

## **Cultural Sensitivity and Diversity in Religious Education Textbooks: A Case of Junior Secondary Schools in Botswana**

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**Abstract.** This qualitative study investigated the extent to which the junior secondary schools religious education textbooks used in Botswana promote cultural sensitivity and diversity. Semi-structured interviews were used to collect data from participants who were purposively sampled in three selected junior secondary schools in an urban setting. The results revealed that religious education textbooks are perceived to be culturally insensitive and deemed to promote the dominant cultures. In fact, religious education textbooks marginalise the cultures of the ethnic minorities which is a reflection of political and social orientations of nation building project which propagates the cultures of the dominant ethnic groups. In addition, the textbook prescription guidelines are somehow ambivalent since they are not clearly articulated hence subject to abuse. The study concluded by suggesting a review of the curriculum which is presently assimilationist, examination-oriented and largely influences how religious education textbooks are written. Textbook writers need to access credible sources as they engage in the writing of textbooks.

**Keywords:** diversity, culture, textbooks, sensitivity, religious education, secondary schools, Botswana.

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### **INTRODUCTION**

Religious Education has always been taught in schools dating back to the coming of the missionaries to Botswana around 1862, even though it was more of Bible study than Religious Education (RE). During the pre-independence era the Bible was the main textbook used for religious instruction especially for potential and practicing converts. In addition, the reading of the Bible by African converts was meant to make them further appreciate and promote European cultures which were viewed as superior. The main objective of the missionaries was to convert locals into Christianity and spread Western culture through the biblical text.

Missionary education was a strategy for propagating capitalist ideals and a mechanism for sustaining colonialism and imperialism. In the post-independence period the teaching and learning materials have ignored the context in which education operates. However, textbooks are critical in the promotion of effective learning and teaching and coupled with this is their production, distribution and how they are controlled.

Since attaining independence in 1966, and of late, in an attempt to conform to the globalizing society, Botswana adopted a variety of approaches to RE teaching. The first transformation was from confessional to neo-confessional approach in religious education teaching and learning while the text books used were mainly Christian-based. For example, at junior secondary school level *Developing in Christ* curriculum was used while at senior secondary school level the curriculum was *Christian Living Today* and in both curricular the content was solely Christianity. In 1996 the multi-faith Religious Education curriculum at junior secondary school level was introduced (Botswana Government, 1996) and it adopted a phenomenological approach to RE teaching and learning. Its aim was to explore and raise religious awareness, tolerance, sensitivity as well as knowledge and understanding of a variety of religious traditions found in the country and beyond. It also emphasized the relationship between religious beliefs and human experiences. Though it was multi-faith in content the textbooks that were used largely emphasized and covered Abrahamic religions namely Christianity, Islam, Judaism, and to a lesser extent other religions. The textbooks did not adequately address diversity in relation to a multi-faith curriculum. The 1996 curriculum was revised in 2008 and there was little change in as far as content coverage was concerned, especially since the interpretive approach to RE which was adopted emphasized Christianity as the major religion in Botswana while accommodating other religions (Botswana Government, 2008). This shift also affected the way textbook writers presented their material. The series of reforms in relation to the teaching of RE were in line with the government's project of nation-building where differences were expected not to exist despite the nation's pluralistic nature.

## **Statement of the Problem**

There is bias in the content of junior secondary school Religious Education textbooks towards some religions either by covering them inadequately or totally excluding them. When dealing with African Traditional Religion, most textbooks draw examples of culture from what are regarded as “major tribes” who are predominantly of Tswana descent to the exclusion of the so-called “minor tribes.” The country is multi-ethnic, multi-cultural and multi-religious something that textbook writers lose sight of hence breeding a sense of cultural insensitivity. This is mainly due to the nation-building ideology that underpins the adoption of assimilationist policies. Minority ethnic groups tend to be inadequately reflected in the books or are at best underrepresented and at worst misrepresented. This breeds lack of respect and intolerance to ethnic minorities since written texts are usually viewed as authoritative legitimate knowledge hence they have an influence on how people view themselves in relation to others.

Research questions that guided this study are:

- How do religious education textbooks influence teaching and learning in culturally diverse classrooms?
- What are the experiences of teachers and students in using textbooks in culturally diverse classrooms?
- To what extent are minority ethnic groups reflected in religious education textbooks?

