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State Reflection on Religious Education and Restructuring of the Education Landscape in Swaziland

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Abstract: This study describes the state's reflection process on religious education in the face of religious diversity. The objectives were to describe howthe state engaged in reflective thinking on religious education; explain the ways in which schooling could be used to unity the citizens. Parents were sampled. Semi- structured interviews and documents were used to collect data. Content analysis was used to analyse the data. The analysis revealed that state officials restructured religious education by engaging in reflective thinking on their actions and inactions. Officials' reflections were guided by the interests of the state but influenced by local and global religious changes and political debates. These were of great concern to the state because of their potential effects on peace and stability. It was concluded that educationremain the best vehicle for promoting unity in the face of religious diversity. Thus, acompulsory Christian-oriented religious education was introduced in 2017.

Key words: Christian-oriented religious education, State reflection, Religious education

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I. INTRODUCTION

Any type of education and religious education in particular requires states to reflect on their actions and inactions for the interests of present and future societies. States have an obligation and a responsibility for maintaining and sustaining peace and stability in societies, through different means, including education. Religious education and management practices are posing challenges to Swazi societies which have been dominated by single religion, Christianity. Since, the introduction of formal education in Swaziland, Christianity has contributed to sustainable ethics in Swaziland, for example, in giving the fundamental values of trust and faith, hope and humility and purity. The ethics of modern Swaziland are to be understood in the light of profound influence which Christianity has had upon the Swazis. Modern education ethics has to be understood within the Christianity framework. Modern education ethics with no specific reference to its Christian background could lead to the methodological blunder of approaching education. The Swazi ethics and other professional ethics have been built upon Christian ground, and the design of every ethical code and every ethical system in modern Swaziland. It may be difficult to approach ethic matters apart from the moral teachings of Christianity.

The socio-economic and educational changes which took place in the late 1990's in Swaziland challenges the Swazi state to engage into process of reflection thinking. Reflection thinking on religious education matters led the state into deeper understanding around areas of religious diversity and their implications to both current and future educational and non-educational practices. Reflection thinking isessential in leading professional and policy makers into deeper understanding on educational related matters that might be otherwise ignored, misunderstood, misrepresented, misinterpreted or unsettled. For the past fifteen years, there has been void in state, professionals' reflective thinking where religious education and religious thinking was concerned. A reflective thinking that may allow professionals to think about what they are doing in regard to religious education and future sustainability of the country.

In Swaziland, it is documented that the Christian-oriented churches, state and the monarchy played an important role in initiating educational and Christian oriented curriculum changes in Swaziland during and the post-colonial era (Matsebula, 1970; Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto, 1972). The role and influence of the churches, state and the monarchy in education in Swaziland is not a new phenomenon. It's an old practice which started during the reign of Queen Labotsibeni, "Mgwamilongavutfwanetiko", she was a pioneer of education in 19th Century and she ensured that the State and the Monarchy played their crucial roles in promoting peace, unity and educational changes in Swaziland (Mtsebula, 1970; Levin, 2001). Levin, (2001) noted that Queen Labotsibeni devoted her time in ensuring that King Sobhuza 11 received proper education. It is claimed that Queen Labotsibeni once argued that the power of the white people lies in money and books (Levin,

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2001), therefore the state and the Monarchy should be involved in promoting education for sustainable peace and sustainability of the Swazi nation and the spirit of oneness/inclusivity. In 1911 Queen Labotsibeni imposed tax on the Swazis as a strategy of promoting the development of education in Swaziland (Matsebula, 1970). This was viewed by the colonial powers with suspicion because they believed that the tax might be used for other purposes other than the announced purposes (Levin, 2001). In 1916 Zombodze National primary school was established and Matsapha Swazi National built in 1932. These schools were financed from the Swazi National Fund; in this every Swazi taxpayer contributed two pounds per year (Levin, 2001; Matsebula, 1970). Building these schools the monarchy aimed at changing the country into centres of education excellence, beam of hope for the hopeless, centre of cultural, social and industrial development and training for all Swazi students, mainly the sons of Chiefs, to prepare them for their future responsibilities in today's challenging society (Matsebula, 1970). This was of multiple benefits, to ensure the survival of the existing order, peace and for promoting education for all Swazis because educating the sons of Chiefs was a strategy for promoting governance which is embedded in traditional practices and values; since Chiefs in Swaziland are strategically positioned for societal changes and political stability (Levin, 2001). They are perceived as custodian of peace and stability and these factors are important in initiating any societal developmental programme, including educational programmes (Levin, 2001).

