History education and citizenship conundrum: Experiences and perspectives of Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education history teachers in Lesotho

Introduction

History is considered by some as a simplistic story of the past or a school subject that studies events over time and space. Other efforts to define history describe it as the study of people that take into account ethnic groups, social trends, religion, philosophy and political orientation.1 Whilst Ajala2 understands history as a tool used to develop peaceful coexistence in society by imparting to learners the norms and values that promote healthy human existence. Cole and Barsalou3 view history as a type of education, which promotes and secures heavily marginalised ethnic, religious and cultural identities that can easily be subjugated within the society. The views above are an insinuation that the promotion of certain values and production of good citizenry are critical in the mandate of school history. Supporting this perceived relationship between history and citizenship, Fru4 indicates that through history education, learners become responsible, reflective and active citizens who can make informed decisions. In this way, history helps learners improve their capabilities to think critically as informed citizens. Stearns5 concurs by stating that history is the subject that creates well-informed citizens about the society they live in. This significant value of citizenship education has led to a global increased interest as with many more countries embracing such global effort is the integration of citizenship values into the history curriculum and syllabus of schools. Despite the successes of this initiative in some contexts, others have received it with mixed feelings thereby problematising its implementation and compromising the chances of a successful outcome. This article interrogates the relationship between school history and citizenship through an exploration of the perceptions of history teachers in Lesotho about the promotion of citizenship values through history education. The rationale for the investigation stems from the inclusion of citizenship values as part of the aims of the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCS) history syllabus. The study operated within the interpretive paradigm and a qualitative case study approach of four purposively selected high schools and eight teachers in Maseru, Lesotho. The data collected from semi-structured interviews revealed that the teachers possess very vague and varying understandings of citizenship. This vagueness ultimately translates into the classroom practice in the form of a lack of harmonious implementation of the LGCS history syllabus’ prescriptions on citizenship values. The teachers however, have a mostly positive feeling about the importance of imparting citizenship values to learners, especially in the unique context of Lesotho through history education. This article recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) initiates a robust curriculum reflection process, together with relevant stakeholders that will inform policy on the effective implementation of the citizenship clauses of the LGCS history syllabus.

There have been serious efforts across countries to make history education more relevant. One such global effort is the integration of citizenship values into the history curriculum and syllabus of schools. Despite the successes of this initiative in some contexts, others have received it with mixed feelings thereby problematising its implementation and compromising the chances of a successful outcome. This article interrogates the relationship between school history and citizenship through an exploration of the perceptions of history teachers in Lesotho about the promotion of citizenship values through history education. The rationale for the investigation stems from the inclusion of citizenship values as part of the aims of the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCS) history syllabus. The study operated within the interpretive paradigm and a qualitative case study approach of four purposively selected high schools and eight teachers in Maseru, Lesotho. The data collected from semi-structured interviews revealed that the teachers possess very vague and varying understandings of citizenship. This vagueness ultimately translates into the classroom practice in the form of a lack of harmonious implementation of the LGCS history syllabus’ prescriptions on citizenship values. The teachers however, have a mostly positive feeling about the importance of imparting citizenship values to learners, especially in the unique context of Lesotho through history education. This article recommends that the Ministry of Education and Training (MoET) initiates a robust curriculum reflection process, together with relevant stakeholders that will inform policy on the effective implementation of the citizenship clauses of the LGCS history syllabus.

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with the responsibility to ensure that the relationship succeeds. We approach this article from an experiential premise and the assumption that the way teachers perceive a programme and the level of skills they are exposed to about that programme is directly proportionate to the extent of their commitment to its implementation and the eventual success or failure. Consequently, we sought in this article to understand and interrogate the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education (LGCS) history teachers’ experiences of citizenship, their perceptions on the expectation to promote citizenship values through history teaching, and problems encountered in their efforts at promoting citizenship values through the teaching of history.

Background

Subsequent to the link between citizenship and history as aforementioned, the effective implementation of the former is mainly reliant on how the latter is organised in the school set-up. In context of this article, in Lesotho history is offered at the secondary school level as an optional subject in the curriculum. Out of the 14 LGCSE history syllabus aims, three were identified in this article as having citizenship connotations. Consequently, we used these as the citizenship variables for the LGCSE.

The inclusion of these three key citizenship-related aims in the LGCS history syllabus indicates the importance that the curriculum and assessment policy places on the attainment of citizenship goals through history education, and constitutes part of the rationale for this article.

