

Exploring the Impact of Pedagogical Challenges in Multiculturally History Classrooms in 2022/23: A Teaching and Learning Perspective in Botswana Secondary Schools

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INTRODUCTION

Botswana is a multicultural state and like other culturally diverse nations, it faces challenges of diversity and inclusivity in education. In Botswana, English is the official language and Setswana is a national language and the education system recognizes these two as languages of instruction. This is a challenge as there are other ethnic groups in Botswana whose languages are neither English nor Setswana. In schools, this has proven to be a problem as there are diverse students for whom Setswana is not their mother tongue and they do not grasp concepts easily. Chebanne and Moumakwa (2012) observed that the San remain illiterate and marginalized because of the current state of education in Botswana where the Education Language Policy is monolingual. The San have been left out of the education system since their indigenous language is not incorporated into the national curriculum. This poses a problem for History in that its subject matter deals with indigenous people and it will be difficult for teachers to teach students who feel their ethnic groups are marginalized.

Multicultural education is particularly relevant in today's world which is becoming increasingly diverse ethnically and racially. Such education focuses not only on intergroup relations and respect for cultural diversity but also promotes tolerance, co-existence, empowerment, and social change. Multicultural education has always been linked to critical pedagogy and teaches students the challenges of critically examining knowledge presented to them taking into consideration different perspectives (Salili and Rumjahn, 2001).

Moreover, education perceptions are also shaped by a complex and extended process of socialization, which takes place as a result of the kind of teacher education received, teaching experience, and actual classroom practice as well as educators' individual responses to the former (Mier, and Haartell, 2009). Teachers have to deal with the evolution of history as well as diverse students. The challenges accompanying present changes, however, have more immediate resonance with teachers of history. Teachers are faced with more students than before, some students with increasingly diverse backgrounds, abilities and interests which pose new challenges for the teaching of history in almost all institutions (Booth and Hyland, 1996). However, culturally diverse classes is becoming phenomenon, it should not be taken as a challenge but should rather be taken as an opportunity for teachers to display multicultural competence.

This study takes cognizance of the view that African history teachers construct historical and pedagogical meaning for themselves and their students in a culturally diverse classroom. It acknowledges that history teaching is complex as teachers need to find ways of connecting with all students but still retain the integrity of the subject. This study tracks some of the national and local policy initiatives related to cultural diversity

in education. It notes some of the significant curriculum reforms in Botswana in order to examine the provision of education that is inclusive and takes into account the perspectives of many groups. Such an initiative contributes positively to breaking the barriers of exclusive education and nurtures a socio-cultural discourse of inclusive education within Botswana's diverse society.

Slater (1995) in a historical perspective suggests that history curricula must include local, national, European, and global perspectives in a sensible balance. Minorities should have the right to study their history but not the exclusion of broader perspectives. It is recognized that the balance of local, national, and global history might differ according to the ages and abilities of students. Due recognition should be given in the syllabuses of political, economic, social, and cultural history. There should not be a predominance of political history as it is not the only issue that history education should address. Gender and minority issues must be carefully borne in mind. Therefore, based on the above argument, this study is pertinent in its attempt to appreciate issues of diversity in the history classroom and possibly come up with modalities pertinent to closing the gaps of inequality in the teaching-learning process to avert a situation where some cultural groups might end up being disadvantaged.

Statement of the Problem

Teachers of history are faced with many challenges in teaching culturally diverse classrooms. Sensitive historical issues are some of the problems that History teachers face in Botswana. For example, marginalised groups are usually presented as villains or subordinates in textbooks as opposed to the principal Tswana speaking groups which to some extent legitimize the rule of Tswana groups over the marginalized (Mafela, 2010). Goldberg and Savenije (2018) argue that teaching about sensitive issues in history cannot be isolated from the cultural and socio-political context even though it poses different challenges to teachers in different societal contexts. Mafela (2010) further exemplified that there is a continued status quo in Botswana history textbooks where there is an apparent absence of minority groups except on topics that reflected conflicts between principal Tswana groups and ethnic minorities at the socio-cultural and political levels.

