Religious and Moral Education Textbooks in Upper Primary Schools in Botswana – A Question of Relevance

R.K. Moseki, B. Dinama, and G. V. Olesitse

ABSTRACT

Concerns have been raised about the quality of religious and moral education textbooks used in upper primary school classes in Botswana. Therefore, the main purpose of this study was to assess the appropriateness of these textbooks. The study adopted a qualitative methodology approach, using interviews and also reviewing some documents. Data collected from the study suggest that the content of the prescribed religious and moral education textbooks in the upper primary school curriculum does not address the prescribed syllabus objectives, hence affects the teachers' classroom practices and consequently students' learning and performance. Based on these findings, the study, therefore, recommends the involvement of teachers in the selection of the prescribed textbooks for religious and moral education in upper primary schools classes.

Keywords: Primary School Students, Religious and Moral Education, Self-Determination Theory Textbooks.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Ten years after independence, Botswana came up with its first National Policy on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1977) and introduced a slightly different form of Religious and Moral Education curriculum which, nevertheless, was still Christian inclined (Dinama, 2010). A multi-religious and a more inclusive form of Religious and Moral Education (RME) (Sepotlo, 2004; Seretse, 2003) was introduced after the second and present Revised National Policy on Education (Republic of Botswana, 1994).

This present curriculum is inclusive in terms of acknowledging the existence of a variety of religions as well as their inclusion in addition to Christianity. This is an important and progressive step since the religious landscape of the country comprises a diversity of religions that includes Christianity, African Traditional Religion, Islam, Hinduism, Baha'i Faith, Sikhism and Buddhism (Matemba, 2009).

The Status of Religious and Moral Education in the School Curriculum

Many countries, including those on the African continent, have had to contend with the struggle for the inclusion and recognition of Religious Education in the curriculum (Machingura & Mugebe, 2015; Dlamini, 2018). In Botswana, RME was a non-examinable subject at primary school, leaving the examination level for quite some time. However, the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 (Republic of Botswana, 1994) recommended that the subject should be examined at primary school level. Currently, primary school teachers have not been trained to specialize in any given subject, including RME; hence, they find themselves teaching all the nine subjects offered at that level, even though they may not have been exposed to some of the subjects. Unfortunately, this means that teachers are expected to teach subjects which they do not specialize in. For instance, in the case of RME, some teachers have not been trained for the new curriculum, hence are challenged in the implementation and appropriate use of teaching methods and materials.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

The Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE) recommends that all relevant stakeholders should be involved in the process of textbook selection (Republic of Botswana, 1994). However, at primary school level, textbook selection tends to be mostly based on the interests of the publishing companies in terms of financial gain rather than the relevance of the content. In this way, selfish interests are promoted and motivated by the urge for profit, while ignoring the relevant academic needs of the users (Mohammed & Kumari, 2007; Dinama, 2015). Moreover, the observations made show that in several instances, the textbooks do not adequately elaborate on the content to be taught as suggested by the syllabus.

The assumption is that this selfish act compromises the quality of textbooks, which eventually cripples the effective delivery of instruction since textbooks aid teachers to deliver content to the students during teaching and learning. Further assumptions are that these textbooks are merely based on the syllabus objectives, yet they should satisfactorily address them. It is on these grounds that this study sets out to investigate the extent to which the prescribed textbooks used in religious and moral education lessons for upper primary schools in Botswana are relevant.

III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. What are the perceptions of teachers, education officers and learners on the relevance of prescribed religious and moral education textbooks at upper primary school level?
- 2. To what extent do religious and moral education textbooks address the educational needs of learners at upper primary school level?
- 3. What are the challenges faced by teachers and learners when using the prescribed religious and moral education textbooks at upper primary school level?

IV. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by the Self-Determination Theory (SDT) which states that there are links between personality, human motivation and optimal functionary (Deci & Ryan, 2008). The theory is concerned with the motivation behind choices people make without external influence and interference. SDT posits that there are extrinsic and intrinsic motivations that are vital forces that shape the nature of individuals and how they behave. Intrinsic motivation refers to factors that influence people's behaviours in a certain way or those that direct them to a particular direction; hence, internal feelings motivate how individuals act (Deci & Ryan 2008). It is in this context that teachers of RME are influenced by what they think they know about the subject in the selected textbooks that contain various syllabus topics. Naturally, there would be textbooks that would motivate them because they contain content that is aligned to syllabus objectives, while others would not since the content they expect from those texts would be missing, inadequate, or inaccurate, and this motivation is then passed on to the learners (Butler & Shibaz,

The prescribed textbooks can be an extrinsic motivation to both teachers and learners (Deci & Ryan 2008; Tessier, Sarrazin & Ntoumanis 2010) if they contain enough syllabus content. To both the learners and teachers, textbooks provide massive help in their everyday educational journey since they are a point of reference. That is why it is vital that they contain adequate and relevant content in order to effectively respond to needs of the users since this could be a source of motivation in both teaching and learning. When both teachers and learners are intrinsically motivated, they become more autonomous towards teaching and learning, respectively, thus being more determined and responsible for their work.

V. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

A. Introduction

Almost all the school systems that offer RME in their curriculum have a textbook or a textbook series designed for the syllabus (Aggarwal, 2009; Blinkova & Vermeer, 2019; Jie & Desheng, 2004; Kiliç & Aktan, 2015; Oruç, 2015; Aydemir & Özel, 2017). On this basis, Slavin (2000) asserts that textbooks provide learners with basic information about a topic, while developing their reading capabilities and research skills in terms of acquiring ways of finding and using information. In this way, textbooks should be suitable and user friendly in order to assist learners to learn independently (McNeil & Wiles, 1990) while empowering them to be critical thinkers.

Textbooks are intended to address the needs of their users by taking into consideration factors such as age, level of education and background (Jie & Desheng, 2004; Ajayi, Ongugbile, Gbadegesin & Anuforo, 2017) as well as assist learners to reflect on their own life experiences. Garinger (2002) suggests that when selecting textbooks, teachers need to take into account the age of learners, their proficiency in the language being used for instruction, and the context in which they are learning. Furthermore, Haggarty and Pepin (2002) note that for many learners, textbooks are their first and sometimes only exposure to books and to reading, hence, providing an opportunity to improve their reading abilities. In a situation

where teachers may not have been adequately oriented to a curriculum, they may have difficulties in the use of textbooks prescribed for a particular subject (Mandi & Shahril, 2014).

B. Challenges of Textbooks in Teaching and Learning

Although textbooks serve as important instructional tools, they have limitations too. Fischer, Hilton, Robinson and Wiley (2014) observe that textbooks may be limited in their role and use due to factors such as content which may be inadequate. The most severe limitation of textbooks lies in their inappropriateness in addressing syllabus topics (Felhert, 2017; Alemu, 2017). Textbooks may also affect a teacher's creativity if one is totally reliant on them, to a point whereby they will not explore other sources when preparing their lessons (Felhert, 2017).

There are instances whereby textbooks may have a bias in relation to the use of selected pictures and language used (Ndura, 2004) as seen in one of the textbooks used in upper primary schools in Botswana (Kgathi & Seganabeng, 2010), and that is why Cappiello and Dawes (2015) suggest the need to have the readers in mind when writing textbooks. Though Ndura (2004) made this observation much earlier, that in their presentation of ethnic minorities, there are instances whereby textbook writers have avoided telling the truth but have tended to romanticize reality to the disadvantage of minority ethnic groups; such an instance is depicted in one of the prescribed books in Botswana upper primary classes (Ngongola & Selwe, 2006). Similarly, in contexts where some religious traditions have assumed dominance which by default has been linked to national identity, textbooks have expressed the narrative of the dominant religion (Blinkova & Vermeer, 2019; Dinama, 2015).

C. The Involvement of Teachers in the Selection of Textbooks

During textbook selection, it is vital for teachers to be involved in allowing them to advise on relevant textbooks that meet their teaching needs and learning spaces (Amerian & Khaivar, 2014). Such involvement holds a valuable meaning in advancing ideas for what textbook authors could take into consideration in their future writings. Sieber (2008) observes that negative cultural distortion may lead to social and personal misrepresentation and, in that way, marginalize learners who belong to that culture. In such an environment, sensitive issues need to be handled appropriately, since if they are not, they can demean the socially disadvantaged learners' who may easily lose focus on education. Furthermore, Bowen (2009) adds that documents such as books should be assessed for their thoroughness in terms of adequate information.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The objective of this study was to investigate the relevance of religious and moral education prescribed textbooks for upper primary schools in Botswana. Therefore, a qualitative research approach was selected as being suitable since the researchers aimed at understanding the phenomenon in depth by interrogating the events, actions, conversations and interactions (Barret, 2007). This was done by employing semistructured interviews and a review of documents as the main methods of data collection. The emphasis was on how the participants in their natural setting, which in this case is their workplace, understood the role and use of textbooks (Mohajan, 2018). The methodology chosen assisted in providing information on how the participants experienced the phenomenon under study.

The participants consisted of five upper primary schools teachers and three education officers in the Sidule East inspectorate region. The purposively sampled participants (Ames, Glenton & Lewin, 2019) were primary school teachers employed to teach at upper primary school level at either a public or private primary school with a minimum of at least two years of experience as an RME teacher. The education officers from the Ministry of Basic Education had at least two years overseeing RME at primary school level.

