced within the context of Christian National Education. During this period Islam, Hinduism and Judaism were also accommodated. After intense research, heated debates and consultation in the 1990s, consensus was achieved on an approach that would treat all religions impartially and for the common good. This consensus was not an easy feat. This issue of education in religion became a highly contested terrain. An influential sector shared strong views that state schools had to be secular and by definition, not teach any religion at all.

Apart from Christianity, other religions, especially African Traditional Religion, Judaism (Hebrew/Jewish Studies), Islam (Arabic Studies), Buddhism and Hinduism play a significant role in the lives of millions of South Africans, as they have done for centuries, and as they will in future (Prozesky & de Gruchy, 1995:1). The National Policy on Religion and Education (2003) provided the policy framework for this new approach. The learning area Life Orientation in the NCS Grade R to Grade 9 and the NCS Grades 10-12 developed the necessary platform. The new subject in the FET Band, Religion Studies, gives full expression to this innovative approach (Learning Programme Guidelines: Religion Studies, 2008:7).

4.4.2 Reason for offering Religion Studies

Unlike Biblical Studies, which only focused on Christianity, Religion Studies is inclusive. One respondent (P1) said: *“Biblical Studies only teach about Christianity. It is better to study Religion Studies.”* This comparison of RS with Biblical Studies means that in the minds of the principals RS is connected with Biblical Studies.

Another principal (P2) commented: *“To take the place of Biblical Studies which was offered before NCS? Religion Studies deals with moral regeneration and opens learners to other people’s religions. Biblical Studies: the school identified its morals and values through it.”* Apart from reiterating the replacement of Biblical Studies with RS, this subject also deals with morals and values. According to the respondents these advantages of RS motivated the principals interviewed to offer this new subject. This theme of morals has surfaces in both the learners’ responses. This corroborates the theme of the value of RS for the fostering of moral values. The notion of exposing the learners to other religions was corroborated by both the learners and educators.

4.4.3 Staff and SGB support for offering Religion Studies

RS was thoroughly discussed and then identified as an option by all stakeholders (P2): *“Yes. It was discussed at length. Identified at school. Competence of teachers. Parental support. SGB was involved as well as owners of buildings / property.”* The competence of teachers was taken into account, and both parental support and that of the School Governing Body (SGB) was obtained. Despite the abovementioned process based on the feedback of the interviews with the educators both the school and the SGB was *“Not telling the parents deeply of the subjects.”* This lack of full information has resulted in a measure of apprehension among some of the stakeholders.

4.4.4 Knowledge of Religion Studies policy guidelines

One of the principals (P1) said that: *“We went to department to find out the weight of the subject, but we select a teacher who was interested in Religion Studies.”* After acquainting themselves with the weight of the subject, subject policy, assessment guidelines past NCS examination papers from the department the principals then selected teachers who were interested in Religion Studies. The depth of knowledge of RS by the principals is a critical issue. The attitude of a well-informed principal will cascade easily on to other stakeholders, thereby exerting a positive influence on the rollout and impact of RS.

4.4.5 Availability of trained teachers

According to a principal (P1) the teachers were trained in RS and *“There are not more than forty learners in this class and we feel that she can manage this class.”* Two of the three educators had majors in RS, and another had a first year tertiary course in RS to his/her credit (P1: *“We had a teacher trained - a religious person who did Religion Studies as course.”*)

Both these schools are among the most fortunate ones in the province, if in the country in having two educators with special training in RS. This must be the exception than the rule. These factors would have undoubtedly played a positive role in learner performance.

4.4.6 Freedom of choice for Religion Studies learners

According to one of the principals (P1), *“Every year we have a workshop of all streams of studies at school. They take home and discuss with parents.”* Both the principals conduct an annual workshop for all stakeholders outlining all the streams of studies offered at the school and (P2) *“They always have choices for as long as parents are willing for the school fees to be increased.”* Learners take a letter and the list of subjects home to discuss their choices with their parents. RS was on the list as an optional subject.

The subject choices are generally restricted by the size of the existing staff establishment. According to one of the principals (P2) *“The staff establishment of 14 teachers does not give us much room. Therefore some teachers are employed by the parents who have never raised this as either a concern or a complaint. Economy was broadly discussed.”* Principals commented that if parents conceded to an increase of school fees, more SGB teachers could be appointed, who could assist in widening the subject choice, but without this happening, the choice was bound to remain a restricted one. The principals, however, conveyed the impression that learners had a real choice of RS, among other options with no hint of any coercion. This notion of the principal does not corroborate with the experience of learners of the furtive impression by the school that RS is compulsory.

4.4.7 Adequate preparation of Religion Studies educators

Both the principals expressed a need for refresher courses: *“It is nice to do refresher courses for the teachers in Religion Studies. It is very important.”* In-service training has been already highlighted by Rajbansi (2009), Smit and Chetty (2009) in the light of the specific challenges facing RS educators.

Principals also envisaged a more engaged role for the Department in support of the educators: *“... but Department of Education is also expected to play a role better than monitoring.”* This notion corroborates with that of the subject advisor: *“As a new subject with a low intake it is not given proper and full attention by the Education Department, this also goes for tertiary institutions.”* If the Department of Education is sincere about RS achieving its outcomes then it needs to lead the way forward by making more permanent appointments at both the provincial and national level.

One of the educators in RS is also a Christian pastor. This is not a challenge in itself, but could become one if RS is subverted into an exercise in “spiritual formation.” It would be unfortunate if the earlier references from learners about RS helping to “grow spiritually” came from Christian sources like this educator and the

“shadow” cast by the influence of the former Biblical Studies. This distorted role for RS would be highly lamentable.

