Vernacular as a Resource for the Implementation of Guidance & Counselling Curriculum in Botswana

By

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Abstract

This study investigated the use of vernacular as a resource for teaching Guidance and Counselling in Botswana secondary schools. The sample comprised 48 teachers from ten randomly selected secondary schools in Botswana. Qualitative research design was used to conduct the study while in-depth interview, focus group discussion and observation of guidance lesson were used as the methods of data collection. Findings of the in-depth interviews, which were later confirmed by the focus group discussions, showed that the teachers preferred to combine lecture, students’ class presentations and class discussion to teach non-controversial issues while they used debate to discuss controversial issues. These were modern teaching methods; they seemed oblivious that vernacular methods may be used to enhance teaching and learning of Guidance and Counselling. Furthermore, the interviews, focus groups and the observed lessons showed that teachers and students switched from English to vernacular for ease of making clarifications. Other findings were that teachers opined that it was necessary to professionalize the teaching of Guidance and Counselling especially in terms of skilful application of vernacular resources like proverbs and folklore to the teaching of Guidance and Counselling.

Introduction

The goal of education is to transform the self and to expand the mind through the process of internalization and the application of previously acquired information to subsequent real life situations (Live Alive, 2005). In pursuit of this goal, various countries develop and implement their respective National Policy on Education; with the view to enhance sustainable development. An example is that Botswana’s educational development may be attributed to two major landmark policies, the National Policy on Education (NPE) and the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE), (Tau, 2007). Particularly through the RNPE, the government of Botswana identified seven key issues considered to be vital to development of education; the most relevant to Guidance and Counselling among this is effective preparation of students for life, citizenship and work. In response to this key issue, the Botswana Ministry of Education advocates a two-prong approach to the development of the school child: The school curriculum should offer cognitively focused (examinable school subjects) as well as offer affectively focused curriculum.
Guidance and Counselling is an affective curriculum initiative in Botswana which stipulated that Guidance and Counselling should be taught as a school subject and that guidance services should be offered in schools to promote students’ overall development (Botswana Government, 1994). As a school subject, it is time-tabled and taught as stated by Policy guidelines on Guidance and Counselling (Botswana Government, 1996).

Statement of the Problem

The mandate that Guidance and Counselling affective-based curriculum should enhance overall adjustment and sustainable development in students requires that students should acquire knowledge and life skills offered in this curriculum to the extent that they can apply them in their daily living. Language is pivotal to acquisition of knowledge and life skills. Therefore, lack of proficiency in the language of instruction puts the students at the risk of inadequate acquisition of the knowledge and skills. To avert this risk, students should freely express their thoughts and clarify their issues which they find difficult to understand or to express.

Botswana language policy approved English language solely as the language of instruction in all school subjects except one; Setswana, the local lingua franca. Yet being foreign, students in particular are grappling with learning the language. This means that the students have to process information received in Guidance and Counselling classes in a language in which they are not proficient; while Setswana the language they are more proficient in, is considered unofficial during Guidance lessons. By implication, English language is accorded a higher status than the students’ vernacular, a phenomenon which has been termed linguistic genocide (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2004). Explaining the adverse effects of this phenomenon, Skutnabb-Kangas argued that English –only submersion programmes are attested as the least effective educationally for minority students. He argued that this experience fosters monolingualism and it is responsible for linguistic genocide. He suggested that, in keeping with The Hague recommendations regarding the educational rights of national minorities, bilingualism and multilingualism should be encouraged.

To ease the concomitant difficulties of monolingualism in the Guidance and Counselling classroom thereby enhance students’ understanding and application of these concepts. Apparently therefore, it seems expedient to engage students’ thinking skills in the resources of the local lingua franca, like proverbs, folktales, myths and legends; even if this might require translating them into English or using their equivalents.

