

## Strengthening Civic Education in Botswana Primary Schools: A Challenge to Traditional Social Studies Curriculum

by

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### Abstract

*The primary goal of social studies is citizenship education. Social studies as citizenship education seek to provide students with knowledge, skills, and attitudes which will enable them to actively participate as citizens of a democracy. However, the extent to which the subject is achieving this goal since its introduction into the Botswana school curriculum in 1969 has been somewhat questionable. Recent evidence suggests that products of our schools are manifesting some behaviours that are not in tandem with good citizenship. This paper therefore examined the views of some primary school teachers in Botswana on the effectiveness of Social Studies in promoting citizenship training and self reliance among the learners. This is essentially a survey study. One hundred experienced teachers (with over ten years of teaching primary social studies) were purposively selected for the survey. A questionnaire tagged "Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Social Studies in Developing Appropriate Citizenship Education" with a reliability coefficient of 0.94 using Cronbach Alpha was used to collect data for the study. Two research questions were addressed in the study. Major findings in the study are: teachers poor rating of Social Studies as a tool for achieving citizenship training, more emphasis in Social Studies teaching is placed on theory rather than practice, existence of few materials on Social Studies to assist teachers, and that Social Studies is failing largely to promote self reliance skills in the pupils. The implications of these findings for retooling Social Studies curriculum to achieve the goals of basic education in Botswana were discussed in the paper.*

*Key Words: Social Studies, Citizenship Education, Self Reliance, Civic Education, Botswana.*

### Introduction

The ultimate aim of any educational system is to ensure that children develop their cognitive, emotional and social capacities – and that they acquire the skills they need to realize their potential (UNESCO, 2004). It was based on this type of fundamental principle that social studies was introduced in Botswana in 1969 as part of the lower standards 1 and 2 curriculum. The subject was later introduced to the whole primary school curriculum system in the country in 1982 after the 1975 recommendations made by National Commission on Education to replace history and geography that were in place then (Adeyemi, 2000). The reason for replacing history and geography was that it was not catering for pupils' interest and also would not cover controversial issues of globalization. These subjects (history and geography) focused on issues that had no obvious relation to the learners; for example history; which would be European history such as the discovery of sea route to India by Christopher Columbus and geography taking those mountain ranges such as the Himalayas. Adeyemi (2000) argues that citizenship was directed at west values and beliefs by the colonial administration as children were to learn European goals which emphasized monarchy: such as kings, queens, princes, and princesses while in geography, children would learn physical features especially those of European climates, vegetation, mountain ranges, hills and rivers, which was rather not relevant to their immediate environment.

Arguing in the same direction, Hennings, Hennings & Bonish (1989) points out that;  
young people should know the significance of the key events  
and people in the history of their nation and civilization  
in general; should know the significance of the key  
document and philosophical ideas that have played  
a major role in the development of their nation (p.89).

In addition to the above view, the teaching of social studies in school should equip pupils with knowledge on the emerging issues such as HIV/AIDS, teenage pregnancy, child abuse, gender issues, and also how to handle the already infected and how to live with the affected people. Social studies courses should provide learners with information that will later be beneficiary to them outside the classroom. Furthermore, social studies should provide a forum for children to learn about and practice democracy, self-reliance, development, unity and 'botho' [social harmony] as espoused in the national principles of Botswana. The principle of democracy enables the people to have a say in decisions affecting their lives while self-reliance enables them to be responsible and learn those basic life skills for self -supporting or survival. Through unity and social harmony, children are able to learn how to live with others by sharing resources available during their learning. This is in line with Parker (2008) argument that "democratic citizens need both to know democratic things and to do democratic things".

According to Stockard (2007), globalization, technological advances, and demographic shifts have changed our economy. "It is therefore imperative that we understand the fundamental shifts....., and yet we must devise new ways of educating our high school students to succeed in the twenty-first century. In the twenty-first century, our high schools are increasingly challenged to provide young people with new skills that are different from those around which we have organized our educational system in the past"(pg ix). Thorough education and more particularly social studies education should therefore be geared towards enabling children to learn the meaning of democracy and self-reliant skills and how they work. For example, in Botswana, social studies prepare children for a particular kind of relationship to one another and to the political community. Children are typically introduced to Botswana's constitution as part of social studies curriculum at an early stage. This is an important movement because the constitution is the citizens hand book and the nations book of agreement (Michaels, Michaels & Michaels, 1980).

