

# Exploring Citizenship Education: Cultural Study Curriculum in Botswana

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The research project presented here examined the concept of citizenship education in the context of cultural studies in Botswana's lower primary level which is from standard one to four. Cultural studies as a discipline of study has just been introduced in Botswana primary schools. Issues on equality and social justice are becoming crucial in Botswana's growing democracy and as such the role of schools in promoting cultural diversity cannot be overemphasized. As such, this study also assessed the degree to which the cultural study curriculum advances the aspirations of citizenship education. The findings of the study revealed that the pedagogical practices in cultural studies were major barriers to the productive teaching of multiculturalism in cultural studies. Additionally, teachers also seem to have inadequate understanding of the concepts of multiculturalism and citizenship education. The study recommends that cultural studies should be introduced to the University of Botswana and teacher training colleges.

*Keywords:* democracy, pluralistic society, kagisano (social harmony), pupils, multiculturalism, Tswana culture

## Background of the Study

This study drew on the notion of citizenship education as both a political ideology and as a part of the school curriculum that dates back from the Graeco-Roman world during the archaic age (776 B.C. to 479 B.C.) (Heater, 2004). From its inception, citizenship education was meant to produce disciplined and loyal citizens (Heater, 2002). Citizenship education assumed different names and purposes, as it spread across the world depending on countries' ideologies. As such, citizenship education is presented as civic education, social studies, government and education for citizenship (Reinsenburg, 1992; as cited in Heater, 2004).

Aristotle (1955; as cited in Heater, 2004) once reflected that, "The citizens of a state should always be educated to suit the constitution of a state" (p. 1). Even though this assertion was made a long time in the historic past, it still reflects the current trends in citizenship education in Botswana and elsewhere. Citizenship education is meant to produce citizens who are patriotic to the state hence abiding by the constitution of their countries (Daview, 2005). It is apparent that the aim of citizenship education is good citizenship or to produce a good citizen although at times what we regard as a "good citizen" is squarely subjective. The difference between citizenship and a citizen is that, the former is considered by various authorities as a status or a feeling of belonging to a state, society or community (Lawy & Biesta, 2006) and the later refers to an individual who

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has been bestowed with the status or who has the strong feeling of membership of a country or society (Heater, 1991; as cited in Tse, 2001).

The goal of citizenship education includes among others, preparing children to become members of a democratic society. Different governments put more emphasis on different domains as vital components of their citizenship training (Adeyemi, Boikhutso, & Moffat 2003). The dimension of citizenship education that Africa and Botswana adopted was emancipatory in nature. In other words, countries introduced citizenship education as a move towards affirming their positions as independent countries. In a Botswana context for example, it was an opportunity to re-assess and re-assert her national identity (Republic of Botswana, 1977). The principal aim by the Botswana government in asserting the national identity became evident and pronounced with the contents of the RNCE (Report on National Commission on Education) (1977) entitled *Education for Kagisano* (social harmony). The report posited that the principal aim of education was to develop the individual. In other words, imparting knowledge and skills, values and beliefs necessary to promote active participation in societal activities including dealing with everyday challenges. RNCE also noted that the education system should orient young people towards social, cultural, political and economic life of the unique society.

According to RNCE (1977), one of the primary objectives of education at primary school in Botswana is to develop children's ability to express them in Setswana, both orally and in writing" (p. 69). Citizenship education in Botswana is influenced by the national educational policies, such as RNCE and the RNPE (Revised National Policy on Education) (1994). As such, citizenship education is channeled towards nation building and developing a society which has a universal identity embraced by all citizens (Solway, 2002). This means that, citizenship education in Botswana promotes homogeneity in the socio-economic, political and cultural spectrum.

### **The Introduction of Cultural Studies in the Primary School Curriculum**

Cultural studies were introduced in Botswana lower primary curriculum as a result of the recommendations of the RNPE (1994). The major aims were to develop pupils' knowledge and understanding of their culture and traditions. These included emphasis on the development of knowledge, skills and values needed to participate in the civic life of their local communities and the nation (Republic of Botswana, 2002).

