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REPORT

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# Exploratory study of the perceptions of spirituality and values in schools in Kenya

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## Abbreviations

BEBB	Build Education Back Better
CBC	competency based curriculum
CRE	Christian Religious Education or
FGD	focus group discussion
WCD	whole child development

## Executive summary

We conducted an exploratory study whose main objective was to investigate stakeholders' perceptions of spirituality and values in the primary school setting in Kenya. 'The rationale was linking the discourse on spirituality to values, and specifically to a study on Values Education focusing on primary schools in Kenya, that had been carried out in 2014.' A qualitative research approach was used as it was felt it would yield richer and deeper data from a relatively small sample compared to a quantitative method, especially given the time constraints. The study used a focus group discussion (FGD), which was carried out using an online platform. The discussion was based on five key questions that had been identified as important for gaining insight into the group's perceptions of spirituality and values and linking these to the whole child development and whole school approach. Eleven participants who fitted the profile of persons who were or had been involved in the primary school education sector were purposively selected from Eldoret and Nairobi. The FGD took two hours and was recorded with the approval of the participants. The findings of the study suggest there is a connection between spirituality and values, in a way that one leads to the other; it was also found that values instilled responsibility and a sense of holistic learning and education and helped individuals appreciate political, cultural, and religious differences. Furthermore, the new Competency Based Curriculum (CBC) includes values and explicitly requires values to be taught in every lesson. Following from the findings, it is recommended that the concepts of spirituality and values be taught in teacher education as well as in in-service teacher training for those who may have missed it in their initial training.

## 1 Introduction

This study was undertaken to explore the perceptions of a selected group of individuals regarding spirituality and values in the primary school setting in Kenya. The study used a focus group discussion (FGD), which was carried out using the Zoom online platform. The FGD was based on four key questions that had been identified as important for gaining insight into the group's perceptions of spirituality and values and linking these to the whole child development and whole school approach.

## 2 Background

The FGD on spirituality was part of ongoing discussions under the Build Education Back Better (BEBB) initiative. The BEBB initiative, initiated and supported by Porticus, has the objective of supporting education systems to prioritise, promote and integrate whole child development (WCD) approaches and pedagogy which respond to the needs of vulnerable children during and post COVID-19. The initiative recognises that all children, especially the most disadvantaged, require information, skills, experiences and fundamental values that enable them to participate as productive, ethical citizens in their communities and throughout the world. The five thematic areas were identified for discussion:

1. Understanding spirituality as a core element of whole child development (WCD);
2. Role modelling as an approach to inculcate values;
3. Strengthening continued learning for the most vulnerable children through stakeholder engagement;
4. Children's online safety in the time of COVID-19 and beyond ;
5. Building Back Better Equal Education: Gender lens.

The FGD on the theme of spirituality involved three organisations in Kenya, namely: Kenya Conference of Catholic Bishops (KCCB); Jaslika Consulting Limited; and Akili Network. JET Education Services, based in South Africa, coordinated the process, and monitoring and evaluation (M&E) was carried out by Dalberg. The discussion, which was organised by Prof. Ahmed Ferej and Warue Kariuki, brought together teachers and head teachers, former teachers and other people working in education.

## 2.1 Objective of the study

The main objective of this study was to explore stakeholders' perceptions of spirituality and values in the primary school setting in Kenya. 'The rationale was linking the discourse on spirituality to values, and specifically to a study on Values Education focusing on primary schools in Kenya, that had been carried out in 2014.' Specifically, the study sought to determine whether there is a connection/linkage between spirituality and values education; how spirituality and values contribute to holistic education and the WCD approach; how religious education contributes to the teaching of values education and spirituality in our schools; whether values have been introduced into the CBC and how they are taught in schools; and what the key challenges of teaching values and spirituality in primary schools are. The following research questions were formulated to address these areas of inquiry.

