

Pedagogical Complexities in Multicultural History Classrooms in Botswana Senior Secondary Schools

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Abstract: Botswana is a pluralistic society, yet its education system is tailored from a homogenous dimension. This paper interrogates the competence of history teachers in teaching multiculturally diverse classrooms. The study examined the challenges faced by History teachers in multiculturally diverse classrooms and the pedagogical approaches that could be used to combat that state of affairs. The study was pursued using the theoretical framework of Critical Pedagogy which ideologically advances that education within multicultural societies must be democratic and take into account social justice and diversity issues. The study implored the qualitative research methods and was pursued within 12 (N=12) senior secondary schools in 7 (N=7) educational regions in Botswana. A total of 36 (N=36) teachers and 120 (N=120) students participated in the study. The results indicate that the history teachers have no training on how to teach multiculturally diverse classrooms. Such a scenario end up frustrating both teachers and students since a lot of them end up feeling pedagogically isolated in the teaching-learning process. Therefore, there is need to rethink teacher training amongst the many factors which could help ameliorate this state of affairs.

Keywords: Multicultural diversity, multicultural education, critical pedagogy, culturally responsive curriculum

Introduction

History education is important in a culturally diverse environment since it is not only about stories of the past, but it also inculcates good morals, values, and promotes nationalism. Botswana is a multicultural country; it has different ethnic groups in most parts of the country. The subject provides the understanding of interdependence in the social, economic and political spheres. History enhances the understanding of causes, consequences, continuity and change, similarities, and differences. In Botswana students from different backgrounds and societies are expected to learn and be taught together in a classroom. A multicultural environment requires a history teacher who creates a dialogue about issues that affect diverse students and should be able to articulate and integrate cultural diversity to alleviate any potential conflict situations in a multicultural classroom. In view of the above, this study explored the pedagogical challenges that history teachers face in a culturally

diverse classroom at senior secondary schools in Botswana. In Botswana student's underachievement in education is associated with their differences not being taken into consideration during curriculum delivery. This has led to a call by researchers and academics to come up with theories on cultural responsive pedagogy to explain the difficulties and solutions of teaching students from diverse cultures and help them reach out and operationalize their potential. The relevance of cultural responsive pedagogy is that it takes cognizance of students' experiences, perspectives and ethnic diversity in the education fraternity (Rychly and Graves, 2012 and Gay, 2002).

In most instances, school culture is different from the culture or background where students come from. Stoicovy (2010) explained that cultural responsive pedagogy is the remedy to a culturally contextualized teaching and learning process. Culturally responsive pedagogy for teacher education and training is required as it prepares teachers to be sensitive to the cultures of their students and understand how culture can be a determinant of how they plan their teaching. In Botswana, cases of school dropouts are usually associated with how students are treated and handled by teachers in classrooms. Students who drop out feel that teachers are insensitive and inconsiderate of their cultural background. Therefore, cultural responsiveness is critical for teachers teaching minority groups in Botswana.

According to Harcourt (2015), history teachers have to theorise their teaching according to the need of vulnerable students as a way of being culturally responsive. For teachers to promote cultural responsive pedagogy, they need to consider the nature and purpose of the subject. For example, in the case of History teachers, they have to confront controversial topics and also connect the past to students' lived realities. However, for cultural responsiveness to be successful in history classes, teachers need to be proactive and use the students' experiences as guinea pigs so that they can easily acclimatize to classroom environment. Harmon (2012) on the other hand discusses how culturally responsive teaching can help African Americans achieve educational equity. She laments that the African Americans continue to experience the achievement gaps because teachers fail to apply themselves when it comes to culturally responsive teaching. She observes that cultural responsive teaching has proven its worth and effectiveness and it should be incorporated in teaching preparation programs so that it can prepare teachers to be culturally competent.

Villegas (1991) contends that culturally responsive pedagogy can have positive results in the growth of minority students' academics, when their cultural characteristics are taken into consideration. She noted that cultural responsiveness should introduce instructional methods that bridge the gap between the learners home and school experience. Cultural responsive pedagogy is effective due to the fact that it creates meaningful classroom activities that are not distant from the learners' background experiences (Villegas, 1991). In the case of Botswana, Molosiwa (2009) argues that the education system is biased against minorities groups. She acknowledges that students come from different ethnic backgrounds but the education system serves certain students and excludes others. Pansiri (2011) observed that the education system in Botswana is warped as it has excluded minority groups because of the use of Setswana and English as the media of communication in public schools. The system has rejected the learners from the minority ethnic groups because they end up dropping from schools as they have challenges in comprehending issues due to the fact that their mother tongue is not used in school. The educational system has ignored the linguistic culture of the learners hence their failure to progress to secondary, the few who make it to secondary fails to acquire the literacy skills due to the wrong pedagogy that was used at elementary stage.