The country is heterogenous and yet its education system has a monolithic curriculum that only recognizes mainly Tswana speaking groups and this has not only affected performance from marginalised groups but has also led to students from marginalised groups dropping out from schools (Pansiri, 2011 and Chebanne 2010). Mafela (2008) asserts that the issue of the monolithic curriculum is embedded in history as the social tension between minority groups and Tswana speaking groups has led to dissatisfaction with the total neglect of their histories, cultures, and traditions which are reflected in the History syllabus. Mulimbi (2017) noted that, there is 'continuing dominance of majority Tswana language and culture in the content of public schools' policies and curriculum in Botswana, which are then implemented with fidelity by teachers and administrators, regardless of the cultural composition and perceived needs of their student bodies'. This study therefore attempts to explore the perceptions of teachers and students in multicultural history classrooms.

REVIEW OF RELATED RESEARCH LITERATURE

Studies have been conducted to find out why students have developed certain attitudes and perspectives toward the subject of History. Dilg (2003) in a study examined the impact of multiple histories that accompany students and teachers into the classroom. Moreover, he looked at how history influences what they know, what they learn, and how they react to it. The perceived negative side of history can derail the class as the students will concentrate on the negativity rather than on the bigger picture of why they are learning the subject. According to Molosiwa (2009), educational policies are drawn to support equity in education but the problem is implementation. From another angle, Jotia and Boikhutso (2013) observe that

the generalization of the policy on language is a major problem in education in Botswana as it doesn't look at other issues such as social identity which plays a major role in the education of students in a diverse learning environment. The language for all policy which does not cater to minority language continues to marginalize other groups in Botswana and this leads to low performance of students from minority groups.

Talin (2014) found that some history teachers used old traditional ways of teaching and thus making students feel that history is a boring and difficult subject. He noted that even though teachers use student-centered methods, they do not consider or meet the student's preparedness as teachers are also concerned about teaching for the examination. Harcourt (2015) argues that teachers need to actively confront controversy in history as this will help them to be responsive to address issues that have been avoided or deemed controversial. He mentions that teachers need to theorize issues without disadvantaging vulnerable students but practice more deeply and enact a culturally responsive curriculum in a unique way to the subject. It is against this background that the current study explores perceptions of the inclusion of multiculturalism in the history curriculum.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The purpose of this study is to understand the pedagogical challenges faced by history teachers in a culturally diverse classroom in secondary schools in Botswana. The study will use the qualitative research method and adopts a phenomenological approach as it deals with real life experience situation. This approach is suitable for this study as participants' perceptions, attitudes and beliefs will be presented as they are described by participants.

Population and Sample

This study aims to describe authentic the experience of history teachers and students experiencing a phenomenon through their perceptions (Creswell, 2013). The purposeful selection of participants will be based on teachers who have been in practice for some time. At least 36 (N=36) teachers' history teachers (N=3 in each school) from different senior secondary schools in different regions in Botswana will be selected for interviews. The teachers chosen must be someone who has served for two or more years in the profession with sound experience of the pedagogical approaches they used in multicultural classrooms.

Instruments

For triangulation, the study will adopt instruments such as Observation, Document analysis and, Interviews. Interviews will be used to explore the perceptions of teachers and students on the existence of History in the school curriculum in Botswana while document analysis will be used to peruse documents such as History syllabus and history curriculum. Observation will be used to look at the pedagogical methods used by History teachers in multicultural classrooms. The use of multiple tools reduces errors usually linked to a method. Triangulation limits the shortcomings of using one data collection methods by using other methods to increase the truthfulness of the findings of the study (Cresswell, 2013).

Collection of Data

Data from interviews and questionnaires was transcribed with the research problem. Once the interviews were done, the recordings were transcribed using the research questions as an interpretative tool and further, the open coding was used to examine the questionnaires filled by teachers. Data analysis was done simultaneously with data collection, this was done to shape the directions of the study. This strategy helped in filling the gaps of what is not clear and not found (Hatch, 2002). It also improved the quality of the

research and allowed believable and trustworthy findings.

FINDINGS

Interesting issues emerged from the data collected from History teachers in diverse History classrooms. Relevance of the subject, general perception of the subject, and complexity of history are the main issues that were raised by teachers during data collection.

Relevance of the subject

Participants' responses revealed that History teachers and students hold a certain perception about the study of history. The findings suggest that teacher participants understood that students had a wrong perception of History, as premised on the student's attitude towards the subject. This caused pedagogical challenges as teachers had to deal with the students' mind-set before they could focus on the historical content. According to participants, the students were dismissive of the subject. Teacher 1 from School C noted that:

The students think that history is a waste of time and hence should be dealt away with since it talks about man and past events which have no relevance to the current needs of society (T1, School C)[1].