## 2.2 Research questions

1. What is the connection/linkage between spirituality and values education?
2. What is the contribution of spirituality and values to holistic education and the WCD approach?
3. How does religious education contribute to the teaching of values education and spirituality in our schools?
4. Have values been introduced in the CBC and how are they taught?
5. What are the key challenges in the teaching of spirituality and values to primary school children?

# 3 Methodology

## 3.1 Qualitative research approach

Due to limited time, it was decided to use a qualitative research approach. This method would yield richer and deeper data from a relatively small sample compared to a quantitative method. Thus, the FGD method was identified as being best suited to the exploratory study. An FGD was organised to discuss 'Spirituality' and 'Values' and the interlinkage between the two. An FGD has a limited number of participants: 11 were selected for this FGD, which comprised six females and five males.

According to Nyumba, Wilson, Derrick and Mukherjee (2018), FGDs are frequently used as a qualitative approach to gain an in-depth understanding of social issues. The method aims to obtain data from a purposely selected group of individuals rather than from a statistically representative sample of a broader population. The FGD method can be used in a variety of disciplines. To ensure success of the FGD, it is important that the role of the researcher vis-a-vis the participants is clear. Unlike an investigation where the researcher actively engages in probing for answers, as in interviews, for example, in an FGD, the researcher merely acts as a moderator or facilitator in the discussion between participants.

## 3.2 Selection of participants

The selection of the participants for an FGD is an important point of consideration. The participants should ideally be identified based on their role or knowledge of under the theme under discussion. Guided by the focus of the study, it was thus decided to select persons who were or had been involved in the education sector at the primary school level. Seven participants were identified who fitted this profile from Eldoret and Nairobi. Four participants were identified who were not actively involved in the education system at the primary level but were involved with youth in education matters such as mentoring disadvantaged youth or encouraging participation in education by youth in the pastoralist community.

## 3.3 Conducting the FGD

The online mode of conducting the FGD was appropriate due to the diverse locations of the participants.

Initially, a WhatsApp forum was formed, and all the participants and the facilitators were included. This

created an easy mode of communicating with all members at the same time. A short narrative was shared which provided the theme of the study. The participants were also asked to indicate a day and time convenient to them. When the date and time had been established, a Zoom Link was shared with all the participants.

The FGD went well with all the participants, bar one, logging in on time. The FGD was recorded after obtaining the concurrence of the participants. For the most part, the participants' camera and microphones were switched off, except when they were talking. This strategy helped to reduce bandwidth overload since the facilities used by most participants were low bandwidth.

To discuss the five key questions that underpinned the study, the participants were divided into five groups. Each group was allocated one of the five questions. An effort was made to ensure the groups were given about 10 minutes to discuss the questions and each group then presented their response to the larger group. Contributions from all the group members were encouraged.

### 3.4 Data analysis

The duration of the FGD was two hours. Attempts were made to obtain a transcription of the FGD recording using an appropriate digital tool. However, a summary of the recording was been written up and this yielded an acceptable narrative of the FGD and enabled findings to be made and conclusions to be drawn.

## 4 Findings of the study

### 4.1 Discussion

To start the discussion, participants were asked to write down their response to the questions 'What does the term 'Spirituality' mean to you?' and 'What does the term 'Values' mean to you?' The Theme 1 Group on the first day at the Induction Meeting had been asked to do the same.

The responses with regard to Spirituality can be summarised as spirituality being a belief in something that is superior to humans and divine in nature. Spirituality was also perceived as the awareness or sensation of or belief in a higher power than self, that is superior to humans and is akin to being a human sensory experience. Spirituality was also seen as a totality of which we are a part and that has divine characteristics. Many of the participants found it difficult to separate spirituality from religion, hence the repeated use of 'higher power' and 'divine.' Tirri (2009) explains in her study that there is a tendency to define spirituality as related to religion, with religion being defined as, '*...organisational, the ritual and the ideological...and spiritual then being the personal, the affective, the experiential, and the thoughtful*' (Tirri, 2009, 246). Many of the participants were locked into this perception of spirituality being connected to religion. The second part of Tirri's observation is that certain human traits can present themselves in people without being driven by religion. This view was well noted when there was a discussion among the FGD participants that even atheists could possess those traits.

