

Perceptions of In-Service Teachers on Learning/Teaching of Citizenship Education: A Case Study of Chinhoyi University of Technology, Mashonaland West Province, Zimbabwe

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Abstract

The purpose of the study was to establish the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the learning of Citizenship Education. A case study research design was adopted for the study. A total of sixty (60) participants were involved in the study. Purposive sampling was employed to select the participants. Questionnaires and an interview guide were enlisted to solicit information from the respondents. The study established that the respondents were initially skeptical about the course, hesitant to discuss politically related issues, the in-service teachers had a positive perception towards the learning of citizenship education, appreciated that such a forum enhanced their capacities to participate in national development issues and national consciousness, enhanced social and political cohesion and capacity to make informed decisions with regard to national issues. The study also established that lack of political tolerance, restrictive teaching approaches, poor internet facilities, restriction of the course to one department at the university and lack of current non-partisan literature in the library were setbacks for effective learning of Citizenship Education. The study recommends that more teachers be staff developed in citizenship education, teaching approaches be more student centred and that all undergraduate students passing through the university should study Citizenship Education.

Key words: citizenship education, perceptions, in-service teachers, learning/teaching

Introduction

Globally the learning of Citizenship Education has been found to be fundamental in the transmission of citizenship values and democracy. Zimbabwe being not an exception has acknowledged the importance of Citizenship Education. As a step towards the fulfilment of teaching Citizenship Education in the schools, the Zimbabwean government has made it mandatory that all teachers undergo some staff development in Citizenship Education (Presidential Commission, 1999). This is significant in that teachers, as an important variable in youth development, should be well equipped with citizen education knowledge, values and skills so that they can effectively impart the same to the youth. However of concern is the observation that very little has been done to staff-develop teachers towards this worthwhile cause and that Citizenship Education is, to a large extent, surprisingly still non-existent in the school curriculum. It has also been noted that very little research on perceptions of teachers towards Citizenship Education is available. This scenario motivated the researchers to establish the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the learning of Citizenship Education, their experiences during the course and their reflections after undergoing the course. This is also in view of the fact that teachers in Zimbabwe have been subjected to numerous forms of victimization in the volatile political environment often being accused of being sympathetic to opposition political parties and converting schools into anti-government strongholds (Ndlovu, 2009). It is envisaged that engaging in-service teachers in active participation in citizenship education is one avenue of making them more responsible citizens who are empowered to mould responsible students in the schools.

Theoretical Framework

The study is guided by the philosophy of Reconstructionism. Reconstructionists project that society is in need of constant reconstruction and that social change involves both a reconstruction of education and the use of education in the reconstruction of society (Ozmon and Craver, 2007:134). Implied is that the means and ends of education must be completely refashioned to meet the demands of the present day cultural crises. This is also supported by Brameld cited in Kneller (1971:62) who opined that “Education must commit itself here and now to the creation of a new social order that will fulfil the basic values of our culture and at the same time harmonize with the underlying social and economic forces of the modern world.” This calls for a radical and fundamental transformation of society through the education of its members to a new shared vision of a common social order. The thrust of the position is the creation of a new mindset that acknowledges that society is always changing and that education should inform the thread for change and practice. Education should be exploited to address social ills bedevilling society thereby creating a better society and worldwide democracy. One of the key proponents of Reconstructionism Brameld (1904-1987), cited in Ornstein and Hunkins (2008:51), projects that “students and teachers must not only take positions; they must also become change agents to improve society”. One can argue that both students and teachers should get into the trenches to solve societal problems for the benefit of the nation. It is envisaged that knowledge gained should be augmented with practice; hence the educator becomes a social activist. Zimbabwe is currently a nation in crisis as evidenced by social and moral decay and it is incumbent upon the educator to take social responsibility and salvage the nation.

Freire (1996) who was inspired by his experiences of living in poverty led him to champion education and literacy as the vehicle for social change. He believed that humans had to learn to resist oppression and not become its victims, nor to oppress others. He went on to posit that it is not proper for certain individuals to enjoy plenty while others starve.

