



CONFERENCE PAPER

The Use of Media in a South African School: A Case Study of Khabazela High School in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa

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ABSTRACT

Media can be a valuable resource in the teaching and learning of Religion Studies in South African schools. However, many Religion Studies teachers do not have the proper training on how to use media responsibly as an educational resource to make the subject relevant to the learners. This paper investigates what forms of media are used in the teaching and learning of Religion Studies in a South African secondary school. A case study research of four teachers and twenty learners was conducted at Khabazela High School in the province of KwaZulu-Natal. The study reveals that various media in the form of magazines, newspapers, films, YouTube¹ and Facebook² were used in Religion Studies classrooms. It also shows that the teachers at the school particularly relied on media as a teaching resource since they had minimal or no training in the subject. I conclude that while the inclusion of media is a valuable resource for both learners and teachers in the Religion Studies classroom, teachers still require more training for the subject especially on how to effectively use media as a teaching tool.

KEYWORDS

religion studies, educators, learners, media material, Khabazela High School

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Introduction

The importance of using media as a resource in the classroom has been discussed at length by various scholars. Some contend that media can be used to achieve educational objectives and increases learners' understanding of the subject matter (McKeachie, 1986; Clark & Starr, 1986; Ayot, 1984). Others argue that being exposed to various media increases learners' motivation and interest in a subject (Mirvan, 2013, p. 62; Brown, Lewis, & Harclerod, 1973). Brown et al. (1973), therefore, aptly point out that schools should strive to have their own media resource centres that best suits their contexts.

In light of this debate, it is important to think about media as a useful resource that can assist educators with teaching the subject Religion Studies in South African schools. However, many Religion Studies teachers do not have the proper training on how to use media responsibly as an educational resource to make the subject relevant to the learners. This paper investigates what forms of media are used in the teaching and learning of Religion Studies in a South African public high school. A case study research of four teachers and twenty learners was conducted at Khabazela High School in the KwaZulu-Natal province. The study reveals that various media in the form of magazines, newspapers, films, YouTube and Facebook were used in Religion Studies classrooms. It also shows that the teachers at the school particularly relied on using media as a teaching resource since they had minimal or no training in the subject. I conclude that while the inclusion of media is a valuable resource for both learners and teachers in the Religion Studies classroom, teachers still require more training for the subject especially on how to effectively use media as a teaching tool.

Research Methodology

I employed a case study approach to gain a sense of the teachers and learners experiences of using media in the classroom. According to Koul (1997), researchers using the case study approach should investigate an individual or unit in more depth in order to get relevant information. I, therefore, interviewed four educators and twenty learners at Khabazela High School in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. Khabazela High is a public school that offers the elective subject Religion Studies for learners who are in the Further and Education Training (FET) phase (Grades 10–12). It is important to note that I am a senior educator at this school and hold the positions of Head of the Department of Social Sciences and Religion Studies teacher.

Research Findings

The study reveals that the teachers and learners used the prescribed textbook *Shuters Top Class Religion Studies* as a resource material in their classes. This textbook is based on the 2003 National Policy on Religion and Education and the 2010 Religion Studies Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statement (CAPS)

document, and provides a detailed guide on how to achieve the policies aims for the subject. It provides details on what topics to cover every week, how to start a Religion Studies lesson, and what to prepare for assignments, tests, and examination papers. Both learners and teachers regard this textbook as a valuable resource to understand the subject material and content. The teachers, in particular, considered the textbook as providing needed curriculum support since they were not qualified in teaching the subject and had minimal to no training on the content material. The textbooks were purchased by the school, however, at the time of conducting the study, not all of the learners were provided with one due to limited funding. Besides the lack of textbooks, the school did not have a library for teachers and learners. They had to use libraries that were in the surrounding areas of the school – namely, in the suburbs of Hillcrest and Pinetown.

Despite the challenges that faced the teachers (and learners) at Khabazela High, they were creative in finding alternative resource materials for the subject. Various forms of media were used in the teaching and learning of Religion Studies. For one, local magazines and newspapers were used especially for the topic Religion and Media in the Grade 12 syllabus. For instance, the Christian magazine *Joy! Magazine* and Zulu language newspaper *Isolezwe* were found as the most popular resources used by the teachers. Furthermore, DVDs, films, and television programmes were used in the classrooms. For example, the teachers found the DVD *In Your Face* helpful in teaching about HIV/AIDS. *The Jesus Film* was regarded by teachers and learners as good film material that explains Jesus Christ as the central figure in the foundational beliefs and practices of Christianity. The local multi-faith children's television programme *Siyakholwa – We Believe* was another resource that teachers found valuable for teaching about religious diversity in South Africa. Finally, technology and online sources were considered as useful materials for teaching the subject. The majority of educators and learners used their personal mobile phones to access online material since personal computers were not available at the school. YouTube and Facebook were examples teachers and learners gave as popular resources that were used. In fact, teachers highlighted that Professor Jonathan Jansen's (a lecturer in the Faculty of Education at the University of Stellenbosch in Cape Town, South Africa) Facebook post about the funeral of the former South African Minister of Education (1999–2004) Kader Asmal was used by the examinational panel in setting the 2016 Religion Studies examination paper. Although the use of various media certainly played a vital role in the Religion Studies classrooms, teachers still need more training to improve their content-knowledge and methods of the subject, particularly on how to effectively use media resources that are accessible to learners.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper is based on a case study that explored what media were used in the teaching and learning of the subject Religion Studies in a South African public school. The study revealed that Religion Studies educators were not qualified to teach the subject, and they had depended on the prescribed textbook as a central

teaching tool and resource in the classroom. While the textbook was regarded as a valuable resource, not all of the learners had access to the textbook due to the school's limited funds. Nevertheless, various media resources in the form of local newspapers and magazines, DVDs, films, television programmes, and online sources were used as alternative materials in the teaching and learning of the subject. Clearly, the inclusion of media in the Religion Studies classroom provided needed curriculum support, however I recommend that teachers still need more training for the subject, especially on how to make various media resources learner-friendly.

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