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THE DELICATE DROPPING OF RELIGIOUS STUDIES AT ORDINARY LEVEL BY STUDENTS IN HIGH DENSITY URBAN SCHOOLS OF HARARE, ZIMBABWE

ABSTRACT: *With the new developments in technology worldwide, science subjects are dominating in the curricular and given special preference as compared to the arts subjects. This study examined some of the factors that influence pupils to drop Religious Studies at Ordinary Level in Harare Education Province in Zimbabwe. The research focused on aspects such as social problems, intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors on the student as well as the influence from the teachers and school authorities. Four schools were selected for the study and interviews were done to students sitting for the ordinary level examinations to determine the reasons for dropping religious studies. Key informants interviews were done to respective teachers, school authorities to get their views on the dropping of religious education in schools. The other research instruments used were questionnaires, interviews, and the document analysis in order to gather as much data as possible both from students and school authorities. The research found out that pupils in high density secondary schools of Harare are badly burdened by the poor financial background, lack of learning resources, and uncertainty of the future careers of the subject when they finish school. This was found to affect the schools enrolments for Religious Studies at Ordinary Level as well as sitting for the final ordinary level examinations which was shown to have drastically declined. The study, thus, recommended the promotion of modern and dynamic methods in the teaching of Religious Studies with a new changed path for multi-faith approach in lesson delivery as well as the use of technologies to make the learning exhilarating.*

KEY WORDS: *Students, school, religious studies, teacher, urban, pupils, ordinary level examinations, social problems, and intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors.*

INTRODUCTION

Religious Studies in Zimbabwe have always been part of the curricula both in rural and urban areas. According to B.R.S. Chivore (1990), its origin can be traced to the advent of the white missionaries who started formal education. Religious Studies was then introduced in the secondary school curriculum by the white missionaries and become one of the core subjects in any missionary school.

The teaching of Religious Studies was a preserve of the white minority missionaries who wanted to convert African children to Christianity. According to M. Haar (1990), Religious Studies was taught only by the white missionaries and very few indigenous people

were qualified to teach it and this resulted in the subject becoming compulsory in the colonial education system. At this juncture, it is interesting to note that Religious Studies was only confined to few missionary schools and later it was also introduced to a few selected government schools in urban areas.

As pointed out by G. Haar, A. Moyo & S.J. Nondo (1992), at independence in 1980, the new Zimbabwean government inherited a curriculum at secondary schools level structured on the British elitist model, which was designed to alienate the majority of black children. Since its introduction in the secondary school curriculum, Religious Studies at Ordinary Level has not witnessed

any significant change in forms of content and methodology. Though effort has been exerted to introduce and promote the multi-faith approach in teaching Religious Studies, the implementation phase has been piecemeal; hence, the traditional and orthodox methods of teaching Religious Studies are still prevalent in most missionary and government schools throughout Zimbabwe, which has negatively affected pupils' interest and enthusiasm in the subject.

SCOPE OF THE STUDY, RESEARCH METHOD, AND STUDY AREA

The research aimed at seeking to find the principal factors which have influenced pupils to drop Religious Studies at Ordinary Level in large numbers. It involved determining the dropout rate for Religious Studies in four High-Glen cluster Secondary Schools in Harare Education Province. In trying to justify the dropout, the research also established the reasons why pupils are dropping out and hence trying to solve the problem by highlighting some recommendations on how this can be resolved for the benefit of the community. The research also seeks to determine the attitude of students towards Religious Education, the availability of learning resources, as well as the instructional approach employed by Religious Studies teachers in imparting the knowledge to the pupils.

The research tools used were interviews, questionnaires, and primary and secondary data sources. The researchers used two types of triangulation, that is, data triangulation and methodological triangulation whereby data triangulation involved the collection of data over some period and from one person at more than one location so as to check on consistency and validity. P.D. Leedy (1983) regards validity as the degree to which correct references can be made on the basis of results obtained from an instrument.

Method of triangulation involves the use of more than one method of obtaining information (Gunda, 2011). Thus, in this research different times of interviewing as well as data collecting environments were varied so as to reduce the bias. This research utilised both qualitative and quantitative methods

where the researchers tried to simplify what has been observed for the purposes of data analysis and interpretation. Case study was also done on the selected schools so that detailed data was obtained pertaining to the dropout of religious studies by the pupils. Interviews were done both to students, teachers, and administrators so as to get their views on the dropout of religious studies.

