

# Educating for Democratic Engagement in Botswana's Democracy: Challenges of Promoting Democratic Education

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## **ABSTRACT**

*In order for democracy to be sustained in any state, it is fundamentally crucial that the education system should teach citizens about democracy and how to participate in the democratic process. Participation in the socio-political process should be the foundation of active democratic engagement by citizens. Educational institutions are supposed to be platforms for social justice where the learner is given a chance to be heard. In a democracy, schools are supposed to educate the citizens so that they can participate in all matters affecting them. This paper contends that in order for Botswana's citizens to actively participate in the democratic process, there is need for schools to shift their focus and promote democratic education in which pedagogies used are seen to be nurturing awareness of the concept of democracy among the learners. The paper argues that failure to promote 'democracy education' in schools could ultimately compromise the pursuit of democratic principles. The paper further argues that a pragmatic curriculum would be well placed to help foster civic-mindedness and political consciousness among the citizens, thus enabling them to fully participate in the country's democracy. The paper concludes by noting that Botswana's education system has not done enough in terms of addressing the relationship between education and democracy, and puts forward a number of suggestions on the way forward.*

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## **KEYWORDS:**

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## **Introduction**

THE CONCEPT OF democratization has of late speedily gained momentum especially in Africa where democracy is still deemed limited. Many nation-states in Africa have in recent times revisited their education policies with a view to factoring into the school syllabi, the teaching and practicing of democracy. Although the concept of democracy may appear fascinating, it remains a challenge especially among most developing countries. This is essentially because many of the states which claim to be preaching and practicing democracy tend to be undemocratic as very often they have failed to bring the notion of democratic education to fruition. Thus, while many states in Africa may appear to cherish the vision of promoting democracy within their education systems, the level of maturity of democracy in the governance structures of these states is at best questionable.

Some scholars (e.g. Held, 2006) have argued that for democracy to be sustainable, it is necessary that conditions such as constitutionalism, multipartyism, presidentialism, liberalism, progressive legislatures, effective electoral systems, respect for human rights, to state but a few, are firmly put in place. The main argument of this paper is essentially that democratic education is necessary for the advancement of democracy in any given country, and hence should be promoted through classroom instruction and practice in all educational institutions. This is not to suggest that democratic education can on its own sustain democracy; but rather that it is an important pillar for the furtherance of democratic ideals in any democratic society.

The idea of promoting democracy in education is generally regarded as progressive in that the manner in which citizens are taught in schools should be seen to be empowering, while at the same time fostering progressive socio-political and economic values which mirror the very society in which they exist. Gutmann (1999) notes that a democratic approach to education should recognize the importance of empowering citizens to ensure they get involved in policy issues. This will enable them to make choices which are based on democratic social foundations.

This paper commences by explaining the importance of democratic education in any democratic or progressive society, and then proceeds to explore the challenges of promoting democratic education, with particular focus on Botswana. It posits that although it is essential that citizens are encouraged to actively engage in the democratic process (in which the principles of democracy are cherished by allowing every individual's voice to be heard), classroom teaching for democratic engagement and awareness remains a major challenge in Botswana. This is despite the fact that the country is hailed as a shining example of democracy in Africa.

## **The Concept of Democratic Education**

It is incontrovertible that democracy and active engagement in the democratic process can only be legitimized through education. The liberal democratic political theory on education posits that citizens should be educated so that they can develop a love for their country. This can be realized through giving them a voice in the learning process. This implies a form of education that values learner-centered pedagogies which nurture participatory, democratic, inquiry-based and discovery methods as well as promoting constructive ways of learning

(Tabulawa 2003 cited in Carter, 2010:224). Approaching education from this angle gives learners intellectual independence and the freedom to apply their minds to situations so as to find solutions. By so doing, the learners develop higher levels of creativity, become reflective thinkers, develop high degrees of tolerance and can also cooperatively engage in a dialogue (Carter 2010:224). Democratic education creates schools that become laboratories for democracy where citizens are supposed to congregate and engage in pronounced civic activities where they could exchange ideas without fear of victimization. According to Parker (1996), democratic education initiates the learner into being actively engaged in a community of learners where critical civic competences are exercised.

