



Influence of macro-policy factors on decision-making to select Tourism in South African schools: Implications for curriculum relevance

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Abstract

In South Africa there were various changes in educational policy and curriculum framework introduced by the post-apartheid government in 1994 in order to transform the school curriculum. Specifically, focusing on the structure of the curriculum, subject offerings and packages which resulted in the introduction of Tourism as a secondary school subject in Grades 10-12 in 1998. While policy initiatives such as these are intended to provide a relevant and responsive curriculum in schools, the onus is upon individual school to select subjects that reflect this purpose. In this regard, curriculum decision-making in schools, particularly the selection of new subjects tends to be informed by a variety of factors. The study focuses on analysing the extent and manner through which socio-economic factors influence curriculum decision-making that led to the selection of Tourism as a subject in schools. It is clear from the study that the participants linked the influence of macro-policy factors to three aspects: political imperatives, economic benefits, and educational policies. The findings suggest that schools' decision-making to select Tourism was influenced by the view that Tourism (as a school subject) is a means for addressing negative social issues, including reducing or eliminating unemployment and poverty. The evidence from the study suggests that the introduction of Tourism in these schools has not yet led to the realisation of these political and economic imperatives. This suggests that macro/policy imperatives alone as a motivation for the decision to select Tourism do not necessarily lead to social transformation.

Keywords: Curriculum decision-making, curriculum relevance, secondary school subjects, tourism

Introduction

Curriculum relevance has become central in the secondary schooling system as many developing countries attempt to meet the national needs in a global context (Holsinger, 2000; Le Grange & Beets, 2005). In South Africa this necessitated changes in educational policy and curriculum framework after 1994, specifically, focusing on the structure of the curriculum, subject offerings and packages which resulted in the introduction of Tourism as a secondary school subject in Grades 10-12 in 1998. For the secondary school education, addressing the wider economic and social demands through the curriculum became dependent on the relevance and responsiveness of the curriculum represented in the school subjects. In essence, secondary school education in South Africa is called upon to be responsive to the needs of the society. Hence, the introduction of Tourism in the secondary school curriculum was part of the government strategy for addressing wider economic and social demands, particularly the inequalities created by the apartheid (Bantwini, 2010; Bornman, Budlender, Vetten, van der Westhuizen, Watson & Williams 2012). Tourism was introduced as a subject in the South African schooling system in Grades 10-12 (FET phase) with a view to respond to the needs of the country by developing the tourism industry and the local economy. The introduction of Tourism in the secondary school curriculum in South Africa is directly influenced by government policies and is therefore constantly respond to socioeconomic and political trends in the transformational agenda. The subject is meant to empower learners to



understand the related services in the tourism industry and the benefits they bring to the country's economy. Moreover, it is intended to address workforce challenges, and encourage learners to identify entrepreneurial opportunities for themselves, thus addressing the prevailing unemployment in the country (Department of Education, 2003).

While policy initiatives such as these are intended to provide a relevant and responsive curriculum in schools, the onus is upon individual institutions to select subjects that reflect this purpose. In this regard, curriculum decision-making in schools, particularly the selection of new subjects tends to be informed by a variety of factors, including those inside the school (e.g., leadership, resources and teacher qualifications) as well as those external to or outside the school (e.g., economic and political realities). For example, in a study conducted in Australia, Neyland (2011) found that factors within the schools such as institutional support as well as teacher capability influenced the adoption of a new subject. Similarly, in South African research has shown that (non-) availability of qualified teachers (Chakanyuka, 2006; Chili, 2013), as well as that of material and physical resources (Dieltiens, 2006; Levin and Lockhead, 2012), greatly influences decisions about the adoption of a new subject in the school.

Factors that are external to the school also tend to influence education in significant ways. Specifically, curriculum decision-making tends to respond the socio-political imperatives facing society in an era of transformation. For example, the National Planning Commission (2011) states that the interests of all stakeholders need to be aligned to support the common goal of achieving good educational outcomes that are responsive to community needs and the economic development of the country. From this perspective, subjects such as Tourism are seen as key to economic development in the country, given that globally tourism is on the rise (Page, 2005; Dube, 2014). Furthermore, education policies have a significant influence on the curriculum choices schools make as they select subjects that make up the learning program offered to learners. To illustrate, policies such as the Curriculum and Assessment Policy Statements (CAPS) and the National Policy Pertaining to the Progression and Promotion Requirements of the NCS Grades R-12 and the CAPS (Department of Basic Education, 2011), informs curriculum decision-making in schools, with particular reference to subject choices for the FET phase (secondary schools). These policies outline the subjects that are recognised in the school curriculum and the rules of combination of subjects to which schools have to adhere. The curriculum has strong subject oriented approach requiring subject from the two group categories (Group A: all compulsory subjects for all learners, and Group B: elective subjects), to be selected independently from each other.