Freire (1996) called for dialogue and critical consciousness as a means to overcome oppression and domination. In a way it can be argued that he advocated for serious debate and engagement to challenge domination and oppression in the society. The main thrust was on discussing controversial issues in society and coming up with viable solutions for the common good. In a way educators are taken as the vanguard of the new social order to ensure its sustainability. The main idea being to reconstruct the mind-set of the youth at school level through interrogation of concepts of absolute knowledge. This will culminate in the creation of a new social order which is a genuine democracy.

The ushering in of Citizenship education in the Zimbabwean education system is premised around the Nziramasanga (1999:354) findings that project that:

There is a very serious and imminent danger of producing a disenchanted generation who are not loyal to our own nation but who favour foreign influences. The need for national identity, image and patriotism is greater now than ever before. Without being xenophobic we need to encourage national pride and self confidence in our people.

Nziramasanga (1999:354) then recommended that “Citizenship Education should be compulsory in all teacher training programmes and teaching strategies therefore should include participatory methods, direct transmission of knowledge, and research skills by learners.” This became the basis upon which the Zimbabwean government made it mandatory for all teacher professional development programmes to have a Citizenship Education component.

Problem Statement

Vandalism, intolerance, disrespect for diversity, violence and indiscipline in our schools and society have become the order of the day in Zimbabwe. Mashingaidze (2009:2) laments that corruption, intolerance and violence are no longer occasional inconveniences in our lives, but they have become regular, structural, deeply embedded and accepted modalities of doing business and conducting other national affairs. This is an acknowledgement that something is seriously wrong in terms of values and morals in our society. These acts have been attributed to lack of values, relevant ethics, morals, individual and collective responsibilities for protecting property and value for life (Nziramasanga, 1999; Shumba, 2004; Halstead and Pike, 2008; Newzimbabwe, 2011).

National and Strategic Studies (NSS), a form of Citizenship Education, has been made compulsory in all teacher training programmes yet teachers are not an exception to the antisocial vices cited above and in some cases they have been cited as perpetrators. Reports of teachers sexually abusing students, abusing corporal punishment, authoritarian culture where behaviour of teachers is not questioned, soliciting bribes and cases of embezzlement of funds by school authorities have become common features in our society (Manyukwe, 2010). Such unbecoming behaviours are not acceptable from members of the teaching profession. Teachers, as custodians of our societal values and role models for the youth, were considered as ideal people to be pertinent to establish their perceptions and experiences in the learning of Citizenship Education. Teachers have a lot of say in determining national direction because of the profound influence they have over the students who constitute the country's future. The prevalence of anti-social behaviour, disrespect of the law and institutions of the land could be indicators of the quality of teachers and role models within our midst. This is a cause for concern and an indication that the nation could be moving along a wrong trajectory. Suffice to say the role of teachers in this mess need to be established for those in corridors of power to take corrective action as a matter of urgency.

Research Questions

1. What are the perceptions of in-service teachers towards the learning of Citizenship Education?
2. How do in-service teachers value the learning experiences and engagements of the Citizenship Education course?
3. What do the in-service teachers suggest could be done to make the learning/teaching of Citizenship Education more effective?

Significance of the Study

It is hoped that the findings will benefit curriculum planners, teachers, students and parents by coming up with practical insights about the teaching/learning of Citizenship Education. The findings could assist teacher training institutions and universities to improve practice and guide policy makers in coming up with a viable Citizenship Education curriculum. This is so considering that while the course is currently compulsorily taught in all teacher training institutions and polytechnical colleges in Zimbabwe, the seemingly youthful university students who form the bulk of the students do not receive such a noble dose. Yet it is these university youths who should agreeably get this social orientation also. It is also envisaged that anti-social behaviour could be checked making our society a better place to live in.

Background of the Study

Internationally Citizenship Education has been projected as an avenue for availing the youth opportunities to actively and critically interrogate a variety of fascinating, provocative and controversial social issues. Alstead and Pike (2008) project that Citizenship Education has been taken as a core subject in some Western societies such as England which has dedicated 5% of secondary school time to it since 2002. This is an acknowledgement of how Citizenship Education has become so central and valuable to such communities. Citizenship Education has been premised as the basis for producing informed, committed and active citizens (Halstead and Pike, 2008 and Sigauke, 2011). It can be deduced that Citizenship Education is the cornerstone for the moulding of loyal, responsible, productive, vibrant, analytical and law abiding youths.