According to K.S. Sidhu (1984), interviews are crucial in getting the facial and body language in collection which makes it reliable as data collection technique. For students, group interviews were done; and key informants interviews were conducted on administrators and educationists. The researchers used both individual and group interviews to probe information from Heads of Departments, Religious Studies teachers, and pupils who had dropped Religious Studies at Form Four in Harare province of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Culture in Zimbabwe.

For effective collection of data, research instruments like questionnaires were used as these helped to control responses (Cohen, 1985). Documentary analysis was also done on checking the documents for those who were taking religious studies and later dropped. This was done to cater for the non-participatory observation (Jackson, 2004). Four high schools were selected in the High-Glen District of the Ministry of Education, Sport, and Culture of the Harare Region in Zimbabwe. The sample size comprised of 90 students, 30 teachers, and four heads of departments. School leavers were also part of the target population.

Data collected was analysed and then summarised in tables, graphs and pie charts, frequency distributions, and percentages assigned in relation to frequencies of response type. In this state, data became easy to compare. Tables were used in analysing population sizes and responses. Frequency distributions and percentages of samples, similarities, and differences of responses were also analysed.

The research project was confined to High-Glen District of the Harare Region of the Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe. Four High schools were

selected for study to ascertain the dropout in religious studies by students. High-Glen district comprises the high density areas of Highfield, Gen-Norah, and Glenview. The areas comprised of people whose livelihoods depend on formal employment in the industrial areas, informal employment, and some who are not employed at all.

The catchment area of the schools is the local area though there are some who travel from other residential areas and some students from this study area also study elsewhere. In terms of educational administration, there is a district education office in the area which then refers other issues to the regional office and head office in the city of Harare.

LITERATURE REVIEW

With the continuous review of the curriculum, there is still a dispute within the Curriculum Development Unit (CDU) about what may be considered legitimate curriculum content in Religious Studies. According to H. Cohen (1985), there is a problem in determining the Religious Studies curriculum and the students' Christian beliefs. Thus, Christian beliefs should not be taught as body of established truth knowledge in Religious Studies, but Religious Studies must be considered as a subject when it is being taught.

As pointed out by E.O. Iheoma (1986), Religious Studies content should understand the language, history, and customs of society with the aim of preserving the society's identity and social existence. E. Ezewu (1986) also supports the same idea by saying that the nature of society in which the child lives is of paramount significance with regard to the scope of content.

Some scholars are of the opinion that Religious Studies content must be based on the interest and inclinations of pupils themselves (Gunda, 2011). Thus, the curriculum content should satisfy the inherent interests and preferences of the pupils rather than become an imposition of the value judgment of the society as this in the end will affect the pupil's interest in the subject which can then lead to dropping the subject (Cohen, 1985).

In Religious Studies, thus, the child centered approach in lesson delivery should be

employed. This can be done through building the content around the needs and interest of children as well as changing the curriculum which remains static over a long period of time. S. Nondo (1991) has questioned the continuous dominance of Christianity in Religious Studies lessons at the expense of other religious and African traditional religion. This alone undermines the importance of Religious Studies in the school curriculum. The Religious Studies content and syllabus should be relevant and reflective of societal aspirations of the Zimbabwean people besides teaching the Christianity values.

According to S. Schoeman (2006), teaching methods are those strategies or techniques adopted by teachers as the most efficient means of achieving lesson objectives. These teaching methods play a crucial role in disseminating information as well as instilling interest and motivation to the students.

Currently, Religious Studies teaching is basically Bible Knowledge and little emphasis is given to the traditional culture. In the education system at schools and colleges what goes on by the name of Religious Education are lessons in Bible-Knowledge whereby teachers use the Bible content approach and not child-centred approach (Sanders, 1984). Religious Studies is basically now viewed as the transmission of knowledge of the Bible and the Christian faith.

Traditional teaching methods characterised by teacher and book domination are prevalent in most secondary schools in Zimbabwe. P. Kasambira (1998) believes that the persistence of orthodox and conventional methods of teaching Religious Studies have been necessitated by the aims and objectives of the subject and the methods of assessment. There is an assumption that the teaching of Religious Studies is more of indoctrination whereby besides the objective of grasping the concepts, the religious beliefs of the students are also affected as in the end they are to be converted to Christians.