If democracy is about the sovereignty of the people being vested upon them in respect of how they can participate in their country's democratic process, then the fundamental principle of democratic schools ought to be the promotion of a culture of active involvement in the teaching-learning process. Barber (1984) cited in Henderson & Kesson (1999) explains that civic education leads to the construction of a strong democracy which enables citizens to become actively involved in the democratic discourse and enjoy the freedom of being a self-governing community which is focused on a common purpose. In Barber's (1984) ideology, democratic education liberates the learner and subjects the learner-citizen to lifelong dialogical inquiry which broadens his or her scope of understanding pertaining to human existence. The ethics of strong democracy in education leads to the construction of a vibrant curriculum with a transformative agenda whereby after learning, citizens can critically and radically embark on authentic inquiry into issues that affect their socio-economic and political spheres.

While education is supposed to have overwhelming influence on

the principle of democratic citizenship, very little appears to happen within Botswana's classrooms to ensure that citizens get exposed to the fragile, yet very essential discussion on education and democracy. Ravitch and Viteritti (2001) observe that democratic education should fundamentally train citizens such that they could naturally see the need and the importance of participating in the political process so as to express and protect their political interests. Hutchinson (2003) argues that we live in an era in which, more than ever before, we need democratic education which will enable the state to see the need to ensure the voices of the citizens are heard in all socio-economic and political parameters. He further asserts that through democratic education, citizens need to be made aware of the fact that they do not need anybody's permission to be engaged in the democratic process. It is within the context of democratic education that citizens should be given a platform and some control in their school and in their own learning so that eventually they can see the need for gaining control of the national democratic project. Feldman (2003) concurs with this observation by adding that in order for children to develop into competent adults, they ought to be given opportunities where they can be exposed to full participation in the democratic process just like adults. Giving students the mandate to participate at different levels of the democratic process helps them gain some sophisticated understanding of how democracy functions. This will enable them to claim their democratic space.

Harber (1998) posits that in the process of democratization of education institutions, policy makers should encourage schools to empower participants rather than imposing measures and tasks on them and compromising democratic engagement in the process. Addressing the issue on education and democracy in post-apartheid South Africa, Harber (1998:43) states that "educating in a democracy for a democracy is possible, but sustaining this democracy is now the challenge."

Clearly the school systems of most countries are still stuck with the traditional ways of doing education whereby, as Freire (1996) would argue, the doctrine of 'the teacher teaches and students are taught' still dominates in the educational institutions. Schools and teachers tend to promote anti-democratic values and to some degree propagate hostile divisions in society through intolerance and dominance. Instead, teachers can reconstruct schools to become communities of learners and laboratories for democratic life (Campbell 2004). It is through the democratic approach to education that young citizens can be taught the importance of tolerance and cooperation which will help them to become future active participants within democratic communities.

Noddings (1995) cited in Namulundah (1998) notes that schools are institutions which have the potential of helping society develop citizens who have a clearer and a more responsible sense of understanding what it means to live in a democratic community. Schools which subscribe to democratic ways of facilitating education are capable of training students to become active and productive citizens whose level of awareness on contentious social issues is pronounced. Democratic education is predicated on the principle that there is absolute need to move from conservative ways of dealing with education to more pragmatic and progressive ways. Educators who value democratic practices in the teaching-learning process should be willing to use different progressive teaching-learning methods which do not perpetuate the teacher's domination in the learning environment.

Besides, democratic education also cherishes the premise that the learning process ought to be a paradise where all citizens can intermingle academically and enjoy their learning freedoms which consequently will nurture them into becoming engaged citizens. Hooks (1994) quoted in Namulundah (1998:141) states:

*The academy is not a paradise. But learning is a place*

*where paradise can be created. The classroom with all its limitations; remains a location of possibility. In the field of possibility we have the opportunity to labor for freedom, to demand of ourselves and our comrades, an openness of mind and heart that allows us to face reality, even as we collectively imagine a way to move beyond boundaries, to transgress. This is education as the practice of freedom.*