In the post-independent era, education became a state directed entity in Swaziland and elsewhere guarded by national rules and accountability procedures and educational acts, the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 and other related education acts and policies (see National Development Strategy, 1999). Tony Blair the former British Prime Minister once argued that the top priority of his government was, and always be education, education, education is used by different states, including the Swazi state as a vehicle for promoting social cohesion, unity and a tool for fighting racism and xenophobia (Moore, 2006; Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto, 1972).

The national acts in Swaziland are used by state to bring education in line with government goals and global aspirations (sustainable development, gender equality, addressing the problem of racism, xenophobia and social exclusion and discrimination) (see National Development Strategy, 1999). The state stance on education remains future-oriented in nature with a clear focus on promoting responsible, critical citizenship which may urge the development of respect of universal human rights anchored on Swazi cultural norms and practices (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto, 1972). At the centre of education in Swaziland is the culture of inculcating the sense of oneness, unity, spirit of discussing matters of differences in ways in which different cultural perspectives and opinions are respected and valued (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto, 1972). Even, the pre- independence Swazi state was preoccupied by matters of social stability, particularly when Swaziland was under threat from Colonisers, the granting of concessions. Education was seen as a right tool to achieve peace, unity and stability and governance (Levin, 2001; Matsebula, 1970).

In Swaziland religious education, like the education system itself has been and is in a state of continuous change, it is changing in different ways. For example, education has changed and extended from being confined to the elite, the rich towards the Education For All- Free Education. All these changes aim at reducing or eradicating inequalities and poverty in societies and eventually promoting pace and sustainable development. Religion and education are extremely linked in Swaziland and elsewhere, both aim at enhancing the process of socialisation of students and citizens to sustainable practices. Socialisation in terms of developing intercultural competencies, knowledge of human rights, values such as respect of oneself and others. Understanding differences through religious education critical pedagogy, a process of engaging differences, coming to know others and this is part of the socialisation process expected in educational institutions.

The Swazi state and others are concerned with religion and religious education offered in their schools systems. Religion and religious education continue to have massive influence on societies. For example, people are or may be positioned by religion and also positioned themselves in their religious identity (Ghoshi, 2013). This has serious implications for societies and sustainable development. Thus, the Swazi state perceives education or what goes on in schools as critical matters. Schools are microcosm of society and the complexities of religious differences are of concern to because they are reflected in schools and eventually in society. Schools are a mirror of current and future societies. Religious differences have become a concern in Swaziland, USA, and other parts of Europe, since the attack of United States on the 11th of September 2011. This terrorism related attack has challenged different states including the Swazi states to question taken-for granted assumption about religious education and religious institutions practices and the laws governing the states. Institutions such as schools with potential powers to influence students to live through a set of particular religious or other experiences became a focus point for governments, including the Swazi government.

11. Reflective thinking on religious matters

Between 2010 and 2016, the Swazi state began to engage in reflective thinking on religious education and schools. Policymakers have analysed the educational implications of religious education influences on the socialisation of the Swazi students and population. Policymakers were concerned about the socialisation of students in schools and their focus was on ensuring that the socialisation of students is rooted on unsustainable religious ideologies that do not provide the expected norms and values in Swazi society.