However, the major problem associated with the introduction of cultural studies is that teachers were not trained and that the subject is not offered at both colleges of education and the University of Botswana (Dube & Moffat, 2009). As such, lack of skilled teachers in the area hampers its objectives.

### **Research Questions**

In an attempt to address the objectives of the study, the following questions were asked:

- (1) Do teachers at lower primary level (one to four) understand the importance of multiculturalism?
- (2) How do teachers promote multiculturalism in the cultural studies curriculum?
- (3) Does the cultural study curriculum integrate diversity among pupils?

### **Methodology**

The study was a qualitative study utilizing a descriptive case study design. This design enabled the researcher to explore and analyze the study environment so as to get data necessary for the study. This was a

case study of Ntimbale primary school (not real name), SMT (Senior Management Team) and CTR (cultural studies teachers) in the northeast Botswana. The study employed a purposive sampling procedure which is a non-probability sample to get the sample population of the study. Maykut and Morehouse (2003) noted that purposive sampling increased the likelihood that variability common in the problem under investigation would be represented in the data. A total of 16 ( $n = 16$ ) respondents who comprised of the six members of the senior management team and 10 teachers teaching cultural studies made up the sample population of this study.

The study utilized the questionnaire, interview, and participant-observation and official document analysis to collect data. These different methods complemented each other in soliciting formidable data and further enhanced the credibility of the data collected (Wilkinson & Birmingham, 2003; Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007).

### **Findings and Discussion**

The findings of the study are presented based on themes derived from key research questions.

#### **Teachers' Understanding of the Importance of Multiculturalism**

The concept of multiculturalism seems to be a new concept to almost all the respondents. In an attempt to find out teachers' understanding of the importance of multiculturalism, the following questions were asked:

- (1) What is your philosophy of teaching?
- (2) In your knowledge, what is your understanding of multicultural education?
- (3) Do you feel that teaching and learning promote equal opportunities among pupils from diverse groups?
- (4) What is the value of being competent in most cultures of your pupils?

The responses provided by the class teachers reflected that not all cultural study teachers understood the importance of multiculturalism. Two ( $n = 2$ ) respondents representing 28% of the class teachers interviewed put more emphasis on the objectivist conceptualization of knowledge. In other words, they believed that learning took place when pupils were able to respond to the teacher's instructions in the classroom. The respondents' philosophies of teaching-learning process were testimony to the above argument. Three ( $n = 3$ ) of the respondents reflected that they value quality education based mainly on making pupils to pass the examinations. One of the respondents—CTR contended that, "I believe that if pupils are given good instructions, they can do much better ...". Furthermore, some responses indicated that teachers preferred teaching pupils about one national culture than diverse cultures.

Additionally, some respondents pointed out that the teaching and learning of cultural studies promoted equal opportunities among pupils, because there were such objectives which addressed citizenship issues in Botswana. The emphasis was that such objectives helped pupils to know how to live with people from diverse cultural backgrounds. However, one of the concerns is that pupils are taught to understand concepts for the examination purposes rather than practically applying the knowledge for the construction of a harmonious society. This is in line with Odada's (1993; as cited in Asimeng-Boahene, 2003) argument that teachers teach for examinations. The implication, therefore, is that too much believing in making pupils understand the instructions makes teachers to be objective-oriented promoting social values that can improve diversity among the pupils. As such, only lip-service is made to the teaching of multiculturalism.

The respondents differed in terms of their awareness of multicultural issues. Six ( $n = 6$ ) class teachers out of the seven interviewed indicated that they preferred a multicultural education at a lower primary level. Their

consciousness on multicultural issues was revealed when some class teachers outlined their beliefs in the teaching-learning process. There were further shown by their responses to the question that asked them whether the teaching-learning process promoted equal opportunities among the diverse group of pupils. Most of the respondents pointed out that the major objective was to transform pupils into independent and diverse thinkers. CTR, for example, said that, "I want to produce pupils who have self-awareness and pupils who will be able to tackle life challenges. I try by all means to make pupils understand and become proud of their identities".