Taking into account Hooks' (1994) viewpoint, it could be argued that under a democratic education dispensation, students should be given an opportunity for their voices to be heard and a platform to exercise their freedoms through participation in the decision-making process on issues which either directly or indirectly affect their lives. Higgs, Vakalisa, Mda and Assie-Lumumba (2000) mention that democratic education is a form of education which focuses on empowerment and also lays a base for the learners to participate as well as learning to master and directing the course of change by finding interest in learning to do, challenging others mutually as well as learning to live harmoniously with others despite intellectual differences. On this score, Jotia (2008:68) argues that in order for African governments, particularly that of Botswana, to develop citizens who are going to build a strong democracy which will support and sustain development, food production and employment, there is need to develop democratic curricula so that civil society can be exposed to democratic participation at an early stage. Tabulawa, (2003) cited in Carter, (2010:224) observes that it is through democratic child-centered educational practices that students learn to be engaged actively and gain insights into the trajectories of democratic governance within a capitalist economy and the kind of society or social citizenship that education wants to produce so as to further advance the principles of democracy.

Democratic education helps produce innovative, informed,

critically conscious and autonomous individuals who can face life challenges with vigour. An education system that fails to acknowledge democratic practices produces citizens who are patterned to take their place in society unthinkingly. Such individuals turn out to be socio-culturally and politically isolated, with a limited sense of community or cooperative efforts; they become passive and await to be “done to” rather than acting themselves in the democratic discourse (Wolk 1998:7).

According to Fosnot (2005), the constructivist ways of educating people ushers in the notion that knowledge should not be regarded as an absolute truth to be transmitted and discovered but should rather be seen as emergent, developmental, non-objective, viable constructed explanations by humans engaged in cultural and social communities of discourse. Humanistic ways of educating citizens in a democracy cherish the ideal that the process of education should foster the emotional and physical development of the learner whereby students are allowed to question, and engage in independent intellectual judgment pertaining to the world around them. In a sense, under this approach, students are allowed to become creative thinkers, problem solvers and innovative citizens who can always address issues from multiple spheres.

Within a society which values and nurtures democratic ideals such as human dignity, freedom, social justice, equality, love and care for one another, it is of paramount importance that the ideals of democracy are made part of the fiber of the teaching-learning process. This will enable the learners to come to a clearer understanding of the fact that democracy means being thoughtful and paying particular attention to issues that affect one directly as well as the nation-state. This will enable citizens to value the idea that democracy is not only about voting; but rather that it is a way of life which is based on the notion of community involvement.



Green (1999) posits that formal institutional democracies cannot be sustainable and may not even be desirable unless they are based on deep-rooted democratic practices within institutions which advance customs, values and habits of daily lives. Schools are institutions meant to support the teaching and living of democracy by allowing learners to explore social problems and ushering in their own solutions based on their understanding. Democratic education therefore promotes purposeful inquiry whereby the learner-citizens are given a platform to cordially exchange their perspectives on issues and construct their own knowledge on the basis of the exchange of diverse opinions.

Democratic education prepares learners such that they can become responsible and active citizens who respect and protect individual rights and liberties. If schools can become successful in producing democratically conscious and engaged citizens, then eventually we will witness the emergence of a generation which can self-govern at the same time coming into terms with the fact that democracy ought to be produced and be lived rather than being consumed from top-down. Caldwell (2001) states that the call for the democratization of education is a call that opens up avenues for greater citizen engagement in the shaping and delivery of education as well as coming to the realization that education and democracy are intertwined. It is the purpose of education to prepare young people such that they acquire skills and attitudes which groom them to engage energetically in the democratic process. Democratic ends certainly require democratic means. Education should, therefore, advance a participatory democratic ethos which nurtures and respects the rules of engagement. This is the kind of education that Botswana, as a democratic country, needs. Currently the education system is based on the traditional ways of teaching, whereby the teacher is seen as the pool or custodian of all knowledge, and consequently runs all the teaching-learning activities with little or

no participation on the part of the learner.

## **Challenges in Promoting Democratic Education in Botswana**

Wolk (1998) posits that one of the problems faced by democracies worldwide is that the elites have hijacked great and important democratic conversations in schools which deny the common people the voice and power to be actively engaged democratically in the democratic process. A democracy cannot be sustained if the student's voice, the voice that matters most, continues to be suffocated within the school environment. The exercise of democracy instills in learners the ability to exercise the freedom of choice as well as being able to freely question things so as to improve or change the oppressive functions of the status quo.