The Swazi state has been motivated to engage into reflection thinking by the increase of diverse religions in the Swaziland and some peoples' concern on religious diversity and its current and future implications for the sustainability of the nation. A reflective state or professional is the one who "thinks back on what is seen and heard, who contemplates, who is a deliberative thinker" (Vali, 1997). The state or related professionals found themselves making choices, coming to decisions about alternative courses of actions (van Manen, 1991), after studying, analysing what is seen and heard about the educational related challenges.

The future implication of religious diversity and religious education in Swaziland motivated the state to engage in reflection thinking. Van Manen (1991) stated that reflection thinking occurs when the state or people experiences difficult situations in practice and are in charge with thinking through the difficulties. The Swazi state and professionals were in charge of thinking through about the complexities of religious education as respected by the Swaziland Constitution of 2005 and its future implications. These complexities require professionals' and the states' reflective thoughts and reflective practice in regard to religious education and its implications to the existing laws governing the country and policies which facilitates programmes implementations.

111. World Religious Fundamentalism

At globally level, in 2000-2011, religion and religious fundamentalism were at peak of international politics and became a major issue, particularly in Europe, Middle-East and United States, because of their links to extremism and terrorism. These have become a key matter even in small states such as Swaziland. Thus, small states crafted laws to deal with terrorism and other related offences. Politicians from different persuasions argued that religious related fundamentalism were fertile grounds with capabilities to breed terrorism and could be addressed through schools. Schools and their programmes were considered as key sites for the development of sustainable values, attitudes and sustainable world perspectives (Ghosh, 2013). Appby, (2011) stated that states were concerned with fundamentalism because of its nature of oppositional movement towards the state and its distinct religious logic and moral order based on defined by religious commitment. States believed that the distinct religious logic could be addressed through restructuring schools systems and religious education programmes.

The refocus on the restructuring process of religious education in Swaziland was not a new phenomenon in 200-2011. For example, in Canada, a religious diverse society restructured their education system in such a way that there are now varying degrees to which religion is taught in the education system of their provinces. The Canadian French province of Qubec which is largely catholic changed the linguistic system through Constitutional amendments in 1997 (D'Souza, 2012). This notes that state has the power over several aspects of education. In the Milieu of religious and cultural diversity, the state has a responsibility and obligation to enhance harmony and unity among citizenry through an education system, characterised by a unified school system.

In attending to the invisible and visible religious related challenges a state could implement different educational models. For example, the state could remove religious education altogether from the education system or restructure the existing religious education programme. More often, than not, most states ensure that religious education is kept in schools because of multifaceted benefits to the nation. For example, religious education is not only a solution toconflict related challenges; it has a spiritual dimension which touches on the meaning and purpose of life itself (Watson, 2004). It also challenges the state to view their policies and religious differences not as merely existential accidents but a relevant matter to political unity and parents' matter. Teaching of religious education is a very contentious matter in different countries. For example, teaching of religious education was a very contentious matter in Canada because parents were once worried about the religious values taught to their children. Schools and their programmes became a centre of attraction to Canadian parents. Given that schools are sites where religious and non-religious values and attitudes are developed and shaped in different ways. The ideology that religious identity is the sole identifier of the human person, in the context of religious and cultural diversity was an issue of great concern to the Canadian parents (Sen, 2006). In the United States of America, parents who were Christian fundamentals (American religious right) have attacked multiculturalism and religious education because they claim that they were moving away from the fundamental values of Christianity.

The type of religious education which was offered in Swazi schools 2000-2016 posed a challenge to the religious values, particularly the Christian values of the country. Swaziland is a country based on the

fundamental values of Christianity, which others believe need to be protected by the state. This religious education scenario, made Swaziland to find herself in the midst of religious and cultural diversity crisis. The relationship between religion and education became tricky and sticky, and provides a possibility breeding ground for fundamentalism, fundamentalism as a means of ensuring religious identity and asserting supremacy of a particular religion. This situation forced the Swazi state to restructure religious education programme and advocate for religious education which promotes religious consciousness, which preserves an essential connection to the on-going practice of life within the Swazi community. This notes that state through its education system should govern in the interests of its citizen constituencies (Ligards, 2000), living in the midst of religious and cultural differences and not be influenced by the even cultural thinking of multiculturalism. Religious differences and the need for political unity, cry out for sustainable religious education and responsible education system, with capability to respond to this question: how education could be used as an institution that works for the unity of citizens in the face of religious and cultural diversity influenced the state to refocus on schooling system.