4.4.8 Retraining of educators

Both the principals expressed a resounding call (“Yes”; “Yes”) for retraining, workshops and seminars, especially since RS is a new subject with unique outcomes. Training in neither the former Biblical Studies nor the more recent Religious Studies would adequately position educators to achieve the outcomes of the new RS. Rather, it could become a handicap. This was not a challenge among the educators that were interviewed. They had sufficient training were updated adequately through workshops. This should become a regular practice of the Department of Education as their gesture of commitment to RS.

4.4.9 Role of the Department of Education in retraining teachers

Both the respondents indicated a range of descriptions from *“The Department does not do enough to encourage the teachers to do Religion Studies”* to *“None at the moment.”* Given that RS is a new subject, there is an urgent need for regular retraining against the backdrop of the current challenges of educators as they roll out RS. This notion also corroborates with the earlier impression of principals and also that of the subject advisor of not enough support from the department.

4.4.10 Preparedness of newly qualified Religion Studies educators

The principals were unable to answer this question as *“We are not employing new staff at the moment. We would not know.”* As was expressed earlier these two schools were fortunate enough to have two of their RS educators trained in RS.

The full alignment of the training of the RS educators to the nature, content and outcomes of RS is critical for their preparation. This could form a focus for another research project on RS.

4.4.11 Religious inclusivity in Religion Studies classes

Both the principals interviewed identified the lack of diversity in their schools as a drawback: *“The school is not so diversified. No diversity in the choice of Religion Studies.”* Sadly, this is still the plight of schools, as was highlighted earlier, in both the rural and peri-urban areas even in post-Apartheid South Africa.

One school principal (P2) was *“not comfortable enough to invite other religious persons.”* It would seem that there is a degree of apprehension about inviting other religious person to address learners on RS. If this is so because of a fear of proselytization then the special nature, content and outcomes of the new RS has not been adequately clarified. Being fully apprised of the aims and rationale of RS would go a long way towards dispelling mistrust and apprehension about inclusivity in RS classes.

4.4.12 Other concerns about Religion Studies

One of the principals (P1) contended that *“in Grade 11 and 12 there is duplication of what they do in the course outline.”* A scrutiny of the themes as presented by Smit and Chetty (2009:337-339) clearly reveals no duplication. This deficit in knowledge is troubling, and has been also seen among the educators in their contradictory responses. These recurrent observations call for significant briefing of all the stakeholders so that they can function from a common understanding of the outcomes of RS.

One of the concerns was: (P2) *“My belief is that unless the school has access to other cultures, it would find it very difficult to make learners understand religions other than theirs. This is where the importance of training comes in (continuous).”* The principals viewed the limited access to other cultures and religions as a drawback for learners beginning to *“understand religions other than their own.”* Here again there is a need for accurate information about RS. While including people from other religions, even as teachers would be desirable, the outcomes of the new RS can still be achieved without such participation. Religious diversity would undoubtedly enhance such teaching and learning of RS. It would seem that the outcomes of RS have yet to be fully clarified through quality in-service training.

4.4.13 Summary of Emerging Trends from the Principals' Interviews

Principals heard about RS when it became listed as a replacement for Biblical Studies. Hence, confusion emerged between RS and Biblical Studies. RS, unlike Biblical Studies which focused on Christianity, is inclusive and also deals with morals and values. One of the recurring themes of this study is the nature of RS as a subject being blurred by Biblical Studies. RS was thoroughly discussed and then identified as an option. The competence of educators was factored in and support from the parents and the SGB was obtained. The principal acquainted himself / herself with the policy guidelines and selected educators who were interested in RS. The depth of knowledge of RS by all stakeholders could not be confirmed from the interviews.

All the educators were already trained in RS, and classes had up to 40 learners. The principals shared the process of introducing RS as an optional subject. This entailed conducting annual workshops outlining the streams of study on offer. Learners were given a letter and a list of subjects to discuss with their parents. RS was one of the options on the list. Subject choices are generally restricted by the existing number and competence of staff. If more school fees are raised additional SGB educators can be employed, thereby widening the choice of subjects. According to the principals, learners had a free choice of RS among other options. Principals also saw the need for refresher courses and an engaged role of the Department with educators. There was a potential problem for a RS educator who also was a Christian minister. If he did not receive the requisite retraining there was the danger of him allowing RS classes to degenerate into a platform for promoting spiritual formation.

Both the principals were emphatic about the ongoing need for retraining, workshops and seminars since RS is different from the erstwhile Biblical Studies. Smith and Chetty (2009: 347-348) also support the idea of retraining educators. They call the RS teacher an "*ad hoc*" teacher. According to them RS educators were not always adequately trained. The Department does not do enough to support RS teachers, given that it is a new subject. Both schools did not recruit new RS educators as they already had trained teachers on their staff.

The lack of diversity in the school according to both the principals was a drawback. The apprehension about inviting religious leaders reflects a lack of a full understanding of the nature and scope of RS.

Another concern was the alleged duplication of course outlines for Grades 11 and 12. These were scrutinized by the researcher and no duplication was found. There is a need for continual briefing in view of this deficit of accurate content knowledge of RS. Limited access to other cultures and religions can be something of a barrier to understanding other religions. There is a dire need for thorough retraining to help teachers achieve the outcomes of RS even without diverse religious participation. Again this calls for clarification of the particular outcomes of RS through quality training.

4.5 DATA PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION FROM SUBJECT ADVISOR

After the data from subject advisor (SA1) was analysed, it was presented below with discussion of the findings reflected in themes. Special attention has been given to triangulate themes if warranted.

