Post-colonial dilemmas in the construction of Ghanaian citizenship education: National unity, human rights and social inequalities

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

A B S T R A C T

This article contributes to the growing interest in the compromises which African models of citizenship education make between Western and indigenous curricular agendas. It traces how Nkrumah's educational ideals were reshaped by the teaching of human rights, individual independence, enterprise and economic development. We employ historical policy research, a critical literature review and interviews with key officials to construct a chronology of Ghanaian civic education, providing insights into postcolonial dilemmas around promoting national unity over social difference, critical learning and child-centred pedagogy, the valuing of indigenous cultures, challenging social inequalities and the need for the 'decolonisation of the mind' (Sefa Dei 2005b).

1. Introduction

Nation-states construct young people as citizens in a variety of ways. An important distinction should be made between education *of* the citizen and education *for* citizenship (see Arnot and Dillabough, 2000). These two elements in liberal democracies are linked in that the former refers to the democratisation of schooling, opening up access and equalizing participation of all groups in society, while the latter takes forward the project by specifically creating democratic citizens through a dedicated curricular subject – that of citizenship education (although this is often called social studies). The focus of this article is the latter – education for citizenship, the curricular subject and pedagogic ethos that reflects it. These small but significant political educational curricular programmes carry with them considerable responsibilities such as the transmission of core values or 'citizen virtues' so as to unite members of a community. Such values influence the strategies used to transmit different knowledge and skills to various groups of children in preparation for adult life. In today's world, rising levels of social inequalities, unequal participation of marginalized populations in benefitting from the process and outcomes of development, social unrest, as well as the prolonged existence of intra- and inter-national conflict, has led UNESCO (2015:2) to argue that citizenship education should now take centre stage in the post-2015 development agenda. The focus now is the global goal of promoting peace, nation-building

and social cohesion. Global citizenship and civic engagement together with learning to tolerate others have therefore become a key social learning outcome for educational systems which are encouraged to (a) promote the acquisition of skills, values and attitudes that would enable young people to become responsible citizens, and, (b) help youth to address such contemporary development challenges as human pressures on environmental resources, land degradation, climate change and a foreseeable scarcity of natural resources. Today the view that youth citizenship and citizenship education are both linked to education for sustainable development is steadily gaining momentum (UNESCO, 2015, 2).[1]

However, this new agenda requires an understanding of the issues that citizenship education faces within different development contexts. We already know that post-colonial African governments have had to negotiate considerable obstacles in order to frame the education for its young citizens (Mamdani, 1996; Harber and MnCube, 2012). They have had, for example, to decide how far to reflect the *duality of citizenship* that Mamdani (1996) described – a duality that reflected the forms of citizenship located in the relationship of the individual to a modernising liberal democratic state, as well as the forms of citizenship that define an individual's relationship to the power dynamics and forms of authority found within (predominantly rural) traditional ethnic communities. Citizenship education, in effect, has to address the tensions between national, political, socio-cultural and economic demands,

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[1] By 2003, youth citizenship became the focus of international development goals (World Bank 2007, 2010) was declared the year of Youth Citizenship. The Millennium Development Goals (UNESCO, 2015) promoted youth citizenship along with gender equality and human rights.

strong local, generationally organized, ethnic and gender cultures and indigenous community-based civic traditions giving young people a number of responsibilities and duties in relation to their elders, the extended family and community. West African countries have also had to address the added pressures of international aid-giving agencies demanding economic structural adjustment, and (since the 1990s) the democratization of civil society and the promotion of human rights. Government success in creating democratised modern laissez-faire economies has increasingly been thought to depend upon a mobile, flexible and skilled workforce that is not held back by the traditions of collective agency, traditional communities, language and identities.

We contribute to this growing scholarly debate around African models of citizenship education by analyzing the approach taken by the post-independence Ghanaian government[2] to the education of its citizens and the critiques of such approaches offered by academic researchers. Our investigation focuses on (a) its political goals in promoting the education *for* citizenship and in framing their version of a modern (active) citizen and (b) the implications of these goals for the democratisation of school culture and pedagogy. Our aim is to uncover the settlements found in the history of Ghanaian citizenship education, a notably peaceful West African country that is associated with interlocking 'dual transitions' to democracy and a market-based economy (Bratton et al., 1999). The Ghanaian government is also noted for its commitment to create a strongly unified sense of nationhood over and above an ethnically diverse society.

In the first section we describe our research study and its methodological concerns before considering the jagged historical evolution of these national goals for citizenship education, drawing on a range of data sources. As we show, a sequence of Ghanaian governments have accumulated a battery of ambitions for the school curriculum in terms of the rights, duties and responsibilities for Ghanaian citizens.[3] However research studies of Ghanaian schools raises questions about the effect of Ghanaian civic education agendas on its transitioning teachers and students. The critiques expose the difficulties that schools, teachers and students face in terms of cultural traditions, socio-cultural identity and continuing social inequality.