Yet another issue is that there is scarcity of professionally trained personnel who could proficiently teach the subject with the help of Setswana linguistic resources. From the inception of the teaching of Guidance and Counselling in Botswana till date, mostly, the subject is being taught by non-professional –volunteers. Some are teachers without any professional training whatsoever in Guidance and Counselling who volunteered to teach it and simultaneously teach the subjects in which they specialized. Others are teachers with Minor Degree or an elective course in Guidance and Counselling in their First Degree or at teacher colleges. Others are teachers designated by the Botswana Ministry of Education as Senior Teacher Guidance due to their demonstration of interest in implementing guidance and counselling programs; these may or may not have any iota of training in Guidance and Counselling. Overall, the entire scenario is one in which Guidance and Counselling is taught mostly by teachers who lack training on how to teach Guidance and Counselling.
Theoretical Model

The theoretical underpinnings of this research are the humanistic and multicultural perspectives of counselling, and bilingualism. The humanistic perspective advocates that learning should be phenomenological while the multicultural perspective asserts that language is the vehicle of culture, everyone’s language should be respected and because school results are better when children are taught in their mother tongue; children should be taught in their mother tongue (Committee on Culture, Science and Education, 2006).

Beyond these explanations, bilingualism asserts that the bilingual approach enhances deeper understanding of concepts, and it makes thinking and expression of oneself better (Live Alive, 2005). Furthermore, Live Alive argued that when children continue to develop their abilities in two or more languages, they gain a deeper understanding of language and how to use it effectively. As such, as they have more practice in processing language, especially when they develop literacy in both, they are able to compare and contrast the ways in which their two languages organize reality. Children who think in their mother tongue may learn better, faster and most importantly internalize learning. If applied to the Botswana scenario, it may be beneficial to apply Setswana proverbs, folktales, myths and legends to explain certain Guidance and Counselling concepts which may enhance their understanding and future applications.

Purpose of Study

The purpose of the study was to find out if vernacular (Setswana) is being applied in teaching of Guidance and Counselling in Botswana secondary schools.

Research Questions

The following research questions were asked in order to attain the purpose of the study:

What language was used by the teachers to teach Guidance and Counselling?

What methods did the teachers use to teach Guidance and Counselling?

What is the teachers’ attitude towards the use of Setswana to teach Guidance and Counselling in Botswana schools?

Methods and Procedures

The study used qualitative research design. The study sample comprised 48 teachers, [ten Senior Guidance Teachers, 4 male, 6 females in each school]. These were government approved coordinators of the school guidance team. Only the Senior Teacher Guidance taught in a particular school (nineteen classes); therefore, only this Guidance teacher was interviewed and only the Senior Teacher Guidance (STG) counsellor was available in another school for interviewing. Therefore altogether, ten STG, 16 teachers (two from each of eight schools) were interviewed. There were four Focus Group discussions (comprising of members of the school guidance committee). These ranged in size from a minimum of four to a maximum of eight persons.

For purposes of triangulation, data were collected with three data collection methods: In-depth interview, focus group and observation of guidance and counselling lessons (three lessons were observed from three of the ten schools). The researcher observed the unique protocols for obtaining permission to collect data per school. Therefore, in some schools, informed consent
of the Head or the Deputy Head of school had to be obtained prior to obtaining that of the Senior Guidance Teacher while in others, the informed consent of the Senior Guidance Teacher sufficed. The Senior Guidance Teachers introduced the researcher to the teachers. The researcher explained the research intention, the data collection procedures and emphasized that the information would be kept confidential; except for research purposes. The researcher read out the questions that would be asked during the in-depth interview and the focus groups and explained that the intent of observing the lessons was to obtain information which may help to improve on the teaching of Guidance and Counselling. It was emphasized that participation was voluntary, and one may withdraw from participating as one dims fit one would not be liable. Then, teachers who agreed to participate in the study were enlisted.

