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Establishing Levels of Teachers' Democratization of the Teaching and Learning of Religious Education Curriculum in Botswana Secondary Schools

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ABSTRACT The study investigated the levels of democratization of teaching and learning of Religious Education (RE) curriculum in Botswana Secondary Schools. This was provided by RE teachers. The data was collected through the use of a questionnaire and analysis of an observation guide on classroom democratic performance. The findings reveal that secondary school teachers have a good knowledge of democratic pedagogy. Teachers have explained many instances where they have made students over-dependent on them by use of teacher- centered methods instead of facilitating learning. It was observed that the given 10 areas for the facilitation of named democratic processes have not been accomplished very well.

INTRODUCTION

The most important event in the history of Botswana RE during the recent years must surely be the adoption of World Religions Approach to RE syllabus in Botswana Junior Secondary Schools in 1996. The Junior Secondary Schools RE syllabus of this World Religions Approach contains five modules.

- *The first module* deals with introduction to religion, the origin of the universe and humankind, religious practices and ceremonies.
- *The second module* integrates basic beliefs, teachings, intermediaries and ceremonies.
- *Third module* deals with respect for life which includes three forms of life, factors that can destroy human life and one project investigating rites/rituals that mark and reinforce transitional process of human development in life.
- *The fourth module* integrates issues of sexuality such as the importance of family and the role that religion plays in family life, the roles of men and women and the influence of any (at least) three religions on them, understanding facts about Human Immuno-deficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome (HIV/AIDS), how different religions help in controlling HIV/AIDS and assist in making AIDS victims feel accepted and assist in making AIDS victims feel accepted. It also deals with knowing the different contraceptives used for family planning and analyze views of different religions on them.
- *The fifth module* deals with issues of justice which includes understanding the meaning and importance of freedom, awareness of basic human rights from a religious perspective and understanding capital punishment.

The foregoing revision of the Junior Secondary syllabus that happened in 1996 can be seen as the initial approach to democratise Botswana RE curriculum. Before 1996, there was the Junior Secondary syllabus known as ‘Developing in Christ’. What should be noted which has been observed by many researchers, is that it is the Christian influence which overwhelmingly dominates most of the African curriculum landscape. An example is adduced that Botswana RE was born in an overwhelming colonial context which aimed to secure the influence of Christianity. This has continued to gain momentum since it was first inherited from the nineteenth century European religious fervour (Goldman, 1965; Loukes, 1965; Cox, 1966; Smith, 1969; The Fourth R, 1970; Cox, 1983; Sealey, 1985; Mmolai, 1988; Ramahobo, 1991; Awino, 2002). It is this Christian slant that received great deal of attention at the preparation of the several common syllabuses in some African countries, the best known ones being the *Developing in Christ for the junior secondary schools* and the *Christian Living Today for the Senior Secondary Schools in Botswana*. One would question whether such a practice of a mono-faith or cultural monism can be legitimated as a democratic pedagogical enterprise. Fortunately,

the Botswana Junior Secondary syllabus was reviewed in 1996 to address the problem of the Christian-inclined curriculum by introducing World Religions into the syllabus. This introduction of many religions into the curriculum may be a sure sign of democratisation of RE curriculum especially at the junior secondary level.

Although in the foregoing discussions, the case of junior secondary schools may depict a sign of democratization, the situation of senior secondary schools in which a Christian inclined content is taught can be regarded as giving very limited attention to the democratization of the subject matter.

Noticeably, democratic education can be seen to be establishing itself as an indispensable practice at the junior secondary level of the RE programme. While this promises exciting changes and opportunities, there are internal threats within the curriculum practice which limit open space for free classroom practices, respect for pluralism and academic freedom. For example, when it comes to the teaching and learning of RE only a few of these religions are appropriated or embraced in classroom-based learning. Also the teaching styles may still be teacher-centred. These practices may tend to illustrate that effective democratic pedagogy may not yet be a reality in RE curriculum. But it is vital that RE teachers should acquire an excellent knowledge and positive attitude in order to enable them to deepen democratic practice in the curriculum to the full.

This research intends to find out the levels of teachers' democratization of the teaching and learning of Religious education curriculum in Botswana Secondary schools.