Zimbabwe has made relentless efforts in its endeavour to emulate the Western world in coming up with some packages to buttress its Citizenship Education. The Presidential Commission (1999) recommended that Citizenship Education be part and parcel of the school curriculum up to tertiary level. For teacher training and teacher staff development programmes the course has become mandatory. This ensures that teachers have well-grounded concepts and strategies to contribute to the children's moral, ethical and political development. It is thus of utmost interest to note that the teacher has been accorded such a high responsibility of shaping the future leaders of the nation.

However the reality of implementing this noble cause has not been a smooth trajectory. The teaching of Citizenship Education in schools is largely marginalized and in some instances non-existent (Presidential Commission, 1999 and Sigauke, 2011). In Zimbabwean secondary schools Citizenship Education is alleged to be cascaded through subjects like Geography, History, Religious and Moral Education and Education for Living (Presidential Commission, 1999 and Sigauke, 2011). The Presidential Commission (1999) projected that while other subjects can be used to mould good citizens Citizenship Education can do this better.

Suffice to say part of the content in the above mentioned subjects has some relevance to Citizenship Education, but the ideal would be to offer Citizenship Education as a subject to the youths. One can safely conclude that Citizenship Education is not being accorded the seriousness it deserves; it is largely marginalized in the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum. Mudenge, (2008) reported that for civic education there have been development and release of syllabuses for Zimbabwe Junior Certificate and Ordinary level. The report goes further to suggest that civics education was infused into the Language and Communication syllabus for Advanced level students. This is an indication that efforts are being made to ensure that the youths are somewhere catered for in preparing them for their participation and contribution to national debate and constructive engagement.

According to Osler and Starkey (2005) Citizenship Education is a controversial and contestable concept. Implicit in this is the idea that the motives and intentions behind offering the subject in the school curriculum are highly debatable and could be defined by those in corridors of power. Faulks (2006), Divala (2007) and Sigauke (2011) project that Citizenship Education could be used to undermine the same democratic dispensation that it is supposed to develop. Hence the thrust may not be for the benefit of the nation but political leaders in power. A symptom of this scenario is the call to teach partisan history in the schools by the war veterans with those teachers alleged to be teaching “wrong” history facing the music. Teachers have been threatened with death or expulsion from some areas on suspicion of teaching students “wrong” things by ZANU-PF (Zimbabwe African National Union-Patriotic Front) youths and war veterans (Ndlovu, 2009; Tendi, 2010; Sigauke, 2011). To safeguard themselves teachers have tended to neglect topics deemed not favourable to the authorities. Just to highlight the high level of intolerance within the Zimbabwean society, ZANU-PF youths stormed into parliament and brutally attacked elected members of parliament in the presence of police officers during the debate of the Human Rights Bill (Matenga, 2011). Such high levels of disrespect for institutions and purposes they serve is regrettable and a recipe for disaster for the vulnerable in our society.

National and Strategic Studies a brand of Citizenship Education has been introduced in teacher training colleges and other tertiary institutions since 2002 (The Herald, 13 September 2011). The course is premised on four themes: entrepreneurship studies, legal and parliamentary studies, International Relations and Zimbabwean History and Heritage studies. There have been mixed reactions to the National and Strategic Studies curriculum with some accusing it of being narrowly construed and partisan (Mashingaidze, 2009 and Ndlovu, 2009). Responding to a parliamentary committee on allegations of using National and Strategic Studies to teach partisan politics. Mbizvo, the Permanent Secretary in the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary education, refuted the allegations (Herald, 13 September 2011). The Permanent Secretary, however, conceded that the National Strategic and Studies curriculum would be improved to include new concepts such as Peace, Governance and Conflict Resolution. This is an admission that the current National and Strategic Studies curriculum being offered in teacher training colleges is inadequate and needs urgent redress as it may not adequately prepare citizens to understand the dynamics of our contemporary reality and map out an informed trajectory for the future.

