

Teaching Shona Culture in Secondary Schools: A Case for Masvingo Urban Schools in Zimbabwe

by

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Abstract

This paper explores the extent to which Shona culture is taught in Masvingo urban secondary schools following the call for its teaching in schools as a way of preserving and passing it to generations. The qualitative study which involved five Shona teachers from the selected five secondary schools, examined the ways used to impart culture in the schools and established suggestions as to how the teaching of culture can be improved. Ways used to teach cultural values included: visits to cultural sites, public lectures, corporal punishment, cultural activities such as youth cultural festive, culture huts, sporting activities and subjects like music, Shona, history and art. Although these ways contained rich cultural lessons, the examination found that only a few pupils participated in and benefited from those activities and that some schools were not taking the inculcation of culture with the seriousness it deserves. Demands of the subject as stipulated in the Arts and Culture circulars distributed to schools were in most cases not met. Some teachers confessed ignorance on the matter. Participants suggested the introduction of culture villages/centers and cultural exchange activities with rural schools so that their urban pupils could be exposed to traditional values. The investigation, therefore, concludes that schools teach culture education to a limited extent as it is not accessible to all pupils and is not run as specified by the circulars. As a result, this research urges the responsible Ministries to formulate clear policies on the teaching of culture and closely supervise their implementation.

Key words: culture, *unhu/ubuntu*, education, Zimbabwean secondary schools and heritage.

Introduction

The teaching and learning of Arts and Culture education has been introduced in Zimbabwean secondary schools as a compulsory programme to curb indiscipline and moral decay, but there are concerns that, schools may not be taking it seriously. The assertion is based on that immoral behavior has been on the rise in schools despite the inception of the programme in 2010 (Magwa and Ngara, 2014; Manguvo, Whitney and Chareka, 2011; Thondhlana, 2014). Secondly, the Arts and Culture education was launched in schools during the time when education and culture were under one Ministry; Ministry of Education, Sport, Arts and Culture and currently the two fall under different offices, hence, this can launch problems in coordination of activities. Thirdly, Arts and Culture education was introduced to schools through circulars, it has no syllabus and is not examinable. Hence, it is on this pretext that the current study examines the extent to which secondary schools in Masvingo urban have been able to impart culture to pupils.

This work was carried out in the urban schools where Zimbabwean pupils have been in contact with foreign cultures resulting in culture assimilation. The introduction of foreign values has captured their attention to an extent that they now regard their own culture as backward or old-fashioned (Mawere, 2014). To produce socially acceptable graduates, Muropa et al (2013); Mavhunga, Moyo and Chinyani (2012) advocate for the teaching of *unhu* (culture) education. The emphasis on the preservation and teaching of culture has been made by Mubaya and Mawere (2014, p. 180) who propound that cultural heritage should be “guarded strongly against any possible forms of threat and destruction so that it can be handed down to progeny untainted”. These authors concur with Nziramasanga Commission’s (1999) recommendation that culture be infused in the school curriculum.

As a result, the National Cultural Policy of Zimbabwe (2007) endorsed the school as the key stakeholder in the promotion of culture. The implementation plan was disseminated to schools through Circular 28 of 2010 on the Institutionalisation of the Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe, Circular 29 of 2010 on Exhibitions and Festivals and Circular 3 of 2011 specifying The Arts and Culture Inter-House Competitions in Schools. These curriculum innovations then marked the country’s desire to provide a holistic education that incorporates spiritual, cultural and moral values (Vision 2020:20). However, in a related research conducted in Bindura, Kasowe (2014) shows that culture education is not taken seriously in secondary schools due to scarcity of both material and human resources. Whilst she discusses the implementation of culture education, she restricts her study to the different factors that affect the teaching of culture. However, this examination goes a step further to examine the extent to which schools have been able to inculcate culture in pupils. Ndhlovu (2014) carried out a similar study in Matabeleland South rural secondary schools and found that although most schools acknowledge that the programme should be implemented according to the Ministry specifications, there is tendency amongst schools to give attention to it towards competitions.

This investigation focuses on urban secondary schools therefore, assumes that the way culture is taught in rural and in urban schools can be different. Hence, the need to examine the extent to which urban secondary schools as public institutions have been able to enhance the development, accessibility and enjoyment of culture among their school children who seem to be out of touch with their own culture.

The ways used to impart culture in urban secondary schools and their contribution towards the inculcation of culture were assessed in a dispensation where the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education in collaboration with the Ministry of Arts and Culture has made concerted efforts in encouraging arts and cultural activities in schools. It is on the backdrop of this brief background that this study wishes to explore the efficacy of secondary education system in inculcating the cultural values in pupils.