1.4 inculcates ideals of tolerance as a pre-condition for the attainment of peace, stability and eventual national unity and development.

1.12 develops an awareness of environmental factors and their impact on the socio-economic and political development of Lesotho.

The meaning of citizenship is fluid and sometimes understood varyingly in different times and space. Marshall describes citizenship as a status bestowed upon people who were full members of a community. According to him, it required a direct sense of community membership, based on loyalty to that community, which is a collective possession. In this view, citizenship is described as the status of a person recognised as being a legal member or part of a nation. This view deviates from the previous in terms of the focus on birth as opposed to legality, respectively. Another dimension from Herbert and Sears assumes citizenship as a relationship between an individual and a state, and amongst individuals within a state. Thus, citizenship refers to a person’s sense of belonging within a geographical state and her relationship with other individuals within that same state.

Citizenship involves being a member of a community by enjoying its rights and having relationships with fellow citizens. Consequently, a person’s citizenship is intrinsically linked to their identity. McLaughlin supports the link between citizenship and belonging to a community by alluding to minimal and maximal interpretations, with both interpretations conceived in identity in its social, cultural and psychological forms. In the ‘new South Africa’ for example, the official version of democratic citizenship is seen as a maximal one by positing, a citizen is one who is expected to hold an identity as a member of a democratic country, which entails not only rights but also duties. The vision of citizenship reflected in the Constitution of South Africa is also maximal in terms of the virtues it expects: citizens are assumed to be committed to the common good, to
Many scholars have conceptualised the purpose and manner of teaching and learning of history in different and sometimes conflicting ways. Scheiber brought up the idea of historical literacy, which refers to what an individual accumulates from studying history. One of the indicators of his historical literacy framework is the idea of citizenship. Implying that for a person to qualify as historically literate, that individual is expected to have acquired certain demonstrable core citizenship principles. Therefore, the process of learning historical concepts and historical facts can give an opportunity for pupils to develop their citizenship traits. This resonates very well with the arguments of Ajala and Ndille who argue that history affects learners’ norms and values, and that history is used in certain contexts such as in Cameroon to enforce a policy of national integration which in itself is an element of citizenship. In this way, history as a subject is a tool that helps develop within a society a peaceful coexistence. Phillips attests to the above arguments by suggesting that a history curriculum should encourage pupils to think independently, present sustainable arguments, communicate effectively, co-operate and learn from each other, be curious, interrogate evidence as well as be appreciative of more than one point of view and a range of different interpretations. He goes further to encourage that the history curriculum must seek to produce citizens who have a properly informed perception of their own identity as well as those of others and who actively promote inclusive, as opposed to an exclusive, view of community, society and nation. Such citizens will also be able to cultivate a depth of vision amongst pupils, addressing some universal values such as tolerance, social justice and honesty.

Despite the above visible alignment between history education and citizenship, some views however, suggest that combining both can have a few challenges. Brett for instance, states that there is a fear that a sustained focus on these issues will somehow take pupils away from the core business and substance of history. He further claims that the explicit teaching of citizenship in a history context may mean on occasions interweaving history and contemporary politics lessons within the context of an overarching sequence of lessons. To mitigate this impasse, Batchelor therefore suggests that it would be useful for citizenship coordinators to issue guidelines in order that subject specialists understand the specific requirements that education for citizenship entails. He suggests that these guidelines should make explicit how the subject they are teaching contributes to the understanding of citizenship, how it can exemplify the operation of values and concepts essential for citizenship, how it may help students to develop their skills of analysis, critical judgments, expressing a point of view or participating co-operatively with others.

**Methodology**

This qualitative study sought to explore Lesotho history teachers’ understandings of citizenship and their perceptions of the role of history education in promoting the citizenship values embedded in the LGCSE syllabus. We approached the study from an interpretive paradigm as we assumed the subjective perspectives of the teachers to be the reality that was primordial in achieving the goals of the study through an in-depth exploration. Convenience and purposive sampling techniques were employed to determine participants for the study; with only schools offering history at the LGCSE level being considered. Four schools in the Maseru district were used in a proportion of two history teachers per school. We ensured that all the teachers are currently teaching history at the LGCSE level of Forms D and E.