Worse still, this stuff is what we are subjecting our youth moulders (teachers) to, taking cognisance of the fact that a nation is vibrant and strong as its youth., then what type of a nation’s future generation would one envisage? This scenario is substantiated by Faulks (2006), Nyakudya (2007) and Ndlovu (2009) who claim that in some instances Citizenship Education is instituted to ensure political expediency, compliance, loyalty and acceptance of the status quo. Implied is the idea that Citizenship Education can be a tool for manipulation of the youth by those in corridors of power. However, Tendi (2010) and Nyakudya (2011) argue that the National and Strategic Studies curriculum in its current form can deliver. What is pertinent is how it is implemented to attain the desired outcomes. Maybe the pertinent issue is the interpretation and engagement of the student objectively in the learning of Citizenship Education.

Given the vulnerability of teachers and their initial training, their attitude towards Citizenship Education and the rationale for undergoing the course become causes for concern viewed against the prevailing political Environment. Chinhoyi University of Technology has incorporated a course of Citizenship Education in the Bachelor of Technology Education degree programme for in-service teachers in accordance with the Presidential Commission (1999) recommendations. The course is premised on producing informed, committed, tolerant, active, and autonomous and critically reflective citizens (Presidential Commission, 1999; Halstead and Pike, 2008; Mashingaidze, 2011). It is hoped the course will cultivate in students a sense of national identity, critical thinking, patriotism and care about their civic duties and responsibilities.

This will then trickle into the youth in schools and the society at large. This stance revolves around the fact that teachers are crucial in nurturing the minds and souls of the youths. Sigauke (2011) points out that a draft Citizenship Education syllabus for the school curriculum was in place by 2007 and is yet to be implemented. Sigauke (2011:83) further suggests that in its current form there is a possibility that the syllabus could be resisted by opposition groups, teachers and students. This scenario gave impetus to the researchers to establish the perceptions of in-service teachers to the teaching of Citizenship Education

Teachers' behaviours in some situations have been found wanting and inconsistent with the demands of their call of duty. Of late teachers have been accused of sexually abusing students, using corporal punishment to discipline students willy-nilly, perpetuating authoritarian culture in schools and embezzling school funds (Manyukwe, 2010). This is also supported by Shumba (2004) and New Zimbabwe (2011) who project that there is a lot of sexual abuse perpetrated by teachers in the schools which goes unreported. These unbecoming behaviours driven by selfish desires are not consistent with the expectations of the teaching profession and could be an indication of shortcomings on our teacher training or recruitment.

Research Methodology

Due to the need to obtain an in-depth analysis of perceptions, experiences and the participation in Citizenship Education the case study research design was adopted for the study. The case study is an in-depth study of instances of a phenomenon in its natural setting and from the perspective of participants involved in it (Leedy, 1997:166). The study benefits from the design's ability to use different methods of data collection techniques such as questionnaires, focused group interviews and observations. This ensured triangulation which according to Cosby (2003) and Bailey (2007) caters for validity and reliability. The study also adopted the case study since its main thrust was on identifying, describing and analysing the perceptions, experiences and views associated with the learning of Citizenship Education. The case study was also found ideal since the study focused on one entity in a specific setting and therefore the results obtained are not generalisable but applicable to this group only.

Population

The population for the study comprised secondary school teachers on the Chinhoyi University's Bachelor of Technology Education In-service programme of the 2011 to 2012 academic year. The participants were specializing in the following skills areas: Business Studies, Computers, Agriculture and Food Science.

Sample and Sampling Procedures

Sixty (36 male and 24 female) secondary school teachers enrolled by Chinhoyi University of Technology Bachelor of Education degree programme in 2011 participated in the study. All the students who embark on the in-service programme are qualified teachers who hold a teaching certificate or diploma and have at least two years teaching experience. Purposive sampling was employed to select participants for the study. The teachers were briefed about the nature of the study and those who volunteered registered to take part in the study. Ten participants were interviewed to cross check and get an in-depth understanding of issues raised in the questionnaire. The researchers purposely selected this sample because they believed the members could articulate Zimbabwean teachers' perceptions towards Citizenship Education.