Theoretical Framework

A theory that can best inform a research on the promotion of African culture is Afrocentricity. Afrocentricity as a theory gives emphasis to “the centrality of the African, that is, black ideals and values as experienced in the highest forms of African culture...” (Furusa, 2002:53). This becomes the best theory to examine the promotion of African culture in schools as it repositions the pupils who have been alienated from their culture, grounding them within their traditional context. In other words, it can be viewed as a “pan-African idea of change which provides the proper education of children and the essence of an African cultural revival and survival” (Asante, 1995:1). As it stresses the commemoration of African culture and heritage through education makes it very important to examine the teaching of culture in Zimbabwean schools. Afrocentricity advocates for the understanding, recognition, proper presentation, promotion and preservation of the African culture.

Culture has been defined in different ways depending on the use. This study adopts the National Cultural Policy of Zimbabwe (2007) definition:

“culture is the totality of a people’s way of life, the whole complex of distinctive spiritual material, intellectual and emotional features that characterize a society or social group and includes not only arts and literature, but also modes of life, the fundamental rights of the human being, value systems and traditions and beliefs” (p. 8).

This policy explains culture as the entirety of a people’s living, putting into consideration the philosophies of the people, their spirituality, their expressive features, the economic way of life, their constitutional way of life (political) and the social life. This implies that for a child to be considered as having learnt culture, one should have learnt all these aspects.

Methodology

This research is qualitative in nature as it focuses on a social phenomenon, the promotion of culture in schools. The study adopted the case study design where a single district was engaged as it sought to thoroughly describe and explain the teaching of the way of life among the Shona people. Multiple cases of five secondary schools in Masvingo urban were used to establish the extent to which schools have contributed towards the teaching of culture in youngsters. Participants were purposively drawn from schools. From each school one Shona teacher was selected. Hence, the sample consisted of five teachers from all the school types in the district. Shona teachers were selected because they are usually entrusted with the organisation of cultural activities in most schools and as classroom practitioners who are key actors in the process as they do both the teaching and the evaluation. This was meant to solicit information on the activities done to promote culture in the secondary schools. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were used to gather data. Interviews were meant to source rich descriptive data. Documents in form of syllabuses to all taught subjects in the Zimbabwean secondary school curriculum were analysed as primary documents to shed light on the contribution of the formal curriculum towards the teaching of culture. This was because not adequate information on subjects not represented in the sample could be solicited from the participants. Collected data was presented and analysed in the narrative form. Data analysis was a continuous process throughout this investigation.

Results

Interviews with the teachers indicated that their schools regularly visit cultural heritage sites such as the Great Zimbabwe Ruins and the National Museum of Zimbabwe. Educational trips are arranged especially in the History Department as a way of bringing life to what pupils learn in Zimbabwean History. During the trips, pupils learn how the traditional Shona people lived as a society-how they settled, the types of shelter, their traditional foods, ancient tools etc. The instructors lead the tours and discussions as pupils are given chances to ask questions. These tours are very important as the “heritage sites have significant values to the community – aesthetic, spiritual, symbolic or other social values that people may associate with the site, as well as rituals, music, language, know-how, oral traditions and the cultural spaces in which these ‘living heritage’ traditions are played out (Deacon, 2009, p. 310). Such significant heritage should be beneficial to all pupils so that they get to know the key elements of their culture. However, the study found out that not all pupils benefit from these educational trips given that only a small number manages to raise funds for the trip expenses. This in turn means that very few of the secondary school youths are benefiting from these educational trips. It is also of paramount importance that teachers who are experts in educating the youths should take time after the tours to discuss with their pupils what they have learnt from the cultural sites. No trips to such sites were mentioned in the Shona department where the language that carries the Shona culture is taught.

Respondents also indicated the significance of Heads in imparting morality in schools through the assembly platform. This is done through story telling from which life lessons are drawn and at one school, they use the bible. One teacher argued that this is because morals that are cherished in the Shona culture, are the same values cherished in Christianity so this has helped them in inculcating morality in pupils. This is the only method that has gone a milestone in reaching out to all students. Pupils are taught such values as hard work, determination, self-control, love, perseverance, punctuality, trustworthiness and respect for elders and for each other. These virtues form an integral part of our culture.

Although the government of Zimbabwe has banned corporal punishment in its schools indicating that it should be administered by the head of school only, it was established that corporal punishments whereby extreme deviants are beaten and given work to do as form of punishment for bad behavior have contributed immensely towards the teaching of the cultural social values, morality and ethics in these secondary schools. Students avoid such painful punishments leading to acceptable behavior. The use of such methods for behavior change date back to the pre-colonial education system where they proved to be very effective. These findings support Nziramasanga's (1999) observation that corporal punishment is part of the culture of Zimbabweans for disciplining their children and a reflection of the biblical injunction 'spare the rod, spoil the child'.