As the personnel officially designated by the Ministry of Education to teach guidance classes, and as the Coordinator of the school guidance team, the researcher regarded the ten Senior Guidance Teachers as the primary source of data. Therefore, on obtaining their informed consent, they were all subjected to the in-depth interview. In addition, the sixteen other teachers who were volunteer teachers of the subject were similarly interviewed. Focus group interviews were conducted in four (The numbers of persons per group were eight, five, four and four persons per group). Information which were obtained during the in-depth interview and the focus group discussions were recorded as much as possible verbatim, by the researcher in the researcher’s journal. Three Guidance lessons which were conducted by teachers who had volunteered to be observed were also observed and the data which were obtained were similarly recorded in the researcher’s journal.

Data Analysis

Guided by Grounded theory, the themes that emerged from the data which were obtained were identified (Malott & Herrmandorfer de Zaid, 2007). This method is used in qualitative research to assess recurring patterns of responses.

Findings

Guided by the research questions, the following themes were obtained from the in-depth interviews, corroborated by the focus group discussions and later by the classroom observations:

What language was used by the teachers to teach Guidance and Counselling?

Information which was received from the in-depth interview, focus group discussions and the three lessons which were observed showed that, in line with the Botswana Language policy, the teachers used English language to teach Guidance and Counselling. Simultaneously however, as acknowledged by some teachers, “some teachers and students expressed themselves in Setswana. Students did if “they found it difficult to express themselves in English” while teachers did to make clarifications in order to improve students’ understanding of explanations.

What methods did the teachers use to teach Guidance and Counselling?

All the 48 teachers preferred to combine lecture with student class presentation and discussion as their teaching. For the presentation, students were divided into groups. Each group discussed their given topic and they made conclusion on the issues. Afterwards, their representative presented their views on their allocated topic to the class. A few teachers asked students to ‘research’ (find information on the topic from home, including to survey opinions of people in their community about the topic. Out of 16 teachers interviewed in the ten schools, only four teachers from three schools use proverbs and folktales to drive their point’s home. For example,
a teacher used folktale to teach the concept of Time Management. These three teachers used proverbs from time to time.

Interestingly, these methods were not consciously used. Explaining, the teachers stated that they “just used common sense” ... “we did whatever occurred to us”.

3. What is the teachers’ attitude towards using Setswana to teach Guidance & Counselling in Botswana schools?

All participants of the study supported the Botswana language policy which stipulates that English is the sole language of instruction for Guidance and Counselling, just like other subjects except Setswana. On the contrary, they opined that Setswana should be used for clarification of issues. Therefore, they noted that there was need to accommodate switching between English and Setswana. The current linguistic setting in a Guidance class was expressed by a teacher as follows: “Botswana is cosmopolitan, it has a multiplicity of ethnicity and language ... sometimes there could be a foreign student in the class; Setswana should not be used (instead of English) as the medium of instruction ... students should be allowed to express themselves in Setswana if they have difficulty and when they want to make clarifications”.

It seemed that majority of the teachers were oblivious of the idea that they could tap and apply linguistic resources like proverbs and folklore to enrich learning in the Guidance and Counselling class room. It appeared that it was the interview question which awakened this consciousness in them. This was to the extent that they pined after having more information on the issue. In addition, they eagerly stated that, they would appreciate to be professionally trained to teach Guidance and Counselling. They desired to learn “how to apply Setswana proverbs and folklore to the teaching of Guidance and Counselling”. They agreed that Setswana has a wealth of language resource which may enhance sustainable development in students.

Discussion, Conclusions & Recommendations

The finding of this study that both teachers and students switched over from the officially approved language of instruction (English), to Setswana for clarification purposes, when students had difficulty in clearly expressing themselves tends to confirm the argument of Makinde and Olabode (2006) that children prefer to express pertinent issues in their mother tongue. The fact that people switched from the official to the unofficial language of instruction tends to confirm the argument of McCarty (2003) that, humans do not easily relinquish their local language for a foreign ‘national’ one, rather, they perceive expression of themselves in their mother tongue as their birthright. Expatiating, McCarty stated that this phenomenon may be because it is through our mother tongue that we come to know, represent, name and act upon the world.