Data was collected with the help of semi-structured interviews. These interviews were guided by the main objectives underpinning this study and were divided into four main sections. Firstly, the emphasis was on defining citizenship. Secondly, participants were asked to identify from the LGCSE history syllabus aims they thought reflected citizenship values. Thirdly, participants were asked how they teach history in order to achieve those aims identified in the syllabus. Lastly, participants were required to state challenges that they faced when addressing issues of citizenship whilst teaching history. Follow-up questions were asked as necessary. The recorded data from the interviews was thoroughly listened to and then transcribed for analysis with the teachers being given the pseudonyms A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H for purposes of anonymity.

The analysis of the data was done inductively following the a priori thematic approach. This implies that the themes were determined by the research objectives explained in the previous paragraph. On the basis of these a priori themes, trends and patterns were identified from the teachers’ responses and then analysed in a manner that was responsive to the objectives of the article. This was followed by a careful, more focused re-reading and review of data. Even though the themes were determined a priori, this approach to data analysis was effective because, despite LGCSE history teachers having differing views, they all relate to the research objectives, which were the main themes for this study.

**Ethical considerations**

The researchers ensured ethical research practice in undertaking the study. Participants were given full information about the study and requested to consent in writing before participating in the study. To ensure confidentiality, the researchers anonymised all participant names and ensured privacy. The protocols and tools of the larger Master’s Degree project from which this study is drawn, were subjected to ethical review by the National University of Lesotho.
Findings and discussion

Teachers’ understandings of citizenship

All of the teachers had the requisite credentials to teach as they all held a Bachelor’s Degree in Education. One teacher indicated that he holds a managerial position in his school as the head of a department (HOD). All teachers were therefore qualified to teach history in secondary schools at the LGCSE level, and could be trusted to have a well-informed understanding of citizenship and proper familiarisation with the contents of the syllabus.

However, despite their requisite qualifications in history teaching, the findings revealed that the teachers do not necessarily demonstrate a comfortable and professional understanding of the citizenship concept. This was evident in their responses to the question of their knowledge of citizenship that was often preceded by pauses and repeating of the word citizenship. Teacher B’s first response was: ‘Citizenship … citizenship is, is about emm … ’ This manner of response often indicates a lack of comprehension on a topic and therefore, the absence of the correct words to explain the concept. The fact that a similar trend was observed in the responses of all the other teachers is an indication of the absence of a harmonious understanding of what the word citizenship entails and how it should be taught in the LGCSE syllabus.

The teachers, however, provided information that we were able to draw from and ascertain the kind of influence they have in their classrooms as they went about teaching history. An issue that came across strongly from the teachers is the potential for cultivating active citizens if teachers do not have identified citizenship competencies. This study revealed that although LGCSE history teachers showed little understanding of the concept of citizenship, they however, demonstrated a positive attitude on promoting citizenship values through history education. This is encouraging considering that the class cannot reach its potential for cultivating active citizens if teachers do not have proper comprehension of that potential. Responses from all participants show the different benefits that they believe could be attained if history education is used to promote citizenship values in learners.

Teachers’ perspectives on history as a vehicle for citizenship education

Issues of nationality, patriotism, tolerance, peace, stability, national unity and development that are reflected in the aims of the LGCSE history syllabus all demonstrate that history education is expected to promote citizenship values. This observation is in support of Phillips, who stated that history education should seek to produce learners who easily demonstrate identified citizenship competencies. This study revealed that although LGCSE history teachers showed little and varying understandings of the concept of citizenship, they however, demonstrated a positive attitude on promoting citizenship values through history education. This is encouraging considering that the class cannot reach its potential for cultivating active citizens if teachers do not have proper comprehension of that potential. Responses from all participants show the different benefits that they believe could be attained if history education is used to promote citizenship values in learners.

Amongst some of the responses in this light are, Teacher G who explained that; ‘learners should be made to apply what they learn from their history lessons to their daily lives if we are to see a different generation’. What this infers is that including issues of citizenship in history lessons would help bridge the distance or historicity of the discipline of history, since citizenship, just like heritage, is about the now rather than the distant past. Putting this into practical perspective, Teacher F elaborated that:

’[T]he first place to start in trying to train children to be active citizens is by teaching them about their origin for them to know who they are and where they come from.’ (Participant G, history teacher, Masera district)

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This implies therefore, that the process of learning historical concepts and historical facts can allow pupils to develop their citizenship competencies. Supporting these positive perceptions, Ajala explains that history inculcates in learners significant norms and values, which can facilitate healthy human existence. In this way, history as a subject is a tool that helps develop peaceful coexistence and harmony, which are indispensable variables for any stable society.