The adequate provision of teaching and learning resources enhances academic performance and motivation of pupils (Duncan, 1989). Deprivation of basic educational resources such as textbooks, affects

pupils' performance, and this in the end may cause pupils to dropout some subjects. However, E. Ezewu (1986) argues that the provision of teaching resources does not necessarily improve pupils' performance as performance is based on ability and attitude. However, there is need for making sure that learning resources are provided so as to motivate students in taking up Religious Studies and improve on their performance.

According to J. Duncan (1989), the general feeling or belief towards Religious Studies is that it is easy and is an option offered to slow learners in schools. Pupils, then, develop a negative attitude towards the subject as they don't want to be associated with cheap subjects. M. Haralambos (1985) rightly confirms that the manner in which teachers react to individual pupils can affect their educational career and feeling towards the subject. The system of streaming practiced by most school has worsened the situation as Religious Studies is offered to the slow learners; hence the fast learners end up dropping the subject. Streaming results in pupils perceived as having low ability being actually denied knowledge which is essential for educational success.

DISCUSSIONS AND FINDINGS

First, on the Qualifications of the Religious Studies Teachers. Figure 1 shows that most teachers who teach Religious Studies attained ordinary level as their highest qualification of learning. Trained teachers comprise 50% with the female teachers dominating from the interviews conducted. The teachers' qualifications are necessary to show competence in the subject areas as this plays a role in ensuring quality education.

M. Hanson (1979) says that the training of teachers and administrators in the education system improves on quality and confidence in the execution of the duties. Students will have confidence in their teachers through the qualifications they hold.

Second, on the Reasons for Dropouts of Religious Studies. To some extent, the school administrators who are the headmasters and

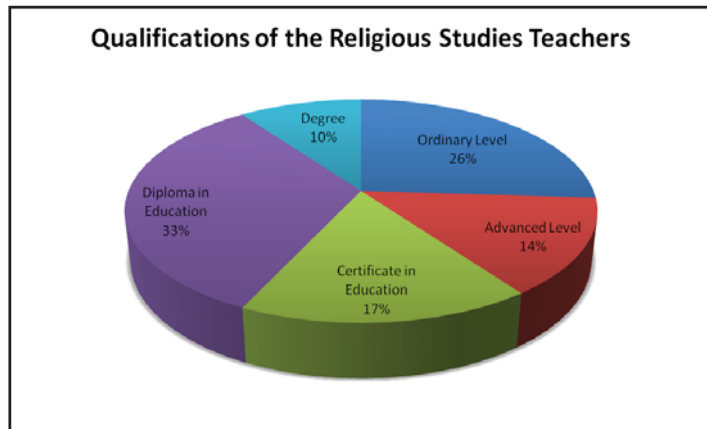


Figure 1:
Distribution of Teachers by Qualification

the teachers contribute as well to the dropout of Religious Studies. About 10% of the students quit Religious Studies because of streaming. Streaming of pupils according to ability is one of the reasons why pupils do not attend certain subjects or take it seriously for they are considered incapable of doing some subjects and content.

According to R. Jackson (2004), lack of interest and poor academic performance at primary level are some of the reasons which adversely affect school performance and, thus, end up dropping Religious Studies as a final resort. According to the teachers interviewed on the reasons for the dropouts, 25% attributed lack of relevance of syllabus and 20% cited inappropriate objectives of the subject which lead to pupils dropping it at ordinary level (interview with the teachers, 9-16/10/2012). Figure 2 shows the responses by the teachers on the reasons for the dropouts.

The headmasters interviewed attributed the dropout to lack of relevance of the syllabus as well as lack of motivation of the students on the subject (interview with the headmasters, 18-25/10/2012). Thus, carrier guidance needs to be done in schools so as to motivate students and letting them know the future carriers they can do with Religious Studies (Ndlovu, 2013).

The histogram shows that about 26% of the Religious Studies dropout in the four schools have a feeling that pupils' dropout is due to the restrictions of the relevance of the syllabus. This implies that the content in the syllabus

seems to be too difficult for pupils' perception. About 20% of the teachers believe that the current Religious Studies syllabus is predominantly Christian in nature and does not include non-Christian sects. They felt that the syllabus should be amended without delay so that it incorporates the students' needs in their learning. The teachers felt that objectives of the subject were not well revised in that though they tended to be measurable within the thirty-minute lesson they hardly have lasting effects (interview with the teachers, 9-16/10/2012).