## **REVIEWED LITERATURE**

### **Introduction**

For a long time textbooks have been considered to be the most fundamental factor in teaching and learning and in the development of the learner as they first get into contact with printed word which is usually directly linked to learning in the school environment. Textbooks are undoubtedly the basis of teaching and learning hence they influence what takes place in the classroom. They are usually regarded as the chief mechanism through which schools aim to fulfil educational objectives (Hummel, 1988). This is particularly true for

developing countries where the use of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) is still limited.

Textbooks may be used to promote effective content and pedagogical knowledge especially since teacher quality is usually associated with teaching materials (Richards, Brown & Forde, 2006). In developing countries, textbooks tend to serve two purposes, first they provide students with subject knowledge which may even compensate a weak knowledge base of teachers and second, they provide under-qualified teachers with reliable and accessible learning content to guide and even inform effective teaching (McCrorry, Siedel & Stylianides, 2005).

### **Textbook Selection, Relevance Integration and Daily Classroom Activities**

In this study a textbook is understood to be a learning resource in print or electronic form used to support teaching and learning. Textbooks as commonly used resources in schools are aimed at guiding instruction in order to improve the performance of learners (Broostrom, 2001; Laws & Horsely, 2006) and are usually chosen based on their content, structure, scope, orientation and level of accessibility to users. Teachers are expected to integrate textbook information into their classroom activities. In addition, students engage more with a textbook if they feel that it is relevant to their own environment since learning is not simply a collection of facts and figures.

Teachers usually use textbooks to provide sequence and logic to the curriculum as is the case with RE textbooks in Botswana. In the classroom, 'good' textbooks especially prescribed ones are revered because they command authority for teachers, students, parents and guardians. They enable teachers to handle the subject matter that they would otherwise find demanding and difficult (Apple, 1993). For example, teachers may use textbooks as a springboard to teaching important concepts and information with regard to providing a framework of the content and how it may be taught (Jamie-Proctor & Byrne, 2008; McCrorry, Siedel & Stylianides, 2005). Therefore, textbooks do influence what happens in classroom learning due to their perceived efficacy in organizing and providing instructional material.

The usefulness of textbooks is mainly determined by curriculum developers whom it is taken understand the needs of both students and teachers who use them, hence the teacher's experience on textbook use equally matters (Horsely, 2003; Engeberston & Rymarz, 2005). In a similar vein, textbooks can become useful tools for teachers since they may enrich the teacher's imagination and passion for teaching. Teachers are empowered by textbooks when they use them creatively and imaginatively in terms of what to teach and how to teach it (Engeberston & Rymarz, 2005). It is in this way that school textbooks determine in a large measure what goes on in the classroom. Therefore there is need for RE textbooks to be culturally diversified and sensitive in their structure and approach. This is particularly important in Botswana which like many African nations is multi-cultural and heterogeneous in its population and religious affiliation.

Despite their good intentions, most textbooks are written as if they contain "established doctrine consisting of unassailable and officially sanctioned truth" (Donia, 2000, p. 42). If they are viewed in this light, they end up being indoctrinating documents. In addition, there are instances when textbooks do not take students' background and knowledge into account. Presently, as it was in the past, textbooks play an important role in both the curriculum and the interpretation of learning environments since they influence the "types of knowledge and attitudes students acquire" (Ayalon, 2008, p. 25). Viewed in this manner, textbooks can be said to perpetuate the dominance of hegemonic groups and marginalize the perspectives of the less powerful in society since they significantly affect the students' knowledge and their perceptions of themselves and others as they are trusted sources of knowledge (Ayalon, 2008). For example, as a way of further perpetuating their power on Africans, during the colonial era Christian missionaries, in sub-Saharan Africa, utilised religion and the Bible to ensure that the colonised despised and rejected their cultural practices, norms and values in favour of the western ones.