The type of religious education offered raised questions on policies and processes relating to its teachings in schools in Swaziland and elsewhere. Policies in regard to participation in mixed gender physical education classes, religious holidays which may clash with exam periods, special attire-turbans, for sakhs, hjab for Muslim girls; rituals-the need to pray five times a day for Muslims (Ghoshi, 2013). The key question for the state is how to deal with these differences in mitigating conflicts in the education system and on the teaching and learning processes. The Swazi state and others have a responsibility and obligation to enhance harmony and unity among its citizenry through a unified school system and unified nation.

The issue of religious education as a key factor in enhancing harmony and unity remains a key matter for the Swaziland and elsewhere. Throughout the history of different countries, religion has been a source of debate because of its controversy and complexities in regard to peoples' rights and liberty. For example, others had argued that religion and religious identity should not override other identities, especially, ones' identity as a human being and a state citizen (Jackson, (2004). These complexities, over religion, also made religious education a complex matter in Swaziland and elsewhere. Religious education pertains or touches on both religious and cultural diversities, complex matters themselves with serious implications for the sustainability of the Swazi nation and the world. Jackson, (2004) emphasised the serious nature of religious education on the existence and sustainability of a nation, where he claimed that other people have suggested that religious education should be replaced with citizen ship education. Religious education is rejected because it is seen as an education which reinforces differences and reifies religious and cultures (Jackson, 2004). It should be viewed by the state as a serious political matter with consequences to states' sustainability. For example, religious education has been seen as transmitter of religious traditions and a vehicle for fostering peace, reconciliation and stability but with potential of perpetuating national conflicts.

Purpose and objectives

The purpose of the paper was to examine how the Swazi state engaged in reflective thinking on the restructuring process of religious education in 2011-2016 and how the education system could be used as an institution that works for the unity of citizens in the face of religious and cultural diversity? This was achieved through these following questions:

- 1. How the Swazi state engaged in reflective thinking on the restructuring process of religious education in Swaziland 2011-2016;
- 2. In what ways the Swazi schooling system could be used as an institution that works for the unity of citizens in the face of religious and cultural diversity?

II. METHODOLOGY

The study was designed to be descriptive in nature, using qualitative data collection procedures. Qualitative approach was adopted for the empirical work because it allowed complex research questions to be investigated in depth.

The macro/micro political theory as a conceptual framework was used to understand and describe the educational processes undertaken by the Ministry of Education and other relevant departments in regard to government reflective thinking on religious education in Swaziland. This framework helps in understanding the values and interests of broader interest groups and actors. It calls for the examination of related policies.

The targeted population of the study included parents, teachers, Religious education expects, and religious organisation members. These were targeted because they were involved in some processes of restructuring religious Education in the country. The rationale for selecting these participants was to attain as much diversity views as possible. Triangulation (using three different data sources) was adopted to enhance the validity of the study (Yin, 2004, pp 97-101).

Semi structured interviews were conducted with the participants. Different religious and non-religious participants were interviewed to verify interpretations and give their perspectives. The second data source was national policies and related reports.

The data was analysed using content analysis procedures and summarised in descriptive form in relation to research objectives. The data was developed into lists and presented in tables. Trends and patterns from the analysis were observed and used to identify the socio-economic processes which urged Government to refocus on Competency based education or to look at it through a new lens and to identify the new expected roles for higher institutions in embracing Competency based education. According to Krippendorff (1999), content analysis is a research method that uses a set of procedures to make inferences from text. Content analysis was considered as an ideal data collection and analysis procedure in this study. The purpose of content analysis is to provide knowledge, insights, facts and a practical guide to action.