The respondents had different views on whether the teaching-learning process especially of cultural studies promotes equal opportunities among diverse groups of pupils. One group of class teachers felt that the teaching-learning process promotes equal opportunities whilst others were for the contrary. Those who agreed that teaching and learning promoted equal opportunities for all reasoned that the teaching of cultural studies did not discriminate against any culture. One interviewee responded that, "I think that everyone is catered for, it treats us all equal, and pupils are given the same type of education regardless of their location and ethnic groups".

According to Mahajan (2002), multiculturalism is about giving people equal treatment and status as citizens of a country regardless of their differences. Furthermore, Mahajan (2002) argued that exclusion and sameness were all forms of discrimination. In other words, complete uniformity and sameness necessitate assimilation to a particular belief or culture. As such, complete uniformity across the curriculum as illustrated by the respondents may mean that some pupils are assimilated into other cultures. This, therefore, explains the reason why most class teachers ( $n = 5$ ) indicate that they prefer teaching a national culture than different cultures. Their understanding is that, curriculum uniformity means lack of discrimination, hence it provides equal opportunities to all pupils.

On the other hand, those who thought that the curriculum did not promote equal opportunities to all pupils reasoned that there is cultural exclusion which is a major impediment. CTR mentioned:

No, I do not think so because you find that pupils are taught cultures... of dominant groups... we do not go deep into learning other cultures. Some cultures are left out definitely and this breaks the spirit of multiculturalism.

The above statement is in line with the argument by Giroux (1983; as cited in Tse, 2001) that, "The school knowledge is a reflection of the distribution of power and principles of social control" (p. 306). This means that the school teaches according to the social set-up or stratum of the society. A study by Dube and Moffat (2009) complements the above contention by pointing out that teaching and learning of cultural studies in Botswana emphasizes values, norms, beliefs and attitudes of the dominant Tswana cultures. It is against this background that one may argue that such a situation denies the pupils from minority groups equal opportunities towards learning their cultures.

The study also revealed that not all respondents had an understanding of the concept of multicultural education hence the need for a transformative curriculum on culture. In other words, some respondents demonstrated a clear knowledge of multicultural issues, but for some, it was an unfamiliar concept to them. This development may be attributed to various factors. Among others, cultural study teachers were not trained when the subject was introduced in schools. One of the respondents voiced her concern about how lack of training in cultural studies hampers their teaching of the subject. CTR mentioned that, "We just teach all the seven subjects because we do not specialize and we sometimes do not know what to teach pupils".

On the contrary, some respondents demonstrated a clear knowledge on multicultural education and the

need for such a curriculum at a lower primary level. Multicultural education to them is all about teaching different cultures to learners. CTR noted that, "looking at multiculturalism, I understand that it is an area that looks at people who are different from different ethnic groups..." However, from the class teachers' conceptualization of the concept of multicultural education, the indication is that they limit it to ethnic group cultures rather than covering a wide pool of knowledge. For instance, CTR indicated that as a Herero (an ethnic group in the north-west Botswana), they should not teach about Baherero only but cover other cultural groups. This response demonstrates knowledge about multicultural education. Multicultural education is a process that puts more emphasis on learners by ensuring that they all have access to inclusive teaching and learning experiences (Rasool & Curtis, 2004).

### **Promoting Multiculturalism in Cultural Study Curriculum**

The study revealed that the two approaches: learner- and teacher- centered, are used, although the learner-centered is the most preferred. Seven ( $n = 7$ ) class teachers agreed that they used student-centered methods of teaching in class. In addition, four ( $n = 4$ ) disagreed with the statement that teachers preferred the lecture method than student-centered. However, the respondents pointed out that the choice of either of the two methods depended on the nature of the topic and the situation at hand. This situation according to one of the respondents is determined by the teacher's assumptions about the students' previous knowledge which in most cases is not influenced by pre-testing. In this situation, all teaching and learning activities end up with being dictated by the teacher.