Social studies should equip learners with the basic skills needed for survival in today's world of work; that is the skill of self-reliance. The children are taught not to expect things to be done for them but rather they must take initiatives and the opportunities that exist for their own development through self-help and hard working. Their hard working will reduce dependency on neither their parents nor the government. Indeed if learners are equipped with the spirit of self-reliance at an early stage, it will enable them to be responsible in meeting their needs in life. For example, a child can be taught gardening skills at school; such as vegetable production. A child can later make his or her own little garden in the backyard and produce some vegetables for consumption while surplus can be sold to get cash which in turn can buy uniform or pay for school fees. This clearly gives a picture on how self-reliant skills can be used for survival. The general objective of social studies is 'citizenship.' Citizenship education also has some objectives to meet for it to have been incorporated into the school curriculum. Ajiboye and Omolade [2005] identified some objectives as follows:

- to create an awareness of the constitution
- to create adequate and functional political literacy amongst learners
- to sensitise learners to functions and obligations of government

- to make learners to be aware of their rights and duties and also to respect the rights of others
- to assist in the production of responsible, well informed and self-reliant skills ~ to inculcate rights, values and attitudes for the development of the individual and the society (pg 40).

Therefore all what social studies do is aimed at producing a 'good citizen' through citizenship education. According to Hahn and Alviar-Martin (2008), there has been much interest in civic education internationally in recent years. However, citizenship/ civic education is a new concept in Botswana and it is still debatable on what exactly it covers more especially as it seems to be infused in social studies. It does not stand as a subject on its own. Zarrilo (2000) noted that authorities have provided several perspectives on precisely what citizenship education tries to accomplish. Citizenship education is a topic of many facets that there is little consensus about what effective citizenship education means.

Parker (2000) defines citizenship education as the kind of education that aims to prepare children for a particular kind of relationship to one another and to the political community in which they live. Citizenship education considers the diversity of individuals in terms of cultural ethics, identity, religious beliefs and family background. Therefore citizenship education can be defined as educating children from childhood to become clear thinking and enlightened citizens who participate in decisions concerning society. Generally, it deals with components such as rights, duties, participation and identity.

This type of curriculum therefore requires that teachers should be in a position to deliver the content that will prepare children for the world outside the school premises and into the community in which they live. Teachers should give pupils the opportunity to manipulate and make their own wise decisions. Teaching approaches need to prepare school leavers with those experiences, which they are about to encounter as young adults and citizens with their communities' together with decision making in a democratic society. Teachers should inculcate in pupils the personal and social abilities and skills to be developed including how to take initiatives and act responsible as an individual or a member of the family, school or a wider community.

It is further expressed that; schools should not see themselves in isolation from the community, which they serve. The school curriculum should promote the moral and physical development of pupils and prepare them for further opportunities, responsibilities and experiences with adult life. By planning the curriculum properly and purposefully, consulting between pupils, school and the community can improve and move towards these objectives and also help to cultivate in pupils a sense of social responsibility in the young citizens of tomorrow.

In Botswana, social studies is viewed by Government of Botswana (2005) as, "the practice of integrating the skills, attitudes, and knowledge from the social sciences and humanities and to educate effective citizens for Botswana". The introduction of new subjects like social studies is very important because it is one of the most contemporary subjects that cover a variety of topics including recent issues in our society. It is of its kind because it is an interdisciplinary subject that draws its content from other disciplines such as economics, civics, anthropology, social sciences, sociology as well as the arts; for us to understand human life and society (Salia-Bao). Davies, Gregory and Riley (1999) noted that: "teaching the social studies is one way of preparing children for a participatory role in adult society. There is need to prepare young people within personal and social education to contribute, cooperate and take responsibility" Social studies remains a core subject that is aimed at inculcating all the necessary skills, values, knowledge and

attitudes that are necessary for developing a responsible citizen. Therefore schools and teachers through social studies are in a better position to provide opportunities for social interaction. For example, creating a chance for children to participate in social functions like HIV/AIDS day, exhibitions and involving them in extra curricular activities; such as music and sports competitions. These activities would bring about social interaction together with self-esteem in children. Salia-Bao (1990:26) noted that, "it is important that our children are given chance through social studies to inquire and learn more about themselves and about the wider communities in which they are to live."

