

Children Media Usage, Civic Interest and Political-Related Practices among Botswana Primary School Pupils: An Experience in Informal Civic Education

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ABSTRACT The study evaluated the impact of an informal civic education programme on primary school pupils' media usage, civic interest and political-related activities in Botswana. The current in-school civic education programme through the teaching of social studies, cultural studies and other related subjects have not produced the desired results. Hence, this study used the 'school civic club' approach in teaching the children about citizenship issues. The one group, time series, pre and post test design was used to collect data for the study. Four hundred pupils selected from ten primary schools across the country constituted the participants in the project. A Civics Scale with sections measuring media usage, civic interest, and political-related behaviour of the pupils constituted the instruments used for data collection. Pupils were exposed to a series of civic-related IEC activities that lasted for three months within their clubs. Findings from the study indicate that the television is the most medium used by the children and this is used mainly for watching games. A large majority of the pupils do not listen to international news, and most of their political discussions are limited to the classrooms. The children rarely discuss political-related issues with their parents or peers. The level of participation of pupils in leadership activities improved with their participation in civic club activities. Also pupils demonstrated a positive interest in political-related activities, especially in participation in politics in future. The pupils demonstrated a general aversion for violence and violent acts. The implications of the findings for sustaining democracy in Botswana were discussed in the paper.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this investigation was to address the critical issues relating to civic/citizenship education of Botswana children, especially as it relates to the use of informal approach to the teaching of citizenship education. Three major issues were addressed here; media usage by pupils, civic interest and political-related activities among the pupils. The study is unique in several ways. Although citizenship/civic education in Botswana have been documented elsewhere, no attempt has been made in the country to explore the use of civic clubs in teaching citizenship issues. Hitherto, efforts have been concentrated on the school curricular in teaching civic issues to children in Botswana through the offering of subjects such as social studies, cultural studies and history at the primary and secondary schools. This perhaps is the first attempt at using a school-based club to teach children in Botswana primary schools about civic issues. Also, the participatory nature of the research lends more credibility to the data generated. Instead of the top-down approach adopted in most previous studies, here the

bottom-up approach, where the pupils themselves were involved in designing the IEC activities was adopted.

Citizenship Education

Social studies as a subject taught in primary and junior secondary schools in Botswana has a broad goal, which is 'citizenship'. This is where children are taught to grow up as responsible citizens of Botswana so that they will engage in the responsibilities for maintenance, defense and improvement of the society. Social studies is the core knowledge base for citizenship education in schools. Although other school subjects are expected to contribute to the development of learners into good citizens. Adeyemi et al. (2003) contend that social studies is the subject that is more related to the promotion of citizenship education in schools. The countries national goals of education and policies also indicate commitment to the promotion of citizenship education in school.

However, a clearer definition of citizenship education is the development of skills, attitudes, beliefs and values that will predispose young

people to participate to become and remain engaged and involved in society, culture and democracy. The focus is to develop citizens who are informed, autonomous and respectful of others, who participate in the political process, who keep the common good in mind in their decision making and finally citizens who act responsibly.

Therefore citizenship education can be defined as an education for children from childhood to become clear thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning their society. Generally it deals with concepts of rights, duties, participation and identity (Gearon 2003). In this sense children should not only know about their rights but should also pair the rights with responsibilities of helping parents at home and even respecting them. At the same time children should be able to participate in community activities such as litter picking and tree planting. They should be in a position to firmly identify themselves with their ethnicity groups. This will help them to uphold their cultural backgrounds.

Citizenship involves learning about the world we live in so that we have more knowledge of what goes on globally and how decisions are made. It also helps us to develop the skills to get involved and work with others to make a difference if there are things we would like to change. Citizenship education should provide investigations of social political issues, follow-up actions as appropriate and reflection on learning outlines a range of broad learning objectives.

This implies that citizenship education has always been part of the process that society uses to socialize children in the knowledge, skills, valued customs and norms that are deemed worthwhile. Citizenship has been neglected; it has been assigned a low curricular priority and its student outcomes are frequently not specified. One of the surprising short comings of the curriculum planning process is the general absence of any continuing, sustained appraisal of what is essential for young people to learn; for example:

Lack of Meaning: Teachers too often present isolated facts apart from any context that might give meaning to those facts.

Irrelevance: Teachers do not typically connect classroom content to students' life experiences or to contemporary issues of interest to them.

Lack of Focus on Rights: Civic education typically fails to address tolerance for the expression of individual freedoms.

Lack of Training in Thinking and Process Skills: Teachers do not, for the most part, provide training or practice in critical thinking, problem solving, decision making or other process skills.