There is a strong view from the teachers that if learners are taught citizenship values as part of their history education from a very young age, they will become better and patriotic citizens in the future. This position was held firmly by Teachers G, B and A. Teacher G noted that:

‘If learners can be taught about these citizenship values and their importance, it will be easier for them to live by them daily as they interact with their community members.’ (Participant G, history teacher, Maseru district)

Teacher B concurred and advanced that:

‘Citizenship education should be instilled in learners from an as young age as these of secondary schools so that they can grow up with the mentality that they have to protect their country at all costs.’ (Participant B, history teacher, Maseru district)

This, she said is because she felt the present political leadership of Lesotho was lacking in patriotism; hence the frequent socio-economic and political troubles Lesotho is facing. She thinks it will take a generation that not only understands and appreciates the history of Lesotho but also values the Basotho identity and nation, to the extent of striving for its prosperity and development. She concluded that this could be achieved through a very aggressive and rigorous implementation of a history education in Lesotho that aligns itself squarely with core citizenship indicators. Expressing similar concern regarding the degenerating socio-political and economic situation of Lesotho, Teacher A suggested that citizenship qualities be instilled early in children in order to nurture in them a real sense of patriotism. Apart from the view amongst all these teachers that citizenship values are essential for Lesotho, there is also a general agreement that it will be more effective if it is taught in an integrated manner with history, rather than as an independent school subject. This, they think is because of the highly convergent nature of the two bodies of knowledge. We know that the past is fixed and that no one can change what happened in the past. Nevertheless, as the values of society change over time and space, the historians’ depiction of the past also changes with them.

Problems that the Lesotho General Certificate of Secondary Education history teachers encounter when promoting citizenship education

The study revealed that even though the LGCSE history syllabus stipulates very clearly the requisite citizenship values and competencies that learners are expected to attain, the syllabus does not provide guidance to history teachers on how they could instruct and assess the content in order to achieve those objectives. Consequently, teachers are left to their own devices to decide and improvise on the methods and resources that could be used. It was further revealed that this lack of confidence from the teachers on how to integrate the citizenship competencies in their history lessons has a domino effect on the nature and quality of their classroom assessment. In this regard, teachers are said to provide minimal assessment opportunities, which are mostly done orally. These oral dominated assessments are compounded by unpremeditated and spontaneous questions with the hope that it will be revealed in their answers whether or not the learners have acquired the requisite citizenship competencies. Also, LGCSE history teachers’ responses revealed that they believe that the MoET is only paying lip service to this initiative of integrating citizenship in history. The teachers explained that their experience of the standardised history examinations from the Examinations Council of Lesotho indicate that the examinations give more weightage to the history content areas of the syllabus, and nothing on the citizenship values and competencies. This raises concerns about the rationale for the citizenship value aims in the syllabus if they are not given equal weightage in the exams.

Conclusions and recommendations

There is no doubt that the political and socio-economic challenges currently facing the Kingdom of Lesotho would be greatly mitigated if current leadership exemplified great patriotism. It would be unsurprising to say they do not have it because they lack the kind of education that instills in citizens an understanding of the history of their country and appreciate its bearings with time, contributing to its advancement. This is the kind of education that the discipline of history, when integrated with citizenship values, can offer any nation. If the prescripts of the Lesotho curriculum and assessment policy are anything to go by, then the aforementioned is also the kind of education envisaged for Lesotho through the LGCSE history syllabus. Despite this clear history-citizenship overt syllabus prescription, its implementation is marred by significant challenges. This study revealed that whilst history teachers in Lesotho have very positive attitudes about the promotion of citizenship values in learners through history education and would love to see more effort in incorporating citizenship education in both teaching and assessment of history, they demonstrated little and, varied knowledge and understandings of the concept of citizenship. Consequent to this variance, there is a haphazard classroom implementation of the syllabus requirements. A key factor that emerged was the fact that the citizenship values expected by the syllabus are not examined by Examinations Council of Lesotho, thereby raising concerns about the seriousness of Lesotho’s intentions on citizenship education.

It is recommended from this study that the MoET with the support of history Teacher Associations and other relevant stakeholders undertake a robust process of curriculum reflection. This process will interrogate and review the
implementation of the citizenship provisions of the LGSCE history syllabus, with the ultimate goal of producing a framework for a more effective and unambiguous implementation by the history teachers. This will go a long way in supporting the curriculum and assessment policy of Lesotho to achieve the valuable purpose for which it was designed.

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Data availability
The data that support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author, R.N.F., upon reasonable request.

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