



CITIZENSHIP EDUCATION IN ZIMBABWE: CHALLENGES AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

Efforts to introduce citizenship education in the curricula of educational institutions such as primary and secondary schools, vocational and tertiary colleges in Zimbabwe have been on-going since 1980. However, the introduction of the subject has been challenge ridden. This qualitative study examines the challenges that have emerged from teaching citizenship education through the secondary school History curriculum in the country. Twenty three History teachers (9 females and 14 males) participated in the study. The findings suggest that the challenges associated with citizenship education in the country emanate from the context in which it is being taught and the influence that this bears on the rationale for, and content of the citizenship education curriculum. As a result the subject is viewed with suspicion and as a bid to indoctrinate the youth. The paper concludes that if the prospects of the subject are to be improved, there is need to depoliticize it and involve varied stakeholders to work the modalities of its implementation.

Key Words: Citizenship education, youth, patriotism , context.

INTRODUCTION

Citizenship education is a topical issue worldwide and many countries have made initiatives to introduce it on the school curricula (Sears & Hughes, 2006). Sears and Hughes view the heightened interest in citizenship education as a result of “a context of perceived disaffection, alienation and lack of social cohesion in democratic societies”. In this regard then, citizenship education should bring about a sense of oneness.

Attempts to introduce citizenship education on the school curriculum in Zimbabwe have been on-going since independence. In 1980, the country emerged from 90 years of colonial rule, an era whose repressive, exploitative and discriminative tendencies had relegated the blacks, who comprised the majority of the population, to a position of second class citizens. Consistent with this, civic education had been provided to white children while black children were instead taught the history of the colonial master. This was a ploy to ensure that the blacks would remain politically illiterate and not claim/demand their rights. One of the mandates of the new government therefore, was to redefine citizenship education and how it could be implemented in all schools. But this has not been an easy task and has been hounded by controversy.

Since independence therefore, there have been several attempts to introduce citizenship education into mainstream education. The discourse has appeared in the curriculum in various guises. At primary school level, citizenship education issues were integrated mainly in Social Studies, a subject whose major goal is to impart citizenship education (**source**). At secondary school level the issues were integrated into such subjects as History and Education with Production. New syllabuses which focused more on the History of Zimbabwe and Africa rather than that of Europe and other distant places had been introduced at independence. Prior to this, the history that was taught in African schools portrayed Europeans as invincible while Africans came through as having no history of their own. This move, according to Moyana (an official in the Ministry of Education), was in recognition of the role that History plays ‘in domesticating a people more than any of the traditional disciplines’ (Moyana, 1984). Education with Production, a concept consistent with socialist principles, was also incorporated into the secondary school curriculum at the time (Chung & Ngara, 1985). The subject was meant to produce an all-round student who could link theory with practice and would some virtue in manual work. Attempts were also made to initiate Political Economy but without success. What should be emphasized here is that these initiatives seem to have been driven by political concerns.



The citizenship education initiatives in the country seem to have consistently been a response to what Arcodia (2000) calls 'philosophical frameworks and emerging political and economic circumstances' or 'a litany of alarm' (Sears & Hughes, 2006). At independence, the new government needed to introduce reforms that would reflect the aspirations of the new political dispensation. One such reform was the adoption of the Socialist ideology which was perceived to be a solution to the repression, exploitation, inequalities and other ills created by colonialism. In addition, there was a lack of social and political cohesion as illustrated by the problem of dissidents which started in Matebeleland in 1982 and which tended to be regarded as an ethnic issue rather than a legitimate political issue. In the late 1990s, the country began to experience political and economic problems, with the latter being attributed to the compensation of the war veterans in 1987. The people's frustrations and impatience with the government manifested themselves through attempts to form opposition parties, thus challenging the one party state arrangement which had been part of the political reforms of the 1980s. These crises precipitated the citizenship education initiatives directed at socializing the young people into ideal citizens.