Botswana is one of the most successful democracies in Africa despite its limitations. What has earned Botswana the crown of a shining example of African democracy is that it has managed overtime to maintain a political system which provides regular constitutional opportunities for people to go to the ballot box and vote for new governing officials. However, it should be noted that providing a platform for elections does not necessarily signal the fact that a democracy is thriving and shining. Democracy as a political system is measured, among other pointers, by factors such as the socio-economic and political conditions obtaining in the country. Multi-party elections have been held regularly in Botswana but to date there are still concerns that the very democracy which is supposedly seen to be shining within the socio-economic environment, appears to be non-existent within the education system. This is clearly one of the greatest paradoxes of Botswana's democracy.

Available evidence suggests that most schools in Botswana are still run in a purely authoritarian manner, with teachers or school heads

running the show, while students are expected to be loyal citizens who are expected to follow rules and regulations without question. In cases where students have challenged the status quo, corporal punishment has been meted as a disciplinary measure and a silencing tactic. In a study entitled, *The Quest for Deep Democratic Participation: Schools as Democratic Spaces in the Post-Colonial Botswana*, an interview with the Principal Education Officer (PEO) for Social Studies, revealed that the delivery of content by teachers in many subject areas is such that they forget they have students in class who are human beings (Jotia, 2008). Most of the teaching is still done in the traditional, conservative way whereby the teacher is seen as a 'demi-god' who knows it all while the learners are perceived as empty vessels which happen to be hungry for knowledge. Democracy is about openness, as such, citizens should be allowed to have an input in the learning process.

Critics have argued that in Botswana, the school management tend to be in absolute charge of the day-to-day activities of the school and to some degree do marginalize teachers and students. Addressing the issues of citizenship education in Britain, Harber (2002:237) contends:

*The Conservative Party has always been unenthusiastic about a genuinely open and realistic political education that uses evidence and encourages young people to make up their minds, for the simple reason that this has been perceived as a potential threat to their 'natural' (and historically empirical) hegemony in the political system.*

It is negative attitudes like those captured in the above quote that have crippled democratic space in Africa in general and Botswana in particular, and have negatively affected the education systems, thus slowly but surely suffocating all efforts at the democratization

of citizenship education. While Britain is an established democracy, a common factor in the context of the above argument is that in both Britain and Botswana, the empowerment of citizens through education is still a major challenge.

It is a central argument in this paper that although the Botswana government subscribes to the principles of democracy, not much is seen terms of the basic principles of democracy in the school system. According to the National Commission on Education (NCE) Report of 1977, Botswana schools were criticized for alienating students from their culture, by denying them the opportunity to use their mother-tongues in the learning process. While this allegation was made way back in 1977, it is still substantially true today, more than 30 years later. Of major concern is the marginalization of certain minority mother tongue languages within the country's education curriculum.

One of the greatest challenges faced by most democracies the world over relates to the issue of ethno-cultural diversity which in some instances can cause socio-economic and political instability if not given sufficient attention. The contention therefore is that if democracy is really about giving every citizen the voice to participate in the affairs which affect them directly or indirectly within the education system, then teaching in the mother languages should also be promoted although general communication could still be done through the official language. Jagger (1999) argues that cultural inequality may impede democratic participation by members of subordinated groups and that the need for establishing institutional mechanisms which could nurture cultural identity is inevitable. According to Nyathi-Ramahobo & Chebanne (2003) Botswana's NCE recommended the use of Setswana for the first four years of schooling in Botswana and failed to recommend the use of other mother tongues which are available in the country thus ignoring the development of other languages and other social domains

in a democracy.

The plurilingual and pluricultural nature of Botswana is such that there are more than 28 languages spoken in the country and yet only English and Setswana are used as the medium of instruction in schools. This scenario definitely has implications on democracy in the education system. Unlike other progressive democracies such as South Africa and Namibia which have adopted a multilingual approach to education policies and curriculum implementation, Botswana still adheres to undemocratic ways of in the education system by denying certain minority languages space within the school corridors and inside the classrooms. Although the students can express themselves in English and Setswana, the promotion of mother-tongue in schools is important in a democratic multicultural society.