Passive Learning: Excessive student passivity by listening to their teachers' lectures, reading textbooks and taking quizzes.

Avoidance of Controversial Topics: Teachers typically are unwilling to take up in the classroom the social controversies that arise in a democratic society.

Citizenship education is a process of training young people to become active, informed and responsible citizens either through informal or formal education. In formal education, citizenship education has long been recognized as one of the fundamental purposes of schooling. Schools therefore, are or have been seen as institutions where young people develop the understanding and the skills needed to become competent and responsible members of the society (Anderson et al.1997; Tlou and Kabwila 2000; Clark and Hughes 2005). This role that schools play in citizenship education is more important especially in this era when the society is increasingly becoming complex in nature; characterized by greater cultural diversity and the apparent loss of a value consensus combined with the collapse of traditional support mechanisms (Citizenship Foundation 1999; Chiodo 2005). The rationale for citizenship education in schools is to produce effective citizens who will work cooperatively with others, develop social justice principles to guide their own actions, think in a critical and systematic way, appreciate and learn from cultural differences, evaluate problems in the wide community and global context, resolve conflicts non-violently, change life styles to protect the environment, recognize and defend human rights and participate in democratic politics (Clough and Holdren 2002; Mautle 2000). Learners are therefore equipped with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that enable them to fit into the society and be able to face the challenges.

Furthermore, the rationale for teaching citizenship education in schools is to train learners to become active, informed and responsible members of the society. Citizenship education instills in learners a sense of identity, membership status, a set of basic values, a degree of interest

in participation and involvement in public affairs of their society (Cogan 1998; John et al. 2005). The inevitable changes occurring in society and the challenges that follow define the nature of citizenship hence a shift in the framework for understanding the activities taken on by citizens (Author and Wright 2001; Schugurensky and Myets 2003). Therefore, Clough and Holden (2002) stated that citizenship education should aim at developing effective citizens who will work cooperatively with others, develop social justice principles to guide their own actions, think in a critical and systematic way appreciate and learn cultural difference, evaluate problems in the whole community and global context, resolve conflicts non-violently, change lifestyles to protect the environment, recognize and defend human rights and participate in democratic politics. It is argued that for learners to become active and responsible citizens they need to have access not only to content to be included in citizenship education curriculum and the pedagogical approaches employed during instruction.

Elements of Citizenship Education

Although the concept of citizenship education is said to be problematic and that scholars do not generally agree on what they consider to be the important components of this concept (Adeyemi et al. 2003), this paper therefore focused on five related elements as outlined by the Centre for Canadian Studies (1999). First is the development of a sense of identity which goes beyond national identity to international and world citizenship. This confers an identity on the individual and an awareness of self as a member of a collective community. An individual is bestowed with a status of membership in which reciprocal rights and responsibilities are exercised on equal terms with fellow citizens. As part of citizenship education, this component aims at students' achievement not only of knowledge but a sense of commitment to or identification with their nation, sense of loyalty, and duty; develop sense of global or world citizenship so that they come to see themselves as members of the world community.

Secondly, citizenship education has a political element which aims to develop political literacy, knowledge and commitment to the political, legal, and social institutions of one's country in the youth which requires an understanding of key political, social issues and the possession of

necessary skills and values for effective political participation in the broadest sense including but going beyond voting to full participation in the life of the polity. Thirdly, citizenship education has an element of observance of rights and duties. Citizens are supposed to enjoy rights to which citizenship entitles them and perform willingly duties that citizenship requires of them which students must be made aware of and then practice. In relation to this, the fourth component comprise the social justice usually interpreted as comprising commitment to the common good which citizens need to acquire and practice. Finally, citizenship education has an element of general intellectual skills such as reasoning, communication skills, critical thinking, problem solving and decision making skills which must be developed in learners.

Botswana National Policy on Education and Citizenship Education

Botswana's Policy of Education, 'Education for Kagisano' which embraces the concepts of social justice and harmony, rests on five national philosophical principles of democracy, development, self reliance, unity and botho (respect for others). All these form the foundations of citizenship education in Botswana schools. The concept of botho, which is the development of a well rounded citizen which the country aspires to have also reflected the country's need for effective and efficient citizenry to be developed through education system among other means.