4.5.1 Reasons for Religion Studies' inclusion in the FET Band

According to the subject advisor who was interviewed for this study, the contribution of a holistic development *“of the intellectual, social, emotional and value system of the learner”* is the strength of the new RS. If this subject is handled responsibly, the subject advisor averred that the South African learner will be enriched by a study of our religious diversity. This is the first time that *“we have a constitution that recognizes ... cultural and religious diversity...and no one religion enjoys privilege above all others.”* This corroborates with the choice of RS by learners being motivated by a desire to learn about other religions and cultures. The subject advisor for RS further commented that this subject *“brings with it enormous responsibility.”*

The statements of the educators on the value of RS for citizenship, broad, analytical, critical and constructive thinking and debate were echoed by the subject advisor: *“Religion Studies enhances the constitutional values of citizenship human*

rights. For the ever inquiring mind of the learner it encourages analytical, critical and constructive thinking and debate.” This perception is corroborated by educators who said: *“Yes, it is useful because it encourages analytical, critical and constructive thinking.”*

A successful Grade 12 learner can offer RS as a *“vital ancillary that goes well with a variety of careers, especially in the Social Sciences field.”* It has also been noted that the outcomes of RS prepare learners for a wider career pathing.

Religion Studies enriches and empowers the learner by increasing knowledge, understanding and respect about a variety of religions, each being unique:

- *contributing to an understanding of religions as historically interrelated with each other, and as interrelated with social, economic and political aspects of life;*
- *encouraging analytical, critical and constructive thinking and debate;*
- *fostering creative thinking about the enduring concerns of humanity;*
- *stimulating reflection on values, morals and norms;*
- *encouraging informed and responsible personal choices.*

(Learning Programme Guidelines: 2008)

4.5.2 Promoting Religion Studies to Schools

The subject advisor makes short presentations to the staff or the management *“to market the subject and to clear up misconceptions that may exist.”* This study has found that there is a lack of detailed and accurate information commonly shared by all stakeholders. More urgent work needs to be done about this critical shortcoming to minimise further misunderstanding in the light of the erroneous coupling of RS with the former and much-maligned Biblical Studies. Biblical Studies was infamous as a ‘soft option’ and an aggregate booster. The subject advisor said that visits are conducted *“to any school that has shown interest.”*

4.5.3 Impact of Religion Studies on Matriculation Results

The choice of Religion Studies in the FET curriculum has been positive for both schools, with both experiencing a 100% pass rate in this subject in 2008 and 2009. The national pass rate in 2008 was 87.3%, and 86.3% in 2009. The range of

results was from 60% to a distinction in one of the schools. The national picture of distinctions was 6% in 2008 and 8.7% in 2009. RS learners in the Eastern Cape obtained good to outstanding results. The subject advisor said: *“Not all provinces obtained good to outstanding results, but compared to other subjects Religion Studies did not perform badly.”*

We have already highlighted this issue of RS increasing schools’ pass rates and boosting learners’ aggregates as a factor influencing the choice of RS. This positive impact on results would undoubtedly be of general interest for subject advisors, principals, educators, learners and parents.

4.5.4 Achievement of Outcomes for Religion Studies

Concerning RS, the subject advisor contended that “reflecting on the performance of schools in my district *“... most schools do justice to the principles of the NCS.”* He continued that the educators in the schools studied also reflected *“adequate coverage of all Learning Outcomes and Assessment Standards.”* This is perhaps an over-generous summation. In his favour the subject advisor adds: *“In this case again I am reflecting on the performance of schools in my District.”* The occasional tendency towards RS focusing on spiritual growth has been already noted.

4.5.5 Challenges in the Implementation of Religion Studies

The subject advisor said that many learners display *“a serious lack of relevant general knowledge”*, and also do not know *“how to incorporate this in their work, especially in answering questions in the final examinations.”* This corroborates with the notion of educators when they said that *“The learners do not understand really what Religion Studies is. It is not as easy as learners said.”* From this statement learners clearly do not have a full grasp of RS. Then the notion of RS as *“an easier subject to swot and pass”* will not be seen as contradictory.

These are also generic concerns in many of the secondary schools nationally, together with challenges in *“essay writing skills.”* Apparently, teachers also have difficulties in developing *“good model assessment tasks,”* which disadvantages

learners in the final examinations and assessment. Many RS learners also display *“poor grasp of Religion Studies terminology.”*

A *“shortage and unavailability of appropriate resources for both teachers and learners”* has also been identified. We have already noted the vast content and reading of RS. This concern is also a hurdle for the educators, together with the *“subject-related methodology”* of RS.

The subject advisor also admitted that the requisite support has not been forthcoming from the Education Department or tertiary institutions. This is a daily frustration to educators as they try to meet the expectation of the NCS.

4.5.6 Challenges of Religion Studies Educators in the Classroom

He also mentioned that teachers experience a number challenges, with some functioning *“under the false impression that Religion Studies, Biblical Studies or even Islamic Studies is almost the same subject.”* The mistaken assumption is that educators who *“excelled in teaching these subjects in the former (NATED 550) syllabus will automatically do justice to the subject.”* The subject advisor commented that *“this sad legacy will present ongoing challenges until these educators are thoroughly retrained to make this critical transition.”*

4.5.7 Other Concerns about Religion Studies

One of the major concerns about RS is that, as a *“new subject with a low intake, it is not given proper and full attention by the Education Department.”* RS is not deemed as one of the priority learning areas in the new South Africa. This has implications for resource allocation. Furthermore, the *“number of schools offering the subject appear to be dropping, or at a standstill.”* This unfortunate trend exacerbates the plight of RS.