Furthermore, Kaltsounis (1979) expressed the view that social studies was directed at transmitting knowledge and stressing only those objectives that tended to increase the children's knowledge. However today the subject has adapted to a world of work in which change and conflict are ever present. All these situations need not only knowledge; rather it also involves experiences in the work place, decision making, critical and creative thinking, communication and cooperation. It also emphasizes in individuals responsibility and in taking responsibility in ones own actions (Smith in Openshaw, 1996).

The Openshaw (1996) view is supported by Botswana Vision 2016, "Towards Prosperity for All" that; "Botswana will need to be educated to understand better the importance of entrepreneurial skills. The stability and success of the economy will depend upon the emergence of small and medium sized enterprises in which people take risk and generate employment for other" (pg.36). Therefore self-reliance is important for the nation and education should be organized to serve development. It involves turning out productive citizens capable of manning the existing portions in the economy and creating new opportunities for self-employment or employment for others. At the same time, one of Botswana's national principles is self-reliance. Specifically, schools are expected to inculcate the spirit of self-help in the minds of the children. Children must be taught not to expect things to be done for them by the government or other agencies. They must be ready to take initiatives and to seize opportunities that exist for their own self development. Social Studies should teach them the principle and practice of self reliance. The inquiry and problem-solving methods of teaching social studies were thus recommended for developing these principles in the children (Education for Kagisano, 1977). Raditlhokwa (2003) argues that although Botswana has done comparatively well in providing educational facilities for its people, the entire educational system is still essentially colonial and unempowering. It still produces graduates who lack the skills required to feed themselves and serve their society meaningfully (pg.24).

Social Studies is therefore seen as a key subject to inculcate all the necessary skills that are to develop the youth into autonomous citizens. Social studies as an interdisciplinary subject, advocates for children's learning through hand on experiences that is to say; the subject can only yield good results if proper methods and approaches including selection of relevant content is made in order to teach Social Studies. The school as a learning centre should not isolate themselves from the community as it is an important information resource for both learners and teachers. This is because the prime goal of social studies is "citizenship" which calls for all students to be able to participate actively in their local communities, states, national and global communities. The community still remains an informal institute which moulds young learners in order to achieve the social studies goal. In the community children will learn their village histories, norms, values and other important aspects of life such as their families, the political parties, religious institutions. The skills are gained as the learners help their parents at home for example selling at a tuck-shop, which enhances entrepreneurial skills that can be applied to boost self reliance which is one of Botswana's national principle helping at the lands or at a carpentry shop and so on. This enables learners to be self determined for the future. All students

should be able to participate fully in their local state, national and global communities. Social studies the most important curriculum area that covers civic development although after curriculum areas and the classroom and school climates are also factors after agencies in society are, such as family, religious institutions, associations, political parties and the media, also influence students civic education.

### **The Study**

It is recognized that the issues of critical thinking, self-reliant and development of positive citizens is lacking in the Botswana society. But with the introduction of social studies there is the hope that the situation will change for the better. Therefore, this study attempted to find out the perceptions of teachers on the effectiveness of social studies in promoting citizenship and self-reliance skills in primary school pupils in Botswana. This is purely a survey research, and the aim was to obtain information from primary school social studies teachers on the effectiveness of social studies in promoting citizenship training and self reliant skills among primary school pupils in Botswana. Specifically, two research questions were addressed in the study:

2. What are the teachers' general perceptions of social studies as a tool for citizenship training?
3. What are the teachers' general perceptions of social studies as a tool for the development of self reliant skills?

One hundred experienced teachers (with over ten years of teaching primary social studies) were purposively selected for the survey. A 25-item questionnaire tagged "Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Social Studies in Developing Appropriate Citizenship Education" with a reliability coefficient of 0.94 using Cronbach Alpha was used to collect data for the study. The questionnaire was on a 4-point Likert scale of: to a large extent, just adequate, marginally and not at all. Respondents were expected to indicate the level to which social studies was achieving its goal in relation to the 25 items by ticking any of those four indicators. The questionnaires were personally administered to the teachers in their various schools and were collected back within one week. Data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics.

