

THE IMPACT OF COMMUNITY-BASED EDUCATION ON RURAL DEVELOPMENT IN BOTSWANA: A CASE STUDY

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Abstract

This study investigated the impact of community-based education on rural development in Botswana. The study took the form of survey through elaborate literature review, the use of questionnaire and structured interview questions. Respondents were made up of randomly sampled population from the village dwellers and community school managers in the study area. Multiplicity of research methods – participatory, action, quantitative and qualitative - were blended into what is termed triangulation. Findings were many and varied, which also revealed problems in the rural development field. Some of them were not anticipated. These findings were grouped under the following main headings – leadership education, economic independence, socio-politico-cultural participation, technological, intellectual and business skills, and independent enquiry skills. The conclusion that could be drawn was that in Botswana, community-based education has contributed towards rural development immensely. The suggested recommendations as panacea to improve community-based education for further rural development in Botswana were made especially the need to emulated case studies of successful examples and adapt to local conditions and needs.

KEY TERMS: Community-based education, Rural Development.

Introduction

Societies educate their youth and education, from both traditional and modern perspectives, serves societies in a variety of ways (Boaduo 2005). In both the functional and responsibility levels, education provides four major services to societies: Education helps in the development of the right personality in societies:

- equips individuals with knowledge and skills
- provides the tolls and skills in the development of attitudes and awareness.
- helps in the development of creativity in individuals to bring about positive changes in societies.

Education, therefore, serves as an instrument for social change, which contributes, to social development.

Botswana had their own traditional education identity long before they were exposed to the European formal education influences. A pattern of education and culture were firmly established. Learning of children and the youth was informally oriented towards the practical activities in the home, on the farms, in the grazing fields or in the various workshops where implements were designed and produced. Education was compulsory and free. It was the responsibility of every community members to educate their youth in the traditional and cultural norms that were held in high esteem. The whole environment was used as the classroom. Graduates from the traditional Batswana institutions readily got employed because the curricula reflected largely on the needs of the Batswana society and emphasised on specific knowledge and skills required for sustenance. For instance, if war was eminent

most male youth and able men were conscripted into the army to be trained to defend the nation. At peace times most knowledge and skills training concentrated on aesthetic nature of the Batswana culture – weaving, crafts, decoration, bead-making and beauty tactics, especially among the women folk (Boaduo, 2005).

The impacts of formal community-based education on rural development in Botswana were investigated in this study. It was identified that different groups in the country have contributed to the development of education from the colonial era to present. These groups included religious organizations, communities, the colonial government and private organizations. However, communities have played the most significant role throughout the entire period of the existence of Botswana (Moorad, 1993). Community-based education is principally geared towards meeting the immediate and future needs and aspirations of the members of the community (Shapera, 1943; Swartland & Taylor, 1987).

Like in all traditional Africa, community-based education shares close connection with the traditional African education system. To Moorad (1993) traditional African education system consisted of both formal and informal provisions. The informal aspect as practised in Botswana was community-based; and explains that community education is characterised by traditional upbringing, which normally climaxes in the initiation school for boys and girls called bojale and bogwera. The education offered by these institutions was based on the needs of the various communities in the socialization of the youth into acceptable values and norms of the society (Yoder & Mautle, 1991). The school and the community have shared educational theses, facilities, costs and management. In general, in Botswana, schools belonged to the community as the community belonged to schools (Odharo & Monnathoko, 1991).

With the passage of time, diverse changes have taken place in both the scope and initial purposes of community-based education in Botswana. Phases of education, prompted by various nationalistic, socio-economic, political and personal needs of the community members have been evident. The reorganization and restructuring of community schools and a quest to meet the immediate and future needs of the community still remained a fundamental purpose. The transformation of much of the early efforts at providing education in community schools resulted from the need for national unity through the introduction of formal education by the colonialists (Parsons in Yoder & Evans, 1991).

Despite the shifts in its scope and purpose, community-based education remains a vital aspect of education provision in Botswana and a priority of the national political leaders. This is clearly documented in the Revised National Policy on Education of 1994 (RNPE, 1994). Community-based education has been a common theme in all the National Development Plans (NDP 1-9). For demand related reasons the mainstream National Education System is unable to shoulder all the responsibilities of the development needs of the country hence the role of community-based education (Nhundu, 2003).

Assumption of community-based education

In Botswana, community-based education rests on the assumptions that education makes significance difference in the lives of people of all ages and increases their worth, responsible roles (in terms of employment and decision making) they can play in society, their dignity and potential for development (Sundaram, 2002; Macuacua, 2002). Generally, education is a means by which people can enrich and enhance their lives and that of their

communities through playing responsible roles and living responsibly (Botswana, 1993; Nhundu, 2003).

Development implies change, increase in human capital. Modernization theories contend that community-based education is a means to achieve development goals at the rural communities level (Sundaram, 2002). The reason is that educated population is more productive and would have the attitudes and behaviours required for sustained development than one, which suffers from the scourge of illiteracy (Hugo, 2003). In Botswana, there is a link between education in the community and development at both national and community levels (Harbison, 1983; Parsons, 1999). This is enshrined in the Government's National Development Plans.