According to the subject advisor, *“Educationists, at least at school and even officials at the provincial level”* display a *“lack of acceptable knowledge / understanding”* of the distinction between Religion Studies and the previous religion related subjects, (especially Biblical Studies, Religious Instruction or Bible

Education). The subject advisor lamented that, *“All the ills of these former subjects are leveled unfairly and indiscriminately to Religion Studies.”* We already emphasized the analytical, critical and constructive approach of RS, together with its special learning outcomes places it in a unique position that is disparate from the former permutations of Biblical Studies.

The subject advisor concluded that even *“at the Head Office in Pretoria and even at our Provincial Office, we do not have a Subject Specialist tasked with the responsibility of taking care of the subject and developing it. RS depends on well-meaning ‘baby-sitters’ ”* who attempt to do their best. From these last comments decisive action has to commence at the national and provincial in permanent appointment to these critical functionaries.

4.5.8 Summary of Emerging Trends from the Subject Advisor’s Interview

The contribution of holistic development is the strength of RS that warrants inclusion in the FET Band curriculum. Recognition of cultural diversity is a new feature in the South African classroom. Teaching RS demands great responsibility. The value of RS for developing citizenship, analytic, critical and constructive thinking are here again echoed by the subject advisor. Such outcomes open up career paths in many fields. Also RS is promoted in school presentations to clear misconceptions about RS. However, more detailed and accurate information has to be commonly shared by all stakeholders.

RS has already had a positive impact on matriculation results, with two of the schools in 2008 and 2009 obtaining a 100% pass rate. Results ranged from good to outstanding, and RS did not perform badly compared to other subjects. The subject advisor contended that most schools in his district did justice to the principles of the NCS concerning RS. According to him, their teaching reflects adequate coverage of all the learning outcomes and assessment standards. Also, if RS is seen as an equivalent to Biblical Studies can the outcomes of RS be realised in this state of confusion. Furthermore, the perennial risk of RS being subverted to serve a spiritual formative role should be avoided.

Some of the other challenges for RS teachers lie in the integration of learning RS content, essay writing skills and developing good model assessment tasks which can positively affect final examinations and assessment. Learners do not understand RS terminology adequately. A shortage of resources, the vast content and subject-related methodology of RS are other concerns. Therefore, RS educators experience daily frustrations in trying to meet NCS expectations. Another challenge is the recurring misconception that RS is similar to Biblical Studies or Islamic Studies. These subjects, as predecessors to RS, have muddied the water. Most of the stakeholder groups represented in our study confirmed that this misconception still exists. Smith and Chetty (2009: 346) have also noted this sad recurrence. Educators trained in Biblical Studies have no advantage in teaching RS. They need thorough retraining to unlearn the old and learn the new.

The subject advisor was also concerned that RS, as a new subject with low intake, was not given proper consideration. The number of schools offering RS has not increased over the past years since 2008. Provincial officials also show the same confusion about RS being the same as Biblical Studies. There is no subject specialist at the National or Provincial level offices, but both these offices have interim appointees who, in the view of the subject advisor at least, attempt to do their best. This is far from an ideal situation. The national Department of Education has to follow through on its mandate and begin by staffing both the National and Provincial Offices with well-equipped and highly motivated curriculum leaders for RS.

4.6 SUMMARY OF CHAPTER

This chapter has analysed the data from the semi-structured interviews with the learners, educators, principals and the subject advisor. After each of these analyses, a summary of the emerging themes was also presented. The next chapter will summarise these emerging themes, present a summary of the study, offer some conclusions and advance some recommendations on how the findings of the study can be utilised.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY OF THE FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This chapter will firstly offer a summary of the study. Conclusions of the study will also be presented and some recommendations will be made on how the findings of the study could be utilised. Areas for further research will be also suggested.

5.1 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In 2006, a new subject, Religion Studies, was introduced in Grade 10 as an optional subject. It represents a major paradigm shift in education of religion at the public school level. Before the emergence of this new subject Religion Studies, the study of religion was diverse and often furthered specific religious interest groups.

Minimal research has been conducted on the factors influencing the choice of RS in Grade 10 by the learners, subject advisors, the principal and educators. This subject might constitute an 'easy option' to boost the learner's performance. Former or "recycled Biblical Studies" educators may be available or even volunteer to teach this subject or they may have to be absorbed within the system. The data would provide more accurate details on what is actually going on.

In 2008 the first cohort of Grade 12 learners completed this subject. More comprehensive and detailed feedback is critical for the evaluation of the goals of this new subject. This study focussed on one aspect of such needed research, that is, the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in the FET Band by the principals, educators and the learners. What did the learners expect from this subject? Why did they offer this subject? Was the principal's choice of offering this subject in support of the learner's career goals? Were the learner's choice correlated with the intention of the subject advisors? Were the educators also in support of the learner's vocational goals? What were the factors that have influenced the choice of Religion Studies as a subject in the FET Band by all the key stakeholders?

Ethics, morals, and cross cultural issues are critical for the development of our new democracy. While RS is optional it could lay a critical role towards these goals. Subject advisors would be encouraged if the Principals, educators and learners were committed to the learning outcomes of Religion Studies. It would also better inform the key stakeholders of the perceived merits of this subject. More specifically this study would illuminate the complex reasons behind the choice of the subject by all the four key stakeholders. Religion Studies has been only implemented to the Grade 12 level in 2008 and the researcher wanted to know what informed the choice of the subject.