### **Results**

What are the teachers' general perceptions of social studies as a tool for citizenship training?

The summary of the results presented in Table 1 indicates teachers' perceptions of the effectiveness of social studies in promoting both citizenship training and self reliant skills. Specifically, items 2, 6, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17, 21, 22 and 25, directly focused on citizenship training.

Table 1 - Teachers' Perceptions of the Effectiveness of Social Studies in Promoting Citizenship and Self-reliant Skills in Primary School Pupils in Botswana  
N= 100

To what Extent does social studies makes pupils:	To a Large Extent		Just Adequate		Marginally		Not at All	
	n	%	n	%	n	%	n	%
Understand their culture and social relatives	40	40.0	38	38.0	20	20.0	2	2.0
Understand their duties as citizens	26	26.0	21	21.0	49	49.0	4	4.0
Appreciate other people in the society	31	31.0	24	24.0	30	30.0	15	15.0
Tolerate other people in the society	22	22.0	18	18.0	40	40.0	20	20.0
Being creative	12	12.0	10	10.0	19	19.0	59	59.0
Develop good manners and appropriate social behaviour	20	20.0	19	19.0	30	30.0	31	31.0
Solve practical problems	10	10.0	12	12.0	15	15.0	63	63.0
Reducing conflicts among pupils	11	11.0	21	21.0	38	38.0	30	30.0
Acquisition of interpersonal skills	8	8.0	14	14.0	34	34.0	44	44.0
Effective conflict handling styles	6	6.0	10	10.0	15	15.0	69	69.0
Makes pupils responsible	18	18.0	10	10.0	41	41.0	31	31.0
Make pupils to love Botswana (Patriotism)	31	31.0	36	36.0	30	30.0	3	3.0
Develop critical thinking ability	8	8.0	10	10.0	25	25.0	57	57.0
Create political awareness and literacy	10	10.0	17	17.0	24	24.0	49	49.0
Develop respect for elders and authorities	34	34.0	28	28.0	30	30.0	8	8.0
Understand the functions of governments	19	19.0	32	32.0	19	19.0	30	30.0
Understand structures of Government in Botswana	24	24.0	27	27.0	14	14.0	35	35.0
Ability to give sound judgment	6	6.0	14	14.0	32	32.0	48	48.0
Ability to make correct decision in the face of a problem	8	8.0	10	10.0	22	22.0	60	60.0
Ability to solve problems without teacher/parent assistance	6	6.0	11	11.0	29	29.0	54	54.0
Create awareness of the constitution	14	14.0	10	10.0	21	21.0	56	56.0
Voluntarily participate in community activities	21	21.0	27	27.0	39	39.0	13	13.0
Awareness in environmental issues	28	28.0	34	34.0	26	26.0	12	12.0
Appreciate other peoples work	5	5.0	12	12.0	33	33.0	50	50.0
Understand their rights as citizens	20	20.0	28	28.0	37	37.0	15	15.0

It is clear from the teachers' responses on each of the items on citizenship training that teachers perceived social studies as very weak in developing effective citizenship in the learners. For example, 47% of the teachers indicated that the subject has the capacity to developing appropriate knowledge of citizenship duties in the learners, while about the same number, 48%, indicated that the subject could teach children about their rights adequately. It could be argued that fundamental things for learners to know are their rights and duties as citizens, and if social studies is failing in achieving these in the learners, then this poses a critical question regarding the extent to which the subject is achieving its objectives. Similarly, it was evident from results in Table 1, that the subject is not adequately making the children to know the structure and functions of government in Botswana. This is really challenging because, at this age, learners are expected to be aware of the various organs of government in their country, and the functions of each arms and levels of government. So, if the subject that is expected to equip the learners with