Botswana is a multicultural state and like other culturally diverse nations, it faces challenges pertaining to 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 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. Although culturally responsive pedagogy is important as observed by many scholars, it is vital to note that instructional resources used in classrooms must also be relevant to the discourse other than that the whole exercise might prove to be futile.

Statement of the Problem

Botswana is not a homogenous society. Its heterogeneity has always triggered challenges in terms of having to educate the citizenry without assimilating or imposing the mainstream beliefs, morals and values unto the minorities or the marginalized. Cultural diversity can at times be a deterrent to learners' equal acquisition of skills and knowledge. This is because both the teacher and the learner can find it difficult to reach a common goal if an inappropriate pedagogy is used in culturally diverse history classes. History classes demand the students to question, research, debate and summarize issues. These therefore need the right pedagogical practices that teach content knowledge and skills from the perspective of inclusive and equitable education. Orosco and O'Connor (2011) argue that lack of exposure to diverse cultures limits the abilities of teachers to match effective instructional practices to the learning needs of students from diverse cultures. Moreover, lack of teacher training on multicultural education is generally a challenge to the teaching profession and equally a challenge to the History classroom within culturally diverse classrooms. Teachers might have the relevant content but their lack of exposure to multicultural education and culturally responsive pedagogy poses a problem of equitable educational opportunities. This study therefore makes an attempt to explore the pedagogical challenges that history teachers face in culturally diverse senior secondary schools' classroom.

Theoretical Framework: Critical Pedagogy

Critical pedagogy is relevant to this study as it draws on the social and critical education theories and cultural studies. Critical Pedagogy also examines schools' historical context as part of social and political fabric that characterizes society, it also subscribes to the notion that any pedagogical practice must be committed to social transformation that is in solidarity with marginalized groups (Duncan-Andrere and Morell, 2008). Moreover, critical thinkers study History, which deals with socio-political issues and cultural studies as well as studying pedagogy.

This study therefore intends to explore the pedagogical challenges of teaching history in a culturally diverse classroom. Shor (1992) articulates that Critical Pedagogy is a student centre program for multicultural democracy in schools. For Shor, Critical Pedagogy is an agent of education empowerment which deals with process active, social and cooperative. He mentions that the responsibility of a

teacher is creating an empowering curriculum which explains the students' experiences and respect their languages and experiences. This further shows that Critical Pedagogy is relevant to this study as the study will look at the performance as well as the perceptions of teachers and students within the existing History curriculum in Botswana.

Literature Review

In teaching multicultural classrooms, teachers are faced with a mammoth task of bringing diverse learner's expectations, attitude, perspectives, cultural experiences and attributes. All these factors can be a test of character for the teachers. Dilg (2003) examined the impact of multiple histories that accompanies students and teachers into the classroom. Moreover, he looked at how history influences what they know and what they learn and how they react to it. The impact of history leads to deeper and richer experience for students and teachers and it has the power to support or derail the intention of the class. The perceived negative side of history can derail the class as the students will concentrate on the negativity rather than on the bigger picture on why they are learning the subject. Teacher training is vital in this aspect so that educators can be armed with the right skills to function inclusively.

Cochran-Smith (2004) suggests that when teaching for social justice, teachers should be trained to deal with communities rather than be trained for individuals. She emphasized that learning to teach for social justice is difficult hence it can be taken as developing a particular teaching instruction. Teacher's personal characteristics and experiences affect the way they teach. Teaching like other professions act on the bases of positionality hence they vie and interpret issues based on personal history (Irvine, 2002). Addressing issues of diversity, Molosiwa (2009) argues that policies are drawn to support equity in education, but the problem is implementation. She calls for the inclusion of multicultural education in teacher education programs so that teachers are well equipped with pedagogical skills to address the needs of diverse students. 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 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 for minority language continues to marginalize other groups in Botswana and this lead to low performance of students from minority groups.