South Africa recognizes eleven official languages (Desai 2001) while Namibia uses thirteen languages for curriculum implementation (Brock-Utne 2000). Parker (1996) has observed that in instances where people have differences in the context of democratic education, those differences should be used as strengths and virtues whereby cultural and whatever other diversities are used to foster social participation which ultimately would help build a strong democracy. Education plays a fundamental role in the preservation and spread of a language, hence the recognition of linguistic diversity in the country is crucial (Nyathi-Ramahobo & Chebanne 2003:2). Where education is practiced democratically, linguistic and socio-cultural diversity have to be promoted.

One challenge of democratic education in Botswana (as elsewhere on the African continent) is that students who are lower achievers are often given some degrading labels in schools and those with speech deformities are hardly ever given a chance to express themselves because they are regarded as slow, time wasting and difficult to hear or

deal with. Basically, those with physical handicaps are never seen to be worth anything let alone worthy of any respect.

Education in a multicultural environment, citizenship can be seen to be aligning itself to democratic principles if it allows individuals to be proud of their identity and at the same time respecting their similarities and their interconnectedness. Education in a democratic state should therefore be seen to be promoting the ideal of the learner's self-realization by utilizing their peculiar talents plus their mother tongue to learn and to also contribute positively in society through pronounced social action. Hutchinson and Hunt (2001) reflect that in democratic societies, school settings should allow students, parents, staff and administrators to express themselves freely in whatever language so that they can effectively communicate their experiences and ideas. If education is about transforming citizens, then Green's (1999) logic that a democratic education system that supports transformative citizenship should enable the learners to advance their voices without being discriminated against or fear of victimization, should be applauded.

One issue of concern, which stifles the existence of democracy in Botswana schools is the use of corporal punishment. Admittedly the practice is not tolerated in Botswana alone but is acceptable in other countries as well. Summarily, this practice has a silencing effect on students and inhibits learners from becoming critical of their environment. In Botswana, caning has its origins in the country's colonially-imposed authoritarian system of schooling (Tabulawa, 1995; Prophet, 1995; Marope & Amey 1995 cited in Jotia 2008:145). Students are often subjected to corporal punishment even for minor 'breaches' such as talking to their friend in class, which consequently transforms them into passive learners since many would prefer to remain silent and keep out of trouble, rather than being vocal and ending up in trouble.

In order for Botswana to move towards making the teaching-

learning process sufficiently democratic as well as fully implementing citizenship education, teachers ought to understand the relationship between democratic education, discipline, use of corporal punishment and students' rights as human beings. The character of any democratic culture is essentially active participation which makes it possible for an individual to grow independently intellectually (Featherstone & Featherstone 2003). The journey to train students to become responsible and vibrant citizens should start within the school parameters and in instances where schools are used as torture chambers through the unreasonable application of corporal punishment, the fear of producing violent citizens should begin to ring in every citizen's ears.

Botswana's democracy is marred by the serious challenge of voter apathy especially amongst the youth. Molomo & Somolekae (2004) concur by charging that despite the lowering of the voting age from 21 to 18, youth participation in national elections still leaves much to be desired as evidenced by the low participation especially in the 1999 elections and the subsequent ones. According to Jotia (2008:81), if introduced in educational institutions, democratic education can help elevate the level of political awareness and consciousness especially among the youth. Botswana's Independent Electoral Commission (IEC) report of 2002 indicated that voter education should be given to the youth if voter apathy is to be curbed. On the basis of the IEC report's analysis, it could be argued therefore, that the best place to start teaching about elections and voting should be in schools.

Equally of concern is that Botswana's democracy has not reached a stage where a significant number of youth could be expected to register and campaign for political office. Political ignorance has always haunted segments of Botswana society and this is mostly attributed to the fact that there is only limited involvement of students in student governance issues in various educational institutions especially at

primary and secondary school levels. Lack of involvement by students in the decision-making process has at times led to social unrest in several schools especially in senior secondary schools. For instance, the edition of *Mmegi newspaper* of September 20 2004 reported that Masunga Senior Secondary School had experienced a chain of strikes as a result of students rebelling against the administration allegedly for being too heavy handed and not involving them in matters that affect their lives. Similar incidents occurred at Matsha and Gantsi Senior Secondary schools, as well as at Moeding College amongst other education institutions. Such developments end up negatively impacting citizens' involvement in national politics.