Furthermore, the students question the subject's relevancy in the 21st century. This suggestion seemed to be anchored on the belief that the subject doesn't serve their interest as it does not offer anything on their career wise. Teacher 2 of School D asserted that:

Learners who don't take History as a subject believe it is irrelevant to the 21st-century learner and therefore a waste of time. The attitude is very dismissive and underrating. There is a general belief that History is boring (T2, School D).

History teachers revealed that students want to be taught more about local than Western history. The Botswana History syllabus for secondary education is divided in two segments, being African History and European History. Though the syllabus has an African History segment, topics on different ethnic groups in Botswana are conspicuously absent in the syllabus. According to participants, lack of local history in the syllabus has made students not see the relevance of History. Teacher 2, School F asserted that;

Learners do not see a future in History. Our curriculum doesn't speak our various local histories. It is as if we do not own our history to learn and celebrate-cements inferiority complex perpetuated by colonialism (T2, School F).

Moreover, participants have expressed that it is difficult to teach history since the students dismiss it as a dying subject. This is a pedagogical challenge as, despite efforts presented by teachers, students are just not interested in learning History. The students have developed a negative attitude towards the subject and they are reluctant to pursue it as they believe it is not relevant to the modern world. Teacher 1, School F reflected on his experience in the classroom by echoing the following sentiments:

Most of the students in my classroom believe that History is not relevant in today's world hence a negative attitude towards the subjects. This makes it difficult to teach students who doubt the subject and view it as a dying field of study (T1, School F).

General Perception of the subject

Students have negative attitude towards the subject as they do not like reading. Teachers usually share handouts with the students and expect students to read them without explaining. This traditional pedagogy

has given the subject a bad image hence students having a wrong perception about the subjects. Teachers though have defended their stance by elaborating that it does not matter which pedagogy is applied, the students are not interested in learning History. Another participant explained that the perception of History is based on bias and people do not have full details on the importance of History in the curriculum and the classroom. Teacher 3 from School F noted that;

There is bias in the History syllabus and teachers find themselves at the centre of this bias as they have to follow the syllabus as it is. Students and the society don't understand conundrum(T3, School F).

Furthermore, History teachers revealed that this kind of negativity against History caused a lot of challenges in teaching it, especially in multicultural societies. For example shortage of culturally responsive teaching material and insufficient contents in the teaching materials relevant for certain cultures. Some History teachers felt that because of how students perceive History, the subject needs to be revamped to meet the needs of the students. Participating teachers provided varying responses as they questioned certain topics in the History syllabus. They expressed that some topics are outdated and that the syllabus should review the topics scrapped as the topics are no longer relevant. Teacher 2 from School E explained that;

As a teacher, I feel some materials in the curriculum are outdated/not relevant and have to be struck out e.g. Origins of Humankind. Certain topics don't offer much in terms of explaining current events. They are just rigid and don't offer much to the students of history. (T2, School E).

Complexity of History

Participating teachers revealed that student view history as a complex subject and this has led to them not performing well in the subject. One participant mentioned that some students have developed a negative attitude towards the subjects. This mentality has led to pedagogical challenges as students have blocked their minds and don't want to do anything. This was evident in the following extract by Teacher 1 from School E;

Learners have a negative attitude towards the subject, they believe it is demanding and difficult. There is a lot of reading and writing essays in the examination (T1, School E).

Furthermore, the finding revealed that students find History to be demanding especially when it comes to assessments as it requires the students to read extensively and then write essays in the final examinations. However, according to another participating teacher, it is not only students who feel that the subject is complex, some teachers feel that the subject is intricate. This has made them use pedagogies that support learning and simplify certain concepts for the students. T2 from School F pointed out:

Teachers and learners of history think that History is complex and difficult to grasp. This notion emanates from the fact that History itself requires scholastic rigour (T2, School F).

Participating teachers believed that ethnicity can destroy social relations in class. Hence the need to merge students of different backgrounds together when doing group work in the history classroom. Teachers' views seemed to be anchored by building social relations in the classroom to achieve unity and promote inclusivity. The views from participating teachers revealed some differences to what scholars have written about the challenges facing History teachers but these challenges are not peculiar to Botswana secondary schools. Sources have acknowledged that indeed pedagogical challenges exist in History classrooms. They might not be similar to what is happening in Botswana but teachers around the world experience pedagogical challenges in the History classrooms. Prell (2012) asserts that multiple perspectives and diverse cultures in multicultural History classes cause pedagogical challenges since teachers have to find common ground before they can settle for a method to use. Furthermore, the participants shared their sentiments on

how different beliefs of students can be challenging as learners bring their customs and beliefs into the class which hinders them from grasping the taught concepts. Santoro (2009) explains that the lack of knowledge of students' cultural values, practices, and traditions by teachers shapes how learners perceive the study of History, which leads to negative attitudes towards the subject.

