

# Factors Influencing the Choice of Religion Studies as a Subject in the FET Band

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## Abstract

This paper investigates the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies in Grade 10 by the learners, educators and principals. 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 this subject in Grade 10 by the learners, educators and principals.

Is this choice of the subject by the learners motivated by their vocational and career goals? 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. What do learners expect from this subject? Why are they offering this subject? Is the principal's choice of offering this subject in support of the learner's career goals? Are the learner's choice correlated with the intention of the policy formers? Are the educators also in support of the learner's vocational goals? What are the factors that have influenced the choice of Religion Studies as a subject in the FET Band by all the key stakeholders?

**Keywords:** Religion Studies, Religious Education, Education in Religion, Religion

## **Introduction**

In 2008 Religion Studies emerged as an optional subject for matriculation purposes. 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, gave full expression to this novel approach (Learning Programme Guidelines: Religion Studies 2008:7).

This study focuses specifically on the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies as a subject in the FET Band by the principals, educators and the learners. It should be noted that the rationale of subject advisors, with respect to Religion Studies is surely of a very different nature from the kind of choices made by learners, educators and principals.

## **A Brief Overview of the History of Education in Religion in South Africa**

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 bias. Coupled with definite philosophical presuppositions, Religious Education, in particular, bolstered the enigmatic Christian National Education programme (Chetty 1995:57).

### **A New Direction for Religious Education in South Africa**

The *de facto* situation in South Africa is one of religious pluralism. Therefore, says Chetty (1995:59-60) '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, learners, educators, religious representatives, governing bodies, media, religious leaders, (italics mine) etc. Input should be as broadly based as possible (Chetty, 1995:59-60).

After feedback from the different stakeholders, it was the Institute for Comparative Religion in Southern Africa (ICRSA) 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 and multi-tradition approach.

### **The Role of Religious Education in the Post-apartheid Curriculum**

Since 1994, the desired intent for a new and relevant curriculum which will address the requirements of all learners in South Africa was established in numerous documents and various publications of the National Department of Education. Eight different learning areas were 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 an Outcomes-based Education system was developed for South Africa (Roux 2000:173).

## **Redefining the Role of Religious Education in South African Multi-cultural 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 by the HSRC 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 results of this empirical research indicated that there are many problems within the diverse South African school environment (Roux 1997:102-107). 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).

## **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).

## **Literature on Religion Studies in South Africa**

As mentioned in section one, Religion Studies 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. Little has been written on this focussed area of research. The collaborative research of Smit and Chetty entitled 'Advancing Religion in Southern Africa' (2009) and that of Naran Rajbansi entitled 'Prospects and Challenges in the Implementation of Religion Studies in the School Curriculum' (2009), are important contributions in this field.

Smit and Chetty highlight the issues of religious diversity, learner recruitment, educator competence and career pathing as factors influencing learners' choice of Religion Studies as a subject. South Africa offers the ideal case for analyzing the shifting paradigm from a religion-specific curriculum to a more inclusive curriculum representing the religious diversity present in the country (Smit & 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 & 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 fulfill the curriculum requirements. 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 offers the following recommendations: the resource materials must be more accessible and well-balanced; and educators need to be trained and unbiased.

Both these studies do not consider the factors influencing the choice of Religion Studies. The concern of the researcher is 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; and what was the rationale for Religion Studies in the view of the curriculum planners and designers? 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.

## **Influences on Subject Choice**

The literature on subject choice tends to focus on aspects of peer influence, self-efficacy, utility value, motivation, teacher factors and family.

### ***Peer Influence***

A peer group may create either a positive or a negative social influence (Boaler *et al.* 2000). Peer views on Religion Studies would play a critical 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. While a positive peer estimation, on the other hand, would open the way for this subject choice.

### ***Self-efficacy and Utility Value***

According to Bandura *et al.* (2001: 187-206), 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.* 2001). 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.

Schunk (in Zimmerman, Bandura & Martinez-Pons 1992:665) aver 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. Religion Studies, like any 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 the subject is 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.

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 & Pajares 2002). Despite this sense of group-belonging, learners need autonomy so as to enable them to make their own decisions. In a Religion Studies class, positive peer pressure may be an advantage as, at times at high school, there is less attention from the teachers.

If a person believes that a direct benefit will ensue from the task he / she is performing, there is a higher probability 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 & Schunk 1996; Eccles & 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 (Deci & Ryan 2000).

Utility value is also a predictor of academic achievement (Eccles & Wigfield 2002). Weiner (2009:7) argues that expectations of long-term success greatly influence an individual's subsequent achievement. This may also play a role in the selection of Religion Studies as a subject.

Teachers have a pivotal role to play in respect of learning. This is borne out by Anderman, Eccles and Wigfield (2000:220) when they state 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 & Wigfield 2002). This is surely applicable to Religion Studies. If a teacher has high expectations of Religion Studies learners, 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 (Anderman, Eccles & Wigfield 2000:220).

### ***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).

Intrinsic motivation refers to the motivation to participate in an activity for its own sake (Pintrich & Schunk 1996). Hunt (in Pintrich & Schunk 1996:248) argues that intrinsic motivation gives rise to exploratory behaviour and curiosity. Deci and Ryan (in Bateman & 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 (Deci & Ryan 2000). Learners who are intrinsically motivated work on tasks because they find these tasks enjoyable.

Extrinsic motivation is demonstrated when an individual embarks on a task in order to gain a reward or to avoid punishment (Yang, Zhang & Wang 2009). When students study Religion Studies merely in order to obtain high



marks, they may be said to be extrinsically motivated. Deci and Ryan (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).