This study restricted its focus to the Uitenhage District of the Province of the Eastern Cape. Furthermore as an optional subject only certain schools in the Eastern Cape have offered this subject. These schools were far and widespread. Therefore, a carefully chosen sampling was critical for the validity of this research. This study had chosen the case study approach of two schools within one district in the Eastern Cape. These schools were chosen because they were the only two schools with the highest number of RS learners in that particular district. An attempt was made to obtain an 'information-rich' representative sampling of responses from these two schools.

After careful consideration, the interpretive approach seemed to offer the best access to the kind of knowledge the researcher desired. The key elements of the Interpretivist paradigm are as follows: it assumes that reality is constructed through the meanings and understandings developed socially and experientially; it accepts that the investigator and the object of investigation are linked and not separated, and that truth is negotiated through dialogue.

A theoretical framework that narrowly links rational choice with cultural reproduction theory can prove to be inadequate. This study would be deficient if it was restricted to the family or home factors. Peer influence, self-efficacy or ability, utility value, motivation and teacher or school factors have to be included.

The case study approach was used for this research. This study used semi-structured interviews to obtain qualitative responses from learners who were

offering Religion Studies. Individual semi-structured interviews were additionally conducted with the principals and educators and subject advisor.

Permission from the Eastern Cape Department of Education was obtained so that all stakeholders could participate in the research project. After receiving consent from the Eastern Cape Department of Education appointments were arranged for conducting the semi-structured interviews. These interviews were conducted outside teaching hours. This avoided the infringing on the learning programme. The researcher abided by ethical considerations as contained in the University of Fort Hare, Faculty of Education Handbook of Post Graduate Qualification Policies and Procedures 2009.

This study restricted its focus to two schools within one district in the province of the Eastern Cape. Therefore the validity of this research would be specifically for this province. Any generalizations that might be extrapolated nationally should be cautiously made given the limitations of this case study approach. While case studies have been formerly deemed as limited in the generalisation of its findings, more recently it has gained respectability especially in the light of its depth in rich information.

5.2 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Learners did not have a *real* choice but were led to believe that RS was compulsory. The school had an influential role on learner's subject choice. Parental participation fluctuated from active to passive guidance. Learners saw RS as an easy subject and an aggregate booster. The school community both informs and influences the subject choice of learners. The peer influence of friends and fellow learners also feature in subject choice.

RS teaches about religion and culture, respect, catalyses moral development is enjoyable, easy to study but requires extensive reading. The limited diversity in RS classes did not allow for this respect to be tested. RS can catalyse the development of moral values. Despite this subject being an aggregate booster, learners enjoy RS and therefore do well.

After balancing the “costs and benefits,” according to rational choice theory, learners choose subjects with a utility value for their career pathing. RS opens the possibilities directly and indirectly. The majority of learners said that RS will assist them in their career path, not only narrowly in religious and pedagogical vocations but also more widely. RS could assist in careers with constituencies of religious diversity, in the medical field, human resources and journalism.

The attitude of the educators has a substantial bearing on learner subject choice and performance. RS educators have substantial general teaching experience. These educators have been teaching RS since 2006. All RS educators have a background in Religion Studies. Despite subject advisors also giving some orientation to the new RS educators, continual retraining is important.

RS fosters citizenship, non-discrimination and the rounded development of the learner and these objectives have attracted educators to teach RS. Learners enjoy RS, have self-efficacy, their performance ranges from good to well and see some utility value for their future career path. Educators have a positive view of RS and contend that RS fosters respect, analytical, critical, constructive and lateral thinking. These outcomes for RS will open up many career paths even outside of religion and education.

Resources are one of the other challenges for RS. Parents, the community and the SGB are not well informed. Fully informed stakeholders will have no reason for misconceptions and the ensuing mistrust.

Principals were introduced to RS when it replaced Biblical Studies and much confusion of the two has ensued. RS is inclusive and also catalyses the development of morals.

The process of offering RS involved learners, educators, parents, SGB and the community. The policy guidelines were consulted. The depth of knowledge of RS by all stakeholders is insufficient. Trained RS educators had about 40 learners.

The process of introducing RS as an optional subject followed the Departmental guidelines. Subject choices were restricted by the number and competence of staff. RS was one of the optional subjects.

Principals emphasised the ongoing need for retraining by refresher courses, workshops and seminars and an involved role of the Department. Retraining would prevent the RS educator from being an “*ad hoc* teacher.” The Department has failed to act proactively in the introduction of RS as a new subject.

The lack of diversity in the school cannot dispel the uneasiness towards other religious leaders. Continual debriefing will correct inaccurate information about RS.

According to the subject advisor the aim of holistic development is the specialty of the new RS that merits inclusion in the FET Band. Cultural diversity is a new South African feature. That RS fosters citizenship, analytic, critical and constructive thinking is reverberated by the subject advisor.

These broad outcomes open up wider career paths in several fields. RS is marketed with school presentations to clear false impressions about RS. More information has to be commonly shared by all stakeholders.

Matriculation results have improved with two schools obtaining a 100% pass rate. Results ranged from good to outstanding results. Most schools do justice to the principles of the NCS. Adequate coverage of all learning outcomes and assessment standards has been noted. This assertion is problematic given the confusion between RS and Biblical Studies. There is the perennial danger of RS being usurped for a spiritual formative role.

Challenges lie in the integration of learning, essay writing skills and developing good model assessment tasks. Understanding RS terminology, confusion of RS for Biblical Studies, a shortage of resources, the vast content and subject related methodology of RS are other concerns. All the stakeholder groups confirm this misperception. Researchers also concur with this finding. Biblical Studies educators have no lead in RS but rather also necessitate retraining.