Overall, the finding suggests that teachers as the drivers of historical knowledge must have the requisite skills and scholarly acumen to face perceptions and challenges that are eminent in History classes. The findings also revealed that students viewed historical concepts as difficult to grasp. This is because the students viewed History as a concept.

DISCUSSION

Interestingly data revealed that students are dismissive of the History subject in the curriculum and this poses a pedagogical challenge as teachers have to deal with students' mind-sets before they can focus on the content of the subject. The findings indicate that the student found the subject irrelevant and showed no interest in learning it. Martell (2014) concurs and reported in his study that students who do not value history are usually passive in history lessons. This barrier affects the teaching and learning of history and leads to waning students' interests (Berg, 2019).

Okumus (2021) states that historical education gain meaning because it explains some morals in historical studies and evaluates historical events as well as learning virtues and value system when students learn about the past. Likewise in a study by Yilmaz (2008) on *A Vision of History Teaching and Learning: Thoughts on History Education in Secondary Schools*, it was reported that history aims to enhance social understanding and to show the importance of civic lives. Contrary to the above sentiments, this study observed that students find history irrelevant in today's world as it does not provide skills and knowledge that one can use both academically and socially. Students have a negative attitude towards the subject as they feel it has no place in the modern world and that it is not relevant. Chiodo and Byford (2004) posit that the role of history as a subject is to orientate students towards the values and beliefs of all cultures to understand the world and enable students to participate in it. Within the same scope of logic, Grange (2016), notes that historical studies involve studying past events to recover the history, culture and language of the colonised people and applying this understanding to influence and inform the present. Teachers, policymakers and other educational stakeholders must work towards decolonising the History curriculum and making it relevant to students in Botswana societies.

The study findings indicate that students find History to be irrelevant and monotonous. From the interviews, it became apparent that students have developed an attitude towards the subject as it does not fit in their career aspirations and has no relevance to the current needs of society. Similarly, the findings of this relate very well with those of a study by Nyamwembe et al. (2013) who reported that students have a negative attitude towards history and that they did not value the subject as it did not relate to the present or the future. To the contrary, in a study; *Students' Attitude towards Studying History and Teaching Practice*, Kriti (2021) argues that it is upon teachers to bridge the gap and break the stereotypes that history is an irrelevant and useless subject. Also, teachers should help students understand the complexities of people's lives, diversity and relationships between groups for students to appreciate the subject. It can be argued that the negative perspective towards the subject in some areas is due to teachers' failures in making the subject more interesting to students. In a sense, a case is made here that the history teachers are not innovative enough to make the subject more appealing to students from diverse backgrounds.

Moreover, the students prefer to be taught more about local history than European history. The Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education (BGCSE) History curriculum is divided into segments, African history and European history. The students pointed out that the subject lacks relevance since local History

is limited in curriculum. Rudolf et.al (2018) shared in their study almost similar findings to the effect that the English history curricula is predominantly white and excludes minority groups, hence students stereotype history to be a white man's story. Similarly, Guyver (2013) noted that in New Zealand and Australia, there have been debates in balancing the history of the colonisers and that of indigenous people and the injustice they suffered at the hands of the colonisers. Another perspective is discussed by Weiner (2018) who asserts that in the Dutch educational system, the curriculum and learning material marginalize minority learners resulting in the content and pedagogical practices that do not support alternative ways of learning. This has led to the culture and histories of minority groups being added to the regular curriculum as a mere side note and mentioning of this social bias is kept to a minimum, thereby perpetuating the acceptance of the inequalities normal.

CONCLUSION

The study has shed some light on how students perceive the study of History, the students find History irrelevant to the discourse as it does not go well with their career aspirations. Students have pointed out that History does not offer much in terms of what they want to study at the tertiary level. Moreover, the lack of indigenous History in the curriculum has made the students find the subject irrelevant as it does not teach them their history. The issues have made students question the relevance of History in the curriculum and this perception has made it hard for teachers to apply themselves in classrooms. Nevertheless, the study offered important into the pedagogical practices that History teachers could use to mitigate challenges in History classrooms.

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FOOTNOTE

[1] T1, T2etc. are used to differentiate opinions from teachersat the same school while School A, School B etc. are used to differentiate schools