### ***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 (Fenemma 1990; Hoffmann-Barthes *et al.* 1998).

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.' 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.

RS teachers should ensure that they facilitate their learners' critical thinking skills, creative thinking skills and problem-solving skills. Learners would then appreciate the value of Religion Studies for broader challenges in life. More often than not, Religion Studies, 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). 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 & 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 Religion Studies 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 (NCS).

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

The literature on subject choice also tends to focus on the family as an important factor.

### ***Economic and Cultural Capital of Families***

Van De Werfhorst, Sullivan, and Cheung, 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' (2003:41-62). In support of this assertion, Van De Werfhorst *et al.* 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' (2003:41). Subject choice is thus influenced and 'reproduced' by economic and cultural factors.

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 any theoretical framework for studying subject choice lies in it only linking 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.

### **Cultural Reproduction Theory**

According to Bourdieu's theory of cultural reproduction (Bourdieu 1984; Bourdieu & 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).

A body of theory that has developed chiefly within the realm of economics is rational choice theory. It one of *several* theories that may be used to shed light on the choice of Religion Studies as a school subject,

### **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 & Bernholz 1987; Hogarth & Reder 1987; Swedberg 1990; and Green & 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). 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) avers 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 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

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.

## **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.

Within the post-*Apartheid* context, some parents with social and economic capital, in keeping with the notion of relative risk aversion, 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 enroll their children in either private or former Model C Schools. 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.

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. 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 & 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 Religion Studies. 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.

## **Research Methodology**

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.

## **Sampling**

This study focused on two schools within one of the districts in the Eastern Cape. This choice was made purposively. The schools offered religious studies to male and female students from a low- to middle-income demographic. 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 also increased the external validity of this study. One set of interviews were conducted with ten learners from each of the two schools. This study therefore elicited the responses of a total of twenty 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. The next section will offer some conclusions and advance some recommendations on the findings of this study.

## **Conclusions to the Study**

Learners did not have a *real* choice but were led to believe that Religion Studies

was compulsory. The school has an influential role on learner's subject choice. Parental participation fluctuated from active to passive guidance. Learners saw Religion Studies 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 and is enjoyable, easy to study but requires extensive reading. The limited diversity in Religion Studies classes did not allow for this respect to be tested. Religion Studies can catalyse the development of moral values. Despite this subject being an aggregate booster, learners enjoy Religion Studies 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. Religion Studies opens the possibilities directly and indirectly. The majority of learners said that Religion Studies will assist them in their career path, not only narrowly in religious and pedagogical vocations but also more widely. Religion Studies 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. Religion Studies educators have substantial general teaching experience. These educators have been teaching Religion Studies since 2006. All Religion Studies educators have a background in Religion Studies. Despite subject advisors also giving some orientation to the new Religion Studies educators, continual retraining is still needed.

RS fosters citizenship, non-discrimination and the rounded development of the learner and these objectives have attracted educators to teach Religion Studies. Learners enjoy Religion Studies, 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 Religion Studies and contend that Religion Studies fosters respect, analytical, critical, constructive and lateral thinking. These outcomes for Religion Studies will open up many career paths even outside of religion and education.

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

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

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

The process of introducing Religion Studies as an optional subject followed the Departmental guidelines. Subject choices were restricted by the number and competence of staff. Religion Studies 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 Religion Studies educators from being ‘*ad hoc* teachers’. The Department has failed to act proactively in the introduction of Religion Studies 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 Religion Studies.

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

These broad outcomes open up wider career paths in several fields. Religion Studies is marketed with school presentations to clear false impressions about Religion Studies. 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 Religion Studies and Biblical Studies. There is the perennial danger of Religion Studies being usurped for a spiritual formative role.

Challenges lie in the integration of learning, essay writing skills and developing good model assessment tasks. Understanding Religion Studies



terminology, confusion of Religion Studies for Biblical Studies, a shortage of resources, the vast content and subject related methodology of Religion Studies are other concerns. All the stakeholder groups confirm this misperception. Researchers also concur with this finding. Biblical Studies educators have no advantage in teaching Religion Studies 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 Religion Studies is static. Provincial officials also reflect confusion of Religion Studies and Biblical Studies. The lack of staffing of the subject specialist at the National or Provincial level office is perturbing.

## **Recommendations**

Based on this study of the factors influencing the choice of Religious Studies on the FET Band we make the following recommendation:

- Steps should be taken to ensure that learners be given a *real* choice
- Detailed information about the unique nature and outcomes of Religion Studies including its critical engagement should be shared
- 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 either overt or covert compulsion
- There is a need for clarity between spiritual formation and catalysing moral development
- Educators should continue to foster learner enjoyment of Religion Studies
- Steps should be taken to facilitate the integration of learning, develop essay writing skills and encourage good assessment tasks
- Diversity should be increased in classes so that respect can be tested
- More information should be given about direct and indirect career pathing
- There is a need for continual re-training through refresher courses, workshops and seminars
- Steps should be taken to address the inadequate resources of Religion Studies

- Despite the ‘flattering’ results for Religion Studies, efforts should be taken by all the stakeholder groupings to ensure that learner’s competencies become a means in which Religion Studies markets itself
- Concerted on-going effort should be made to clarify the confusion between Religion Studies and Biblical Studies
- The Department should assume a more engaged role in Religion Studies
- Steps should be taken by all the stakeholder groupings to encourage religious diversity in the Religion Studies class
- The National Department of Education should staff both the National and Provincial Offices with well-equipped and highly motivated leaders.

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