2. Methodological approach

Educational policy research can take a variety of stances, styles and approaches. Of particular relevance is Grace's (1995:3) observation that policy scholarship insists 'that the problem can only be understood in the complexity of those relations. (…) a social-historical approach (…) can illuminate the cultural and ideological struggles in which schooling is located (…)'. Ball (1997) too cautions against viewing educational policies as abstract categories that can or should be realized in the same way in every setting. This article offers what he called a *policy trajectory* approach – one that attempts to capture the dynamics of policy across and between different levels and to uncover the ways in which policies evolve, change and decay through time and space as well as identify their, at times, incoherence (Ball, 1997, 266). Drawing on his experience of conducting qualitative and quantitative research of citizenship education in Ghana and Liberia over the last decade, Quaynor (2015) also urges us to recognize the historical considerations that shape the ways people understand "citizenship" and "democracy" and the relationship between citizens and the state. He points to the need to define the term "citizenship"…in order to avoid transplanting Western conceptions of citizenship that emphasise political and civil rights over social and economic ones' (p.124), thus overstressing the role of

schooling in this task. Although schools are the most convenient settings in African countries to engage in citizenship education, restricting citizenship research to the school environment has inherent limitations since not all young people in post-colonial African societies are able to attend and stay in school. Civic education can be promoted through local communities. Many young Ghanaians participate in structured community activities and cultural development groups, athletic teams, and religious organizations. Also, conflicting messages concerning identity and culture can be communicated by traditional leaders and government schools (Coe, 2005). Limiting the study of citizenship to formal civic curriculum therefore may offer an incomplete picture of the broader process of African models of political socialization (Quaynor, 2015).

Bearing this methodological advice in mind, our research approach was to unearth as far as possible official and informal citizenship education strategies. We employ historical policy research, a critical literature review, and interviews with key officials to construct a chronology of Ghanaian civic education. A range of key public documents about citizenship education were purposively selected through a form of documentary snowballing that yielded relevant policy statements, speeches, development reports, technical commission reports, media articles, research publications and reports, education syllabi and curriculum documents. We were guided by May's conceptualisation that 'documents do not stand on their own, but need to be situated within a theoretical frame of reference in order that its content is understood' (May, 1997: 171). We recognize that studying curriculum documentation could imply successful implementation, giving the government's curricular guidance more significance and power than it had. Also the history of the curriculum subject does not relay teachers' views and adaptations when working with heterogeneous school populations and communities, some with low resources and/or in distant rural areas where they are unlikely to engage with the state.

Our review of the official curricula goals, and research literature on citizenship education is complemented by the accounts we found in policy documents enriched by nine 'informer' interviews in 2006 with officials working in the Ghana National Commission of Civic Education (NCCE), the Ghana National Commission on Children (GNCC), the Commission on Human Rights and Administrative Justice (CHRAJ) and the Ghana Education Service (GES), and the Ministry of Youth and Employment (MMYE). Discussions with Ghanaian educationalists and a review of relevant Ghanaian research findings also formed part of our research design, allowing us to reconstruct a historical chronology of the education policy-cycle relating to civic education, exploring its ambitions and significance through interviews and a review of relevant research literature. This strategy enabled us to, 'consider not only the ways in which meaning is constructed, but also the ways in which new meanings are developed and employed (May, 1997: 173). Below we describe the shifting citizenship agenda that citizenship education needed to address, moving from a first phase of post-independence/post-colonial formation, to the transition to a democracy in the 1970–90s, and the third phase, after 2002, of engaging with internationally recognized human rights and neo-liberal development agendas.

3. Constitutional challenges: the new Ghanaian citizen

The political, economic and social context in which education for citizenship was developed in Ghana could not have been more challenging. By the turn of the twenty-first century the Ghanaian education system, which according to Pryor (1998:221) had always had its roots not "in traditional cultural practices but in colonialism", had adjusted to an increasingly global neo-liberal agenda. Global pressures had encouraged the country to weave a rights-based discourse into its educational policy at the same time as promoting an entrepreneurial modernizing economy and culture. Active in promoting these dual 'liberalizing' and modernising agendas (apart from the WTO, WB and

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[2] For more information about Ghanaian youth citizenship project see Arnot et al. (2012) RECOUP Policy Brief 15 2010 at http://recoup.educ.cam.ac.uk/publications/policybriefs.html.

[3] The Ghanaian education system only gives access to the citizenship education curriculum to those who attend school – some 10% of children remain outside the school system (UNICEF, 2012).