RS, as a new subject with low intake, was not afforded all the requisite support. The number of schools offering RS is static. Provincial officials also reflect confusion of RS and Biblical Studies. The lack of staffing of the subject specialist at the National or Provincial level office is perturbing.

5.3 CONCLUSIONS

The study revealed that learners did not have a *real* choice but were led to believe that RS was compulsory. The school has an influential role on learner's subject choice. Parental participation fluctuated from active to passive guidance. The peer influence of friends and fellow learners also feature in subject choice.

Learners saw RS as an easy subject and an aggregate booster. RS is easy to study but requires extensive reading. Learners enjoy RS, have self-efficacy and their performance ranges from good to well. RS will assist learners in their career path, not only narrowly in religious and pedagogical vocations but also more widely in careers with constituencies of religious diversity, in the medical field, human resources and journalism.

The aim of holistic development is the specialty of the new RS that merits inclusion in the FET Band. Cultural diversity is a new South African feature. The limited diversity in RS classes did not allow for this respect to be tested.

Educators have a positive view of RS and contend that RS fosters respect, citizenship, analytical, critical, constructive and lateral thinking. These broad outcomes open up wider career paths in several fields. RS teaches about religion and culture. RS can catalyse the development of moral values. There is the perennial danger of RS being usurped for a spiritual formative role. RS fosters citizenship, non-discrimination and the rounded development of the learner and these objectives have attracted educators to teach RS.

Despite subject advisors also giving some orientation to the new RS educators, continual retraining is important. Fully informed stakeholders will leave no space for misconceptions and the ensuing mistrust.

Challenges lie in the integration of learning, essay writing skills and developing good model assessment tasks. Understanding RS terminology, a shortage of resources, the vast content and subject related methodology of RS are other concerns. All the stakeholder groups confirm the confusion of RS for Biblical Studies. Researchers also concur with this finding. Biblical Studies educators have

no lead in RS but rather also necessitate retraining. RS, as a new subject with low intake, was not afforded all the requisite support.

5.4 RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on this study of the factors influencing the choice of Religious Studies in the FET Band the following recommendations were made:

- Steps should be taken to ensure that learners be given a *real* choice

Attempts should be made for the school to be transparent with the subject choice of RS. No impression should be created overtly or covertly by the school. Especially educators and principals should exercise special caution in sharing their preferences.

- Sharing of detailed information about the unique nature and outcomes of RS including its critical engagement

In the absence of 'in-depth' information misperceptions about RS remained unassailed. Regular information-sharing meeting should be scheduled with all stakeholders, especially parents and the community. Educators should be especially very conversant of the unique nature, learning outcomes and assessment standards of RS. The critical engagement of RS should be also shared openly.

- Informed stakeholder groupings e.g. parents, educators, principal, SGB, community, Provincial and National Department of Education should not abuse their influential role of support by overt or covert compulsion

In the light of the human rights of learners all stakeholder groupings should be cautioned against any violation furtively or openly. The terrain of the school should be the vanguard for the maintenance of human rights.

- Clarity between spiritual formation and catalysing moral development

Given the ongoing blurring of RS with the erstwhile Biblical Studies and its equivalents, a clear disclaimer should be offered that RS does not foster spiritual

formation. As an academic discipline using critical engagement it can however catalyse moral development.

- Educators should continue to foster enjoyment of RS

This factor is critical for the success of this subject. The self-efficacy of educators will influence learner enjoyment of RS. Educators should be adequately resourced to maximise their efficacy.

- Steps to be taken to facilitate integration of learning, developing essay writing skills and encourage good assessment tasks

These were highlighted as important concerns which should be taken up with vigour. The integration should not be presumed but assessed. Exercises in essay writing should be approached from a developmental perspective. A range of assessment tasks should be given to ensure preparedness for the formative and summative assessments.

- Increase diversity in class so that respect can be tested

Exposure to religious diversity is an important vehicle to challenge the prevalence of respect. While learner diversity might be difficult to overcome, guest presenters could be a convenient conduit to introduce religious diversity. This should be promoted without fear of proselytization.

- More information be given about direct and indirect career pathing

While RS may be restricted as far as direct career pathing, information about this and especially the vast array of indirect career pathing should be made explicit and readily available.

- Need for continual re-training through refresher courses, workshops and seminars

The Department through its structures should develop a culture for ongoing retraining through a range of learning experiences for RS.

- Steps to be taken to address inadequate resources of RS

The effective functioning of educators to achieve the unique learning outcomes warrants access to adequate resources. The role of the Department and its structures should be deployed to empower educators.

- Despite the “flattering” results for RS, efforts need to be taken by all the stakeholder groupings to ensure that learner’s competencies become a means in which RS markets itself

Learners need to be assisted by the educators to grasp the special nature and unique learning outcomes of RS. Knowledge of RS should be the stepping stone for understanding which should catalyse the inculcation of respect and non-discrimination.

- Concerted on-going effort be made to clarify the confusion between RS and Biblical Studies

If at all possible, this constraining issue should be approached with vigour and laid to rest as soon as possible. All modalities should be explored to ensure that the baggage does not remain with us any longer.

- That the Department assumes a more engaged role in RS

The call for the Department to assume a more engaged role has been repeatedly made. Institutional steps should be put in place to ensure that this materialise and becomes the pattern for the future.

- Steps be taken by all the stakeholder groupings to encourage religious diversity in the RS class

Given the range of stakeholder groupings e.g. parents, educators, principal, SGB, community, concerted efforts should be made to be as inclusive as possible mimic the religious diversity of our wider society.

- The National Department of Education has to staff both the National and Provincial Offices with well-equipped and highly motivated leaders.