Statement of the Problem

The current Botswana Junior Secondary multifaith RE curriculum adopted in 1996 clearly seems to portray an embodiment of the diversity of religions and openness to the study of various religions. It therefore reflects a phenomenological approach to the study of religions which encourage learning 'about' and 'from' religions (Awino, 2004). While the foregoing statement posits a noticeable positive change towards creating a democratic space in the teaching and learning of religions, the problem is that there are some internal threats within the curriculum practice which are a hindrance to open space for a free classroom practice, respect for pluralism and academic freedom. For example, at some level of Botswana RE, especially senior secondary,

learners are not being exposed to the diversity of religious and ethnic identities in Botswana today. The researcher argues that such a curriculum has a weakness as it does not fully contribute to learners' knowledge, understanding and appreciation of the diversity around them. It has been pointed out in some quarters that religious education has a clear role to contribute to a form of education in which schools appreciate the range of global, national, regional, religious and ethnic identities displays an awareness of religious plurality and pedagogy (Jackson, 2003; 2004; DfEE/QCA 1999a; 1999b).

In some of the studies done in RE in Botswana, questions that are rarely asked are: what is RE for? How do we teach RE? Whose interest does RE serve? What kind of RE pedagogy do we reproduce and for what society? Such pressing questions which should form part of research in RE have never been critically reflected upon to a greater extent in a detailed research as compared with what Kallaway has done to apartheid education in South Africa and other scholars to education elsewhere (Kallaway, 1984; Ngugi, 1986, 1990; Freire, 1993; Tabulawa, 1997, 1998).

Kallaway (1984: 34) argues on the role of schooling thus "...there is a naivette regarding the political context of schooling, its essentially ideological nature, and the parameters of power within which policy recommendations gain acceptance or rejection." If we examine this statement deeply one can envisage the relevance of Kallaway's assertion to RE curriculum. There is need to question whether Botswana RE curriculum enhances the development of a democratic pedagogy.

Other problems are that the RE curriculum at the junior secondary level only appropriates a few religions and with a little emphasis on indigenous knowledge. Worse still, the nature of the teaching and learning process that goes on is not easy to decipher clearly given the monofaith and the multifaith that takes place at some levels of the curriculum.

To put it another way, there is need to gain clarity as to whether the nature of teaching and learning processes and tasks that take place enable deepening of democratic practice in the classroom. It is against these issues raised that the study investigated the levels of teachers' democratization of the teaching and learning of RE curriculum in Botswana Secondary schools. Specifically, the following research questions were the focus of the study:

- 1). What do teachers understand by the term democratic pedagogy?

2). How have RE teachers democratized the teaching and learning of RE curriculum in Botswana Secondary Schools?

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The type of research design used in this study was the descriptive and phenomenological research design. Both the descriptive and phenomenological studies, according to the researcher determine and describe the way conditions are. Descriptive research also called survey research is useful for investigating a variety of educational issues and problems. For example, in this study the researcher is looking at what is possible or expected as a result of democracy which is currently in vogue.

Creswell (2002: 61) observes that descriptive designs are procedures in quantitative and qualitative research in which investigators administer a questionnaire to a sample of respondents in order to describe the opinions, behaviours of the population. These designs have an advantage for this study because of the following reasons:

- A phenomenological design has the advantage of treating what is studied as observable phenomena and hence can possibly measure what appears (Sutcliffe, 1984).
- These designs are descriptive in their features and can help the researcher to describe the nature of what is being surveyed and validate theoretical assumptions about what is investigated (Cohen, Manion & Morrison, 2000: 171).

The study employed multiple approaches such as use of questionnaires, classroom observation and interview guides. Multiple approaches were preferred owing to the fact that they provide not only insight, broad understanding and different prepositions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998: 71; Creswell, : 2002: 61) but also offer objective evaluation in which the observer manipulates and observes social or human situation in a dispassionate manner (Creswell, 1994: 2; Neuman, 2000: 261; Mertens, 2003: 9; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003:27).

The population of the study from which the sample was drawn was from Secondary School RE teachers in the Southern, Central and Northern regions of Botswana with 24 schools purposively

drawn from 149 schools. The researcher selected the sample based on own judgment on whom to select. For ethical reasons the names of the schools to be used in this study were concealed.

Table 1 indicates the distribution of respondents according to the three (3) regions, RE teacher population, sample schools and sample RE teachers.