Methodology

Design

This study will follow a qualitative research approach with attention on a phenomenological design. According to Cresswell (2013), phenomenology is concerned with the study of experiences from individuals' perspectives. The researchers in this approach tend to collect data in the field, at the site where participants experienced the problem under study.

Population Sample

The research population in this study will be obtained from senior secondary schools in Botswana. There are 34 senior secondary schools country wide in 10 educational regions, namely; Central (Serowe), Ghanzi, Southern (Kanye), Kweneng (Molepolole), South East (Gaborone), Chobe (Kasane), Kgatleng (Mochudi), North West (Maun), North East (Francistown) and Kgalagadi (Tsabong). For this

study, 12 (N=12) schools in 7 (N=7) regions will be sampled considering their diversity. The sampled schools will be selected from regions that have different cultures. The number of selected schools is significant as the schools are from 7 regions across the 10 regions in the country.

Sampling Procedure

For the purpose of this study, the study will select participants through purposeful sampling. The researcher will purposefully select teachers who have experience in teaching multicultural classrooms as well as students who have experience the phenomenon of being taught in a diverse classroom. In purposeful sampling the sample is chosen for a specific purpose (Cohen et.al, 2009), for example in this study history teachers will be chosen from different senior secondary schools in Botswana because they will indicate distinctly the challenges they face in multicultural classrooms from diverse regions. Purposeful sampling is common in qualitative research as selection of participants is based on the needs of the study (Morse, 1991). The researcher has an obligation to choose participants who have the experienced and are ready to give a good account on the study.

The selection of participants will be purposefully done, on the basis of their experience in secondary school history classrooms. Cohen etal (2004) noted that critical purposive sampling is a way of sampling, where participants are selected on the grounds of existing knowledge by the researcher. This type of purposive sampling is used, specifically, when the researcher wants to select specific unique cases that can provide special information. The participants in this study will consist of 36 (N=36) teachers and 120 (N=120) students. Cresswell (2013) suggests that a small sample size is sufficient for a phenomenological approach in qualitative research. Hence this study took a small sample size that will provide specific information.

Instruments for data collection

This study was conducted through triangulation, by using Observation, interviews and document analysis. Triangulation limits the shortcomings of using one data collection methods by using other methods to increase the truthfulness of the findings of the study.

Data Collections procedures

The procedure will start with the researcher taking the questionnaire personally to the chosen schools to administer them. The questionnaire will be accompanied by the letter introducing the study being undertaken. Furthermore, for the interviewer to feel the emotions, opinions and feelings; in-depth interviews will be conducted. This will involve personal and direct contact between the researcher and respondents.

Data analysis procedures

Hatch (2002) stated that data analysis is a systematic search of meaning and processing of data so that it can communicate. The strategy that will be used in this study is interpreting, categorising and pattern seeking. In this study, data from interviews and questionnaires will be transcribed in relation to the research problem. Once the interviews are done, the recordings will be transcribed using the research questions as an interpretative tool. Furthermore, open coding procedure will be used to examine the questionnaires from the teachers (Straus and Corbin, 1990).

Ethical Consideration

The study will ensure that informed consent is obtained from participants. It is imperative that participants know exactly what is involved in the study and the reason why they have been chosen to participate. Participants' privacy, confidentiality and anonymity will be guaranteed. The schools' names shall be pseudonyms to protect their identity. Materials used to collect data will be destroyed once the research has been concluded.

Results

The results showed that teachers teaching History in a multicultural society experience pedagogical challenges which emanate from the fact that Botswana is a heterogeneous society, but the education is set up on a homogenous basis. The results are specifically presented below:

Communication

Most participants viewed communication challenges as prevailing in multicultural classrooms. During classroom observations it emerged that teachers resorted to code-switching and used Setswana (the national language) instead of English (official language) which is the medium of instruction to explain some concepts in culturally diverse classrooms. Moreover, most participant teachers also responded in the interview and questionnaire that most students preferred to use their 'mother tongue' in classrooms than the official language which is English. The findings revealed that there was a language barrier and teachers resorted to Setswana to help students understand historical content. However, most teachers are from different regions and cannot teach in the student's preferred language. Moreover, the students' class composition in these regions is made up of students from different ethnic groups. For example, in School D, one class had students from seven different ethnic groups (Afrikaans, Baherero, Basarwa, Tswana, Bangologa, Batharo, Bakgalagadi). This was a major problem as students expected teachers to use their mother tongue, but it was not possible because of the variety of languages in classrooms. This led to teachers using the national language (Setswana) as it was common amongst students.