There is growing emphasis that Guidance and Counselling should enhance students’ development (Hui, 2003). Development requires that the developing person understands the curriculum content. Vernacular items like proverbs and folktales are linguistic features with innuendos which are usually applicable across cultures may enhance knowledge beyond classroom application. They may enhance gaining insight into concepts as well as enhance application to their respective experiences as they interact with people in the society. It is noteworthy that both the students and the teachers are already switching from English to Setswana whenever they found it necessary to do so. Due to the fact that they consider this practice pragmatic, and it may be necessary to officially permit the switch.
While the teachers approved of the switch, they did not approve that Setswana should be elevated to being an official language of instruction in a Guidance lesson. They were concerned that the foreign students might lose out. To cater for this, these foreign students could be made to state their linguistic equivalents of the Setswana proverbs and folktales. Generally proverbs have universal application; they are cost effective in helping the speaker to communicate. A teacher or a student could narrate a folktale learnt from Setswana, in English Language. An example is the Setswana folktale that denounces late-coming: Why the hare has a short tail is because other animals were punctual to meeting in which tails were distributed, the punctual animals took the long tails and the hare had to take only the left over short tail. The notion of equivalents supports the argument that both the first and the second language may complement each other (McCarty, 2003). Equivalents may improve students’ performance in English, especially essay writing, thereby improve students overall academic adjustment and development. It may also improve class discussions. Explaining the process, Malott and Herrmandorfer de Zaid (2007) reported that class discussions are an essential tool for fostering personal growth and awareness. To this extent, class discussion should enhance student’s understanding.

Beyond equivalents, role play may also be used to promote equitable learning between local and foreign students in guidance classrooms. Explaining, Malott and Herrmandorfer de Zaid (2007) noted that “role play” enhances classroom experiences and facilitates self-understanding.

Another finding was that Guidance and Counselling was “not being taught by professionals”. This may explain the difficulty teachers had in recognising that Setswana was a repository of methods which could be used to enhance learning. When asked to list the methods that they taught, Guidance and counselling with; findings showed that they “just applied the same methods” they had been trained to use in their subjects of specialization. Only one among all the teachers who held a Diploma in Setswana, one who was currently enrolled in a Bachelors degree program in Counselling, asserted that she from time to time, applied Setswana language resources to teach Guidance and Counselling. There seemed therefore a pervasive need for teachers to be professionally trained on methods of teaching Guidance and counselling.

Guidance and Counselling should groom the emotional development of teachers and students. As a subject, primacy should be given to venting one’s feelings and thoughts in an anxiety free lesson atmosphere. Especially the lessons which were observed, students showed that they needed to express themselves, clarify concepts and organize their thoughts. Their behaviour affirmed the argument of Makinde and Olabode (2006) that teaching effectiveness requires that the local language be used. This result tends to affirm the earlier argument of McCarty (2003) students are already conversant with their vernacular prior to enrolling in school and after lessons they speak the language at home therefore, the use of vernacular to for teaching should be encouraged while linguistic imperialism should be discouraged.

Recommendations

In view of the findings of this study, the following recommendations are being made:

As a school subject, as much as possible, Guidance and Counselling should be taught by professional Guidance counsellors.

Teachers of Guidance and Counselling should be trained on the application of indigenous linguistic features like proverbs and folktales to the teaching of Guidance and Counselling.
In cosmopolitan countries that approve that only English language is the sole official language of instruction, teachers should be encouraged to use English language equivalents of the vernacular proverbs and folklore, and their equivalents in the language of the foreign students in order to ensure that learning is inclusive.

In order to promote the status of Guidance and Counselling, it may be necessary to examine the subject.

References