Western education has always been tailored to satisfy the needs of the advantaged hence imposing meanings and defining values to the less powerful in

society. The definition of what is culturally worthwhile possessing has always been defined by the advantaged. The advantaged will then seek to maintain the privileged position using assimilationist approaches by making the dominated operate according to the dictates of the “super culture” whilst their interests and needs are neglected. Generally, the dominant groups decide on what goes on in the classroom as a result schools cannot change society but what it does is to perpetuate the existing societal differences in society in subtle and hidden ways whilst legitimising certain values and identities. This imperialist tendency was aimed at furthering the imperialist agenda in order to psychologically prepare Africans to accept capitalism as the dominant and viable economic system. Local African communities were discouraged from practicing various elements of their traditional culture which missionaries viewed as pagan and evil. In this way, missionaries encouraged one view of reality based on an assumed superior culture. The text that was used to further buttress this view was the Bible which tended to be the source of authority for both Africans who were converted and those who were not. The trend is true to date whereby the Bible is the authoritative text of morality for both the converted and those who may not be practicing Christianity or any religion. When used in this way, textbooks may promote and maintain prejudice and distorted perspectives especially when they interpret basic values in a pluralistic environment as understood by the mainstream portion of society (Ndura, 2004). There are instances when textbooks ignore or do not accurately chronicle and portray the experiences of the disadvantaged in society such as when RE textbooks are silent about the “minority” cultures and their religions in Botswana.

### **Cultural diversity in textbooks**

Culture is central to learning as it plays a vital role in shaping the thinking process of students who are from diverse ethnicities. This is because it entails how people live, dress, behave and how they respond to their environment by providing them with a sense of identity, beliefs, values and behaviour. This is discernible in child upbringing. Viewed in this context, culture is understood as a dynamic commodity that individuals integrally possess and one that keeps

changing with time as individuals encounter multiple experiences. When viewed as both a possession and a process (Jackson, 2004) culture can be transmitted from one generation to another through various social institutions such as the family, religion and schools. It then becomes part of the natural process of growing up in a family and community as the young participate in societal and political institutions including schools. However, unlike the family or local community students in schools are from different cultural backgrounds and may share or not share any cultural traits. It is therefore a challenge to textbook writers to ensure that what they write for students offers equal access to information by addressing diverse cultures and ethnicities. In this way, textbooks that are culturally supportive of their students have the ability to empower and inculcate self-assertiveness (Richards & Rodgers, 2006). There is no doubt that differences in religions can also be associated with differences in culture. Religions as aspects of ethnicity possess cultural elements which by their nature assist in imparting various values, norms, principles and practices to their followers hence subjecting the followers to a particular code of behaviour. In this way religion is an important cultural factor that is similar to other identity sources like languages, history or cultural heritage. However, this paper is located within a wider framework of ethnicity, religion, tribe, language and social identity.

Within schools, textbooks are the major source of information that promote and guide young people on what culture entails. Naturally, teachers and students are the ultimate users of textbooks therefore teachers are particularly dependent upon 'good' books which constitute a key element of the education experience of every student (Altbach & Kelly, 1988). However, textbooks can also hinder the promotion of cultural and ethnic diversity if they promote a single culture within a diverse society. For example, textbooks may contain hidden agendas that are meant to promote the values and ideologies of dominant groups and by doing so they promote and perpetuate stereotypes. After all, textbooks are commonly viewed as providing an objective picture of society and give an impetus to the already inherent social structural inequalities which are not immediately and easily visible. Furthermore, textbooks promote this trend by

deliberately leaving out images and perspectives of minorities. In addition, the education system expects them to conform to the status quo and become submissive and resilient to these unfair practices.

By leaving out images of the disadvantaged, textbooks contribute to the development and promotion of stereotypes and negative attitudes especially those that confirm unjustified perceptions as well as incorrect and inappropriate images of others and this could lead to distrust and hatred. It is unfortunate that textbooks are mainly used by young people who are at their most impressionable level because “the beliefs, perceptions, and understandings that students acquire early on tend to influence what they learn later in school and elsewhere” (Greaney, 2006, p. 48). At times textbooks are selective in their account of issues and fail to recognize the contribution of minorities and the powerless or may deliberately misrepresent achievements of the under-privileged (Greaney, 2006). In some instances, there is an imbalance in presenting issues by deliberately de-emphasizing some issues especially those that involve perspectives of the wronged or subordinated groups especially if the dominant group is the one responsible for the atrocities committed. Textbooks can also deliberately distort historical facts for ideological purposes. In addition, textbooks may be used to manipulate people’s minds using what Greaney (2006) refers to as “persuasion techniques through the use of words “in order to create, for example, a strong and “favourable and unwarranted impressions of people, events, and nationalities” (p.57) such as barbaric acts, rogue state, terrorist, or generalities such as peace-loving.