The context for this study is the Nziramasanga Presidential Commission on Education and Training Report (1999). The Nziramasanga Presidential Commission on Education and Training was appointed by the President of Zimbabwe to "inquire into and report upon the fundamental changes to the current curriculum at all levels so that education becomes a useful tool for character and citizenship formation"(Presidential Report, 1999:349). The Report, among other things, recommended that citizenship education be introduced as an independent subject on the school curriculum in Zimbabwean schools to address the problems that were in the country's schools and society which it depicted as follows:

Vandalism, violence and indiscipline in our schools and society are a result of lack of values, relevant ethics, morals, individual and collective responsibilities for protecting property and valuing human life. This reflective of that *unhu/ubuntu*¹ is currently lacking in society and the formal education process (Presidential Report, 1999:349).

The Presidential Report (1999:354) further noted:

There is a very serious and eminent danger of producing a disenchanting generation who are not loyal to our own nation but who favour foreign influences. The need for national identity, image and patriotism is greater now than ever. Without being xenophobic we need to encourage national pride and self confidence in our people.

The rationale for the introduction of citizenship education therefore was that the youth had lost anchorage in who they were and there was need to instil in them a sense of identity and belonging. Indeed around the time the Commission was appointed there had been an upsurge in violence and destructive behaviour amongst the youth especially in institutions of higher learning in the country (The Herald: 22 January; 29 and 30 September 1997; 25, 27 and 30 October 2001). These disturbances occurred against the backdrop of the economic and political problems in the country, with the latter being associated with the emergence of a new opposition political party in the country. As noted above, however, the Report viewed the unrest among the youth as an indication of a crisis in citizenship and a disconnection with values. Citizenship education was therefore, regarded as a panacea to this disconnect, a way of influencing young people's civic attitudes and a tool for protecting the country's democracy.

The Report noted that citizenship education initiatives in the curriculum at the time were inadequate. With reference to the status of History on the school curriculum, the Report observed: "...one subject in which citizenship issues are covered at secondary school level is not compulsory.....real Citizenship Education is marginalised and to a larger extent it is never taught (Presidential Commission, 1999:50). In response to this observation, in 1999, the study of History was made compulsory up to 'O' level and it became one core of the subjects on the secondary school curriculum together with such subjects as English, Mathematics, Science and ChiShona or Isindebele². A feature of the new History syllabi for the various secondary school levels (forms one to six) that came into force in 2003 are the Human Rights and Democracy topics which, according to Osler and Starkey, are widely recognised as being core to citizenship education. These were meant to complement traditional topics with inherent citizenship education concepts such as the French Revolution and Dictatorships

in Europe. Making History compulsory was perhaps in recognition of the role that the subject plays in education for citizenship. The move was meant to ensure that all students would encounter citizenship education in their curriculum experience.

The period after the Nziramasanga Presidential Commission Report (1999) saw a number of developments in the area of citizenship education in the country. Besides integration of citizenship issues into the History syllabus, there were attempts to introduce Human Rights education as a stand-alone subject but these failed. In the primary school, the HIV/AIDS and Life Skills Education Primary School Syllabus was introduced in 2003. Although the syllabus has heavy dosages of HIV/AIDS education, it includes aspects of citizenship education such as values and beliefs, participation in community programmes and conflict resolution. It should be noted that citizenship education initiatives in the primary schools has not generated much debate, perhaps because they do not focus on blatant issues.

In tertiary institutions, a new compulsory subject, National and Strategic Studies, whose focus would be citizenship education, was introduced in 2004. The country also witnessed the introduction of the National Youth Service whose goal was also citizenship education. These initiatives have generally been viewed as an attempt to indoctrinate the youth (Nyakudya, 2007; Mashingaidze, 2007 & Ranger, 2004). But Maravanyika (2011), Apple (1990) and Jansen (1991) counter argue that there is no education that is apolitical and that all education is designed to achieve certain political and economic ends.