In view of the fact that most teachers are not competent in multiple subcultures, they are bound to create cultural borders in the teaching-learning process. Cultural borders in the teaching-learning process refer to a situation where the teacher directs all the teaching activities along his/her culture. In other words, being biased towards the mainstream culture at the expense other diverse cultures in the classroom (Gollnick & Chinn, 2004). The implication here is that some pupils would be denied equal opportunities in learning their cultures. As such, multiculturalism cannot be seen to be promoted in cultural studies. Dube and Moffat (2009) charged that some cultural study teachers felt that the teaching of minority languages was a waste of time and resources. A related scenario was revealed by five ( $n = 5$ ) of the class teachers disagreeing with the statement that standard one to four pupils should be taught in their mother tongues. The teachers may be communicating the same information that it is a waste of resources.

The study also revealed that the reason for preferring a learner-centered approach is mainly to make pupils active participants in the teaching-learning process. Almost all the respondents stated that learner-centered approaches help in addressing the differences in abilities among pupils. One of the respondents went a step further and said that she used the learner-centered approach to avoid creating a cultural boundary in the classroom. Banks and McGee Banks (2005) referred to a cultural boundary as "the presence of some kind of cultural difference" (p. 41). As such, the teacher uses the approach as a way of bridging the cultural differences in cultures among pupils. As a result, the teacher adopts a multicultural approach which opens up equal opportunities for all pupils to share information about their cultures.

Class teachers pointed out that they mainly catered for the differences in abilities in their teaching-learning process, especially the lower and higher achievers. This is performed through the variation of the teaching and learning activities as well as providing remedial for the slow learners. This may imply that differences in ability are the only noticeable differences by the class teachers. The cultural study syllabus stipulates that teachers

should use methods that make learners to actively participate in the learning process. This is aimed at improving performance in all lower primary school in Botswana including pupils with different learning needs and disabilities (Republic of Botswana, 2002). The syllabus is characterized by lower level objectives which need recall type of responses. Ultimately, teachers cater for the differences in abilities as a means to addressing the policy requirements. The implication is that, teachers target making students pass than teaching them for socio-economic and political development and empowerment.

### **The Nature of the Cultural Study Curriculum**

The study revealed that although cultural study curriculum was good, its contents were too advanced for the level of the pupils at lower primary. Most class teacher cited the terminology used as a major barrier in teaching. The good part of the curriculum according to the responses is that, it exposes pupils to various cultures in Botswana. One teacher, for example, said that “the curriculum is good, it is okay, because there are those objectives which promote the characteristics of each tribe like dance, songs and values”. The same sentiments were shared by members of the SMT especially heads of departments who lamented:

Aa! Yes, it is a good program. It does not have anything against any group. It promotes all Batswana except when talking about something found in a particular locality. The objectives are even fair enough to cater for all cultures.

An analysis of the lower primary cultural study syllabus confirmed that indeed the objectives were open enough to embrace all cultures. The only obstacle is the language barrier in the teaching-learning process. Pupils may possess the right information about their cultures but fail to articulate in a language that is not their mother tongues. The implication here is that teachers find it difficult to conduct the teaching-learning process given the language problem.

The language problem is also a contributing factor that made class teachers to view cultural studies as being beyond the scope of pupils understanding at a lower primary. Almost all the respondents pointed out that there were some concepts and topics which were difficult to comprehend, especially that pupils were expected to learn them as they were. One teacher commented:

I think the terminology used is of high level. The terminology is too big because they (pupils) use Setswana at standard one then switch to English in standard two. They then meet big words in standard three which the curriculum requires them to know.