Table 1: Distribution of Schools, RE Teacher Population and Sample

Regions	Total schools	Total re teacher population	Sample schools	Sample re teacher population
South	41	147	8	48
Central	70	234	8	48
North	38	135	8	48
Total	149	516	24	144

Elhance et al. (2007: 19) provides principles of sampling upon which sampling theory is to be based to arrive at a fairly good idea about the best possible values of the parameters. Some of the important laws he enunciates are:

- (a) Law of Statistical Regularity
- (b) Principle of Inertia of Large numbers

This normally suggest that the larger the sample size, the more dependable and reliable the results become. So this means that as the sample size increases, the results tend to be more reliable. This is what the researcher has done by opting for twenty-four schools overall out of 149 schools.

- (c) Principle of Persistence
- (d) Principle of Optimization

This principle suggests that an effort should be made to get the best possible or optimum results in terms of cost, energy and efficiency. Similarly, the larger the size of the sample, more would be the cost and energy of conducting the survey, but better would be efficiency also.

- (e) Principle of Validity

This principle suggests that a sample design is called valid when samples are drawn at random, with adequate size of sample and collection of data as well as careful analysis which are scientifically done. The above submissions of principles of sampling tend to confirm what Rosier, in Keeves (1988: 109) says that most sampling plans assume random sampling so that each member of the sample is selected with a known probability.

In this study, 144 RE teachers were purposively sampled. The study sampled 24 schools, eight from each of the three regions, Southern, Central and Northern. In each school, six (6) RE teachers were sampled. The schools from which the samples were drawn took cognizance of the three geographical locations of each region namely, the urban, sub-urban and rural areas of Botswana. By purposive sampling, there was a random selection of the number of schools (24) required. Using purposive sampling technique numbers of teachers were obtained to respond to the questionnaire, take part in interview as well as be subjected to observation.

Results and Discussions

The results obtained are based on the two research questions as already shown under the section that deals with the problem statement. The findings of this study were tabulated under Tables 2 and 3.

The teachers understanding of the term democratic pedagogy

Table 2 summarizes responses of teachers on what they understand by the term “democratic pedagogy.” The results show that teachers have a perception of what a democratic pedagogy means. The five ways of looking at it as summarized, on the whole, can help one to decipher what explicit and implicit meaning engender. The term democratic pedagogy as given in the five directions may not be so different or ambiguous but tend to provide a normative and descriptive term (defacto or dejure) to the whole idea of it

Table 2: The teachers’ understanding of democratic pedagogy

Conception	North	South	Central	N= 106	%
A system of learning in which learners are free and innovative	12	8	7	27	25.5
Learning that encourages active and full participation of all learners	10	10	5	25	23.6

Teaching allowing space for learning about diverse religions	12	3	7	22	20.6
It is a child-centered learning	6	8	6	20	18.9
A teaching and learning system that allows free expression of all in a classroom	3	4	5	12	11.3
Total	43	33	30	106	100

North Vs South Vs Central $\chi^2 = 8.19$ $df = 4$ $p < 0.01$. The difference is insignificant, i.e. the fit is good.

Statistically the calculated chi-square value is less than the critical value of 9.438 ($8.19 < 9.438$). What this means is that the idea of a democratic pedagogy seems to appeal equally in terms of understanding to the respondents of the three different regions.

The conceptions given in Table 10 seem to show the features of democratic pedagogy in the extent to which it gives learners the fullness and freedom with which they can interact with one another

The conceptions given in Table 10 seem to show the features of democratic pedagogy in the extent to which it gives learners the fullness and freedom with which they can interact with one another. Perhaps it is to be said that it ensures a desirable classroom situation against the internal and external systems which can set up barriers to a free discourse and communication required of a democratic classroom. A class which makes provisions for full participation has the true spirit of the good of all learners, so to say, on equal terms. The conceptions of teachers seem to concur with the views from the literature that was reviewed (Hamacheck, 1968; Flanders, 1970; Piker, 1983; Falinowski, 1990; Freire, 1993; McNergney et al., 1999; Adeyemi, 2002; Polelo, 2005)

Some conceptions of democracy in the review of related literature which correspond to certain democratic conceptions cited by the respondents include but are not limited to:

- A situation, in which the learners' classroom behavior demonstrates flexibility, perceives the world from a child's point of view and allows experimentation (cf Hamacheck, 1968).