The goals of the citizenship education curriculum would be: 'to enable children to grow into good citizens who conform to certain accepted practice; train them to hold beliefs; to ensure the reception and acceptance of our values, ethics and civic processes by all our youth; and to enlighten our children of their civic rights, obligations and responsibilities' (Presidential Commission, 1999:353). The suggested curriculum would focus on such aspects as Our Heritage, Legal Education (learners learning about human rights, responsibilities and obligations); National Identity: a study of our culture...a close study of our democracy (252).

This paper examines experiences History teachers with citizenship education in Zimbabwe in relation to the History curriculum that came into force in 2003. The objectives of the study were to:

- examine the experiences of History teachers in the teaching of citizenship education issues
- assess the challenges emerging from these experiences
- evaluate the prospects for institutionalisation of citizenship education.

The History curriculum remains central in the delivery of citizenship education because the recommendation made by the Presidential Commission to have the discourse as a stand-alone in the country's school curriculum has not yet been implemented.

Defining Citizenship and citizenship education

Citizenship is a complex and contested concepts. Consequently its interpretations are broad and its definitions are varied ((Osler & Starkey, 2006; Sears & Hughes, 2006; Davies, 2001Kerr, 1999). Traditionally, citizenship as conceptualised by T.H. Marshall comprised of three elements namely civil, political and social (Beck, 1996). Contemporary notions of citizenship are influenced by social, political and economic, environmental issues and so perceptions about it have remained muddled and its meaning is a subject of constant debate. However, Barbalet (1988) simply defines citizenship as 'those who are and those who are not, members of a common society'. This definition has its own problems as it does not account for other types of citizenship, but it will suffice for this study.

Citizenship education which is sometimes referred to as education for democracy, or civic education (Nieuwehuis, 2007) also tends to provoke debate and controversy. Consequently, its value and contribution to people's has at times been questioned (Kisby & Sloam, 2009). In this paper, citizenship education is viewed as the preparation of young people for their roles and responsibilities and for the challenges and uncertainty of life through provision of relevant education (Kerr, 1999). The main goals of citizenship education are to provide political socialisation and to equip young people with knowledge, skills and values to participate effectively in



democratic a society (Kisby & Sloam, 2009). Along the same lines, Davies (2001) views the functions of citizenship education as socialisation into norms and citizen duties and promotion of autonomy and critical thinking. He however, argues that these functions are contradictory as socialisation implies fostering of compliance and obedience and it is difficult to reconcile this with critical thing. In my view such dichotomies may manifest in the implementation of some citizenship education programmes.

METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study investigated the challenges and prospects of citizenship education in Zimbabwe based on the experiences of twenty three practising History secondary school teachers who part-time students at Great Zimbabwe University. Of these participants, nineteen are on a three year undergraduate Bachelor of Education (Bed) In-Service programme and four are on a one and half years post Graduate Diploma in Education (Grad.DE) programme. The ages of the participants ranged from 26 to 44 years. Their experiences as teachers of History ranged from five to 23 years. Four of the participants were teaching History at Advanced ('A') level while the rest were teaching it up to 'O' level. The participants were from six of the country's ten provinces as well as from different school settings as follows:

- urban schools- 5
- church/mission schools -3
- rural schools-17
- peri-urban-6)

This diversity enabled the study to learn about citizenship education experiences from the different settings and the emerging challenges and provided for triangulation of data.

Sampling was purposive and sought out participants who had experienced citizenship education as implementers of the curriculum. Data was gathered through intensive semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions. The interviews were meant to collect data regarding the experiences of teachers with the delivery of citizenship education. The focus discussions were used to further pursue issues that had emerged during interview with individual participants as well as to triangulate the interview data. The transcribe interview data was made available to ten participants for checking.

RESULTS

Findings of this study suggest that teachers from different contexts and situations identify similar issues pertaining to their experiences in delivering citizenship education through the History curriculum and this reflects a commonality of experiences. They stated the overall aims of History and citizenship education as to foster patriotism and national consciousness.