A. Data Collection Instruments

In this study, interviews and review of documents were adopted as data-gathering instruments. In particular, semi-structured interviews were adopted because they allowed for immediate follow-up and probing in order to obtain more data and clarity about the phenomenon under study (Banks, 2014; Creswell, 2014). Furthermore, they allowed participants to clearly express themselves regarding how they use RME textbooks in classrooms. Interviews further allowed freedom, adaptability and consistency in obtaining information from the participants (Turner, 2010; Qu & Dumay, 2011; Jong & Jung, 2015). While the intention of the researchers was to record the interviews, some participants were reluctant to be voice-recorded; hence the researchers wrote down some responses, although it proved to be a challenging task to write down the responses word for word.

When reviewing documents, the researchers relied on a variety of written materials which was a complementary data collection source, whilst further strengthening data obtained through other means

(Bussetto et al., 2020; Dalgish et al, 2020). The documents reviewed were the various textbooks by the three main publishers, namely, Collegium Educational Publishers, Botsalano Publishing Company and Heinemann Publishers. In addition to the three main publishers, there were also others such as Nelson Thornes, Macmillan and Longman, which were regarded as supplementary texts. Other documents reviewed were; the National Policy on Education of 1977, Revised National Policy of Education of 1994, The Report of the National Commission of Education of 1993 and Religious and Moral Education for Upper Classes Syllabus of 2000. As suggested by Creswell (2009), data collected was categorized into themes based on the research questions.

VII. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

A. Challenges Encountered in Teaching and Learning of RME in Upper Primary School Classes

The teachers pointed out that there were several challenges regarding the RME textbooks with respect to syllabus coverage, for example, the basic information on the origins of religions, rituals, and places of worship, leadership hierarchy in the different religions mentioned. In addition, the participants indicated that there were challenges faced by both teachers and learners in using the prescribed textbooks. For instance, teachers and education officers indicated that the structure and content of the textbooks needed to be reviewed. They observed that there were several glaring inadequacies such as typographical errors, biased pictorial illustrations, gender bias, lack of index and unnumbered sections, which all need attention. One of the teachers Ms. Tebbie said:

"Most of our learners are under-performing in the Primary School Leaving Examinations because of the inadequate content coverage in the textbooks. The prescribed textbooks do not satisfactorily address the syllabus. Why can't we as teachers be involved in the selection of the prescribed textbooks? Some of us very often have to spend our money at private internet cafés where one would go to search for the subject content. At least some of us are lucky that we have access to resources since we are stationed in big villages. What about teachers who do not have access to internet cafés and libraries in their area? For teachers in remote rural areas, teaching becomes difficult because they do not have access to internet cafes and libraries."

Mr. Zeeks stated that:

"I have reservations about the content found in the textbooks. Teachers need reference books and extra reading material about the subject. Where do they get such books when they are in a remote area? The content of the current textbooks needs to be reviewed to ensure that typographical errors, misrepresentation of other religions and bias are avoided."

Similarly, Mr. Bob said:

"Content is the problem. Most of the books don't have typical examination revision questions section. Some of the tables in the textbooks do not have captions, while in others, the cover page pictures would depict one religion while leaving other religions out, as if telling the learners that the depicted religion is the only one that matters."

Another participant Mr. Hussie said:

"The textbooks are in favor of Christianity and biased against other religions, minority groups and those discriminated against based on gender. The content on Christianity dominates the textbooks pages. For instance, how does one explain the overly use of male picture illustrations? The learners need to know that both men and women have important roles to play in religion and society, and also that we have to live peacefully with people from a variety of religions. Since there is a bias towards Christianity, learners could take it that Christians are more important than people who belong to other religions."

An education officer Mr. Vance said:

"I would say; generally, the books do not give equal attention to various religions in Botswana in terms of pictures depicted. I would also say, the syllabus objectives are not fully covered in the textbooks. The books need some panel beating."

Mr. Hussie said:

"I doubt if anyone of us would say that these textbooks fully cover the syllabus objectives in a fair manner which is not biased. Learners should not be misled into thinking that individuals from certain social and religious groups are better than others. This is what some of these books tend to portray. We teachers need to be absolutely clear that the learners don't look at it that way."

Ms. Forky had this to say:

"Surely, the learners expect the difficulty and quality of any revision questions within the textbook to match test and examination questions. Very often the questions are not well phrased, and it is not rare to come across typographical errors. Don't get me wrong, the textbooks are easy to understand, and that's what learners may prefer, rather than difficult English language. The books are easy to understand but

some books have too many grammar and spelling errors. Some chapters in the books inadequately address the syllabus objectives."