### **Turning Classrooms into Spheres of Pragmatic Democratic Education**

The relationship between citizenship, democracy and education is obvious. Consequently, schools should not just teach about democracy without providing a platform where both teachers and students can experience democracy. Learners should be educated such that they can be part of the solutions to the problem of democratic deficits and disjuncture. The fruits of education and democracy should be the self-realization of the learner as well as the development of consciousness for the common good of all around him or her (Tarrant, 1989). Every citizen who graduates from an academic institution should be powered with the democratic intellectual apparatus which will enable him or her to deal independently with all life challenges and manifestations.

Citing Dewey, Romano (2006:9) highlights that educators should frame their social objectives on the basis of knowing the forces and causes which produce the evils from which people suffer, and must frame them on the basis of those forces and conditions in the actual



situation which supply means for their realization. Failure to do so will fuel the crisis currently being experienced in education whereby the graduates produced cannot link the social problems being experienced to education. Democracy should be a lived experience. Jotia (2008:165) states that the constructivist model of education regards learning as a give-and-take process in which the learner is at the centre of the learning activities within a collaborative social discourse where the teacher needs to be re-skilled and be given the right tools for democratic education. That way, the teacher can serve as a facilitator of knowledge and not a dictator in the teaching-learning process.

Classrooms should become spheres for democratic encounter through promoting group discussions, dialogue, drama, debate and generally free expression of view. O'Brien (2003) cited in Jotia, (2008:165) sells the idea that if schools want to be places where students prepare to be highly literate individuals, then they should strive to become places where students are encouraged to be strong citizens. This, inter alia, means participating in healthy debates. It is in the context of this culture of democracy that literacy flourishes as students work to hone their skills and become better readers, writers, speakers and listeners.

According to Freire (2000), the best way to educate people is through the fostering of critical consciousness in the learner whereby the environment in the classroom is such that the learner can question the socio-economic and political realities surrounding him or her. The curriculum has to be democratized and this process should include a revisit of evaluation and assessment procedures. The traditional forms of assessment which place emphasis on tests and examinations should be reconsidered with a view to introducing more progressive forms of assessment which feature such tools as portfolios, research projects, experimentation, field trips, class discussions, films, etc., which

strategies promote inquiry and discovery. Wolk (1998:112) argues that all forms of assessment, including test-based, are subjective; and that when children are assessed within the dominant paradigm, there is a danger of ending up with numbers and percents, whereas when children are assessed within a democratic and naturalistic belief system, 'we end up with human beings'.

The major task facing Botswana as a democratic nation today is to adopt civic education programmes starting from learners' families through communities to primary, secondary and tertiary education institutions which can conscientize young people about democracy. Such a paradigm shift in civic curriculum would enable educators to move towards a democratic political culture in which students will not only hear about democracy but will live and practice it in the classroom. Cunningham (1991) quoted in Osler (2000) has observed that if schools want young people to learn that they can have some control over their lives collectively and improve their lives as citizens, they certainly ought to be given a chance to practice democracy in school.

The power of democracy lies within the principle of participation. As such, the more democracy is practiced in schools, the better the chances that the younger generation will develop the zeal to participate in the political and social spheres of life. In a study by Finkel (2003) titled *Development of a Democratic Political Culture* which compared the situation in South Africa, Dominican Republic and Poland, it was found that citizens who were exposed to civic education, training and participation had proved to be significantly active in politics than those who had no clue about what civic education is about. Finkel's (2003) study further revealed that in South Africa, the rate of political participation by those who reported having gone through civic education doubled as people became more actively involved in political activities. The author argued that exposure to democracy

training programmes translates directly into increased involvement in the political arena. Pykett (2007) mentions that citizenship education policy is very important in an existing and evolving discourse of educational policy, and that its social context is essential because it will bring about civil renewal among the citizens as they get to understand their role in a democracy.

The traditionalist approach to education which offers no platform for students' voices to be heard, as well as fails to promote student-teacher or student-student dialogue in the classroom, does not promote shared mutuality and as such stifles democratic engagement. Burch (1999) contends that our classrooms are environments where there is no enthusiasm amongst the learners, no shared experiences, humorless spaces with awkward silence, where affection is absolutely absent as evidenced by the assertion that students tend to be empty vessels and are supposed to behave "religiously" (i.e. in a docile manner) in the teaching-learning process. Burch further posits that democracy is not built through straight rows of desks in the classroom as well as the imposing of authority on students who ultimately are expected to behave like messiahs who are ready to enter heaven. Democracy is built through the development of sound social rapport in education, whereby learners are first and foremost appreciated as human beings and the social climate under which they interact with one another is jovial and filled with love and respect for one another's diverse opinions.