Additionally, the study revealed that using Setswana and English interchangeably was an accepted way of explaining content to the learners. Some respondents highlighted that the medium of instruction is a major pedagogical challenge in diverse History classrooms. *Learners are often not fluent in the medium of instruction-English language because English is a vehicle for transmitting historical facts, most historical events are beyond or out of reach of the learner's basic knowledge base and the fact that History is taught in English makes the subject hard for the learners*, one teacher lamented. The points they raised bordered on the fact that students struggled with the English language.

Teaching Practice methods

The study also revealed that Teaching Practice methods utilised by History teachers in diverse classrooms were not proper as most teachers lacked multicultural education experience. When asked about their experience and understanding of multicultural issues, most participants indicated that they had been self-taught as they had received no training on multicultural education. Hence the fundamentals of dealing with students from different backgrounds were not instilled in their teaching practices; the teachers' challenges and experiences differed from one region to another.

Participating teachers emphasized that they need to use sensitive methods and avoid triggering any emotions from the students. The participants emphasised that they must embrace diversity in their

teaching. One teacher indicated that, “*you need to come up with teaching methods that are not harmful or cause any sense of being undermined as some topics might not be sensitive to certain other groups*”. Another teacher concurred, “*One has to be sensitive in applying certain methods as cultures differ in terms of practices*”, the comments from teachers show that they appreciate students' differences and that they must apply appropriate pedagogies to accommodate all learners.

Students Background

According to most participants, there are pedagogical challenges in the classroom due to stereotypes and these have forced teachers to adopt suitable pedagogies that can accommodate learners. The pedagogies include talking to the students about the stereotypes and challenging the stereotypes to make the students feel in a safe space in culturally diverse classrooms. Participants gave an account that the student's background can lead to distortion of historical facts and content as they have to be sensitive in approaching certain topics. For example, ‘*Describing the way of life of the Khoisan*’, the topic touches on aspects of the Khoisan lifestyle and their religion. This assertion was premised on the principle that acknowledges learners' ability against their beliefs that certain issues are not supposed to be discussed in public. Participants shared that these led to distortion of historical context due to students' customs and beliefs as a hindrance to teaching and learning.

The participants' responses revealed that this behaviour by the students is a major pedagogical challenge as cultural beliefs hindered their progress in learning history. One teacher explained that the students were divided as they came from different cultural backgrounds hence difficult to teach them as they have different beliefs. The participant believed that societal norms and values influenced students' behaviour and how they viewed each other. “*Sometimes when teaching some topics like the Central Bantu and Khoisan, I encounter problems like tribalism, racism inequality, and just general judgement among students towards each other*”, one teacher lamented.

Curriculum

The Botswana General Certificate of Secondary Education History syllabus for senior secondary schools is divided in two sections, the first section is African History, taught in Form 4 and the second section is European History taught in Form 5. The challenge is that students are not interested in learning European History as they feel it is not important in life. The students abhorred what they perceived to be Eurocentric content of history offered to them as they preferred local content over ‘foreign’ content. Essentially, the participants believed students underperformed in European History because they are simply uninterested in the subject matter. According to the participants, this led to pedagogical challenges because instead of focusing on teaching, teachers have to now teach basic skills of contextualising historical content.

Discussion

The findings indicate that participants have challenges in implementing the appropriate pedagogical approaches in culturally diverse history classes. In order to reach the desired goal of inclusivity despite multicultural diversity in the classroom, teachers should utilize teaching methods that accommodate all learners. However, participants highlighted that the methods used must not distort history or lose historical context. The study agrees with Cohen and Lohan (2004), who emphasized that equity pedagogy, can exist when teachers use a wide range of teaching styles and approaches to close the gap between diverse students and socio class groups. Additionally, the current study findings indicated that teachers are not equipped with the skills to tackle sensitive topics in history classrooms.

This connects with Parvish and Linder-Van Berschot (2010) who reflected that teachers should be well cognizant on how their own cultural perspective are designed and affect their learners' need and the cultures they come from. Thus, it may be difficult for teacher to use teaching methods that are relevant in history classes if they do not unaware of the needs and background of their students.