Conversely, one head of department attributed the problem of high terminology to the lack of training in the subject. This is interpreted as meaning that the class teachers are not putting enough efforts in understanding the cultural study materials. Lack of professional training of cultural study teachers becomes a problem, because teachers need to understand and think along the lines of cultural study subject domain. Dube and Moffat (2009) reflected that lack of training hampered the degree to which class teachers may advance the needs and aspirations of cultural studies in Botswana.

The document analysis confirmed some of the complaints voiced by the cultural studies teachers on complex terminology. For instance, pupils are introduced to concepts such as conflict resolution at standard 2 and then cultural equality and diversity at standard 3. This seems abstract for the level of pupils at such grades considering the fact that by then they have not mastered the English language. In addition, teachers fail to understand some of these concepts due to the lack of training, thereby making it difficult for pupils to understand what they teach. The implication here is that the intended purposes of such good concepts are not

achieved, hence denying pupils' vital knowledge on citizenship education.

On a related note, the study revealed that the cultural studies curriculum was playing a significant role in citizenship education. The respondents pointed out that the major role of cultural studies in citizenship education was that of molding pupils into better citizens. One of the responses by a class teacher was: "I think that cultural studies are playing a significant role because at the end of the day, pupils are taught values, morals, beliefs and to be tolerant ...". Similarly, three ( $n = 3$ ) of the five ( $n = 5$ ) respondents agreed with the statement that cultural studies produced critically conscience and diverse minded pupils. Some respondents felt that the curriculum was playing a major role in citizenship education because of the inclusion of particular topics like citizenship education. The thesis, therefore, is that, topics and objectives may address valuable elements about citizenship education, but teachers' pedagogical practices determine the degree to which pupils would comprehend and practically apply the concepts.

In view of the above arguments, the literature points that most schools advance educational policy matters rather than educating for pronounced citizenship engagement on the socio-cultural and political issues. Teachers are guided by the country's policy position on citizenship education and their duty is to dance to that tune. Adeyemi (2008) hinted on the Botswana government policy position on bilingualism by indicating that it disadvantages pupils from minority groups. Dube and Moffat (2009), on the other hand, revealed that the values, norms and beliefs of the minority groups were rarely incorporated in the cultural study curriculum. This implies that, most examples are from the mainstream Tswana culture, because the policy governing nation building is geared towards a homogeneous nation (Adeyemi, 2008; Nyamnjoh, 2006; Ramahobo, 2002; Jeremiah, 2008; Tafa, 2001). Given the above data, a case could be made that the teaching of citizenship education and multiculturalism through the cultural study curriculum at primary schools is facing some mammoth challenges. The use of English language pedagogy which is foreign to the learners makes the whole scenario quite complex.

### Conclusions

The theoretical part of this study explains the reason why the teaching-learning process tends to have some inadequacies in promoting equal opportunities for all pupils. The aim is to try and show that a curriculum that promotes homogeneity in most cases fails short of catering for the needs of all pupils in the teaching-learning process. The democratic theories of multiculturalism argue that social groups provide the context within which our identities are shaped. As such, denying pupils platforms to talk about their cultures in the teaching-learning process is tantamount to an attack on their livelihood as individuals and groups at large. This explains the reason why it is necessary to have an inclusive teaching-learning process that caters for all diversities to enable all pupils to prosper. Jotia (2008) observed that Botswana could build a strong democracy, if it could formulate an education system that values giving children a voice in the teaching-learning process.

The empirical part of the study, on the other hand, wanted to understand the views of the cultural study teachers and members of the SMT in relation to the practicing of multiculturalism in the school. The aim was to find out their practical knowledge and experiences that guide their understanding of citizenship education. In this process, qualitative methodology was utilized coupled with the phenomenological paradigm.