### **Multicultural Education as a Tool for Promoting Democracy**

In a discussion of this nature, it is pertinent to explore the relationship between a democracy and the concept of cultural diversity which includes issues such as minority rights, freedom of association, freedom of speech, gender disparities, disability matters, gay and lesbian issues,

rich versus poor, varied intellectual ideologies and related issues. The concept of diversity is predicated on respect for differences, and as such offers distinct opportunities for appreciating each others' race, culture, gender, religion, physical and mental ability, sexual orientation and age (Lum 2007). Arguably, a democracy should be multicultural, meaning that it has to be seen to be addressing or embracing elements of various cultural groups of people under its wings. In a multicultural or multiethnic democracy, it is crucially essential that multicultural education is promoted in all institutions of learning so that citizens can learn to celebrate their diversity and develop a mature willingness to tolerate or accommodate one another despite their cultural differences. Educating for tolerance is still a challenge in the context of Botswana's pluralistic democracy since not all cultures are embraced by the curriculum. Multicultural education seeks to conscientize citizens about, why for instance, it is vital to treat people with disabilities as human beings and ensure educational institutions are equipped with the necessary supporting mechanisms for their learning. Such education also enlightens the nation-state about the importance of respecting diversity of religions. This is a type of education concerned with creating an educational environment in which students are free to from a variety of micro cultural groups based on race/ethnicity, gender, social class, regional grouping and people with disabilities experience educational equality (Banks 2006:78). In a democracy of diverse cultures, it is necessary to teach the citizens about respecting other people's freedom to associate, to worship, to express opinions, to eat a certain type of food, to wear whatever they choose (providing they do not go about in the nude), to dance in whatever way, to be proud of speaking their language, to laugh according to their cultural dictates, to cry in a certain cultural way.

Multicultural education is supposed to help address the problem

of inequities in education especially those related to special education (Chinn & Gollnick 2009). Commendably, the government of Botswana has taken steps towards promoting diversity by introducing a facility for people with physical challenges, in the President's Office. Ideally this noble move ought to now be followed by the development of a curriculum on multiculturalism to cater for learners from primary school all the way to tertiary institutions so that citizens can be educated about the importance of respecting diversity in a democracy. The nation has to be alerted on the dangers of discriminating on the basis of disability, gender, sexual orientation, skin colour, tribe, political ideology and economic position, among others.

## **Conclusion**

The paper has observed that in order to educate citizens so that they become civic-minded and politically conscious, there is need for the education system to embrace critical pedagogies such as critical inquiry, sharing experiences, creating self-plans of action, debating as well as promoting dialogue. This will result in the creation of a learning environment which is congruent with Botswana's democratic principles. Botswana's education system should be re-fashioned in a way that promotes multiculturalism as a way of closing the cultural gaps which exist within the school environment and in society in general where some citizens perceive themselves as marginalized as a consequence of either the school system's or society's failure to recognize and respect ethnic, linguistic, cultural and socioeconomic diversity (Campbell 2000). Democratic education advocates justice for all people regardless of people's ethno-cultural positions in society.

Democracy is a noble phenomenon particularly when well understood and practiced. The only challenge however is that often

times not many people subscribe to its tenets, especially in the context of the education system. It is pertinent that all forms of education in whatever discipline should give learners the autonomy to take charge of their learning. Botswana's education system should nurture democratic principles in which citizens appreciate that disagreements in society are healthy as long as they are handled with mutual respect. Education in Botswana should promote eros – i.e. an environment in which everybody is allowed to reflect the desire to know as well as freedom to disagree with others in both social and political dialogues. In any given democracy, there should be a pronounced relationship between the national democratic ideals and the education system. Without such a sound symbiotic relationship, democracy is bound to suffocate, which development may ultimately affect the degree of citizen participation. Needless to stress that the future of democracy in any given country lies in the hands of the youth; therefore the education system should prepare the youth for robust involvement in the democratic process.

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