Participants identified the following as problematic areas in the secondary school History syllabi: Human Rights, Democracy, and Dictatorships in Europe, post-independence developments in Zimbabwe and the Zimbabwe Constitution and the French Revolution. These are core topics in the delivery of citizenship education through the History curriculum and problems with their teaching would in a way indicate the challenges of the discourse in Zimbabwe.

The message that came through from the participants' responses is that the said topics are sensitive. Three main trends emerged in relation to the teaching of the topics.

Students' reception of citizenship education issues

Three issues emerged in relation to students' reception of citizenship education issues. Firstly, participants reported that after studying topics whose content is overtly citizenship education students would apply the lessons from topics. Two examples which illustrated students' application of knowledge were given. In the first instance, after studying the Human Rights topic, some students refused to clean toilets and to do manual work around the school because there were some people employed for the job. The History teacher was then accused of inciting the students to revolt against the school authorities. Another participant cited an incident

whereby the headmaster tried to exclude some students from classes for non-payment of school fees, again after the affected students had been exposed to the Human Rights topic. The students pointed out to the school head that they have a right to education. The school head in turn asked the History teacher- *Do you now work for a Non-Governmental Organisation (NGO)?* (NGOs have been at the forefront of providing civic education to communities and this has not been taken kindly in certain quarters).

Secondly, indications are some of students have become civic and politically literate and can relate what is being taught in classes for citizenship to occurrences they encounter in their day to day interactions. The participants explained that they could be more politically literate than assumed as a result of everyday experiences where, in some instances, they have witnessed political violence in their communities. They cited the following as questions asked which had put them as teachers in awkward positions:

- *Which political party does the teacher subscribe to?*
- *Which political parties did the Unity Accord of 1987 unite? (the idea being to emphasize the exclusion of other significant parties from the Accord)*
- *Why was so and so not accorded national hero status? (A question raised when the wife of the founder passed away and was not declared a hero and yet spouses of other leaders have buried at the national shrine)*
- *Was Chenjerai Hunzvi (the late war veterans' leader) involved in the liberation war? Why is he not featured in History books?*
- *Who initiated the land reform programme- the opposition or the ruling party?*

According to the participants, students ask the above questions, not because they are ignorant of the issues but as a way of signifying the gaps in the content of the citizenship curriculum currently on offer in secondary schools. Such a development as argued by Kisby and Sloam (2009:1) is quite acceptable as "young people must be allowed to fully experience politics, deliberate upon experiences, and reconstruct citizenship in their own image" if the goals of citizenship education are to be realised.

Thirdly, it emerged from focus discussions that some students are affiliated to political parties and try to use classrooms to advance political ideas. Anecdotal evidence from teachers revealed that outside the school grounds some the students were youth leaders in political parties and in these positions the students yielded power even over their teachers.

Fear of victimisation

Participants revealed that they were afraid to teach citizenship related topics because of fear of victimisation by the school administration and the community and *being labelled as bad apples and unpatriotic*. They claimed that History teachers are often accused of *teaching politics*. One respondent said that *whenever there is victimisation of teachers in the community, teachers of History bear the brunt*. Another participant related an incident where a young newly qualified teacher taught the Human Rights and Democracy topics. There was uproar in the community about it resulting in his transfer from the school. After the incident, education officials visited the school and teachers were advised that they should know the limits to which they teach certain topics.

Other experiences which were recounted by the participants and that instilled fear in them about handling certain topics include:

- teachers, in informal discussions with school administrators, being discouraged from teaching the citizenship education topics to avoid upsetting the situation.
- at a district subject panel meeting, an official advised teachers to avoid teaching of Human Rights and Democracy and an 'A' level topic- Zimbabwe under black majority rule, especially the period after 1999 when a strong opposition political party emerged. They were also advised to leave students to make their own analysis of issues and other controversial issues. Justification- to avoid harassment.
- a member of parliament sitting in a history where the lesson topic was Hitler's Germany. After the lesson complained to the school head that focus should be on local history and not histories of foreign countries.