Lack of motivational background and lack of interest from pupils in general both have 14% responses. Pupils lacked motivation from parents who hardly encouraged them to do homework at home. Pupils' sentiments were that home backgrounds were not conducive to learning. About 10% of the teachers agreed that streaming of pupils is one of the factors which influenced the subject drop-out. D.C. Sanders (1984) also points out that streaming of students have an implication on the performance of the students as it labels students.

Third, on the Teaching Method Used. From figure 3 shows that about 10% of the Religious Studies teachers from the high density schools in Harare use dictation method when teaching the pupils. It is an indication that teachers hardly use varied teaching methods. Discovery method through group work was used by about 20% of the teachers and 30% of the teachers use the lecture and chalk board method. From the teachers interviewed, about 40% of the teachers give notes to the pupils either by dictation or by chalk-board writing. The teachers stated that shortage of basic resources and the non-availability of revision practice books influenced teachers into giving notes to pupils (interview with the teachers, 9-16/10/2012).

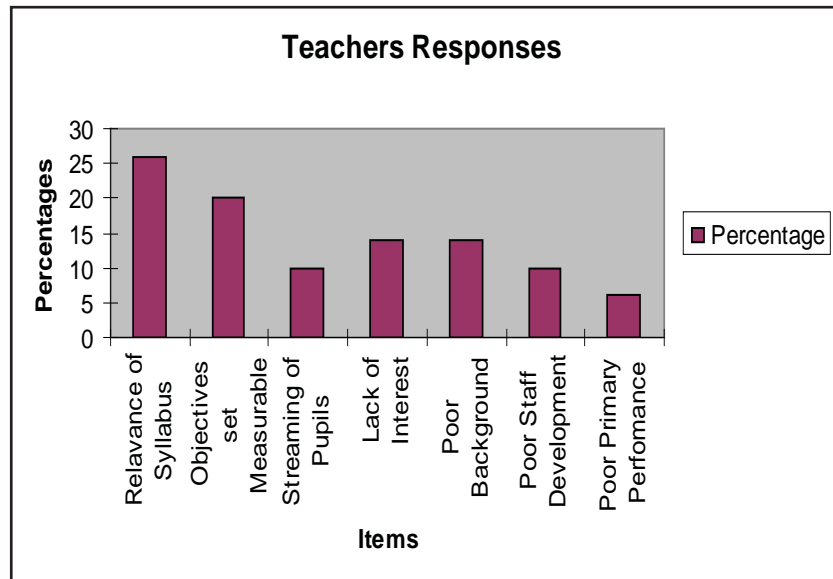


Figure 2:
Responses by Teachers on the Dropout of Religious Studies

The research found out that the problem of text books shortage is common in all the schools under study. Discovery learning, according to P. Obanya (1985), affirms that teachers should encourage researching, reasoning, and presentation of accounts by pupils. Most teachers interviewed agreed that most of the pupils are of mixed abilities who find it difficult to make their own notes but need to be spoon fed (interview with the teachers, 9-16/10/2012).

M.R. Gunda (2011) regards drama as essential in Religious Studies lessons. He argues that it provides opportunities for active participation in lesson being taught at Ordinary Level and it will be easy for the pupils to recall the information dramatized. There is need to adopt and implement the new approaches in Religious Studies teaching that makes the subject interesting.

As shown in figure 4, about 40% of the Heads of Departments of the four schools confirmed that the lecture method was used by most teachers because of the format of assessment of Religious Studies examinations stressed retention and the regurgitation of stories. The Heads of Department also agreed that note giving is often used by some teachers although they agreed that such scenario make the Religious Studies lessons to be

