

Teaching Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of Life Orientation in a Diverse Ex-Model C High School

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Abstract

Life Orientation (LO) subject in schools (school and guidance) is based on the belief that its uniqueness forms the foundation of holistic development of the learner, guided by learning outcomes which focus on personal, social, career and physical and recreational development. LO also focuses on the diversity of learners as human beings in their totality as the self in relation to society. The research therefore explores teachers teaching Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO in a diverse Ex Model C high school. It attempts to provide information that can assist the schools and the Department of Education to further review the present policies in LO. The research adopted a qualitative interpretive approach, where LO teachers were interviewed.

Keywords: Life Orientation Teachers, Ex-model C school, diverse Grade eleven learners, Citizenship Education and Subject Area

1. Introduction

Ever since the inception of the new democratic country in 1994, there has been a drastic change in policy formulation with an aim of redressing the socio-economic, educational and political imbalances of the past. This to a certain extent affects teachers' activities and quality of education. This is the reason why I conducted this study together with my colleague who did hers on Career and Career Choices as a Learning Outcome of Life Orientation (LO) at the same school. The aim of this study is to provide information that can assist the schools and the Department of Education to further review the present policies in LO and also assist in the improvement of teaching Life Orientation in South African schools. I will start by discussing the contextual background of the school at which this study was conducted, as this will assist with the understanding of how teachers teach LO.

2. The Context of the Inquiry

Permission to conduct the research was obtained from the Gauteng Department of Education and district office. The principal of the school was approached and s/he agreed that the school will participate in this research study. The school is situated in the ...of Mpumalanga Province in South Africa. The research was conducted at a school where Life Orientation teachers were interviewed as a group for about fifty minutes. Questions asked were based on teaching Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO. For example what is "Citizenship" from South African context?. Teachers were diverse because they were coming from different countries and provinces such as Limpopo, Mpumalanga, Gauteng and North-West. One teacher was a newly appointee coming from overseas. Learners too came from different locations hence a diverse X Model C school.

3. Research Question

Previous study by Visagie (2009), Prinsloo (2007) and Rooth (2005) have investigated the implementation and investigation of the status of LO in South African schools, but little has been written about teachers teaching LO with special reference to Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO in an Ex-model C high school consisting of diverse learners coming from different provinces with different cultures, languages and behaviours. On this note, the research question that guided this study is: How is Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of Life Orientation taught in an Ex model C high school?

4. The Aim of the Study

The aim of the study is to:

- Explore and describe how Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of Life Orientation is taught in an Ex model C high school.

5. Theoretical Framework

This research followed the theoretical framework of Vygotsky's, which is the socio-cultural (social interaction) theory. This theory plays a role in the development of cognition through mediation as Vygotsky (1978) states that every function in the child's cultural development appears twice: first on the social level (between people), and later on the individual level (inside the child). This theory is therefore relevant to this study as it focuses on the interaction between individuals within a complex society embroiled by various factors. Through interaction and group discussion in LO class, learners and teachers will be able to learn more about what Citizenship Education is all about. Vygotsky (1978) further mentions that the educational process leads to the child's cognitive development, but does not coincide with it.

It can thus be emphasised that the preceding theoretical framework is important and relevant to this study, as we are in the currently changing society and education system that needs constant positive interaction between the developing child and the experienced knowledgeable adult, who is capable of producing in the child the appropriate life and learning skills that will enable him/her to gradually gain control over real life. This implies that mediation and discussion can be viewed as important approach that can lead in most cases to the successful mastery of tasks and knowledge jointly done by the teacher and learners in a teaching and learning situation. Mediation between individuals through diverse tools such as language, people and communication media, in complex levels of system such as families, schools and communities thus plays a significant role in the holistic development of learners.

6. Life Orientation as a Compulsory Subject in Schools

Life orientation (LO) became a compulsory subject in schools after 1994 when South Africa became a democratic country. Life Orientation was formally called school guidance prior 1994 in South Africa and it was found that this school guidance was full of disadvantages such as being too rigid and also not being a holistic interdisciplinary subject. It is based on the belief that lays the foundation of holistic development of the learner because its definition deals with "self in society". LO is further guided by Learning Outcomes which focus on personal, social, career, citizenship education and physical and recreational movement. LO also focuses on the diversity of learners as human beings in their totality as the self in relation to society

