

Title

Education for Living Together in Society with ‘Outsiders’: Perspectives from the Republic of South Africa as a Host Society

Research Overview

This study discusses education for living together with ‘outsiders’ through an analysis of interviews conducted with an educator and a government official in charge of a compulsory subject called Life Orientation in the Republic of South Africa, which deals with topics such as democracy and citizenship.

Purpose

This study aims to discuss education for living together in society with ‘outsiders’ by analysing a case from the Republic of South Africa (RSA) as a host society. In doing so, it establishes potential reference points for further discussion of theories and practices concerning education for living together among people from ‘outside’ (such as refugees and immigrants) and people from ‘inside’ (those who are from a host society) of a particular society. This study holds both academic and social significance in a contemporary context marked by the rapid rise of xenophobia.

Methods

Utilising a qualitative methodology, this study analyses interviews conducted in February 2026 in the Western Cape Province (WCP) of RSA with an educator and a government official responsible for a compulsory subject called Life Orientation, which addresses topics such as democracy and citizenship.

Results/Discussion

First, this study highlights that in RSA (particularly WCP), schools seemed to be required to implement measures that acknowledged the presence of people from ‘outside.’ The educator’s perspective revealed that ‘mass migration’ was ‘a big issue’ in RSA. Particularly in WCP, the influx of people from the African continent and other provinces had led to the problem of ‘oversubscribed’ schools. Amidst this, the government official emphasised the importance of developing ‘respect’ and ‘multicultural thinking.’ The increasing number of immigrants necessitated the incorporation of ‘multiculturalism’ and ‘multicultural teaching’ into RSA’s education to foster respect. Furthermore, within the context of addressing the schooling of children of immigrants, while emphasis was placed on language provision, Life Orientation seemed to incorporate respecting them as citizens.

Second, in relation to education concerning ‘global citizenship,’ emphasis seemed to be initially placed on addressing concepts such as ‘citizenship’ and ‘good citizens.’ The educator’s narratives suggested that while concepts such as ‘asylum seeker’ and ‘legal[/illegal] immigration’ were covered in Life Orientation, learners were encouraged to update their (xenophobic) perceptions towards foreigners. Within this framework, learning about immigration as ‘world dynamics’ was reportedly developed by asking learners whether anyone they knew personally was living abroad. Furthermore, the educator’s narratives indicated recognising the difference between ‘citizenship’ and ‘global citizenship,’ highlighting the need to first teach the roles and responsibilities of being a ‘citizen.’ Apropos this, it was discernible that by learning responsibility towards their own country, learners developed a sense of responsibility towards the world, recognising themselves members of a ‘global village,’ which in turn enabled them to engage with ‘global issues.’ Conversely, the government official emphasised the importance of the Life Orientation subject advisors and educators acting as role models

of ‘good citizens’ within a culture of ‘hard work,’ thereby strengthening ‘national culture.’ Regarding the relationship between ‘national culture’ and ‘diversity,’ it was noted that while developing a ‘common vision’ was necessary, RSA lacked this vision precisely because of its diversity. Moreover, in discussions on the need to respect diversity, it became apparent that there was an understanding that minority groups needed to be respected if they were ‘good’ and ‘productive’ citizens.

Third, with regard to conflict management, emphasis seemed to be placed on addressing real issues in society. The educator’s narrative suggested that learners in their immediate environment may not yet be adequately equipped to engage with ‘global issues,’ indicating a perceived need for experiential learning opportunities, such as participation in international programmes. Furthermore, the strength of Life Orientation, which covered conflict management, appeared to lie in its capacity to provide learners learning opportunities by referring to real issues. In RSA, the practice of sports seemed to be particularly valued, such that it was also a learning area within Life Orientation. In relation to this, the government official stressed the importance of sports in conflict management, as RSA was perceived as a ‘sports mad country,’ where the success of the national team united people. It was also stressed that when people were ‘in harmony,’ they tended to ‘forget’ about diversity, implying that sports in RSA was related not only to unity among South Africans but also to relations with immigrants.

The study concludes that, in discussing education concerning living together with ‘outsiders,’ it is necessary to scrutinise the meaning of learning the concepts of ‘citizenship’ from one’s local and real contexts, as well as strategies for extending such understanding into a global context. Exploring resources such as sports may be utilised as concrete practices assuming importance when discussing such education.

Keywords

living together, outsiders, host society, the Republic of South Africa, Life Orientation