In the foreword to the three-year junior secondary school social studies syllabus, it is expressed that social studies as a subject should help in promoting activities in the classroom which lead to the production of informed and empowered citizens who can meet the challenges of the 21st century (Botswana Ministry of Education 1996). The aim of social studies as given in the syllabus is to develop a sense of cultural identity in students and focusing on citizenship participation and nation building, social studies is expected to promote social responsibility, dedication to ones work and empathy towards others and build self reliance among other roles. Social studies exist to develop the knowledge, skills and attitudes in learners necessary for productive citizenship. Some of the aims of the three year junior secondary syllabus directly related to citizenship education require that students should;

- 1 recognise the importance of culture within Botswana and problems that accompany cultural or society change.
- 1 understand the main developmental issues facing Botswana the most serious problems facing humanity.
- 1 understand the concept of governance and structure of their government.
- 1 practice concepts of justice and good citizenship and choose to participate in the growth and development of society.
(Botswana Ministry of Education 1996, p. ii)

The Study

The formal approach to the teaching of citizenship issues in Botswana has not yielded much in terms of pupils' engagements in civic activities and practices. This study was therefore conceptualized to design and implement an informal civic/citizenship education programme through the school civic clubs, and to evaluate its impact on pupils' civic-related activities. We attempted to examine pupils' media usage, their civic interest and level of participation in community-based civic activities, as well as their conflict handling styles, in terms of how they will react when annoyed by a situation. Specifically, the following research questions were addressed in the study:

1. Will there be a difference in media usage among the pupils before and after the civic IEC intervention activities?
2. What are the dominant news items listened to by pupils in Botswana primary schools?
3. What is the frequency of discussion of current events and political-related issues among the pupils?
4. Will there be a change in pupils' level of participation in civic issues and leadership roles due to the intervention club activities?
5. Will the civic club IEC activities have any influence on pupils' political interest?
6. What is the general pattern of pupils' reactions to annoying situation?
7. What is the general pattern of pupils' beliefs regarding some civic issues?

METHODOLOGY

Research Design: The one- group, time series research design was employed in the study. With this design, standards six and seven pupils from

ten primary schools in Botswana constituted the group and the repetitive measures of the group were taken in three stages – before the commencement of the project, during and at the end of the project. This design also made use of the participatory approach, where the participants were involved in developing the project IEC materials and even the implementation stages. This design according to Kahn and Best (1981) allows for a researcher to take observation in a group of subjects over a period of time.

Participants: Pupils in standards VI and VII in ten primary schools in Gaborone and Francistown constituted the subjects for the study. The ten schools were randomly selected from the list of schools obtained from the Ministry of Education. Initially, five standard VI pupils were selected from each school for the orientation programme, focus group discussions and the civic education IEC programme development. This cohort of subjects constituted the core group that was involved in programme development and they went back to their various schools after the initial training to start the civic clubs. From each of the selected schools, one teacher, specifically, the social studies teacher was also be selected to participate in the sensitization workshop/training. They eventually served as the club Advisor/ Adviser for their school. When the clubs were formed in the schools, each school club actually had not less than 50 club members, yielding a total 500 subjects in all. Data was collected using this estimated number of four hundred (400) participants.

The civics Information, Education, and Communication (IEC) activities were implemented through the civics club in each school. These activities included:

- (i) Lectures/Symposia and debates in civics issues
- (ii) Video shows on governmental activities and civic activities.
- (iii) Visit by clubs members to the parliament, Local government, universities, Courts etc to observe the running of government.
- (iv) Community activities within the school and in the local communities –meeting on Saturdays for environmental sanitation activities and other civic duties in their area.

These activities were carried out by the pupils with the support of the teacher-cooperators and the researchers. The activities spanned over a ten –week period.

To evaluate the impact of the IEC activities on the pupils' civic-related knowledge, attitudes and practices, the civic knowledge, attitudes and practices (CKAP) developed and validated by the researcher were administered on the participants before, during and after the civic IEC activities. This repetitive measures was to enable the researchers monitor changes in knowledge, attitude and practices over time, rather than a one-shot approach which may not give a total, comprehensive picture of programme effectiveness. It also allowed the researchers make changes where and when necessary.

Data Analysis: Data collected were analyzed using both the qualitative and quantitative methods. Data collected from the focus groups discussion were analyzed qualitatively, where pattern of participants' responses were examined across gender and schools. For the quantitative data, percentages, means, and t-test were used to analyze the data.

FINDINGS

The first thing that is reported on here is the use of media by the participants before and after exposure to civic activities. Media usage is considered crucial to civic learning, especially in an informal programme as experimented with in this study.

As part of their civic activities, it was interesting to find out level of media usage among the pupils. Three common media were examined in this study and the findings before and after the IEC activities are presented in Tables 1(a) and (b).