From group B schools may offer any combination of any number of these subjects, and a learner must choose a minimum of three from the list. Vocational subjects, including Tourism, are listed in Group B. In building their curriculum packages in the FET phase, schools have to take respond of the needs of the socio-economic needs of the country, while operating within the parameters of these policies. Secondary schools in the pre-democratic South Africa focused on intellectual training in its narrow sense (Jansen & Taylor, 2003). The democratic government put a new emphasis on skills development and as a result a number of vocational subjects, such as Tourism were introduced. So, this transformation is from an education-driven to a functional model of skills development within secondary schooling (Obanya, 2004).

Another policy that seem to influence schools' curriculum decision-making is the White Paper for Post-School Education and Training (hereafter, White Paper for PSET) (Department of Higher Education and Training, 2013). The White Paper for PSET makes provision for the delivery of the PSET in order to meet the socio-economic and cultural needs of the society as a whole. It proposes a system that will align post schooling to the entire transformational agenda of providing various skills for economic growth. The policy is linked to economic goals through the production of individuals with knowledge and skills necessary for them to compete nationally and globally. The emphasis on the skills as a prerequisite for growth might have implication on the decisions-making at secondary school level in terms of the suitability of subjects selected for curriculum inclusion, simply because secondary schools might have to be relevant to post-schooling options for their learners.



Using external factors as a basis for curriculum choices and selection of school subjects can have positive or negative influence on the relevance and responsiveness of the school curriculum to the needs of both learners, the communities they come from, as well as the country. This new subject, Tourism was redefined and reconceptualised in the light of highlighting the heritage and places of interest such as these (Department of Basic Education, 2011). Therefore the ideology behind the introduction of Tourism was to contribute to a greater understanding of history and heritage, as opposed to the detached silences of old voyeurism and spectacle tourism and thus contributing to the debate and discourse of decolonising the curriculum. Therefore, this paper reports on a study that focused on the factors that informed curriculum decision-making in four schools in rural KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. The study analysed the decision-making processes that led to the adoption of Tourism as a school subject and the factors that influenced this decision. The paper focuses on analysing the extent to which and ways through which socio-economic factors influence curriculum decision-making in South African schools. Specifically, the extent and ways in which socio-economic factors influence curriculum decision-making that led to the selection of Tourism as a subject in schools are examined.

Methodology

The study focused on curriculum decision-making, and in particular, as it involved the decision to adopt Tourism as a new subject in the curriculum. Using a case study design, the study reported in this paper was conducted in four secondary schools in the Uthukela District in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa. This area which is located in the western part of KwaZulu-Natal, incorporates UKhahlamba-Drakensberg World Heritage Site and the Battlefields, which are regarded as significant tourism destinations in the KwaZulu-Natal province. This area has retained most of its natural environment, which is an aspect that strongly appeals to ecotourists. All four schools were located in rural communities. At the time of the study, the community was characterised by high rates of unemployment, with a few parents working in the nearest town or further away in Johannesburg. The schools under study presented similar features with regards to school organisation, management and governance, irrespective of the different periods when Tourism was introduced as a subject. As such, the four secondary schools that have selected Tourism in their curricular, offered information-rich contexts in which to investigate the decision-making processes leading to the adoption of Tourism as a new school subject (see Dube, 2016). This transformation of the curriculum was calling for greater inclusion of the local knowledge and recognition of South Africa's rich heritage as knowledge to be taught. The inclusion of Tourism as a curriculum subject is significant not only for the school but also for the society that the school is part of.

The study involved a purposive sampling of stakeholders with a vested interest in both the subject (Tourism) and curriculum decision-making, and who were most likely to be knowledgeable about the schools' decision to introduce Tourism in the curriculum. Informed consent was obtained from all the respondents and university approval was granted to conduct the study. Thus, across the four schools, the sample included the principal, the Head of Department (HODs), the Tourism teacher, and a School Governing Body (SGB) member. In-depth semi-structured individual interviews, as suggested by Creswell (2013) were conducted with a total of fifteen (15) participants from across the four schools. The interviews sought to understand the extent and ways in which socio-economic factors influence curriculum decision-making that led to the selection of Tourism as a subject in schools.