The participants were of the view that students reported whatever was discussed and taught during citizenship education related to the community and this would lead to their victimisation.

Tension between citizenship education and issues of the day

Several issues which indicate a tension between citizenship education and issues of the day emerged from the findings. Participants revealed that in teaching citizenship education related topics teachers are misinterpreted and misconstrued to be attacking politicians or the school administration. In the words of one participant, *Examples used by the teacher may be perceived as an attack on individuals. Teachers may therefore have problems in explaining and giving examples to certain concepts and aspects of citizenship education related topics.* The participant went on to relate how he was cautioned by the school head after teaching about Mussolini as a case study of a dictatorship. Another participant observed that *democracy is difficult to define, politicians, parents and pupils may have their own definitions.* When the teacher's definition, which may be more authoritative, is at variance with those other definitions, problems arise and teachers have sometimes been accused of being affiliated to the opposition.

Participants indicated that they had problems with responding to students' questions in the light of the prevailing political environment in which one could not be sure about how the information they disseminated would be construed.

A recurring message was that *teachers play it safe in teaching sensitive topics* and some that participants were left with no choice but to avoid teaching the offensive topics and concentrate on other areas of the syllabi which are not controversial. In addition, the respondents were of the opinion open discussion of citizenship education issues is not yet part of the local culture. They suggested that citizenship education should be introduced in earnest at primary school levels so as to nurture a civic the culture.

Other observations made by the participants were that generally, teachers were not empowered to deliver citizenship education as they lacked the requisite content knowledge and pedagogic skills for the discourse. They also bemoaned the shortage of relevant resources and text books. Lastly, the participants observed that although History is compulsory and schools generally ensure that all 'O' level students register to sit History examinations, not all student attend classes. Such students miss out on opportunities for education for citizenship.

DISCUSSION

The research data shows that there are several challenges associated with citizenship education in Zimbabwe. Findings reveal that teachers are constrained in implementing the citizenship education curriculum. The constraints arise partly from a lack of grounding in Human rights and democracy issues. But more importantly, they arise from a fear of victimisation which is a product of their experiences and the observed experiences of others with the citizenship discourse. Nieuwehuis (2007) contends that citizenship education should focus on the political and social issues of the day. But the problem, according to Torney-Purta & Lopez (2006), is that teachers are frequently uncertain of the boundaries around engaging students because of the political nature of the subject. Furthermore, the insistent message from school heads and education officials to approach citizenship education with caution is indicative of a need for even teacher to conform. This need to conform is implied by the Presidential Report's (1999) definition of citizenship education as that which 'enables children to grow into good citizens who conform to certain accepted practices; trains them to hold beliefs'. However, this stifles the element of rational disputation which should be the hallmark of citizenship education classes. The remonstrations from officials also send mixed messages to teachers about place of the discourse on the curriculum and hamper its effective implementation.

The Crick Report cited by Osler and Starkey (2006) identify three dimensions of citizenship education namely political literacy, social and moral responsibility and community involvement. However, current citizenship education initiatives in Zimbabwe tend to focus more on political literacy and neglect the other two dimensions, implying that they are not holistic in their approach. This is problematic in that the level of one's political literacy is not necessarily an indication of one's level of civic participation and responsibility though



participation and knowledge should be interrelated (Arcodia, 2000). In addition, the kind of political literacy that is encouraged is skewed. There seems to be a specific version of political literacy that is prescribed and those who see beyond this version are considered to be deviant. This could be because as Nieuwehuis (2007:34) puts it "most politicians realise the potential of education to mould a generation, hence cannot allow education systems to ignore their role in educating children for citizenship". However, such a stance suggests a conceptualisation of citizenship education as a tool for social control whose intention is to foster conformity and to moderate delinquency and moral decadence (Davies, 2001).