These key full-time functionaries will be the catalysts who drive the national RS project. Without such vital resource allocation RS will limp along. They need to be

highly motivated individuals who see RS as playing an important role in nation-building.

5.5 AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This study has not investigated in detail the role of parents or home factors in the choice of RS. This would be a very beneficial focus for subsequent research.

The full alignment of the training of the RS educators to the nature, content and outcomes of RS is critical for their preparation. This could form another focus area for research on RS.

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7.0 ANNEXURES

Annexure A: Letter of Permission



OFFICE OF THE SUPERINTENDENT GENERAL
Open House: Tshamek Education Complex - Private Bag 10105 - Grahamstown - 6101 - REPUBLIC OF SOUTH AFRICA
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24 May 2010

Ms PR Chetty
10 Christian Street
Breda
KING WILLIAMS TOWN

Phone: 043 7222 2700

Dear Ms Chetty

PERMISSION TO UNDERTAKE RESEARCH: AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE FACTORS INFLUENCING THE CHOICE OF RELIGION STUDIES AS A SUBJECT IN THE FET BAND: A CASE STUDY OF TWO SCHOOLS WITHIN THE Uitenhage District OF THE EASTERN CAPE PROVINCE.

1. Thank you for your complete application to undertake research in the Department of Education in the Eastern Cape of 12 May 2010
2. Your application to conduct the above mentioned research in the Eastern Cape Secondary Schools and Head Office is hereby approved on condition that:
 - a. there will be no financial implications for the Department;
 - b. institutions and respondents must not be identifiable in any way from the results of the investigation;
 - c. you present a copy of the written approval of the Eastern Cape Department of Education (ECDE) to the District Director of Uitenhage education district before any research is undertaken at any institutions within that particular district;
 - d. you will make all the arrangements concerning your research;
 - e. the research may not be conducted during official contact time, as adjustment and school sponsored programmes should not be interrupted;
 - f. should your research take longer than normal three year study period granted to you by the department and you wish to extend the period of research, an application to do this must be directed to the Director, Strategic Planning Policy Research and Secretariat Services.



Annexure A: Letter of Permission (Page two)

- g. the research may not be conducted during the fourth school term, except in cases where the ECDOE deems it necessary to undertake research at schools during that period. Such a request will have to be evaluated and determined by the Chief Director, Strategic Management Monitoring and Evaluation.
- h. your research will be limited to and approved for:
- two secondary schools mentioned in your application in Uitenhage Education District
 - 10 learners in both schools
 - 2 educators
 - 2 principals
 - one subject advisor responsible for Religion Studies in Uitenhage Education District
 - one subject advisor also responsible for Religion Studies at the Provincial Education Head Office.
- i. you present the Department with a copy of your final report/research/thesis free of charge in hard and electronic format. This must be accompanied by a separate synopsis (maximum 2 – 3 typed pages) of the most important findings and recommendations. If it does not already contain a synopsis, this must also be in an electronic format. The e-mail address is: amalia.hookmod@ecdoe.kznp.gov.za or ecdoe@ecdoe.com.
- j. you may be requested to do a presentation on your completed research to the ECDOE.
- k. you are requested to provide the above to the Director, The Strategic Planning Policy Research and Secretariat Services upon completion of your research.
- l. you comply to all the requirements as contained in the Research Policy duly completed by you.
- m. you comply with your ethical undertaking (undertake form).
- n. you inform the Director, Strategic Planning Policy Research and Secretariat Services with a written report, electronically, half yearly on or before 30 June and 30 November 2010 of each study year.
- o. The Department wishes you well in your undertaking. You are most welcome to contact the Director, Dr. Amalia Hookmod on 043 717 1430 or mobile number 083 271 0715 should you need any assistance.


Dr. Amalia Hookmod
ACTING SUPERINTENDENT-GENERAL



Annexure B: Letter for Subject Choice and Sample List of Subject Options

Dear Parents & Grade 9 Pupils

Subject Choice for 2008

The time has come for each pupil in Grade 9 to choose subjects for study in the Further Education and Training Phase (FET). We have a process underway to assist in making appropriate choices. Discussions regarding career options and the subjects thus required in the FET have been held in the Life Orientation classes. The meeting you attend this evening is intended to provide you with sufficient information to make your choices.

We ask for the completed subject choice forms to be returned to us by Monday 10 September 2009. While we shall endeavour to make every effort to accommodate your individual choices, this may not always be possible. We therefore ask that you complete both columns – i.e. first and second choices.

The subjects on offer, in both compulsory and optional categories, are listed overleaf:

Compulsory Subjects:

English First Language
Afrikaans Second Language or Isixhosa
Life Orientation
Mathematics or Mathematical Literacy

3 subjects to be chosen from the following options:

Life Science
History
Geography
Accountancy
Religion Studies
Economics
Business Studies
Tourism
Physical Science

Notes:

1. A pupil must offer seven subjects.
2. A pupil must offer two official languages.
3. A pupil must offer all the compulsory subjects.
4. Mathematics will be the standard option for all pupils. Mathematical Literacy will only be accepted after individual interviews:
 - all pupils who achieve less than 50% in Mathematics in Grade 9 will be interviewed;
 - other pupils wishing to offer Mathematical Literacy will only be considered by special *dispensation*.
5. Accounting and Science require Mathematics and so will not be options for those who achieve less than 50% in Mathematics in Grade 9.
6. The following are the promotion requirements for the NSC:
one language at 40% at the Home Language level;
two other subjects at the 40% level;
three other subjects at the 30% level.

Please contact us if you have any queries or problems regarding the subject choice for your child.