In schools there is cultural control whereby unequal social and economic power is maintained through the transmission of culture. Those students from families in positions of power are advantaged since they enter school already possessing both the cultural capital and the appropriate language to express their values. In this way, the culture of the powerful classes serve as a legitimate culture that can be mastered at varying levels (Andersen & Hansen, 2012). Those who possess cultural capital are in a position to impose instruments of knowledge, social reality and how these tools should be expressed.



### **Control over the Production and Distribution of Knowledge**

Textbooks are important instructional tools in school subjects which convey certain values, norms, ideologies and various forms of knowledge as articulated by the authors. Textbook use has been contested (Sleeter, 2005) because as indicated earlier, at times they tend to promote particular ideological perspectives and serve the interests of the dominant groups in society, and in so doing, they control knowledge production, use and its distribution (Apple, 1993). Those who have power control the content of the curriculum that ultimately finds its way in the textbooks. In view of this, Apple (1993) argues that:

The curriculum is never simply a neutral assemblage of knowledge, somehow appearing in the texts and classrooms of a nation. It is always a part of a selective tradition, someone's selection, [and] some group's vision of legitimate knowledge. It is produced out of the cultural, political and economic conflicts, tensions and compromises that organize and disorganize a people (p. 222).

Similarly, when referring to education in general Smith (2005) says that:

Education may be used explicitly to promote a particular definition of national identity that includes certain groups and excludes others. It may be used as a weapon in cultural repression of minorities, by denying them access to education, or using education to suppress their languages, traditions, art forms, religious practices, and cultural values (p. 2).

Some group's knowledge is viewed as legitimate and official while other groups' knowledge is negatively perceived. For one to be said to be educated they should have appropriated a certain type of knowledge. That is why questions such as whose knowledge is taught and produced in schools have been raised on a number of occasions and especially by Apple (1998). School knowledge has connections with politics as observed by Apple (1998) yet "very little critical attention has been paid to the ideological, political, and economic sources of its

production, distribution, and reception” (p. 159). It is through textbooks that the “legitimate” knowledge reaches and is made available to schools” (Apple, 1998, p. 159) and when viewed in this way, textbooks become an expression of the dominant group’s ideologies which also supports their social position. As a result of this, knowledge received from textbooks is legitimized by the school system in order to eventually control society hence the beliefs of the dominant group as expressed in the textbook are then taken for granted, as correct, true and legitimate.

Since textbooks express the beliefs of the dominant group, they would usually avoid addressing the issue of how the privileged status of certain groups in society is reproduced and maintained and this avoidance denies students a significant aspect of knowledge in relation to their society. For example, students may not understand that the privileged status is socially constructed and especially since textbooks in most cases would use the passive voice in writing as a way of avoiding to implicate the privileged class (Fitzgerald, 2012). Textbooks may deliberately omit certain aspects of the curriculum that are related to ethnicity and at times they deliberately do not cover them hence ethnic minorities and the disempowered become *‘clearly invisible’* (emphasis mine). Controversial issues such as discrimination and prejudice are avoided in favour of the more favourable and idealistic traditional view of current issues. They further avoid subtleties and complexities existing in society that are related to prejudice. In certain instances, textbooks deliberately or unconsciously conceal entrenched societal biases and prejudices and this usually happens due to the curriculum’s deliberate omission of the disempowered. Inadequate coverage of the disadvantaged groups reinforces the idea that they are not an integral part of society and that is why such coverage of ethnic minority culture “often perpetuates misconceptions and stereotypes” (Banks, 1987, p. 533).

Stereotypes definitely affect how students view reality and as a result students who have experienced prejudices, tend to believe that they deserve the condition that they find themselves in and that there is no need for them to complain about it (Ndura, 2004). Banks (1987) notes that in their presentation of

ethnic cultures, textbooks, usually interpret and perceive them within the lenses of mainstream historians and scholars and in this way students will naturally have a “limited view of social reality and an incomplete understanding of the human experience” (p. 534). That is what Ndura (2004) refers to as “misrepresentation and under-representation of cultural minorities and their life experiences” (p. 144). Ndura (2004) further observes that in their presentation of ethnic minorities textbooks have avoided telling the truth but have tended to romanticize reality to the disadvantage of minorities.

