POLICY BRIEF

Citizenship Education in Zimbabwean Teachers' Colleges

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About this brief

This briefing paper focusing on citizenship formation through education, drawing on a research project on citizenship education and human capabilities formation in Zimbabwean teachers' colleges conducted between 2013 and 2015. It is intended for students, scholars, lecturers as well as policy stakeholders both in the Zimbabwean higher education sector and elsewhere. It provides fresh insights into how a capability-based, human development, *Ubuntu*[1] framework for citizenship education can foster a commitment to advancing democratic values, human capabilities and social justice.

Overview

Since its incorporation into teacher education, citizenship education in Zimbabwe in the form of National and Strategic Studies (NASS) has been contested. Such contestation has focused on forms of citizenship education, the role of teacher education in forming citizens, the type of citizens to be formed, as well as how this should be achieved. To this end Amartya Sen's and Martha Nussbaum's capability approach, human development values and *Ubuntu* is proposed as an integrated framework.

The capability approach addresses plural aspects of human flourishing by analysing sets of opportunities, freedoms and choices available to persons to be or to do what they reasonably value. The study exploits the widespread social value placed on *Ubuntu* as leverage in identifying and claiming capabilities necessary for the formation of critical and democratic citizens. Drawing on four human development values - empowerment, participation, equity and sustainability - situates the study in sustainable human development discourses. The proposed framework expands our understanding of better policy processes, as well as curriculum and pedagogical practices for a critical approach to citizenship education, which contributes towards equipping learners with knowledge and values that foster the formation of critical citizens in society.

Proposals for change include:

• Reforming the approach to national policy processes and practice for evaluating NASS.

• To this end, establishing a capability-based, human development, Ubuntu framework for citizenship education.

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[1] The word 'Ubuntu' originates from Bantu dialects of Africa and is a traditional African philosophy that offers an understanding of humanity in relation to the world.

• Introducing Citizenship Education Resource and Advising Centres at Zimbabwean universities which offer teacher education programs.
• Establishing training courses for citizenship educators at teacher education institutions.

The research project

Based on a doctoral research study carried out in 2013-2015, which aimed to investigate the contribution of NASS to the formation of citizen capabilities at two Zimbabwean teachers' colleges, Nussbaum's three citizenship capabilities were selected as valuable for the formation of citizens capable to contribute towards human development. They are: 1) critical and reflexive thinking, 2) the 'narrative imagination' or empathy, and 3) the ability to think as a global citizen. The research questions considered the contribution of the NASS curriculum to the development of critical citizenship by collecting data from two (2) mid-level policy stakeholders', five (5) lecturers' and twenty-four (24) students' asking them all how citizenship is understood, how it is promoted, and identifying obstacles and prospects of advancing critical citizenship among future teachers. The research further considered the significance of *Ubuntu* in the formation of. Finally, the research aimed to theorise critical citizenship education and capabilities formation.

The challenge: what counts as 'citizenship' education?

Over the last years, various scholars have criticised the citizenship education programs offered in Zimbabwean teachers' colleges and universities, branding them as a form of 'patriotic history' not dissimilar to that of the colonial era. For example, the education system for Africans sought to create docile citizens who would provide labour for the country, while for whites it endeavoured to create future leaders and managers of the country's economy. The introduction of NASS hinged on 'patriotic history' with its emphasis on creating a 'true' Zimbabwean identity, patriotism, and inculcating *Ubuntu* at a time when Zimbabwe was experiencing severe social, political and economic challenges. This 'patriotic history' approach, although useful in providing a detailed understanding of local history, is linked to a number of problems for the formation of citizens. For example, the approach undermines the complex nature of history by advocating an 'authentic' voice propagated by those in power. Emphasising a true Zimbabwean identity also rejects the fluidity of citizenship identities, critical thinking, empathy and global citizenship. Moreover, most lecturers teaching NASS are history educators recruited from secondary schools without knowledge of citizenship education theories and appropriate pedagogical practices.

The top-down approach currently used by government to operationalise NASS, though seemingly effective in transmitting the goals and objectives of a NASS curriculum, is counter to democratic practices and social justice. It also does not allow for active stakeholder participation to foster a sense of ownership of the course by all participants.

As a result, despite being included in college timetables, NASS does not really appear to develop critical and active citizenship capabilities. Its policy practices and processes are not in harmony with advancing human development values of participation and empowerment; the curriculum and pedagogical practices are not well resourced to achieve transformative learning; and finally, the social, political, economic and historical context in which the operationalisation of the NASS curriculum is undertaken is not supportive of the formation of critical citizenship.

An alternative approach

On the other hand, while criticism typically views citizenship education in Zimbabwe as partisan and reduced to narrating a history which advances the agenda of those in power rather than national

interests, there has been limited effort to propose a different approach. An alternative approach, a capability- based, human development and *Ubuntu* informed framework, is proposed for its strengths in dealing with the challenge. The framework emphasises the need to open up opportunities, freedom and choices for citizens to actively participate in policy processes and in programmes which affect their lives. It places emphasis on the need for deliberating when making decisions affecting human beings.

The significance of taking a normative stance to a citizenship education curriculum offers a broad understanding of what it means to educate for critical citizenship. The proposed framework blends capability core concepts, human development and Ubuntu values to accommodate context-specific challenges in operationalising citizenship education.

Policy recommendations

The following proposals are therefore suggested to enrich citizenship education.

1) **Reforming approaches to national policy processes and practice for evaluating the citizenship education course**

Instead of just involving structures within the hierarchies of power of the system, the college community should be involved in a thoughtful, carefully researched transition. Before any new programs or innovations are developed, the staff should agree on a clearly articulated philosophy of education (an education ethic). Lecturers and students should be involved in the decision-making, planning and evaluation processes; support staff and external stakeholders should be involved as partners in the decision-making process.

2) **A capability-based, human development, *Ubuntu* model**

A capability-based human development and Ubuntu model is proposed as an alternative for a people-centred citizenship education curriculum.

3) **Establishment of citizenship education resource and advice centres**

Some lecturers are not aware of the rights they have as citizenship educators, which seriously hinders their efforts to educate students for criticality and democratic practice. More so, some college administrators are not aware of the resources needed to foster critical thinking, global citizenship and empathy in citizenship education, which seriously hinders pedagogical processes. Citizenship education resource and advising centres could improve the situation. This could be conducted in at least three ways: i) organization of further qualification courses introducing teachers and administrators to citizenship education; ii) publication of a series of articles on citizenship education for criticality and democratic participation; iii) establishment of a centre providing advice and advocacy on citizenship education issues.

4) **Training courses for citizenship educators**

Funding support for a pilot project of a capability-based, human development and *Ubuntu* model should be coupled with training courses for citizenship educators. Occasional workshops and conferences can also help to augment this effort.

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