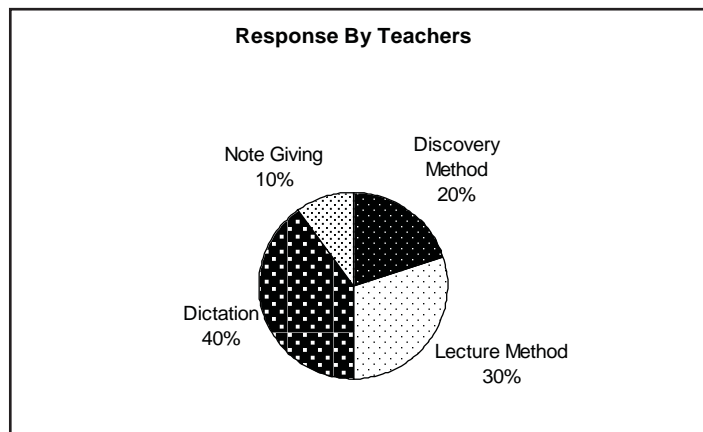
dull, monotonous, and uninspiring; consequently, pupils drop the subject at Ordinary Level. Least number of Heads of Department agreed that discovery method and dictation was barely used by teachers during lesson delivery, since most pupils are of below average and cannot grasp anything either by discovery method or by dictation (interview with the heads of departments, 1-8/11/2012).

Fourth, on the Reasons by Students for Dropping Religious Studies. Figure 5 shows that about 22% of pupils drop the Religious Studies subject due to unconfirmed transfers as revealed in class registers of the four schools. About 28% of the pupils lacked financial support from parents or guardians for them to sit for all the subjects at Ordinary Level. The research found out that the pupils' guardians dictated to them the subjects they would enrol. About 33% of the pupils dropped the subject for no apparent reason. About 7% dropped the subject from school to go and become housemaids, tuck-shop keepers due to lack of financial support from their guardians.

This has been triggered by the high cost of living which most parents are failing to cope depending on their type of employment. Only about 2% of the girl-child dropped from writing the Religious Study subject due to early marriages. The writers felt that this was due to lack of parental guidance. About 5% of the pupils dropped from writing the subject owing to ill health problems as they were at hospital or recuperating from home.

According to R. Jackson (2004), student's dropout from schools due to social problems can as well be attributed to early socialization where the community takes little value in the education. Thus, motivation for pupils to continue studying can begin at the family level if meaningful results are to be attained as the family is the centre for primary socialization.

Fifth, Need to Change the Syllabus. From the information on figure 6, about 60% of the Heads of Department from the four



N = 30

Figure 3:
 Distribution of Respondents View on Teaching Methods Used

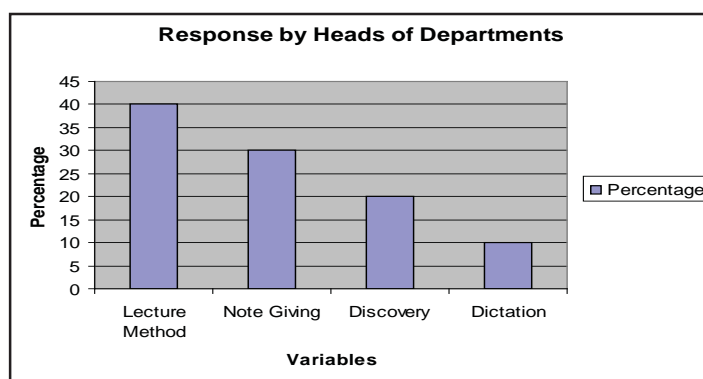


Figure 4:
 Responses by Head of Departments

schools were for the idea that the current syllabus needs to be changed completely so as to incorporate the content that makes the subject interesting. Some key informants from the Ministry of Education officials beg to differ saying that world religions and African Traditional Religions were well catered for, especially at Junior Certificate Level and other subjects like history and sociology. About 30% of the Heads of Departments felt that the current Religious Studies syllabus needs slight alterations.

The research found out that the respondents only wanted other religions other than Christianity to be integrated into it so that there is a balance between Christianity and other religions and traditional beliefs. Some key informants lamented on the lack of relevance in the current syllabus and were for the idea of complete overhaul of the syllabus. This could have been sighted due to poor

performance by most pupils with the current syllabus (interview with the heads of departments, 1-8/11/2012; and interview with the Ministry of Education officials, 9-16/11/2012). B.R.S. Chivore (1990) points also out that curriculum development is crucial and it must take into consideration the pupils and other stakeholders.