Predictably, the study found out that some cultural study teachers still believed that teacher instructions were the basis of classroom knowledge, and therefore, determined the performance of pupils in a subject. In other words, they are still holding to the objectivistic conservative conceptualization of knowledge. These

beliefs have the potential of making teachers teach the syllabus objectives. As a result, some valuable social skills that promote diversity are never taught. It was also not surprising that the study revealed that some of the respondents were aware of what multicultural issues entail while others had no concrete clues. Additionally, the respondents showed different views regarding whether the teaching-learning process promoted equal opportunities among diverse groups of pupils. Their differences were a reflection on how an individual teacher perceived and understood multicultural and diversity issues in education. Those with limited understanding of multicultural issues fall short of detecting discriminatory areas of the curriculum.

As earlier reflected, the study indicated that not all respondents had an understanding of multicultural education. Lack of professional training in cultural studies was cited as the major contributory factor. However, the respondents' understanding of multicultural education was limited to ethnic group cultures than a broad view of the concept. The roles of the school on multicultural issues were pointed out as being to encourage the teaching of societal values which could consequently promote equality and social justice. The respondents had varied understanding of the importance of multiculturalism in a society.

On a different note, the study revealed that language was the biggest challenge faced by cultural study teachers in dealing with a multicultural group of pupils. The language issue was prominent, because the majority of the pupils become fully involved with Setswana and English as languages of instruction when they begin standard 1. The situation causes a serious problem on concept development. This creates some inequalities in the teaching and learning environment.

Perhaps, the other striking point from the study is that although the cultural studies curriculum is a good program, the terminology used is too advanced for the pupils at a lower level. This is attributed to the fact that pupils are expected to learn concepts, as they appear in the curriculum for academic purposes. Such a situation is a result of the nature of the cultural study curriculum which is results-oriented. On a related note though, the study found that cultural study curriculum is playing a significant role in citizenship education. The curriculum molds pupils into better citizens by imparting values, norms, morals and beliefs that make them to respect and tolerate one another. In addition, the curriculum is characterized by objectives and topics that are inclusive enough to cater for a diverse situation. Therefore, it could be argued that the cultural study curriculum to some degree integrates diversity among various socio-cultural groups of pupils.

However, the pedagogical practices recommended for cultural study teachers in a way militate against the integration and promotion of diversity among the various groups of pupils. In most cases, there is lack of content integration, because most teachers are not competent in various cultures of their pupils hence their bias towards the dominant Tswana culture. As a result, the teaching and learning tend to disadvantage most pupils from the non-Tswana groups. The teaching of multiculturalism and citizenship education should, therefore, focus on students gaining bicultural knowledge about the other. In true multicultural democracy, society cannot afford having some of the citizens remaining locked in their own cultural pockets without making an effort to learn about the other. In the case of Botswana, citizenship is presented from a universalistic standpoint, and to some degree, this angle ignores the fact that society is multicultural and diverse in a number of scores.

### **Recommendations**

On the basis of the findings, the study recommends that:

(1) The Ministry of Education should introduce cultural studies in Colleges of Education and at the University of Botswana so as to train teachers. The training of cultural study curriculum teachers would equip

teachers with knowledge and skills to improve the teaching-learning process. Ignorance and lack of knowledge, therefore, will be very dangerous to a teacher of multiculturalism;

(2) The language in education policy in schools should be revisited to allow the use of mother tongue at lower primary level. This situation would give pupils from minority groups the opportunity to enhance their concept development before transition to English language. Denying students the chance to use their languages can impact the area of linguistic deculturalization;

(3) The cultural study curriculum's objectives should be simplified so as to make its terminology comprehensible. There is need to follow a spiraling kind of curriculum, whereby complex knowledge is added to the rudimentary simplistic content;

(4) Botswana's schools should try to teach students taking into account the climate from which the citizens exist and come from. Therefore, the cultural study curriculum should integrate cultural knowledge known to the learner which will help them grasp complex concepts pertaining to other cultural groups. Incorporating such recommendations would help Botswana's education system produces well-versed diverse minded citizens who could confidently exist in a democratic pluralistic society.

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