Statement of the problem

This study investigated the impacts of community-based education on rural development in Botswana. The following main research questions guided the study:

- How do community-based schools meet the educational needs of the community?
- Has community-based schools transformed the economic, socio-cultural, political, technological and entrepreneurial skills of the community?
- What factors influence the community-based schools in terms of community expectations?
- What are the implications of these factors on the future community-based schools programme?

Aims of the study

In Botswana, many learners terminate after their primary or secondary school education. The schools therefore are supposed to equip learners with knowledge and skills that they could use to make a living if further studies are not pursued. This study therefore prospected to identify the contribution community-based schools make towards equipping learners with knowledge and skills they could use in their rural communities after graduation for development.

In an attempt to provide answers to the research questions listed above the study traced among other issues:

- Developmental history of community-based schools in Botswana.
- Investigated the development reforms and innovations made from 1966 to 2006.
- Established through the instruments identified for this study whether community-based schools equip learners with knowledge and skills for rural development.

Methodological design and sampling procedure

This study was conducted in two of the nine regional districts in Botswana, namely Southern and Kweneng districts. The total population of the two districts is estimated at 417 166 and constituted 26.1% of the 1.6 million inhabitants of Botswana (Botswana Census, 2001). The population was sampled from the village dwellers and community school managers and educators for the administration of questionnaires and interview schedules because the study was concerned with the impacts of the education programme on

development variables in the community where these groups inhabit.

Data were collected through participatory action approach with the principles of the triangulation for the treatment, analysis and interpretation. Questionnaires were administered and interviews conducted with the principal role players.

The methodological design was guided by the scientific approach and fulfilled the basic requirements of science inquiry in the following perspectives:

- It confronted the social world being studied directly. The researcher has come to grips with the social reality pertaining to the research problem through prolonged and intimate participation as a teacher in communities rather than adhering to just scientific protocols without being part of the system.
- It established relations between categories of data required to complete the study as stated in the abstract.
- Applicable and relevant propositions were formulated around the relations in the study and investigated further as indicated in the research questions.
- All the propositions were then organised into analytical schema as was done in the treatment, analysis and interpretation of the collected data.

It was identified right from the beginning of the study the methodological paradigms – qualitative, quantitative and participatory action – were not merely collections of research methods. They included certain assumptions and values regarding their use under specific circumstances as identified in this study. During the study process, the researcher encountered both the actual methods and the underlying philosophy regarding the use of each of the selected mixed methodology – triangulation – which, was considered ideal for the study (De Vos, 1998; Polit & Hungler, 1997; Saunders et al, 2003). These included the theory of when and why to apply qualitative rather than quantitative or participatory action and the awareness of the limitations of equally applicable methods. However, the researcher identified that:

- All research methods and techniques are task specific and the task is defined by specific research goals.
- Different studies use different methods and techniques because they have different goals.
- The method must be specific, relevant, applicable and appropriate for the study at hand.
- These should apply to data collection and analysis as well as sampling and questionnaire design.

The implication to this study was that qualitative, quantitative and participatory action mixed methods (triangulation) was used because they complemented each other. For instance where data were required to be quantified the quantitative method was applied especially when treating the administered questionnaire and interview responses for analysis and interpretation. During the write-up where data were to be analysed and interpreted, the qualitative method was applied. However, the participatory action method required specific attention briefly outlined below.

The participatory research and the study

Participatory action research method is self-reflective inquiry in social situations and helps to improve the rationality and justice of the social and educational practices, understanding them and the situations in which they are carried out. Since this study was to find out about the opinion of the Batswana about community-based secondary education provision and their contribution to rural development, it was necessary to involve the rural folk in a participatory manner through local community gathering at the “kgotla” (community gathering at the chief’s kraal), direct interview with respondents and questionnaire administration.

As applied in this study, participatory action method supported and contributed to the effort of individuals, groups and movements that challenge social inequality and work to eliminate exploitation from society (Participatory Research, 1982). Furthermore, it played a liberating role in the learning process by providing the development of critical understanding of the social problems, their structural causes and possibilities for overcoming them and called for democratic interaction between the researcher and those among whom the research is conducted. The composition of participatory action method processes is the collective:

- investigation of problems and issues with the active participation of the constituency in the entire process.
- analysis in which the constituency develops a better understanding not only of the structural causes, that is socio-economic, political, educational, cultural, historical, but the problems.
- action by the constituency aimed at long-term as well as short-term solutions of the problems.

The integration of the three processes gives the participatory action method its fundamental strength and power. The processes are closely related to investigation, analysis or action and can be identified separately, but each process incorporates aspects of the others.

As related directly to this study, the following questions about the participatory nature of the study were asked and brief answers provided to support the choice of this method.

Who are the participants in the study?

The participants included all the stakeholders in the provision of community-based education in the rural areas of the selected districts and all the recipients.

Why should they participate in the study?