It could be observed that the most used of all the media outlet is the Television and the least patronized is the newspaper, while the radio comes in between the two. It could be appreciated that in this age of Information Technology and ICT with a lot of video games in circulation, the Television becomes a very useful tool in accessing all these modern facilities. When prodded further we discovered that the children rarely used the Television for news, but rather more intensely for playing their games. More importantly, it was gratifying to note that the children do use all these media at all. One crucial aspect of media usage is news. We asked the children to indicate the type of news they listen to or watch on Television. The findings are presented in Table 1(c).

It could be observed that less than 50% of our sample does listen to international news, both before and even after intervention activities. On the other hand National news enjoyed a strong audience among the pupils. With regards to local news and sports news, the pupils indicate negative patronage of those news items. The pupils' poor ratings of the local news could be

Table 1(a): (Pre-test) Pattern of pupils' media usage

	<i>Daily</i>		<i>Always</i>		<i>Not at all</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Television	112	38.4	140	47.9	40	13.7
2. Newspaper	94	33.9	65	23.5	118	42.6
3. Radio	97	35.3	111	40.4	67	24.4

Table 1(b): (Post-test) Pattern of pupils' media usage

	<i>Daily</i>		<i>Always</i>		<i>Not at all</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Television	126	33.8	192	51.5	55	14.7
2. Newspaper	153	40.3	96	25.3	131	34.4
3. Radio	131	35.4	147	39.7	92	24.9

Table 1(c): Type of news listened to by pupils

	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. International news	189	47.8	206	52.2
2. National news	197	49.7	199	51.3
3. Local news	145	36.7	250	62.3
4. Sports news	140	35.4	254	64.6

attributed to the fact that there are no local newspapers, television and newspapers in Botswana. There is only one national television and one national radio station and two others whose coverage is only limited to the capital, Gaborone. Botswana is a small country of a population of 1.8 million, therefore anything that

Table 2: Frequency of discussion of current events and politics

	<i>Very often</i>		<i>Often</i>		<i>Rarely</i>		<i>Not at all</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Discussion with parents	91	23.2	127	32.2	71	18.1	104	26.5
2. Discussion with friends	62	15.7	127	32.2	75	19.0	130	33.0
3. Discussion in class	122	30.9	111	28.1	75	19.0	87	22.0

happens in any part of the country becomes national news. However it is strange that pupils do not patronize sport news. Perhaps this may be peculiar to our sample as youths in Botswana generally love sports. However sporting reportage in the country is still largely limited.

Part of the project was to find out the extent of the discussion of political issues among children with their peers, in their classrooms and with their parents. The findings are presented in Table 2.

It could be observed that from table 2 that most of discussions of the political issues among our sample do take place in their classrooms. This is followed by discussions with the parents and friends respectively. It is plausible to argue that at this age the pupils may not be mature enough to understand politics, in fact they may not be able to differentiate their political realities from other realities, social, economic, cultural, religion etc. Therefore their political thinking will be diffused in all these other issues.

As part of their civic activities, we also inquired into the level of participation in civic related issues and activities and the leadership qualities of the pupils. The summary of findings is presented in Table 3.

It could be observed from the table 3 that pupils participate more in cleaning exercises than other activities (75.7% before, and 77.2% after intervention). It could be even postulated that the little improvements noted in all the activities, charity, school team, community cleaning and taking up leadership positions, could be ascribed to the pupils participation in the school civic clubs. Part of the club programme was election of officers to run the affairs of the club, and this provided the pupils with the opportunity to freely elect their leaders unlike in other situations where class and school prefects were appointed by school authorities. This was perhaps the first time the pupils' experienced free choices with some of them offering themselves for the positions enthusiastically.

Botswana has a virile democracy; hence, it was interesting to find out the extent of the pupils'

Table 3: Pupils' level of participation in civic issues and leadership skills

	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Ever held office in club or class	216	55.0	177	45.0
2. Ever belonged to school team or group	287	72.8	107	27.2
3. Ever collected clothes or money for charity	158	40.4	233	59.6
4. Ever taken part in school cleaning exercise	302	77.2	89	22.8
5. Ever participated in community cleaning up	232	59.3	159	40.7

interest in politics and political issues, especially political party-related activities. Table 4 presents the summary of findings on the issues.