With regard to values, some participants' were of the view that values represent the belief in what is right and what is wrong. Others perceived values as principles that guide us on what is important. Values were also said to be essential and fundamental ideas that direct or inspire behaviour and assist people in deciding what matters and what is right for them. Of note was the general consensus that values can vary in different social contexts, so that some positive values in one community or context could be negative values in another. An example was given of how polygamy is accepted in some societies but is not in others. Another example given was that of communities that see increasing their herds through cattle

raiding from other communities as something to be proud and proof of courage and power, while others see this as theft.

## 4.2 Responses to the five key questions

The findings below are based on the response to the five key questions that underpinned the study and were discussed in the FGD.

### 4.2.1 What is the connection/linkage between spirituality and values education?

The first question could be said to also have offered an opportunity to bring to conclusion the introductory discussion on 'Spirituality' and 'Values'. The participants were asked if there is a connection or linkage between spirituality and values education. Responses from participants seemed to indicate agreement that there is a connection between spirituality and values, in the way that one leads to the other. The view was also shared, that values are instilled through spirituality. Examples of responses given include:

*Spirituality deals with the sphere of values and belief.*

*When children are more spiritual and have been taught values, they become more aware and can relate to the environment, clean environment, and take good care of the environment.*

*The spirituality and values in education lead to a sense of hope and optimism in learning.*

There was consensus among the participants that there is a strong connection/linkage between spirituality and values education.

### 4.2.2 What is the contribution of spirituality and values to holistic education and the WCD approach in our schools?

From participants' contributions to the discussion, there seemed to be a general view that spirituality and values play an important role in the development of children, and both are important to the school culture. For example, spirituality and values were seen as playing a significant role in teaching children respect, responsibility and compassion for others.

Values were said to contribute to children's understanding of the importance of the value of life. It was also said that values instil responsibility, a sense of holistic learning and education and help children appreciate political, cultural and religious differences, which contributes to building a society that acknowledges and appreciates diversity.

With regard to spirituality, there view was expressed that with spiritual development, children learn to be confident and comfortable with qualities such as respect, responsibility and compassion, which are important values in the school context. According to Jones (2005), spirituality is important in teaching and could contribute to improving teaching if more focus were directed towards it. This view is supported by the ideas expressed by participants in the FGD, that is, that spirituality tends to strengthen the nurturing of values, which results in developing upright and caring individuals. The inability of some participants to view spirituality separate from formal religious structures was apparent. For example, when questioned as to whether spirituality could be found among those who believed in atheism or traditional religion, some participants acknowledged that they had acquaintances who were atheists but who were nonetheless very good and caring people.

### **4.2.3 How does religious education contribute to the teaching of values education and spirituality in our schools?**

It seems that there was general consensus that values are taught in school, although there is some difference in the way values are taught at primary and secondary school levels. It was said that in primary schools, the teaching of values may not come across clearly as the main topic in the syllabus; rather, values are taught within the practical classroom teaching of subjects. According to some of the participants, values are taught in almost all of the subjects and are emphasised in accordance with the curriculum. There was also mention made of teaching the content of the Bible, the majority of schools being Christian-sponsored, as an indication of values being taught through religion (in this case, Christian Religious Education or CRE as it is commonly referred to).

At secondary or high school level, there is a different approach. Participants emphasised that children are explicitly taught values at this level. One of the participants, who was a teacher, informed the group that, 'There is a whole system of teaching values.' This was further explicated: The first step in the approach used at secondary level in the teaching of values is to present different values to the children. They then identify what they think are key values and choose which values they needed to focus on. Step two of this process was said to be that children choose the core values and alternative values. Then, in step three, children choose their own values, paying attention to the consequences of those values, and in step four, they learn to appreciate the values that they chose. In step five, they proclaim their chosen values, and in step six, the children can act out or indicate how they would live those values.