III. FINDINGS OF THE STUDY

Findings are discussed in relation to the research questions.

1. How the Swazi state engaged in reflective thinking on the restructuring process of religious education in Swaziland 2011-2016;

Globally religious debates and trends influenced the Swazi state to engage into reflective thinking on local religious matters, peoples'practices and their influences on future socio-economic development of the Swazi state and its sustainability. The state reflective thinking on religious matters was characterised by sensitivity, both within and beyond the states borders. As international changes on religious matters unfolded, there were seriously observed by the Swazi state officials. These religious changes were mainly taking place in United States of America and influenced by their political changes. In 2016 the US was in a state or political campaign of changing governments, a unique and "terrible battle" of presidential elections, never experienced in the history of the US. This was a unique presidential election because of views expressed by the Republican candidate (Donald Trump) on religious matters and other sensitive matters such as immigration. Both Democrats and Republicans in the US had different views on religious matters in the 2016 presidential elections. The later were perceived as less tolerant to religious diversity, while the former appeared more tolerant to diversity.

By the end of the campaign it was unclear which part may win the election. This scenario forced the state officials to engage into a serious reflective thinking process on how to deal with religious matters through the country's education system without appearing failing to respect peoples' religious diversities. Respecting religious diversity is one of the key values of the American democracy, which remains a sensitive issue to America's politics. It remains a sensitive matter and a challenging one to America's struggle with terrorism. Religious related terrorism has been a challenge in America since the 9th of September, 2001. The Obama's administration struggled with it, within America and beyond until it vacated office on the 20th January, 2016. This suggests that religious related terrorism remains an international threat to many countries including Swaziland.

In Swaziland, religious matters or diversities and the country's economic stagnation were part of the myriad problems challenging state officials in different capacities. The Swazi state reflective thinking and dealing with religious matters, in a sustainable manner to an extent were influenced by local religious complexities within society or schools and the 2016 US election campaign processes. The two parties in the campaign had different views on religious diversities.

The Swazi local religious complexities which influenced the state to engage into reflective thinking on religious education included policies in regard to participation in mixed gender physical education classes, religious holidays which may clash with exam periods, special attire-turbans, for sakhs, hjab for Muslim girls; rituals-the need to pray five times a day for Muslims (Ghoshi, 2013). Religious differences and the need for political unity, a cry out for sustainable religious education and responsible education system, with capability to respond to religious diversities were some of the local complexities challenging the state to reflect and act on religious matter through education.

In December 2016, after the Republican candidate (Donald Trump) had won the nomination, the Swazi government broadly re-emphasised the fact that Swaziland is a Christian nation and Christianity is central to the curriculum of a student attending school in Swaziland. State officials stated to fast track religious transformation and educational restructuring by involving religious experts, religious associations and organisations and Officials from the Ministry of Education and Training.

People who were in favour of the religious reform noted that Swaziland observes Christian holidays, school year conforms to a Christian schedule, and Public Officials have proven to be quite reluctant to comply with "demands" from minority religious groups to accommodate their holidays. This notes that in some situations if minority group want to be different, they can do so in private, but not in public. The public face of

the state does not have to change for minority interests (White, 2003, P 985). This argument supports the Republican nominated candidate (Donald Trump) stance on religious diversity.

By January, 2016 Christian-oriented religious education became a compulsory subject in the schooling system except at tertiary level. It great deal of content was drawn from the scriptures and designed to help students to see life from God's point of view. Thus, the state established a non-dominational Christian education system in both public and private schools (no specific dogma or religious creed were expected to be taught). It became a public religious education to be followed by all schools, to ensure exposure to, but not imposition of the Christian values.

2. In what ways the Swazi schooling system could be used as an institution that works for the unity of citizens in the face of religious and cultural diversity?