Within a liberal education system there are those who can impose “cultural capital in terms of dispositions such as values and attitudes and legitimize its knowledge production, its meaning and utilization (Errante, 2009, p5). The cultural capital of the dominant class is the one that is considered as the legitimate and an appropriate form of knowledge because it is trusted and deals with inter-personal relations. Popular and dominant culture which is usually presented in textbooks has an influence on the consumers who are future citizens and adults. This then shows the school’s role in reproducing unequal power relations through textbooks.

Textbooks legitimize the status quo by favouring the powerful. For example, the curriculum may aim at limiting access to certain forms of information and in so doing preventing students to be aware of other ways of knowing the world. Children especially from the disadvantaged social groups would negatively view themselves if they do not see their social group represented in textbooks which are viewed as absolute, natural, true and proper sources of information. Formal education by nature transmits social and cultural values especially in terms of how young peoples’ views towards society are shaped. Schools mainly through textbooks transmit societal values including the production as well as the reproduction of power relations and social inequality in society. Puerta and Fages (2010) remind us that values have always been part of education and “have always formed an inseparable part of books” (p. 15). What is found in textbooks is rarely questioned since it reflects what is familiar in the social environment.

Textbook writers too present their own perceptions of reality that is in their environment as well as how they interpret it. What is in the textbooks is not neutral since a certain group will have determined its nature. The content of the textbooks is socially constructed with its naturally subjective interpretations of reality which authors may project as facts since they operate within a particular cultural context and discourses (Lassig, 2008). According to Lassig (2008) textbook knowledge is always highly selective since writers “select and omit, condense, structure, reduce and generalize as well as substantiate information” (p. 11). Textbooks information is viewed as authorized since its contents as well as how it may be interpreted is regarded as “particularly objective, accurate and relevant ... an official ‘stamp’ promising ‘the truth’ (Lassig, 2008, p.12). Since textbooks are largely approved by the state, “their relevance as instruments of political influence and social control becomes apparent” (Lassig, 2008, p.12). In this way they do not only convey data that may be deemed neutral, facts and information but also cultural, social and political values. Since students, through textbooks are given selective access to ideas and information and are predisposed to think and view the world in a particular way, this limits them not to think of other possibilities. Textbooks do more than just provide academic knowledge of the different subjects but they also shape the content in terms of the preferred cultural values and perspectives in relation to the various societal groups.

A question can be raised regarding the degree to which diversity is recognized in terms of incorporating cultures and histories of ethnic and religious minorities. The other question is on the extent to which textbooks may promote inequalities and lack of tolerance. As earlier on indicated, formal education is by and large designed to transmit social and cultural values in addition to providing numeracy and literacy. Textbooks which are the main instruments used in education tend to be biased due to an already prejudiced curriculum and this naturally contributes to reinforced stereotypical negative attitudes. It is also unfortunate that formal education takes place amongst young people who may not be cognitively mature to discern when textbooks paint negative images of certain social groups. Cultures of ethnic minorities are at times not accurately

portrayed, depicted and represented in textbooks. It tends to be normal for textbooks to mirror the societal values and assumptions about the world including those of the marginalized. Lack of a balanced view and representation can demean students from ethnic minorities since it will be the dominant culture that is depicted. At times it is through the type of language used in textbooks since language use is an embodiment of the users' attitudes and meanings attached to it.

### **Cultural sensitivity in textbooks**

Cultural sensitivity entails the recognition of differences between cultures which are reflected in the ways that different groups of people communicate and relate to one another as reflected in the textbooks. Cultural sensitivity may enable students to value and recognise the importance of their own culture, as well as that of others, and textbooks can play a major role in achieving these goals. Developing this kind of cultural competence should be an on-going process as it is an important component of human interaction. For example, a culturally competent individual views all people as unique and realizes that their experiences, beliefs, values, and language affect their perceptions and world-view.