Instruments

A questionnaire, interview schedule and an observation checklist were employed to solicit information from the in-service Bachelor of Technology Education students. The questionnaire was composed of both closed and open ended questions. The questionnaire was found to be an ideal data collection instrument since the population was literate. It also facilitated the collection of large amounts of data simultaneously. An interview guide was used to probe into the issues raised by the questionnaire and to provide an in-depth understanding of in-service teachers' perceptions towards the teaching and learning of Citizenship Education. Face-to-face interviews and focus group discussions were conducted. The observation checklist was used to monitor the proceedings of specific Citizenship Education lecturers and tutorials during the semester.

Pilot study

The questionnaire was pilot-tested on 20 in-service teachers on the Block Release Bachelor of Technology Education programme. This was done to test the questionnaire's relevance, suitability and precision of the questions, appropriateness of the sample and language. The findings were used to improve the questionnaire.

Data Collection Procedure

Permission to carry out the study was sought from University authorities. Participation in the study was voluntary. Participants were asked not to write their names on the questionnaire to ensure anonymity. In addition participants were assured that their responses would be kept confidential and used only for the purposes of the study. The questionnaire was self-administered at the beginning of the course when students had just had sight of the course outline seeking their perceptions towards the course and purported benefits from undertaking the course. Also used to solicit information was the student end of semester course evaluation questionnaire. The observation guide was employed during specific lectures and tutorial sessions throughout the semester. Ten students (five males and five females) were interviewed to get an in-depth understanding of issues being investigated.

Data analysis procedure

Descriptive statistics were employed to analyse the data. The data were presented in tables wherein frequencies and percentages were used. Qualitative data were presented in narrative form as discrete data with statements to substantiate the emerging issues.

Results and Discussion

The results were discussed with respect to research questions.

Table 1: Distribution of Respondents With Regards To Undergoing National Strategic Studies (NSS) During Initial Teacher Training. (N= 60).

Factor	Number of respondents	Frequency (%)
Studied NSS	12	20
Did not study NSS	48	80
Total	60	100

From table 1 above, the majority of the participants (80%) did their teacher training before National Strategic Studies was introduced in the teacher training colleges. About 20% of the respondents had studied National Strategic studies during their teacher training programme. These experiences of the participants may have a lot of bearing on their perceptions and engagement with Citizenship Education.

Table 2: Distribution of Aptitude towards the Learning of Citizenship Education. (N =60).

Aptitude	Number of respondents	Frequency (%)
Positive	36	60
Negative	9	15
Neutral	15	25
Total	60	100

About 60% of the participants were quite keen to study the Citizenship Education course. These were likely to open up and make the learning of the subject more participatory and interesting. The minority (15%) expressed a negative attitude towards the subject. Further probing revealed that their position was influenced by past experience in their National Strategic studies course which had been presented in a partisan manner and experiences of political harassment that had taken place around them. Their fears were premised around the notion that Citizenship Education was another form of indoctrination. This finding is consistent with Faulks, (2006) and Mashingaidze (2011) who project that in some instances Citizenship Education is implemented to cow the youth. This scenario is regrettable and may lead to withdrawal during envisaged class discussions. The 25% of the respondents who proclaimed neutrality expressed anxiety over possible victimisation in a fluid political environment where criticism of bad governance is synonymous with a regime change agenda, since they were not sure of their class composition. Implied is the assertion that our learning environments are continuously under the microscope of those in corridors of power and as such students had a sense of insecurity.

Table 3. Distribution of the Anticipated Benefits from Studying Citizenship Education. (N =60).

Anticipated benefit	Number of respondents	Frequency (%)
Improved capacity to participate in national development issues	28	46.7
Social and political cohesion	13	21.7
Patriotism	8	13.3
Intolerance of diverse views	6	10.0
No benefit	5	08.3
Total	60	100

From table 3 above 46.7% of the participants anticipated to gain knowledge that would make them more functional members of the Zimbabwean society in terms of national development issues. The minority (8.3%) did not see any value addition in the Citizenship Education course. On further probing students indicated increased knowledge did not necessarily translate into increased levels of participation in citizenship activities in the society due to lack of protection on political and civil rights.