The education officers and teachers agreed that the language used in RME textbooks is appropriate for their intended users, even though it inadequately addressed the objectives. Another participant Ms. Forky expressed her unhappiness regarding the textbooks when she remarked;

"Of course, the books are written in a language that is easy to understand. What is the use if the textbook is not good enough to prepare learners for exams? Ya!, the textbooks are not good enough to achieve the objectives of the syllabus. There are too many errors in these books and also that some chapters have inadequate information."

Similarly, Mr. Baku complained about the textbooks and said:

"These textbooks are written in a language that makes the learners understand the basic elements of the subject, but whether the learners have a better understanding of the subject or not is another matter. For example, very often the learners ask tough religious questions about religions other than Christianity and some of us get stuck. We then ask our colleagues who would also be clueless, and that's very much embarrassing. We need textbooks that cover the religions from a broader perspective. Some of us have no resources at all except these shallow textbooks."

Another education officer Mr. Zeeks said:

"Although the books are not rich in content they use simple English language. Also, content on other religions such as Hinduism and Islam is scanty. What I know is that most of the teachers have a Christian background and even if the content on Christianity may not be enough, they can fill in the gaps using their own Christian experiences. Otherwise, teachers need extra reading sources on these other religions. I also think the reviewing of the textbooks is long overdue. For example, there are spelling mistakes in some of the books, and this needs attention. When I looked at Standard 5 and 6 textbooks, I noticed that there are no sample examination questions, but the Standard 7 textbooks have such questions. There is a lack of consistency, as if revision is only needed at this level."

Ms. Tebbie remarked:

"What is the use of having easy-to-read and easy-to-understand book if the book does not address the objectives of the syllabus? I honestly think that is the case with the current set of textbooks. What I know is that some teachers hardly read beyond the prescribed textbook because of lack of resources, reference materials, and lack of good libraries, especially in rural areas."

From these responses, it is clear that even though the language is easy to read, the prescribed textbooks do not adequately cover the objectives of the syllabus. Teachers were in agreement that since the textbooks do not meet the learners' academic needs, this then constitutes part of the challenges encountered in teaching RME.

Even though the prescribed textbooks were a series, the participants complained that schools did not use the same textbooks; hence that compromised the uniformity in accessing the same information since different books are bound to be of different quality. For example, one of the education officers indicated that a set of three books are currently prescribed for Standard 6, but most of the schools are given only one textbook while other schools have a whole set. Such book distribution would naturally constitute a lack of uniformity between schools.

Mr. Hussie noted that:

"Reviewing textbooks takes a very long time. Also, textbooks do not have an index section. Lack of an index in textbooks necessarily makes it difficult to easily locate some keywords. An index would be handy, especially during the lessons. Furthermore, sections and subsections of the textbooks are not numbered. This makes it hard for learners to distinguish between a section and its subsection."

Ms. Forky noted that:

"the prescribed textbooks mostly covered the Moral Education content than that of Religious Education. A large proportion of most of the textbooks comprises Moral Education stuff. This inadequate balance of content could be one of the reasons why in general, the learners do not perform well in the Religious Education aspect but better in its counterpart, which is Moral Education."

The participants agreed that the RME textbooks contained some illustrations, yet they lacked any reallife examples that could stimulate independent thinking skills in learners.

Mr. Hussie said:

"Illustrations are there, but what is lacking in these textbooks are real-life examples that show how some of the religions in Botswana are linked to certain cultures and ethnic activities. For example, the Bakalanga ethnic group very often associates themselves with "Mwali" as their god of rain and that has been captured in the books. What about other ethnic groups like Basarwa, Bangwato, Balete and others? This important information about the religious life of other ethnic groups is missing in the textbooks. In order to avoid prejudice, the illustrations, images and real-life examples of diverse ethnic groups can be included in the textbooks in order for one to appreciate diversity amongst the people. Such an approach would make the prescribed textbooks relevant in the teaching and learning of RME."

The textbooks do not have all the information that a learner may require as well as one that could aid the teachers in their lessons. Both education officers and teachers are of the opinion that there is a need to improve the structure and content of the textbooks in order to appeal to learners and teachers for ease of

VIII. CONCLUSION

The findings of the study indicate that the prescribed RME textbooks for upper primary schools in Botswana do not adequately address the objectives of the syllabus. It emerged in the study that there is bias in the writing and prescription of the RME textbooks in upper primary schools in Botswana. It is also evident from the findings that teachers are concerned about the flaws in the RME textbooks, such as inadequate content, religiously and gender bias, spelling errors, and grammatical errors. It was also observed that the textbooks are full of factual and typographical errors, hence misleading teachers and learners in terms of the information they would need for use. Therefore, the textbooks need to be reviewed in order to attend to these inadequacies. Based on the findings, the study, therefore, recommends the involvement of teachers in the selection of the prescribed textbooks for RME in upper primary school classes.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Authors declare that they do not have any conflict of interest.

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