Due to increasingly diverse population and disparities in society which entail different racial, ethnic, socio-economic, religious, and cultural backgrounds, cultural competence and sensitivity are essential. To value diversity one must respect the differences seen in other people, and that mainly include customs, thoughts, behaviours, communication styles, values, and traditions. It is likely that individuals will have certain perceptions about people who are not like themselves. Similarly, there may be misconceptions in a diverse classroom setting, and textbooks may help in addressing such challenges by encouraging students to think about other people, in order to develop an open attitude towards them (Hummel, 1988). Education has to be sensitive to cultural minorities and that is why denying an individual the right to their culture literally interferes with the formation of their personality (Burtonwood, 2005).

In their traditional or modified form textbooks continue to have an important place in schools and as for students they are a significant source of information on a variety of subjects including issues such as race and culture (Pratt, 1972). However, textbooks should direct the learning experiences to the needs, interests, perceptions, aspirations, and abilities of students. Furthermore, since students in schools are from different cultural backgrounds there is need to use materials that will benefit all students (Ladson-Billings, (2006). That is why Apple and Christian-Smith (1991) suggest that textbooks need to be scrutinized carefully and those that fail to educate children about diversity should not be used while publishers have to develop a wide range of techniques to attract a diverse readership.

## **METHODOLOGY**

Qualitative methodology was used to investigate the extent to which Religious Education (RE) textbooks used in junior secondary schools in Botswana are culturally diverse and sensitive to the users. This methodology sought to understand whether or not Religious Education textbooks are culturally diverse and sensitive by soliciting the views of secondary school teachers and their students. Qualitative methodology was adopted because of its ability to fully engage participants, through interviews, observations and spending time on site while the phenomenon is studied in its natural setting in terms of how the participants interpret and attach meaning to the phenomenon. In addition, interviews which were the main instruments in this study are socially situated whereby both the interviewer and interviewee play active roles in terms of exchanging information on a phenomenon (Roulston, 2011). Interviews and observations were used to collect data. Interviews were chosen to allow the researcher to capture different personal feelings of the participants by allowing them to comprehensively articulate their thoughts on the subject through dialogue (Mills, 2003, Schostak, 2006). In this way, this methodology enabled the researcher to have an in-depth understanding of the experiences that participants have as well as their perspectives of the phenomenon in terms of in-

depth descriptions, explanations, and meanings (Lodico, Spaulding & Voegtle, 2006).

Semi-structured interviews allowed new questions to be brought up by the interviewer. The target group for this research was six junior secondary school teachers in three schools and a group of thirty students who were doing RE as an optional subject and were in their final year. Furthermore, the schools are situated in an urban area hence the students and teachers are likely to come from different cultural backgrounds. This created diversity in their responses making this setup relevant and useful to this research by involving participants who were “information rich” (Best & Khan, 2006). For example, teachers are regarded as experts in RE teaching since they are the ones who guide students in the use of textbooks. All the six Religious Education teachers in the three schools were each interviewed five times for about thirty minutes while a focus group of ten students in each school was interviewed once for about fifty minutes. An audio-recorder was used to capture the participant’s views. In reporting, pseudonyms were used to respect their confidentiality.

## DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

### Cultural diversity and textbooks

The participants acknowledged and appreciated that Botswana is rich in cultural diversity but were disappointed that textbooks were weak in articulating that reality especially with reference to African Traditional Religion in Botswana. In view of these responses, RE textbooks do not adequately address cultural diversity in Botswana. Presently there are two textbooks used at junior secondary school level and these are *Religion For All* (Jacob, Masheka & Morupisi, 1999) and *Junior Secondary Religious Education for Botswana* (Kgathi, Seganabeng & Seretse, 1998).

Participants were divided in their views on whether textbooks were culturally sensitive or not. Initially, teachers in particular tended to adopt the official position that there is tolerance of beliefs in Botswana but their position gradually changed in the subsequent interviews. For example, participants

especially those from the minority ethnic groups were unhappy with textbooks indicating that they do not cover their cultures which fall under African Traditional Religion (ATR). For example, one teacher Ms Pheko said: *“The textbooks leave out other tribal cultures in Botswana and this is seen by many students as an attempt to portray these cultures as inferior”*. The point was further stressed by Ms Seleke:

Examples that are given in these textbooks are mostly limited to the major tribes while leaving out minor tribes and this is not good for the students. Textbooks do not follow the demands of the syllabus as a result. It makes teaching difficult.