Sixth, on an Availability of Teaching Resources in Religious Studies. Though the schools had different capacities to source teaching or learning resources, they experienced a critical shortage of Bibles and commentaries. In all the four schools, the *Revised Standard Version Bibles* were readily available. From the information shown in the diagram, figure 7, about 60% of the resources used are Bibles which are mainly imported into the country. Barely 20% of the Bible commentaries were available from all the four schools. About 80% of the teachers indicated that there was a critical shortage of Bibles in the schools making the learning resources limited which to some extent contributes to the dropout of Religious Studies by the students.

From the key informants interviews done on the school heads and the Ministry of Education officials, textbook pupil ratios ranged from 1:3 to 1:10 or more. Having such a ratio distribution of resources, most pupils can hardly carry out their homework or assignments (interview with the headmasters, 18-25/10/2012; and interview with the Ministry of Education officials, 9-16/11/2012). H. Cohen (1985) says that learning resources helps to improve the performance and need to be provided for the benefit of the students.

According to L. Ndlovu (2013), most school libraries are poorly equipped in terms of Bibles, Commentaries, and others resources for use; and this is a drawback to those who would want to excel in the subject. From the focus group discussions done on teachers and

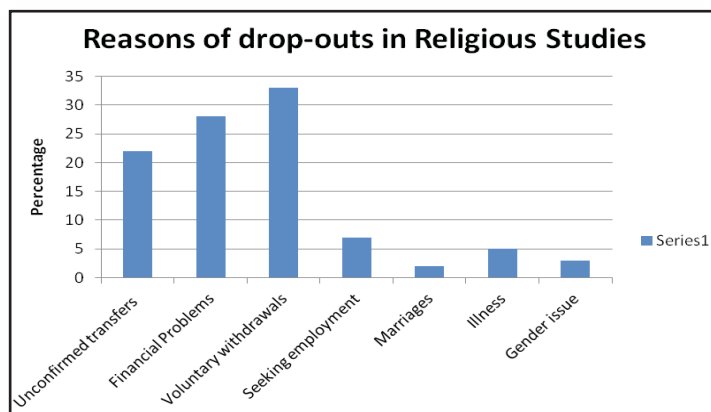


Figure 5:
Distribution of Respondents on Possible Reasons/Causes of Drop-Outs in Religious Studies

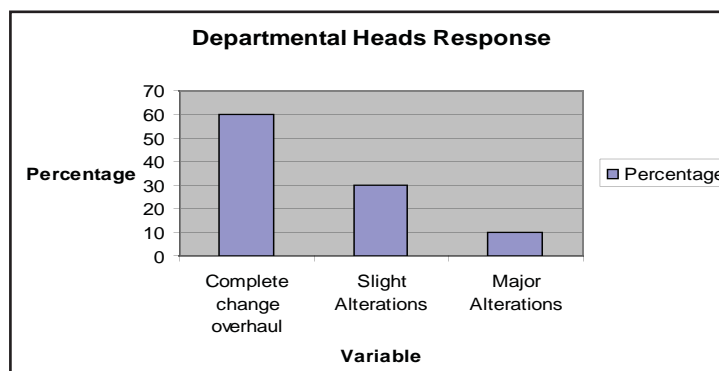


Figure 6:
The Responses of the Heads of Department on Syllabus Changes

pupils, poor performance in the subject was a result of inadequate learning resources and non-availability of revision practice books which makes the pupils well equipped for the examinations. About 33% of teachers interviewed said that inadequate learning materials, coupled with non-supporting home backgrounds, down-graded the status of urban pupils as fully pledged pupils (interview with the teachers, 9-16/10/2012).

From table 1, absenteeism by pupils from the documentary analysis of four schools stood at 27% whilst low teacher morale stood at 20%. This was probably due to lack of teaching/learning resources in the four schools. Pupils could hardly be given homework due to lack of learning resources and most pupils' guardians could hardly afford to buy them personal textbooks since they come from the low income earning families.

Table 1:
 Distribution of Respondents on Possible Reasons for Poor Performance

Possible Reasons	Percentage Frequency	
	Teachers	Heads of Departments
Inadequate Resource Learning	33	50
Poor Staffing	20	0
Absenteeism	27	25
Low teacher morale	20	25
Total	100	100

Staffing issues with the massive exodus of teachers to greener pastures outside the country had impacted negatively on the performance of the students. The remaining teachers, whose morale is low due to poor working conditions, also has an impact on performance of the students; hence, this leads to the dropping of Religious Studies and other subjects. Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation is crucial for both the teacher and the student in achieving goals (Haralambos, 1985).