Findings and discussion

The findings suggest that the external environment in which the schools were located tended to have a direct influence on the choice of subjects for the curriculum. This seems to have been the case in the adoption of Tourism in the schools participating in this study. The



participants linked the influence of macro-policy factors to three aspects: political imperatives, economic benefits, and educational policies.

Political factors

The findings revealed that the decision to adopt Tourism as a subject in the schools participating in this study was influenced by the political imperative for redressing historical inequalities in the country that had been created by the apartheid regime's policy. Informed by national policy reforms and discourses, this view sees Tourism (as a school subject) and the tourism industry as key to addressing socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poverty and to reducing the historical racial, social class and gender inequalities, among others, which are residues of apartheid era policies. In particular, among other education reform initiatives the post-1994 government in South Africa introduced vocational subjects such as Tourism in the secondary schooling system as part of the effort to redress the imbalances of the apartheid era, among them poverty and other socio-economic inequalities in communities (Brady & Kennedy, 2003; Department of Tourism, 2011; Saayman, Rossouw, & Krugell, 2012; Kamugisha & Moteng'e, 2014). The introduction of Tourism, for example, was meant to address the lack of skills which was seen as a barrier to accessing business and job opportunities in the tourism industry, and to promote the participation of the majority of the population, mainly black Africans, in tourism. It was thus aimed to address the many socio-economic imbalances of the past by affording learners opportunities to develop the skills required in the industry and to encourage learners to explore entrepreneurial and job opportunities.

This policy imperative did not go unnoticed in the schools participating in this study. The principals, teachers and SGB members who participated identified government's focus on the tourism industry and tourism education as a stimulus for their decision to introduce Tourism as a subject. The participants confirmed that the introduction of Tourism in their schools had been influenced by the fact that the government had advocated tourism development and tourism training as a priority for the country with the intention of improving tourism and, consequently, the economy of the country for the government and the school communities in this study. One way to achieve this aim, was through a relevant school curriculum that would develop the skills needed to further improve and support the tourism industry. For example, one principal commented:

The new government showed interest in Tourism which was a new subject in South Africa and got it into the curriculum as a way of redressing past imbalances, especially in Black communities. This was meant to help our communities to participate in Tourism activities. The subject was then added on the list which schools can choose from. As a school we saw it fitting to follow the direction of the government by adopting Tourism into our own curriculum (Principal, Busabusa).

Similarly, a Tourism teacher voiced the issue as follows:

Teaching tourism is extremely important especially in this province (KwaZulu-Natal) because this province is characterised by many tourist attractions which are promoted by the government to open opportunities even for small businesses. The subject is worthwhile to be taught in schools so that we are in line with what the government wants to achieve...to promote tourism in the country (Tourism Teacher, Kwasakwasa).

Thus, the schools in the study opted to introduce Tourism because they regarded it as a subject that would align them to the national priorities such as increasing and improving tourism activities in the country. The participants indicated that their schools were under the impression that by including Tourism in their curriculum they would also create tourism awareness in their communities. In an interview, an SGB member commented:

The municipal government has told us that the tourism industry is very important and the provincial government stated this at all the community



forums that we attended. So the decision to include this subject was also because of that, I think (SGB Member, Kwasakwasa).

Given the low socio-economic status due to high rates of unemployment and poverty of the communities in this study, this finding was not surprising. Initiatives that promised to address these challenges by developing skills and providing job opportunities were bound to be welcomed. The location of these communities and schools in a tourism active environment also placed them in an ideal position for the adoption of Tourism as a subject. For them, introducing Tourism in the curriculum was meant to develop skills, create employment and entrepreneurial opportunities for the youth, and ultimately to address the high rates of unemployment and poverty in families. The generally positive assessment of the curriculum was however accompanied by reservations and doubts. Some of the interviewees were unsure whether it really equips learners with the skills necessary for entrepreneurship and employment in the tourism industry. Their uncertainties were evident in such statements as:

Yes, we are told that the subject provides skills relevant for employment to alleviate poverty in our communities but we have not seen any of our learners acquiring those skills or maybe getting immediate employment as a result of taking Tourism at school (Principal: Kwasakwasa).

Although participants believe that the decision to include Tourism as a curricular subject at school level was influenced by national priorities of alleviating poverty through the tourism industry, they also acknowledge that they have not reaped any benefits for the community from such decision. This suggest that the introduction of Tourism in these schools has not yet led to the realisation of these political imperatives almost 16 years after the introduction of Tourism as a subject in the curriculum, very little had changed.