Classroom discourse was premised under the concept that universities are autonomous and enjoy academic freedom. This helped students to open up and led to quite epic and lively discussions. The majority of the participants acknowledged the value addition of the course to their understanding of national issues and change of mindset for those who previously were sceptical about the course and the importance of taking part in national development issues. The majority of the students registered strong distrust of political parties, law enforcement agents and local councils. They also expressed serious reservations about lack of democratic space to openly discuss and share views in the Zimbabwean society at large. A few of the students were overwhelmed by the proceedings and new insights; such that they vowed to go and teach the course after graduation in their anticipated new positing in teachers' training colleges and polytechnics. The majority of the students found the course content was challenging, thought provoking and procedures of conducting the course captivating. The following are some of the sentiments raised by the participants:

Student A: "Open discussion of politically sensitive issues can only be done within the University campus and outside one risks losing his/her life, so knowledge gained may not benefit our communities much."

Student B:"I was a presiding officer in a rural setting during the 2008 harmonised elections and was baffled to realize that all the polling officers claimed that they could neither read nor write when their voting turn came. Ongoing over to assist them cast their vote they shouted their candidate choice, which was against the law. On further probing I got that they had been threatened and were under surveillance. So the prevailing political environment may not allow somebody to exercise his/her obligations as a citizen."

Student C:"Guys give him the chance to air his views, there is no need of being emotional. After all this is just a learning exercise."

Student D: "I have been overwhelmed by the proceedings in this course. Sir can I be allowed to go and teach Citizenship Education during the inter-semester attachment period?"

Student: E: "The course is valuable and pragmatic. It has enlightened me beyond guided democracy, orthodox nationalism and "patriotic" values."

Student F: "The manner in which we run our schools needs to be transformed to allow junior teachers and students' involvement in decision making and reduce authoritarianism culture."

The above sentiments were also echoed during tutorial deliberations where main concerns were on the need for the Zimbabwean society to have a paradigm shift from its prevailing political culture, value system, unethical professional ethics and high levels of corruption. These findings are consistent with Mashingaidze (2011) who projected that there is need for a "radical paradigm shift in our political culture and value system." Observations made during class discussions on sensitive areas of governance and political intolerance showed unease faces on some of the participants.

Table 4: Distribution of Suggested Areas of Improvement. (N=60).

Factor	Number of respondents	Frequency (%)
Inviting guest lecturers	24	40.0
Availability of current non-partisan literature in library	13	21.7
Field trips	10	16.7
Increased access to internet facilities	8	13.3
Making every university student undertake the course	5	08.3
Total	60	100

From the table, the majority of the participants (40%) lamented the lack of guest lecturers. They strongly felt engaging with some senior citizens in their areas of authority would have added more value to their understanding of issues under their jurisdiction. The minority (8.3%) projected that the Citizenship education course should be undertaken by all students that pass through the university to stimulate more debate on pertinent national and institutional issues and enhance better understanding of issues involved. They were of the opinion that such a move would make the youngsters more focused and responsive to national interests and contribute more meaningfully to national debates.

Conclusions

The study established that a minority of the in-service teachers had undergone the National Strategic studies course during their initial teacher training and were hesitant to discuss political issues and did not trust law enforcement agents, local council authorities and even their work mates. The majority of the participants were quite keen to learn Citizenship education and had high anticipations of improved knowledge capacity and national consciousness. The classroom discourse were quite effective as indicated by some of the students intending to go and teach the course in their anticipated roles as college lecturers after graduation. The study also established that the course could be made more effective by engaging guest lecturers, having field trips, making all university undergraduate students study the course and increasing internet access to the students.

The study recommends that more teachers should be staff developed in Citizenship education, more participatory methodologies should be employed in its teaching, reality definers should take a firm position that allows divergent views and political tolerance discourse, and that all students passing through the university are subjected to the Citizenship Education course.

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