Shona literature, both oral and written has been cited as the major way of promoting culture in all schools. The subject components such as *ngano*, *tsumo*, *madimikira*, *zviera*, *zvira*hwe, the novel and poetry carry different cultural messages that are beneficial to pupils. Teachers indicated that pupils are gaining a lot of cultural knowledge from the Shona literature lessons. In his study on folktales, Mapara (2014) found out that oral literature especially folktales play a crucial role in moulding a disciplined citizen. Mapara (2014) observed that folktales are a major component of the Zimbabwean education curriculum right from primary to university level (p.81). In this study on Shona folktales in Masvingo, he noticed that most of the students enjoy and recite folktales and in the process acquire the different cultural values. Such subjects should be made compulsory so that all pupils benefit if the government is really serious in promoting culture in youth.

Three schools in Masvingo urban indicated that they participate in the Youth Cultural Festival which was founded in the province in 2011. This is aimed at promoting culture in youths through theatre, poetry and music. Schools from various provinces of the country participate in the competitions which are based on yearly themes. This is a noble idea which imparts cultural knowledge but should it have involved all schools and all pupils, Masvingo could have achieved a lot in as far as cultural teaching and learning is concerned.

There have been culture weeks in Zimbabwe where cultural activities that illustrate the different unhu/ubuntu aspects are promoted in the different regions under a national theme. For example, the 2016 theme read: *Towards Increased Community Participation* which encouraged interaction between communities.

The 2016 Masvingo Province event was hosted by Danhamombe High School in Chivi district. At such occasions which are meant to teach the youth cultural values, all schools in the study did not participate for various reasons. While four of the teachers expressed ignorance over such events, one teacher said: “*Tozviziva zvichiitwa nemaPrimary*” [we know it from Primary schools]. Such a response implies that primary schools participate more in these cultural activities than secondary schools. However, this research has observed that there is real need for cultural education in urban secondary schools so that teenagers become familiar with their cultural backgrounds as they are prone to influence from other cultures.

Teachers indicated that there were no separate departments for Arts and Culture in their schools as proposed in Circular 28 of 2010 on the Institutionalisation of Arts and Culture in Zimbabwe. Cultural activities were being housed under Shona departments with no expert teachers and committees. Shona departments in all the selected schools indicated that they facilitated drama, poetry and debates in their schools from which school children learnt values of life. Teachers pointed out that during lessons that involve cultural aspects especially at ‘A’ level; they invite elders from the location who have cultural knowledge on the different aspects in the syllabus.

The area of sporting activities was also mentioned as a contributor to the promotion of culture in the secondary schools. A variety of sporting disciplines such as soccer, netball, cricket, swimming, basketball, hockey and clubs such as debate, quiz and public speaking were established. Just as Nziramasanga (1999:73) points out in his results, teachers indicated that sports teach pupils relational skills such as team work, partnership, fairness, perseverance, winning and losing graciously. These are very crucial virtues expected in all spheres of the Shona cultural life. Because only a few who are talented are actively involved in sports, the method suffers limitation in inculcating culture in all learners.

Out of the five secondary schools, only one had a culture hut. The concept of culture huts was introduced to all schools- primary and secondary, rural and urban- by the Ministry of Education, Sports, Art and Culture in an effort to expose pupils to their culture. It was, however, surprising to notice that most of the schools could not set up the structures as required. Where the hut has been built, the cultural centre seems not to be serving the purpose. Pupils are not being exposed to the cultural contents of the hut.

The music subject is also contributing towards the inculcation of cultural values in Masvingo urban’s three secondary schools. According to one of the Music teachers, the topic Appreciation of Music which focuses on the ethnomusicology is playing an important role in the learning of music in the different ethnic groups of Zimbabwe. Pupils are taught to play the different traditional instruments which include marimba, hosho, hwamanda, ngoma and mbira. Traditional dances are also included. Mubaya and Dzingayi (2014, p. 135) believe that “in Zimbabwe, music and dance have since time immemorial been playing a pivotal role in inculcating traditional norms and societal values to the members of the community”.

Music being an art in itself conforms to the popular African assertion that there is no art for art's sake. Thus, through traditional music such as *mbira* music, students can learn both the "sacred and secular" aspects of the Shona culture (ibid, p. 155). This research therefore, wishes for the introduction of such subjects that promote culture in all schools so that all pupils benefit. These should be made compulsory.