such knowledge is really not doing it effectively, then there is a need to review the curriculum. With regards to students' knowledge of the constitution, it was also found that the subject is not adequately achieving this goal. From the teachers' observations, social studies content is failing largely in developing knowledge of the country's constitution in Botswana children. This is another area of concern, because the only subject in Botswana primary and junior secondary schools that is expected to foster the knowledge of the constitution in the learners is social studies. If teachers then feel that the subject is not addressing this aspect, then there is a need to examine the curriculum of the subject again, with a view to incorporate the missing elements. Interestingly however, teachers feel that the subject adequately develops a sense of patriotism in their learners, that the subject makes the children to love Botswana. The explanation for this could be that emphasis is placed more on using the subject to develop patriotism and nationalism in the learners. Ordinarily, Batswana (as Botswana citizens are called) do love their country. This sense of patriotism is pervasive all over the country, and therefore not limited to school pupils alone. Previous curriculum development commissions in the country have tried to incorporate some cardinal principles, such as self reliant, democracy, development, and botho (which mean respect) into the school curricular. Apart from that, the country's Vision 2016 (government of Botswana, 1997), also articulated all these principles, and there has been a conscious and deliberate attempt at all levels of education in Botswana to teach students about these principles. It is not therefore strange that teachers rate social studies as being very effective in articulating the love of the country in the learners. This leads us to the second research question examined.

What are the teachers' general perceptions of social studies as a tool for the development of self reliant skills?

With regards to developing appropriate self reliant skills in the learners, reference could be made to items 6, 8, 17, 18, 19 and 20 on Table 1. Taking a cursory look at the teachers' responses, it is obvious that the teachers' equally rated social studies poorly, in terms of developing self reliant skills in the learners. The teachers' perception could be tied to the fact that from the list of the objectives of social studies and the attainment targets as contained in the syllabus (Government of Botswana, 2005, pg 147), there was no mention of the word self reliant. According to that syllabus:

The primary reason for social studies instruction is to help learners acquire and use information to think critically, logically and rationally in dealing with social, economic, political and environmental issues. It encourages and promotes cultural identity, good citizenship, tolerance....  
(pg147)

From our examination of all the objectives, none actually focused on the development of self reliant skills in the learners. This position was also earlier highlighted by Preece and Mosweunyane (2004), when they noted that in Botswana "both legislation and appropriate education to enable youth to take informed action, seemed to be missing" (pg.87). This is in contradiction to the Botswana national principles which makes the development of self reliant citizens as one of its corner stone. It is therefore imperative that the objectives of social studies teaching in Botswana are re-examined to focus on this critical outcome.

Other areas of focus examined in Table 1 included development of environmental awareness in the learners, development of appreciation of Botswana history and culture, etc. From the findings presented in that table, it could be rightly observed that the teachers actually rated social studies very well in terms of achieving those goals. The view of the teachers is rooted in the list of objectives of social studies as stipulated in the syllabus examined above. Specifically,

out of the nine objectives enumerated in the syllabus about five of them (about 56%) actually focused on environment, history of Botswana and culture. It was therefore not a big surprise that the subject was tailored at achieving these outcomes, more than all other objectives. Arguments have always been that each country tries to define social studies based on what they intend to achieve with it. However, while this argument is plausible, efforts should be made to incorporate as many outcomes as possible to produce a balanced citizen, which is the ultimate goal of the subject (Ajiboye, 2008).

## Conclusion

Generally speaking, findings from this study shows that teachers tend to view social studies as a very weak subject to effect a positive change in citizenship training and self reliant skills among the learners. Social studies was seen by them as performing a passive role in effecting those outcomes, with little emphasis on active learner participation and this actually corroborates the views of Hahn and Alviar-Martin (2008) on the way both teachers and students perceive citizenship. However, an examination of the Upper Primary Social Studies Syllabus (Standard Five to Seven) (Government of Botswana, 2005, pg. 147.), shows that the objectives of the subject as enumerated in the syllabus are quite copious and covered all the areas of citizenship training and cultural appreciation in the learners. Those objectives include development of critical thinking, problem solving, inquiry, desirable attitudes curiosity, creativity, awareness of rights and responsibilities, etc. In line with those objectives, it could also be affirmed that the content listed in the syllabus also corroborates the objectives. One may therefore begin to think that the problem with social studies failing to achieve the objectives may be traced to content delivery by the teachers themselves.

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