Economic Factors

The findings revealed that another influence on the decision to adopt Tourism as a subject in the participating schools was its perceived economic benefits, such as skills development and creating employment opportunities. As the literature suggests that the introduction of Tourism as a subject in schools' respective curricula could be of benefit in responding to the economic needs of the country by creating job opportunities and reducing the high rates of unemployment (Page, 2005; Lewis, 2006; Akinbaode & Braimoh, 2010; World Travel and Tourism Council, 2015). Similarly, a refrain among the participants in the study was the belief that adopting Tourism as a subject would help the learners from these schools to get jobs in the Tourism industry, thereby dealing with unemployment and reducing poverty. In this regard, one principal commented:

We have included Tourism in our curriculum because it is an engaging subject that exposes learners to employment and also career opportunities if it is taught at school (Principal, Kwasakwasa).

Another participant concurred, and further argued that teaching Tourism would lead to employment opportunities and prepare learners to contribute to the required work force.

We included this new subject Tourism because we thought it will [sic] help learners to get employment in the tourism industry immediately....we also wanted learners to assist community members who have small businesses but who are not aware of opportunities in the tourism industry so that the entire community benefits. Tourism helps learners to start their own small businesses such as standing on the roads and selling to tourist on weekends, as the principal would say (HOD, Nawe).

This thinking was not surprising given the high rates of unemployment that are prevalent in the areas where the schools are located. Participants saw Tourism as potentially opening up a range of new career opportunities for learners. Their understanding was that through emphasis on Tourism as a subject in the schools, they would have direct and indirect



economic benefits through employment. This view is supported by Page (2005) who notes that many governments and communities view Tourism education as an opportunity to offer new employment opportunities in this growing sector of their economies.

Linked to this, the participants also suggested that Tourism was selected because of its potential for providing entrepreneurial skills for young people. The participants regarded Tourism as a practical subject that would teach learners vocational competencies such as occupational and business skills that could, for example, help them start their own small businesses. As one principal explained:

Yes, we were told that Tourism [would provide skills that will prepare learners even to start their own businesses. I then thought if learners could be taught this subject they could acquire those skills and I added it in our school (Principal, Kwasakwasa).

The parents believed that the skills that learners would gain from studying Tourism would help them to create employment opportunities so that they could become self-employed. A member of SGB observed:

I think the teachers introduced Tourism because they wanted to give learners some skills and knowledge about the industry of tourism; then they can develop themselves by starting small businesses and sell to tourists who always pass by in this area. I think we are achieving that by giving learners some skills to work in the tourism industry (SGB Member, Kuzolunga).

The participants thus perceived that Tourism would teach the learners economic and business skills that they would be able to use to start their own businesses and to employ people from the community and thereby reduce levels of unemployment with additional impacts such as for example, crime reduction. This perception is in line with the aim of the White Paper for PSET (Department of Higher Education, 2013), which is to increase jobs and to enhance skills by widening access and participation in the economy post schooling. According to this policy, skills shortage is a function of the inflexible post-school education and a major contributor to South Africa's unemployment. Thus, teaching vocational subjects such as Tourism and addressing the skills shortage would not only create employment opportunities in many areas, but would also contribute to reducing the high rates of poverty in communities. The implication here is that there is a great demand, as was also perceived by participants, for more vocational and skills-based subjects in our school curriculum.

Education Policy factors

The findings suggest that the four schools in the study chose to introduce Tourism in their respective curricula partly in response to this view. For example, the participants reported that their decision to include Tourism had been informed by the view that vocational subjects such as Tourism are key to addressing skills shortages, unemployment and poverty. The perception was that introducing the subject would assist learners to leave school with skills that would help them find employment or enter post-schooling programmes at institutions other than universities. One Tourism teacher explained:

The decision to include Tourism was made but I don't think the principal considered that it does not form part of the university requirements as it is not on that list. I think he mainly focused on the needs of the school as the subject is said to be providing skills that are needed in the work place. This is recorded as one of the aims of this subject in the CAPS for Tourism. I think this has been the major focus for the school to address the needs of our community as most of them are not working (Tourism Teacher, Busabusa).

The immediate need to develop vocation-oriented skills and to address the high unemployment and poverty rates seemed to be more powerful in influencing curriculum decision-making in schools. Rather, the decision was influenced by the need to address the



skills shortage and unemployment among the youth in these communities. For these schools, introducing a subject such as Tourism would expose learners to alternative career pathways that would help them access the workplace or create entrepreneurial opportunities and to ultimately reduce the high rate of unemployment plaguing the nation. Like the parents, the principals believed that education in these communities should focus on skills building (White Paper for Post-School Education and Training, 2013). Explaining this view, one principal stated:

In most cases, our learners do not attend universities because parents do not have money. So including Tourism would assist learners after Matric. They still could be accepted at the university but not every learner would [want to] attend university and even those learners who do not pass Matric could use these skills for business opportunities and job creation. This community needs people with skills, so if they follow avenues of education other than universities, I think they could contribute more to the community (Principal, Nawe).