Metaphorically, speaking nobody takes in medicine for a sick person. In other words, the sick person has to take in medicine to get better. In this study, the Batswana public needed to know how community-based education has contributed towards rural development. By participating in the study, they provided inputs and shared the derived benefits from the contributions that they made.

How should they participate in the study?

The ways in which they could participate in the study were varied. These included the use of

social structures like associations in the rural setting, civics, committees, churches, youth groups and traditional leadership.

Who has to learn in participating in the study?

All the participants collectively learned from the various means through which data was collected. The learning was practical involving all the participants and whatever was discovered in the process was collaborative expression of interest and solutions to the problem being investigated.

What has to be learned by the participants?

The participants learned how to identify social problems, which confront them and learn how to investigate the problems to find solutions, which they could apply to solve the problems as well as those to emerge later. The learning was practical and on the job, as a result they were empowered in the process with knowledge and skills educationally.

Why should they learn what they have to learn?

The need to learn as a member of a community is obvious. They needed to find and work out solutions to the problems they encounter without external assistance.

How would they participate in the learning process?

All the participants were fully orientated at the beginning of the study and assigned specific duties to perform. They were required to make specific inputs – devising topics for further research, development of questionnaire and interview questions for administration. All the participants learned through participation.

Finally, the participatory action method was chosen for its strengths relevant to this study, which are the following:

- “A critical analysis is encouraged throughout the research process and not just at the beginning or termination.
- It encourages active involvement on the part of all the participants.
- It is positive in initiating and helping to bring about desirable change and improvement in society.
- It uses the whole community as social environment and the natural behaviour of participants is accommodated.
- As a research framework, it is flexible and adaptable.
- It describes relationships as they develop over time and accommodates changes in thinking which reflect mutations occurring in the context of the study” (Boaduo, 1988:20-25).

Participatory research method helped the researcher to address the research problem with theoretical relevance and this helped to transfer the knowledge from the research findings to the participants (McNiff, 1995; Clark, 1972).

Summary of findings, recommendations and conclusion

The findings of the study were many and some of them were not anticipated. All of them have been listed under the following headings and brief commentary have been provided for articulation:

Leadership education

Active student involvement fosters civic engagement and community participation in rural development activities in Botswana. Most of the school graduates are active participants in the political life of their communities. They play several leadership roles and represent their rural communities in the general political arena of the country.

Economic independence

The economic impact exists in terms of jobs and payroll derived from the school activities. Their earnings have enabled them to participate in the economic development of their rural communities thereby broadening their financial base for further development.

Socio-politico-cultural participation

Community-based schools are a focal point for local politics and students are introduced to political activities in their communities thereby equipping them for their roles at the right place and time. Furthermore rural communities derive a strong identity and a sense of inclusiveness from community-based schools. Some of the school graduates are leaders in their own rights and participate in the social, political and cultural lives of the rural communities from which they grew up. Some are cultural leaders while others make the bulk of civic and other organizational leadership.

Technological

Most of the school graduates have acquired technical skills that have broadened their chances for equitable employment as well as making relevant and applicable contribution towards further development of their communities. The preparation of the community-based school has made it possible for the graduates to further their education to be able to make further contribution towards the development of their rural communities.

Intellectual and business skills

The schools have contributed in the development of the intellectual and business skills of the graduates thereby making them able to establish their own small businesses in their rural communities.

The Unanticipated findings

In a research study, there is the possibility that the study may produce several unanswered questions that would require further studies. The unanticipated findings included the following list, which contained the expectations of some of the respondents who were sampled for the questionnaire and interview schedules.

Independent enquiry skills

According to the respondents, the schools should try to create jobs and employ the members of the rural community for them to earn income to improve their living standards. Furthermore, there was a consensus that the Government of Botswana should locate some of the big projects into the rural areas so that employment opportunities would be opened to the rural communities. The Government should build and improve rural feeder roads so that the established rural business communities could bring goods and services into the rural communities with ease. Subjects that are taught in the community-based schools should be such that they take cognisance of the immediate and future development needs of the communities and the natural resources available so that graduates from the community-based schools can feel comfortable, use those resources, and stay after graduation.

Recommendations

From the findings, the following recommendations were made for implementation so that some of the identified problems of community-based education could be rectified:

- Rural schools should offer programmes relevant, applicable to rural communities' immediate and future needs, and able to respond to them.
- There should be provision of professional development opportunities for the rural community-based school managers and teachers so that they are able to work closer with the established rural community business intellectuals to provide jobs for the community members.
- Teachers should be encouraged to engage in commercial activities in the rural communities, which can also help to provide jobs for the members of the rural communities.
- Teachers and community leaders should engage in research about problems that confront the equitable development of the rural community and make their findings substantive to the government for attention and implementation.

Conclusion

From the study, it was found that a high proportion of the school managers and past students believed that the existing rural community-based schools have transformed the graduates in terms of their levels of education, economic prowess, socio-cultural involvement and technological advancement. It is therefore ideal to indicate that community-based education has made significant contribution towards the development of the rural communities in Botswana.

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