- An atmosphere in which learners are incorporated into learning activities (cf Flanders, 1970)
- An idea that in a democracy things typically get done by majority rule (cf Falinowski, 1990)
- An education which is problem posing and gives learners freedom to discover things for themselves (cf Freire, 1993).
- A situation in which learners are given room for frequent participation (cf Vansickle, 1983).

In this research looking directly at the respondents' conceptions of democratic pedagogy, the researcher attempts to reconcile their conceptions in Table 10 with some views of the scholars advanced from the literature reviewed.

The researcher argues that a democratic classroom must have a type of atmosphere that accords learners a personal interest in discussion, social relations and control. Otherwise a compromised view can only emphasize a high degree of control exercised by the teacher. It is worthy to appreciate that teachers' conceptions have tended to capture what is positive around a democratic culture that needs to be facilitated by teachers. It is noteworthy that the results suggest that RE teachers know what a democratic pedagogy is. This understanding exists despite some levels of the Botswana curriculum being dominated by one religion. This also tends to portray that the Botswana RE curriculum still faces a severe challenge in terms of realizing a democratic pedagogy in the RE curriculum.

Reviewed literature indicates how a number of writers have called for "democratic education" or "empowering education" (Sehr, 1997: 2). Sehr argues that researchers and educators working to create democratic education must begin by asking themselves a simple, yet profound question about what is meant by democracy. He further laments that most educational theorists, researchers and educators fail to consider this question. It is important for RE teachers interested in inculcating a democratic pedagogy in RE curriculum to comprehend the concept of democratic pedagogy as they prepare pupils to participate in expanding democracy in the Botswana RE curriculum.

How have RE teachers democratized the teaching and learning of RE Curriculum in Botswana Secondary Schools?

This research question is addressed by observation guide that had five statements to be responded to on democratization of teaching and learning. It had also the interview question item that explored the extent to which RE teaching and learning have been democratized in the classroom.

Table 3 shows five aspects of democratization of RE curriculum and learning. In Botswana Secondary Schools, concerning the first statement Table 11 reveals that 65.2% (if not well achieved and not achieved are merged) of the respondents indicate that democratization is not well achieved. It is only a relatively small number who indicated that democratization is well achieved.

On the second statement regarding the contribution to the development of group investigation in RE teaching and learning, 60.4% of the respondents felt that this is not well achieved while a relatively small number (4.7%) felt it is well achieved.

A third statement on the increased freedom of students' independent learning, almost 60% felt that it is not well achieved, 34% indicated that it is somewhat achieved while an insignificant number 6.6% felt it is well achieved.

The distribution of results on the fourth statement on Table 11 indicates quite a higher percentage 57.6% combining somewhat achieved and well achieved on the part of building a foundation for diverse religions and cultures. This shows that RE teaching and learning in Botswana respond reasonably well to various religions and cultures.

The fifth statement where preparing learners to negotiate content and activities amongst themselves was sought, has 73.5% of the respondents who say is not achieved or well achieved. Similarly a relatively small percentage (7.5%) who say that learners have a chance to negotiate content and activities amongst themselves.

Table 3: Democratization of the Teaching and Learning in the RE Curriculum

	Well	Somewhat	Not Well	Not
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Statement	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved	Achieved
(1) Level of democratization of learning.	5 (4.7)	35 (33)	52 (49.1)	14 (13.2)
(2) Contribution to the development of group investigation.	5 (4.7)	37 (34.9)	52 (49.1)	12 (11.3)
(3) Increase freedom of learner independent learning.	7 (6.6)	36 (34)	45 (42.5)	18 17)
(4) Built a foundation for studying various religions and cultures.	25 (23.6)	36 (34)	35 (33)	10 (9.4)
(5) Prepared learners to negotiate content and activities amongst themselves.	8 (7.5)	20 (18.9)	38 (35.8)	40 (37.7)

Table 4 further indicates that the observations revealed shows 10 attributes according to which the teachers facilitate the democratization process in the classroom namely: learners' open expression, autonomy group inquiry, active engagement, students' leadership, critical thinking, problem solving, stimulating, discussion and broad participation. The overall results of classroom democratic performance facilitation are reported to be on the average as follows:

Learners' open expression 40.9%, Learners' autonomy 47.6%, Learners' group inquiry 57.1%, Learners' active engagement 54.8%, Students' leadership 42.9%, Learners' critical thinking 42.9%, Learners' problem solving 47.6%, Learners' stimulating 35.7%, Learners' discussion/interaction 40.5%, Learners' broad participation 47.6%

Table 4: Classroom Democratic Performance.