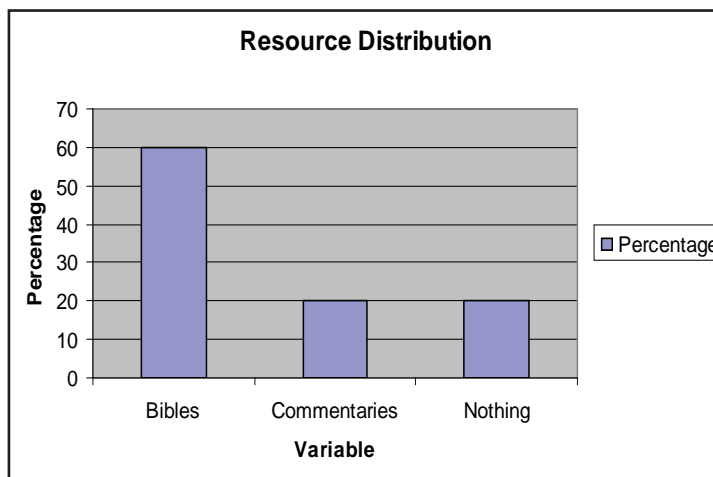


Figure 7:
 The Impact of Resource Shortages on Pupils' Performance

CONCLUSION

The research found out that most Religious Studies teachers were qualified and have had long experience with the pupils' social needs and concerns. Thus, dropping of students in Religious Studies and poor performance is attributed to many factors, among which are: streaming of pupils according to ability which de-motivate pupils from performing better results; pupils' lack of interest to learning; poor background and poor primary performance which was found to have negative impact on the pupil's performance; and development thus dropping out of certain subjects such as Religious Studies. Thus, pupils with such poor family background need assistance from teachers, well wishers, and other social organisations such as churches so as to be afforded the opportunity to go to school.

There is also a prevalence of a wide range of problems in organisations such as syllabus changes or alterations, and varied teaching methods used by teachers and lack of teaching or learning resources. There is hardly time given to Religious Studies teachers on staff

development to counsel the absconding pupils as compared to other science subjects with variety of teaching methods and technological advancements. Thus, pupils end up dropping Religious Studies due to lack of such innovations. There is, therefore, need to advocate for up to date teaching methods, resources, and technologies which makes learning more interesting and child centered.

The following recommendations regarding teaching of Religious Studies have been made:

First, there is need to restructure the Religious Studies syllabus so that it caters for other aspects like traditional beliefs and other religions to see similarities and differences.

Second, financial assistance need to be provided to pupils whose parents and guardians who cannot meet the required amount to register for all subjects at Ordinary Level for example by Hupenyu Hutsva Orphanage and the Nazarene church all in Highfield area. Pupils orphaned due to the

current AIDS (Acquired Immuno-Deficiency Syndrome) pandemic should be followed up and assisted by AIDS organisations so that they complete their academic studies, for example the SOS (Save Our Souls) Children Village and the Mashambanzou Care Centre in Waterfalls, usually pay up fees for registered orphaned children.

Third, parents and teachers should educate children on the importance of a positive attitude toward schoolwork, for productive learning to take place in Religious Studies.

Fourth, the School Development Committee, as the arm of school's development machinery, need to staff develop its Religious Studies teachers to enable professionalism and effective operations by inviting relevant Educational Officers in the subject and conducting seminars on new teaching methods.

Fifth, teachers, especially the newly trained, need constant support from the Head Teachers and from the supervision team, the Heads of Department to guide the teachers and pupils in their learning.

Sixth, the community should be involved in motivating pupils' interest to learn Religious Studies by inviting professionals such as prominent Pastors and Evangelists of various Religions sects to assist in narrowing the syllabus and motivating students to take the subject.

Finally, *seventh*, the Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture, through the Education District Officials, should be involved in processing speedy methods of importing relevant textbooks needed in schools or provide cheaper photocopying stations for schools in High Glen, so that all pupils benefit from available resources.

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Religious Studies at the School of Zimbabwe

(Source: www.google.com, 15/12/2013)

The Ministry of Education, Sports, and Culture in Zimbabwe, through the Education District Officials, should be involved in processing speedy methods of importing relevant textbooks needed in schools or provide cheaper photocopying stations for schools in High Glen, so that all pupils benefit from available resources.