The discussion of religious diversity and its future implications in Swazi society has inevitably drawn the schooling system into the attention of the state. The state believed that the schooling system in Swaziland could be used as an institution that is expected to work for the unity of citizens in the face of religious and cultural diversity. Schools as part of the schooling system have been identified by the state as the key formal institutions responsible for socialising the students in Swazi schools with Christian values. Schooling has been found by the Swazi state and others to be positively correlated with several political behaviours including religious related behaviour (Siedler, 2010; Moore, 2006). In the 1970's the Swazi state used education as a vehicle for promoting social cohesion, unity and a tool for fighting racism and xenophobia after independence (Imbokodvo National Movement Manifesto, 1972).

Schools as sites of schooling process have been singled out by the Swazi state as key agents for promoting political behaviours, particularly Christian behaviours guided by Christian values. The state appeared committed to Christian values which put more emphasis on character training, promoting a sense of community and personal qualities. This was part of the education reform by the Swazi state, because some educational programmes such as religious education programmes were restructured. For example, religious education became a compulsory subject in both public and private schools and considered by the state as the bestroute for promoting spiritual moral development of children of broadly Christian character. The state was concerned with educating future practitioners in their Christian fundamentals ways of thinking, performing and acting with integrity. The school system was expected to conceptualize and define those fundamental Christian values or components in a way that can guide curriculum design and assessment. This was not a unique matter in Swaziland because in United Kingdom Her Majesty's Government through the 1988 Education reform Act directed schools to promote the spiritual, moral development of children of broadly Christian character. There was legally stipulated place for religion and spirituality in the education system. The government's messagesmade more emphasis on Christian character and values based on strong Christian ethics. This notes that the whole or any part of education of the people remain on the hands of the state. Religious values, particularly Christian values in Swaziland are regarded as political as well as a religious necessity and schools are expected to take the lead in teaching Christian values. Religious values and education in general are political matters in Swaziland and elsewhere because national religious identities are often defined through reference to a dominant majority religious group (Partington, 1994).

IV. CONCLUSION

The study concluded that globally religious trends and local religious complexities threatening sustainability of the nation urged the Swazi state to engage into reflective thinking on religious matters and to view schools as agents for promoting political behaviours, particularly Christian behaviours guided by Christian values. The mushrooming of religions, churches and mosques, and religious differences in Swaziland and the need for political unity, a cry out for sustainable religious education and responsible education system, with capability to respond to religious diversities form part of the local complexities which challenged the state to reflect and act on religious matter through education. Reflecting on religious matters is not a new phenomenon in Swaziland. It is documented that the Christian-oriented churches, state and the monarchy played an important role in initiating educational and curriculum changes in Swaziland before and after independence.

The study concluded that the existence of, and informal discussion of religious diversity and its future implications in Swazi society has inevitably drawn the schooling system into the attention of the state.

The study concluded that schools as sites of schooling process have been singled out by the Swazi state as key agents for promoting political behaviours, particularly Christian behaviours guided by Christian values. This was achieved by restructuring religious education programme, making it more Christian—oriented in nature and be in line with government status and constitution. The Swazi ethics in government and other professional ethics have been built upon Christian ground, and the design of every ethical code and every ethical system in modern Swaziland.

Therestructuring process was guarded by education related directives, not Constitutional amendments. This was not a unique matter in Swaziland because in the United Kingdom Her Majesty's Government through

the 1988 Education reform Act directed schools to promote the spiritual, moral development of children of broadly Christian character. Through, educational directives, religious education became a compulsory subject, except at higher institutions of learning. The state expected the school system to conceptualize and define those fundamental Christian values or components in a way that can guide curriculum design and assessment.

It was concluded that the state engaged in reflective thinking because of great concerned and interest in educating future practitioners in their Christian fundamentals ways of thinking, performing and acting with integrity in their work places and societies. All these aimed at achieving democratic principles, sustainable peace and stability and sustainable development in Swaziland and beyond. More often, than not democracy particularly in countries with Christian background is based on the Biblical estimate of the value of human life and the relation of man and God. Sometimes, peoples' believe to democratic principles is due to the Christian atmosphere of their mental upbringing, influenced by Christian values.

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