The questions asked by the students in the study suggest a number of things. First, they indicate that there are gaps and a lack of balance in the content of the citizenship education that is being taught in schools. This has resulted in the exclusion of issues of historical significance (which would promote a holistic development of national consciousness) and a narrow focus on what Ranger (2005) describes as 'patriotic history'. Such a kind of history tends to marginalise certain sections of society who may have contributed to creating the Zimbabwe heritage, for example, ethnic groups, other political parties and personalities (Matereke, 2011). A focus on patriotic history can be detrimental as according to Arcodia (2000) "failure to recognize and understand...diversity leads to severe difficulties in identifying and sharing common values and consequently, a weaker civic culture".

The students' questions also suggest that the Presidential Report (1999) underestimates their levels of political literacy. Again, the questions could be an indication of the students' desire to participate in national debates; after all it's their future that the debates are about. The minimal approach that the Presidential Commission seems to prescribe may therefore be irrelevant for the situation. Kerr (1999) argues that such an approach is characterised by narrow definition of citizenship, promotion of particular and elitist interests and minimal interpretations which result in narrow and formal approaches to the discourse which concentrate on transmission to students of knowledge about the country's History, etc and there is little room for student interaction and initiative.

While History is now compulsory and all students sitting for 'O' level examinations are expected to write it, their participation in the subject tends to be a formality and not guaranteed. Because this comes at a time when a recommendation of the Presidential Commission that citizenship education be introduced as a stand-alone subject in schools has not yet come to fruition, further reduces the impact of the education for citizen initiatives in the country.

Findings reveal that students are generally interested in the citizenship discourse and displayed a high level of civic literacy. This should spell favourable prospects for citizenship education in the country especially in the light of Kirby and Sloam's (2009) assertion that students with the high civic knowledge tend to be amenable to participatory civic activities. However, the prospects are determined by the environment within which the discourse is implemented.

CONCLUSION

What emerges from the preceding discussion is that currently, citizenship education efforts in the country through the secondary school curriculum are characterised by dichotomies and what Sears and Hughes (2006) describe as a tension between education and indoctrination in both discourse and practice. The need to educate the youth to be informed and responsible is recognized. But there is a narrow conception of citizenship. The prevailing socio-political environment in the country does not allow for the proper implementation of the citizenship education curriculum. The need to educate the youth for citizenship has been overshadowed by another need to manipulate them to address political agendas. What passes for citizenship education in the country today is inconsistent with the principles of experiential and service learning. This has resulted in citizenship education being associated with indoctrination. Indeed some of the features of indoctrination are manifest, for example, narrow jingoistic nation building, demonization of opponents and gross oversimplification of both problems and solutions (Sears and Hughes, 2006). Consequently, the legitimacy of the discourse in the school curriculum has been compromised. Clearly, there is a need for a depoliticised approach where citizenship education is not seen as a political ploy but stakeholders



can begin to freely appreciate its relevance. It is recommended that, if the goal of citizenship education is to be realized, there is need for fundamental changes in the way the subject is conceptualised, perceived and taught. Also, there is need for the involvement all stakeholders- the curriculum planners, teachers, and the community- in coming up with a model for citizenship education that all conceive to be the best for the country.

Notes

1. unhu/ Ubuntu: ChiShona and IsiNdebele terms depict qualities of humaneness such as a spirit of caring, community harmony, hospitality, respect and responsiveness, that groups and individuals show for each other (Mzamo Mangaliso in Matereke, 2011)
2. ChiShona and Isindebele: These are the major local languages spoken in Zimbabwe
3. This article was presented at World Conference on Educational and Instructional Studies - WCEIS, 07- 09 November, 2012, Antalya-Turkey and was selected for publication for Volume 2 Number 4 of WJEIS 2012 by WJEIS Scientific Committee.

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