Attributes	Poor	Low	Average	High	Excellent
(1) Learner's open expression	3 (7.1)	15 (35.7)	18 (40.9)	6 (14.3)	0
(2) Learners' autonomy	2 (4.8)	15 (35.7)	20 (47.6)	4 (9.52)	1 (2.4)

(3)	Learners group enquiry	3 (7.1)	10 (23.8)	24 (57.1)	3 (7.1)	2 (4.8)
(4)	Learners' active engagement	2 (4.8)	11 (26.1)	23 (54.8)	3 (7.1)	3 (7.1)
(5)	Students leadership thinking	2 (4.8)	18 (42.9)	18 (42.9)	2 (4.8)	2 (4.8)
(6)	Learners' critical thinking	3 (7.1)	13 (31)	18 (42.9)	5 (11.9)	3 (7.1)
(7)	Learner's problem solving	2 (4.8)	14 (33.3)	20 (47.6)	3 (7.1)	3 (7.1)
(8)	Learners' stimulation	4 (9.52)	17 (40.5)	15 (35.7)	4 (9.52)	2 (4.8)
(9)	Learners' discussion interaction	3 (7.1)	13 (30.1)	17 (40.5)	6 (14.3)	3 (7.1)
(10)	Learners' broad participation	3 (7.1)	12 (28.6)	20 (47.6)	3 (7.1)	4 (9.52)

The researcher's review of the literature reveals democratic interplay that happens at the Heath School in Brookline Massachusetts in USA which is remarkable for complementing education for democracy (Sadowsky in Benninga, 1962: 84-85).

This literature also reveals how the mandate to educate young people for the essential job of functioning as informal and active citizens in a democracy is not taken lightly.

Despite such remarkable possibilities for democratic interplay within certain curriculum elsewhere, that is in USA, the democratization of the RE curriculum in Botswana secondary schools in terms of the organization and practices of creating it is far from complete and seem inadequate.

Table 4 reveals this inadequateness. It can be noticed that out of the five aspects of democratization of the RE curriculum, four areas are not well achieved except in one area in which a good foundation has been built for promoting diverse cultures and religions. Similarly findings concerning attributes that facilitate the democratization process in the classroom, indicates that eight of the ten attributes appear to be below 50%.

Thus, specific areas such as a teacher's contribution to group investigation, increased freedom of students, independent learning, preparing learners to negotiate content and activities amongst themselves are not well achieved. Some of the major findings of studies in Botswana, even though not specifically in RE, has been noted to corroborate the fact that the classroom instruction has remained predominantly teacher centered and authoritarian with students engaged mainly in recall learning and struck an old groove (Prophet & Rowell, 1990; Fuller & Synder, 1991; Tabulawa, 1998; Tafa, 2001).

Under such circumstances it is therefore necessary to explore the possibilities for creating room for democratic pedagogy in the RE curriculum. This would require that RE teachers work for realizing a democratic pedagogy in the RE curriculum. For this to be achieved RE teachers may have to undertake a dual task before them. First, they have to understand clearly what democratic pedagogy engenders and secondly they have to know what kinds of school structures and curriculum practices can promote this.

Conclusion

The following conclusions are drawn from the findings of the study:

1. Concerning the concept of democratic pedagogy, the findings reveal that secondary school teachers have a good knowledge of democratic pedagogy. Teachers have explained many instances where they have made students over-dependent on them by use of teacher-centered methods instead of facilitating learning. The position of teacher dominance in classroom and/or school have been corroborated by part of the literature reviewed (Fuller and Snyder, 1991; Prophet, 1995; Tabulawa, 1997; Tafa, 2001 & Polelo, 2005)
2. On democratisation of teaching and learning, a large percentage of the respondents think that various aspects of democratization of RE teaching and learning in Botswana are not well achieved. Specifically, the findings reveal the following: level of democratization of learning (65.2%); contribution to the development of group investigation (60.4%); freedom of learner independent learning (60%); and preparing learners to negotiate content and activities amongst themselves (73.5%) except building foundation for studying various religions and cultures (57.6) which appear well achieved. In addition, the extent to which the teacher facilitates the given 10

areas for the democratization of classroom is reported as average. This means it is between 35.2% and 57.1%. This might also mean that such facilitation of named democratic processes have not been accomplished very well.

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