Yours sincerely

Annexure C: Semi-Structured Interview with Learners

1. Were you given an opportunity to choose your subjects in Grade 10?
2. What role did your parent/s/guardian play in choosing subjects?
3. How did you hear about Religion Studies as a subject?
4. Why have you chosen Religion Studies as an optional subject?
5. What other subjects could you have chosen? Why did you not choose other subjects?
6. Do you think that Religion Studies is an easier subject to 'swot and pass'?
7. How do you think this subject is going to help you with your career?
8. Is there respect and value for other religions at your school, especially in the Religion Studies classroom?
9. Religion Studies will inculcate good moral values in learners. Do you agree with this statement?
10. What are your views on Religion Studies? Is it a useful subject? Should more learners be encouraged to study it?
11. Do you have any concerns surrounding Religion Studies?

Annexure D: Semi-Structured Interview with Educators

1. How long have you been teaching?
2. How long have you been teaching this subject?
3. Why did you choose to teach this particular subject?
4. Are you trained to teach this subject?
5. Did you major in Religion Studies in your university or college training?
6. Did you teach Biblical Studies before the new curriculum?
7. Why do you think learners chose to offer this subject for their NSC?
8. How are the learners performing in this new learning area?
9. What are your views on Religion Studies?
10. Is Religion Studies a useful subject?
11. Are you well equipped to teach Religion Studies?
12. Is the school informing parents about the nature and content of the Religion Studies lessons?
13. What is the role played by the religious leaders in your community with regards to Religion Studies?
14. What is the stance of the School Governing Body with regards to Religion Studies?
15. Do you have any other concerns surrounding Religion Studies?

Annexure E: Semi-Structured Interview with Principals

1. Religion Studies was not in the original list of subjects for the new curriculum. How did you hear about it?
2. Why is Religion Studies offered at your school? There are many other subjects that could be offered at the FET level. Why did you choose to offer Religion Studies? Please explain in detail, discussing each step in your decision making process.
3. Did you have the support of the staff and school governing body (SGB) for this move?
4. Did you study the policy guidelines (Subject Policy, Assessment Guidelines, past NSC exam papers) for the subject before you decided to implement it?
5. Did you already have a teacher/s trained and capable of teaching this subject? Did this play any role in your decision?
6. Did you offer the learners who are offering Religion Studies as a subject in your school this year a free choice of subjects?
7. Is/are the educator/s currently teaching religion Studies well equipped to teach it?
8. Do they need retraining / workshops, one day seminars, etc.?
9. What role is the Department of Education playing in the retraining of teachers?
10. Are the newly qualified teachers from universities adequately equipped to teach Religion Studies?
11. Do all religions have an opportunity for their beliefs and ideas to be shared equally in the subject as taught in your school?
12. Do you have any other concerns surrounding Religion Studies?

Annexure F: Semi-Structured Interview with Subject Advisor

1. Why do you think Religion Studies has been incorporated into the curriculum in the FET band?
2. How are you promoting the extension of this subject to all schools?
3. Do you think this subject has had an impact on the overall matric results?
4. Do you think the goals for this learning area are being met at the school level?
5. What are some of the challenges in implementing this new learning area?
6. Are the educators coping in the classroom?
7. Do you have any concerns surrounding Religion Studies?

Annexure G: Thematic Representation: Religion Studies in the South African National Curriculum Statement (Abridged Version)

Grade 10	Grade 11	Grade 12
Clusters of religions	History of religions	Conceptual distinctions between identity, uniqueness, unity, similarity, difference and comparability
Origins of religions (History)	Interdependence of religion and social issues	Internal differentiations in some religions
World Statistics on religions	Mutual influence and adaptation of religions	Uniqueness of some religions in wider religious context
Concepts on religious interaction	Approaches to inter-religious dialogue	History and present dynamics of inter-religious relationships in SA, Africa and internationally
Various definitions of religion	Significance of religious symbolism	The roles of teaching in a variety of religions
Religion and related concepts	Theories about religion	The central teachings of one religion
Adherents' and learner's Perspectives on religion	Significance of Narrative/ myth in religions	Oral, written and contemporary sources in several religions
Major dimensions common to all religions, e.g. narrative, ritual, etc.	Religious rituals and their role in religions	Ways of interpreting normative sources or traditions in one religion
Variety of how religions originated	Concepts: worship, mysticism, prayer, faith, spirituality, aesthetics, etc.	The understanding of selected part(s) from normative source(s) in one religion
Variety of social organisation, institutions and roles in religions	Relationship between state and religion	Analysis of any one secular worldview
Some topical issues relating to Religion in South Africa, Africa and the world	Relationship between religion and politics	The notions of religious freedom, human rights and responsibilities in different religions

Annexure H : Participants' Consent Form

INFORMED CONSENT by Participant

I hereby agree to participate in research regarding

“Factors Influencing the Choice of Religion Studies as a Subject in the Further Education and Training Band: A Case Study of two Schools within the Uitenhage District of the Eastern Cape Province.”

I understand that I am participating freely and without being forced in any way to do so. I also understand that I can stop this interview at any point should I not want to continue and that this decision will not in any way affect me negatively.

I understand that this is a research project whose purpose is not necessarily to benefit me personally.

I have received the telephone number of a person to contact should I need to speak about any issues which may arise in this interview.

I understand that this consent form will not be linked to the questionnaire, and that my answers will remain confidential.

I understand that if at all possible, feedback will be given to my community on the results of the completed research.

.....
Signature of participant

Date:.....

I hereby agree to the tape recording of my participation in the study.

.....
Signature of participant

Date:.....