For the participants in this study, introducing Tourism as a subject of choice, would promote skills development and provide an important alternative vocational career in a burgeoning industry. In turn, this would lead to improvement of the services and products on offer in the tourism industry and provide job opportunities for the youth in the communities, where they could for example, be employed as tour guides. This finding is in line with the literature which suggests that the adoption of vocational subjects such as Tourism is mostly inspired by a political desire to increase the equity in education and employment opportunities (Brady & Kennedy 2003; Obanya, 2004; United States Agency for International Development Southern Africa, 2013). The South African democratic government's curriculum was a direct response to the apartheid curriculum which was described as elitist and Eurocentric in orientation and which furthermore privileged formal knowledge and encouraged rote-learning (Jansen & Taylor, 2003). The rationale for including Tourism focused on skills building, job creation and employability and resonates well with the aims of skills development as advocated by the relevant National policies that advocates for transformation in education. However, while the decision to adopt Tourism as an elective subject may be inspired by the promise of skills-building in vocational subjects such as Tourism, the CAPS Grades 10-12 for Tourism (Department of Basic Education, 2011) does not include the teaching of practical skills. For example, the document stipulates the specific aims of Tourism as including:

“...different types of tourists and the purpose of their travelling; the different tourism sectors, with special reference to transport, hospitality, travel organising and support services, and the attraction sector; map work; foreign exchange concepts and the buying power of different foreign currencies; the influence of world time zones on travel; South Africa and the SADC countries as tourism destinations; world famous icons and World Heritage Sites; sustainable and responsible tourism; marketing of tourism products; technology in tourism; customer care and the value of service excellence; and tour planning” (Department of Basic Education, 2011: 8).

Arguably, only the last three of these topics might be interpreted as seeking to develop skills as the rest of the objectives focus on knowledge about tourism. However, whether the actual teaching of Tourism provided the learners in these schools with practical skills training or not was not established in this study. In particular, no work-based learning is required in the policy. Such learning would provide learners with occupational skills that are used in the tourism industry (Swart, Booysse & Burroughs, 2014). As Allais (2014) asserts, despite the best intentions of the South African education policies, adopting these subjects will fail to provide learners with skills needed for employment and for addressing poverty in these communities.

Conclusion and Implications

This study offers insight into the implications of subject selections for curriculum relevance and responsiveness to Tourism as a subject. The decision was premised on the belief that the



curriculum, in terms of subjects taught in the school, must be designed to teach students skills that will promote entrepreneurship and maximise potential for employment in the tourism industry. Although the study sample was very small and the results could not be generalised to a larger population, the findings nevertheless suggest that schools' decision-making to select subjects was influenced by the view that Tourism (as a school subject) is a means for addressing negative social issues, including reducing or eliminating unemployment and poverty. Schools informed by this view might introduce vocational subjects such as Tourism. In this vein, the schools in this study seemed to accept that they were responsible for the development of learners to access employment and thus to reduce poverty in their communities. The implication here is that there is a great demand, as was also perceived by participants, for more vocational and skills-based subjects in our school curriculum.

Given the rural context of these schools, the acquisition of specific skills at secondary school level was valued for its immediate relevance to the needs of the community. However, as the evidence from the study suggests the introduction of Tourism in these schools has not yet led to the realisation of these political and economic imperatives. The researcher's observations suggest that the communities were still experiencing high rates of unemployment and poverty and there were still low rates of participation in the tourism industry by the youth and other members of the communities in question. This suggests that macro/policy imperatives alone, as a motivation for curriculum decisions, do not necessarily lead to social transformation. It is clear that the extent to which the teaching of Tourism in schools might, in practical terms, be addressing government's policy imperatives and school communities' expectations and needs (e.g., addressing unemployment and poverty) requires further study. Therefore, further studies focussing on curriculum decision-making could investigate the extent to which the skills they learn in the subject proving useful in accessing jobs or in starting entrepreneurial efforts, and also the extent to which the economic benefits of teaching Tourism been unrealistically exaggerated. Moreover, it is the researcher's contention that using external factors as a basis for curriculum choices and selection of school subjects can have positive or negative influence on the relevance and responsiveness of the school curriculum to the needs of the learners, the communities they come from, as well as the country.

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