The underlying principle is that LO seems to be undermined by some schools ever since it became a compulsory subject as advocated by the National Curriculum Statement (NCS) (2003). The aim of NCS is to develop the full potential of each learner as a citizen of a democratic society and this poses a problem to some LO teachers. The argument is that if teachers are not committed to teaching LO as a subject to learners, how will learners acknowledge that Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome would assist in the actualisation of their holistic development? Secondly how will they know more about information on values and rights, social justice and other contentious issues as mentioned in the National Curriculum Statement Grade (NCS) 10-12 (2003)? These questions thus guided the researcher to explore teachers teaching citizenship education as a learning outcome of LO in an ex-model c high school in South Africa. Learning Outcome in this study means what the learners are expected to learn and achieve at the end of the taught subject content while ex model school refers to those schools which were meant to be for white learners only prior 1994.

6.1 Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO

According to NCS 10-12 (2003) Citizenship Education encourages acceptance of diversity and commitment to the values and principles espoused in the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa. In this SA Constitution Act 108 of (1996), issues such as the right to Education, right to privacy, discrimination on the basis of race, religion, culture, gender, age, ability and language etc. are addressed. These issues contribute to the development of responsible citizens if learners are clearly taught about them. LO teachers should thus teach these issues or topics using Learner Teacher Support Materials (LTSM) and teaching methods relevant to the content with an aim of achieving the intended lesson outcomes.

7. Research Method and Design

In this study the researcher used a qualitative interpretive approach to obtain a more detailed understanding of the teaching of Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO in an Ex model C high school. This is supported by Henning, Van Rensburg & Smit (2004), when stating that qualitative studies are those which aim for depth rather than quantity of understanding. Ezzy (2002), adds that qualitative methods are those which identify a person's understanding of the situation as something to be discovered rather than assumed. This means that the researcher is given the opportunity to explore the events in detail and be closer to the context. The researcher therefore employed this method in order to explore and interpret the teaching of Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO in a diverse Ex- model C high school.

8. Data Collection Method

Data was collected through semi-structured focus group interviews. This method was chosen so as to encourage discussion and the development of ideas from the participants and allow them to engage in social interactions According to McMillan and Schumacher (2001), in focus group interviews a sampled group of people are interviewed, rather than each person individually. A typical focus group session consists of a small number of participants under the guidance of a facilitator, usually called the moderator Berg (1995). Focus groups in this study thus consisted of one group of ten diverse teachers (male and female teachers from different races, cultures, speaking different languages and backgrounds). The teachers were asked questions based on the teaching of Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO. Questions such as what are the Learning Outcomes of Citizenship Education as well as do they take this subject seriously at their schools were asked.

All the interviews were recorded in a journal (with the participants' permission) and transcribed verbatim, as the researcher was not having an audio-tape

Data was used in the proceeding section for the interpretation of teaching Citizenship Education as a Learning Outcome of LO in a diverse Ex model C high school in which this study was conducted.

9. Ethical Issues

- Permission to conduct this study was granted by that particular school.
- Permission to participate in this study was also sought from the Life Orientation teachers and that was granted.
- Detailed information on the purpose of the research was given to the LO teachers during a briefing session.
- All reasonable efforts were applied in the research process to ensure confidentiality.
- The anonymity of the participants was protected.
- Participants were informed that participation is voluntary and that they can withdraw from the research study at any time without any penalty.

10. Findings and Discussion of the Results

From the focus group interviews, LO participants reported that Life Orientation as a subject is still not taken seriously at the school. Some of the reasons given were that some teachers and school management team use LO periods to cover the syllabus of other subjects regarded as important. Some do not take it seriously because it is not written as an external national education grade twelve subject. These responses are in line with what Visagie (2009) mentioned when stating that there have been arguments made that LO is undermined even if it is also an important subject. Visagie (2009) further added that there is the apparent lack of commitment in many schools to uplift the state and status of this vitally important subject and in some schools especially in the rural areas teachers do not have adequate subject knowledge. From the researcher's experience at University level, LO lecturers should collaborate with the Department of Education with an attempt to restructure the subject further.

11. Recommendation

Based on the preceding discussion the researcher thus recommends that: LO as a subject should be revisited, revised

and be taught by well-qualified knowledgeable teachers.

12. Conclusion

It is evident from the above discussions that teachers, especially LO teachers still face problems in the teaching of LO as a compulsory subject in schools with special reference to citizenship education as a Learning Outcome because of the policies and many papers from the Government and the type of complex environments they are faced with. On this note, it is the responsibility of the Government to once more attend to and also amend some of their policies with an aim of improving this important subject content.

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