Furthermore, teachers had not been trained in multicultural education, hence resorted to using their experience of teaching in cultural diverse schools to tackle challenges pertaining to differences that existed in their current classes. Nieto and Bode (2010) emphasized that teachers should be well trained and equipped in adequate skills and competence to be aware of challenges in classes and ought to be radically to reform their perspective of multicultural classes. Therefore, it is vital that teacher are well trained in multicultural education during training and those already in the service be equipped with this knowledge through workshops and training.

The findings indicate that communication barriers presented a challenge as students there are had difficulties in understanding historical concept presented in English. Most learners were not exposed to the English language outside of school hence have difficulty in understanding complex terms and instruction presented in English during assessment. The findings agree with Michelle, et.al (2022) who posits that the English language poses challenges in utilization of pedagogical practices in History lessons. Therefore strict practices in the use of English in classrooms as opposed to switching to vernacular for ease of teaching are important, this prepares the students for assessment and better understanding of readings and concepts.

Findings suggested that teachers are fearful that in attempting to accommodate learners from diverse background in history classrooms, historical context may be lost as they have to utilize pedagogical styles that resonate with the students' difference rather than historical facts. Teachers therefore, short change the subject in order to accommodate the students. On the contrary, Banks and Banks (2010), posit that teachers should focus on knowledge construction, reduce bias and prejudice by shifting from focusing on student's deficits to stressing students' gift regardless of their linguistic or ethnic background. This suggests that, teachers should focus on the subject matter and treat all students as equal regardless of the background.

History teachers used code switching as an approach, but as much as code switching is a useful resource in a different phase of classroom teaching in a cultural diverse classroom it has proved to be a challenge in culturally diverse societies as students prefer their mother tongue be used in classroom. During classroom observations, history teachers used switched from English to Setswana to explain historical concept, but there was always that dissenting voice that questioned why is the teacher using Setswana and not their home language. The current study findings agrees with Mafela (2010), who explained that this phenomenon emanates from the multilingual context of Botswana and this sometimes causes a conflict as the language in education policy state that only the official language (English) and the national language (Setswana) can be used. Additionally, the findings suggest that the students preferred to use a language they can confidently express themselves in. In contrast, Mokgathi (2016) stated that teachers irrespective of the home language, preferred to use Setswana when they code switch. This was done regardless of the learners preferring their mother tongue to be used. Thus, this was considered to be a legitimate pedagogic approach especially when teaching culturally relevant topics where comprehensive could be maximised by using the national language.

The findings indicate that in some societies, students have stereotypes towards certain topics because of their cultural background. The students come from communities where some issues cannot be discussed in public or by young people. This has led to challenges of teaching and learning of History as student's participation is very low. Teachers have therefore resorted to not teaching specific topics in the syllabus and only teaching topics which students highly participated in. The current study is consistent with Charis and Maria (2021), who reported that it is important for teachers to be trained in multicultural education so that they deal and gain insights in teaching local histories. This will lead to teachers rejecting any stereotypes and fighting against any discrimination and tribalism by including all students with mutual respect.

The students prefer to be taught more of 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 point 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 current study stating that the English history curricula is predominantly white and exclude the minority group, hence the students stereotyping 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 marginalises 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 on the inequalities normal.

Furthermore, Adu-Gyamfs and Anderson (2021) agree that the colonial Eurocentric perception by the west that Africa is backward affected the production of historical knowledge as history education glorified Europe at the expense of Africa. In contrast, Young (2014) makes a case in his study '*Why start with the curriculum?*' by mentioning that in South Africa when the engagement to try and adopt a more African history by reconsidering Apartheid and white history is has become a challenge as it has left teachers and curriculum designers with no curriculum at all. This implies that African History cannot be taught in isolation as the 'white man' or Europeans played a role in the history of African societies. The curriculum in Botswana discusses the achievement of colonisers hence the need for it to be reviewed and a more balanced curriculum be designed to accommodate local history including that of minority groups in Botswana.

Conclusion

Botswana is a heterogeneous society, but the educational system only recognizes two languages which are Setswana and English. This educational system was adopted by the Botswana government at independence from the British. This monolithic system has caused communication challenges not only in History classrooms but also in the educational fraternity in Botswana (Bagwasi, 2021; Nyathi-Ramahobo, 2010). The study has highlighted challenges in the History classroom across the country. It has pointed out that many of these challenges are found in secondary schools that admit learners from marginalised societies and diverse societies.

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Data Availability: The author has all the data employed in this research and is open to sharing it upon reasonable request.

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