### **4.2.4 Have values been introduced into the CBC and how are they taught?**

The CBC was introduced in Kenya in 2018. It was important in this discussion to establish whether values education is integrated into the new curriculum, especially in light of a study on 'Value-based Education in Kenya', carried out in 2014/2015 by the Women Education Researchers of Kenya (WERK), which found that there was no coherent approach to teaching values in Kenyan schools (Wamahiu, S, 2015) .

The responses to this question indicated that values had been introduced in the CBC. According to the group, teaching of values in schools is both explicit and implicit, and achieved through the formal curriculum and co-curricular and extra-curricular activities. Values were said to be infused in every lesson. The curriculum specifies certain values, including respect, love, social justice, patriarchy, teamwork and integrity. Teachers are then expected to include specific values in their lesson preparation.

The issue of caning and corporal punishment in schools and its inconsistency with these values was raised in the discussion. While corporal punishment is banned in Kenya, it is common knowledge that caning happens in schools, leading to a contradiction in the system. However, participants expressed the view that although it is true that caning occurs in schools, there is a gradual change taking place towards using positive discipline instead of corporal punishment. According to the group, this would be achieved through teaching values, where discipline is perceived as positive reinforcement and correction and not equated with beating and other forms of harsh punishment. The use of positive sanctions to reinforce values was said to be the norm that most schools are working towards achieving, and which would enable children to take responsibility for their actions and comfortably admit their wrong-doings without fear of being caned.

### **4.2.5 What are the key challenges in the teaching of spirituality and values to primary school children?**

The group, when asked what challenges teachers and schools face in the teaching of values, mentioned the fact that the values taught in school are at times different from the ones instilled at home. Some parents do not inculcate the same values, which raises contradictions in the upbringing of the children. An example given

was that at home, discipline could be in the form of harsh punishment, while at school there is a move towards positive sanctions which reinforce values. This could result in a lack of complementarity between the home and school when it comes to inculcating values. The issue was raised of teachers teaching values from an academic perspective while they and other school staff members may not live those values, resulting in children not acquiring the values taught in school.

In conclusion, a question was raised on the role of modelling in teaching spirituality and values. The response to this question was that modelling is important and involves the entire school community, including children and teachers and management, who are responsible for ensuring that the values are nurtured. The teachers should explicitly demonstrate the values to children. For instance, teachers need to live the values they teach in the way they carry out their work and engage with children and other teachers. To teach and inculcate respect in learners, teachers have to show respect to the learners.

## 5 Conclusion and recommendations

Based on the findings from the FGD discussed above, the following conclusions can be drawn.

- There is indeed a strong relationship between spirituality and values education
- Spirituality and values play a significant role in education through teaching children respect, responsibility and compassion for others.
- In the old curriculum, values were not taught explicitly at the primary school level but mainly through religious teaching, for example CRE or Islamic Religious Education (IRE), but were covered at the secondary level.
- Values were introduced in the new CBC, with teaching of values at the primary school level being taught both implicitly and explicitly through the formal curriculum, co-curricular and extra-curricular activities and infused in every lesson.
- The key challenges in the teaching values at school include when there is a clash with what children are taught at home and issues of the values taught not being practiced within the school system.
- Spirituality tended to come through in the discussions as being viewed as one and the same thing as religion.

This was an exploratory study with a limited scope. However, the following recommendations can be made:

1. A larger study covering a bigger sample that disaggregates between schools in the urban and rural areas of the country should be considered.
2. The concepts of spirituality and values should be incorporated in teacher training to better prepare teachers to meet the holistic needs of their pupils.
3. The concepts should also be offered during teacher in-service or professional development programmes.

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