Whilst the research found out that a lot of cultural activities are taking place in Masvingo urban schools, it was noticed that teachers are placing more emphasis on morality and ethics leaving out the political, economic and religious dimensions as was explained in Circular 29 of 2010. Mostly, values to do with shaping behavior at school are stressed. This is mainly because they are worried more with students' discipline. However, issues to do with religious, political and economic relevance to society should not be ignored so that the school produces true Shona identities. This calls for sensitization on those areas of culture.

Although there is a cultural policy of Zimbabwe which was released in 2007 by the Ministry of Education, Sport Art and Culture which identifies the school as a key stakeholder in teaching culture, teachers demonstrated ignorance of the document. They indicated that while cultural activities have been encouraged in schools, they are not aware of any documentation and any supervision to that effect from the Ministry. Therefore, each school chooses what to do and what not to do. Such a scenario leads to the production of citizens with conflicting qualities though trained using the same education system. This defeats the key purpose of the school, to promote holistic education (Nziramasa, 1999).

A lady teacher indicated that although some syllabuses clearly pointed out that different aspects of culture should be taught, some teachers choose not to include them when teaching and some do not have that cultural knowledge. She indicated that there is another group of teachers who do not implement the syllabus but teach out of experience and teach for exams. Also, as an aspect that is not meaningfully examined, some teachers feel that it consumes time for exam preparation, hence, they leave it.

The concept of culture village/centre was suggested by one teacher borrowing it from other urban schools especially in Harare such as Domboramwari High and Marlborough Primary schools in Harare where it has been successfully implemented. A culture village as at Domboramwari school is a carbon copy of a rural home aimed at educating the school children on what the rural set up is all about in terms of cultural activities. This can act as a heritage site. Pupils dramatise different cultural activities, hence, exposing them to the traditional foods, ways of dressing, music, song and dance, community living, the marriage institution etc. However, the shortage of suitable land to establish those sites in these urban schools was highlighted as the main limiting factor.

Teachers suggested the introduction of cultural exchange activities whereby urban schools visit rural schools and vice versa to learn culture and exchange ideas. Urban schools pupils will get exposed to the rural environment and in turn, rural schools will also benefit from the urban culture. While the main idea is for the urban pupils to get exposed to different cultural values in the rural areas, the rural pupils will also get to learn some urban values that are crucial in their lives. All the teachers agreed that children in urban areas need that exposure in cultural aspects as urban life has detached them from cultural traditions.

Conclusion

This study concludes that although a lot was done to teach culture in schools, intended results were not met as learners did not participate in at least four activities as stipulated in the guiding circulars. Results revealed that culture was taught through educational trips to cultural heritage sites, public lectures, corporal punishment, cultural activities such as Youth cultural festive, culture huts, sporting activities and the assembly platform. These ways were employed in schools all year round. Culture was also taught through the formal curriculum in subjects such as Shona, religious studies, music, history and art. Although various aspects of the Shona culture were imparted through different activities and subjects, what is worrying is that not all schools taught all the subjects and not all teachers and pupils participated in those activities. It was also noticed that even if some teachers wanted to teach culture, they were not well trained for the subject. Hence, overall, the study concludes that culture was taught to a limited extent.

Recommendations

Due to the absence of a binding policy on the involvement of schools in different cultural activities, the current study encourages the Ministry of Primary and Secondary Education to draft a policy on culture education that can be used as a yard stick in schools. Once documented and send to schools for implementation, effective follow-ups should be made to that effect. Based on the fact that culture is a broad concept that cannot be exhausted through single activities and that some schools are choosing not to cooperate; the investigation recommends the teaching of cultural studies as a separate and compulsory subject in schools so that all pupils can be exposed to their culture. This is meant to easy supervision on implementation as is the case with other subjects in the school curriculum.

The teaching of culture needs specialist teachers. It is from this view that this examination recommends the deployment of experts in schools as teachers for cultural studies. These practitioners are knowledgeable in the field of culture and so given enough opportunity can produce better results. This may also mean the introduction of culture education as a compulsory subject in all teacher training institutions in order to produce relevant staff.

All the cultural activities established in this study need money such that in as far as schools might want to implement them, they cannot afford as they involve a lot of expenses. Therefore, there is need for proper funding for cultural activities. This is meant to accommodate all pupils, rich and poor as both classes need that cultural knowledge attained after attending various activities.

Generally, in secondary schools, teachers see the teaching of culture as a domain for primary schools and view it as diversion from their long syllabuses as it not examined. They therefore do not take it seriously; hence, teachers tend to concentrate on common topics for the exam. Therefore, thus study calls for the sensitisation of teachers and pupils on the need to promote culture in the schools.

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