It could be observed from Table 4 that the children were conscious of political activities around them. Although these children are not yet of voting age, they do follow what is going on in the political circles in their locality. A large majority of them indicated that they will take part in active politics in the future, they will like to run for political offices in the future and definitely they

Table 4: Pupils' interest in political issues

	<i>Yes</i>		<i>No</i>	
	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>	<i>n</i>	<i>%</i>
1. Would enjoy lesson in politics	302	77.7	88	22.3
2. Usually interested in political matters	221	56.1	173	43.9
3. Interest in political parties	335	84.8	60	15.2
4. Interest in news about politics	329	83.5	65	16.5
5. Enjoy political campaigns	244	61.8	151	38.2
6. Participate in politics in future	300	76.3	93	23.7
7. Being on committee nominating candidates	252	64.0	142	36.0
8. Interested in running for pol. office in future	280	71.1	114	28.9
9. Avoid discussion of political issues	165	41.9	229	58.1
10. Vote in election when old enough	302	76.8	91	23.2

will vote in elections when old enough to do so. The findings here demonstrate the level of entrenchment of democracy in the country. Botswana has a population of 1.8million with the youth between 15 and 40 years constituting about 65% of the population. Therefore, if the children are well targeted with appropriate civic education, this will guarantee the sustainability of democracy and democratic values in the country. This has been clearly demonstrated in this study.

We also tried to explore what would be the reactions of the children when they are annoyed concerning any issue in their school or community. Findings are summarized in Table 5.

The first thing to report here is the pupils' general aversion for violence. It is quite interesting to note that a majority of our sample indicate the use of letters, voting and survey (opinion polls): which are general peaceful means as their choice of expressing their feelings on annoying issues. This is really a positive thing, and goes well with the general nature of Botswana. The Batswana (this is how the citizens of Botswana are called) are generally peaceful and peace-loving people. Perhaps it is only recently that violent acts are being reported among the youths. The emergence of violence has been ascribed to things such as illegal immigrants, violent movies on television and cinemas and abuse of drugs and alcohol. Therefore, that the children adopt the peaceful options is gratifying and it is hoped this could be better sustained

through the civic clubs we have established in these schools.

Here we attempted to gauge the opinions of the pupils on what impact the individuals and the youth as a group could make in bringing about changes in their communities. We also attempted to determine their opinion on the need for the introduction of the School Civic Clubs on their school. The findings are presented in Table 6.

It could be observed from table 6 above that generally the pupils have a strong desire to learn more about civic issues beyond what they learn in Social Studies. While they agreed that Social studies teaches about civic issues more than any other subject in the previous findings, they were still eager to learn more about civic issues beyond Social Studies could provide. This is demonstrated in the large percentage (about 93.8%) before and 96.4% after intervention) that stated that they want to learn more. Similarly their views on the need for the club and their intentions to become members were generally positive. In fact, this became evident with 89.1 %(before) and 93.5% of the sample indicating that they will like to become members of the School Civic Clubs. The enthusiasm generated during the piloting of the IEC activities in the clubs in the all the schools actually stimulated a lot of the pupils to become willing and more interested in learning more about civic issues through these clubs. Today, those civic clubs have now become a permanent feature in those schools involved in the study.

Table 5: Respondents' reactions when annoyed.

	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
1. Would protest or demonstrate	132	39.6	201	60.4
2. Would petition	156	40.9	225	59.1
3. Would persuade others	116	31.2	256	68.8
4. Would write letters	264	68.6	121	31.4
5. Would resort to violence	95	25.1	383	74.9
6. Would use leaflets/ letterboxes	184	49.1	191	50.9
7. Would raise/donate money	249	64.0	140	36.0
8. Would participate by voting	280	72.7	105	27.3
9. Would administer a survey	194	52.7	174	47.3
10. Would do nothing	73	19.2	308	80.8

Table 6: Respondents' beliefs regarding some civic issues

	Yes		No	
	n	%	n	%
1. Working with others can improve society	364	93.3	26	6.7
2. Youth can make impact on community decisions.	321	82.5	68	17.5
3. It is difficult for youth to improve society	180	46.2	210	53.8
4. Can personally make a difference in the community.	303	77.7	87	22.3
5. What is learnt in S/S is enough for civic training.	264	68.0	124	32.0
6. To learn more about civic issues	375	96.4	14	3.6
7. School civic club will help learn civic issues	366	94.3	22	5.7
8. Like to be a member of civic club	362	93.5	25	6.5

CONCLUSION

The informal civic club approach experimented with in this study has shown that children civic experience could be enriched using club IEC activities. This was demonstrated in the improvement in children media usage, their interest in civic-related activities and taking up leadership responsibilities by the children. As against the formal classroom approach, the informal approach used here affords flexibility and participation. The children were afforded the opportunities of exploring their environment in learning about civic issues and they were able to implement school and community-based civic projects with resounding success in their localities.

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