For example, as for the textbook *Junior Secondary Religious Education For Botswana* (Kgathi, Seganabeng & Seretse, 1998) the examples under the topic *Rites of Passage*, were drawn from Botswana’s major tribes only such as Balete, Bakgatla and Bangwaketse and left out “minor” ethnic groups. One student, Bakang complained that as students they were being exposed to academic information that is not necessarily applicable in their lives outside school and suggested that more Botswana cultures and religions should make up the bulk of the material in the textbooks and the syllabus. Ms Malebogo, a Religious Education teacher said: *“Textbooks only prescribe what is to be taught but lack in content with regards to other tribes especially African Traditional Religion in Botswana. The rest remains left with individual teachers”*.

A general feeling was that minority ethnic groups were marginalized by textbooks to the extent that students from these groups felt unimportant because the books excluded them. Thus teachers sometimes face difficulties in engaging students from “minority culture” to participate on issues regarding their culture because they felt that what is said though inaccurate was acceptable. Students from marginalised groups also always fail to open up to discuss issues especially those which popular knowledge may not acknowledge.



### **Cultural sensitivity and textbooks**

Participants were divided on whether textbooks were culturally sensitive or not. A teacher, Ms Senate acknowledged that textbooks are limited in as far as their portrayal of cultural sensitivity was concerned, something that was echoed by Thabiso a student.

However, another student Malebo, had a more positive attitude towards textbooks since according to her they enlighten her immensely:

Yes, in the textbooks there are religions which I enjoy learning about very much! I like reading about how the Muslims prepare themselves before worship, like removal of shoes when entering a mosque, and performing *wudu*. Child naming in Hinduism thrills me.

Textbooks that are used in Botswana junior public secondary schools are on the whole not balance since they emphasise inequalities that are inherent in society.

### **CONCLUSION**

Teachers consider textbooks to be a primary source of information for students to understand the subject matter. Religious Education requires that education textbooks should address challenges emanating from religious and cultural diversity in order for them to be relevant. The findings indicated that textbooks as a major resource were not adequately addressing this aspect and were skewed towards particular cultures.

As the student population becomes more diverse, there is need for culturally responsive pedagogies, and textbooks have to capture this diversity. At another level, an education system that promotes diversity is also likely to prevent possible social and political conflicts. Diversity can be through the type of education that a country offers as well as the values and attitudes that are promoted in that system. Textbooks should accommodate students from diverse backgrounds and this has to be the case in order to minimize students' alienation.

Students need to be supported especially when they make use of what they bring to the classroom by identifying, nurturing and promoting it in order to enhance their achievement and self-assertiveness. The textbooks need to make students visible in their classrooms and this can only happen if representation in textbooks is adequate. In addition, the sources that authors access as they engage in textbook writing need to be credible. Minority groups have their own knowledge and a way of understanding and interpreting the world which is often times devalued by the school system, largely because they come from a lower section of society which has little or no influence at all.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

In view of lack of sensitivity in most textbooks and schools in general several recommendations were made and these are:

- Textbooks need to cater for a culturally diverse readership including minority ethnic groups in Botswana.
- Textbooks should manifest and portray a balanced view of the position about minorities instead of perpetuating inaccurate generalizations which do not promote their positive self-image.
- Religious Education textbooks need to emphasize the diversity of various cultural values, norms and principles that are associated with individual religions covered in the curriculum.
- The curriculum needs to be re-designed so that it becomes sensitive to the culturally diverse nature of Botswana classrooms.
- Government must come up with a clear and robust policy on textbooks publishing and production, so that the textbooks are culturally diversified and ethnically sensitive.

- Teacher education should assist teachers to be able to read texts critically in order to identify the writers' mood, tone and purpose in order to be able to detect alternative interpretations.
- Various ethnic heroes and cultures including those of minorities, must become part of the curriculum and should be reflected in textbooks.
- Teachers must be knowledgeable about the social and cultural contexts of teaching and learning if they are to increase learning opportunities for all students.
- Teachers should alert students about textbook biases and their effect on their learning, and self-image.

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