

HISTORY TEACHING, LEARNING AND JUNIOR CERTIFICATE (JC) EXAMINATION RESULTS IN LESOTHO, 2000-2006: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION¹

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Abstract

This paper addresses the status of History teaching and learning in Lesotho which is at its lowest ebb. Very few schools teach the subject and the poor Junior Certificate (JC) examination results exacerbate the situation. An analysis of the examiners' comments in the last seven years points to poor and/or lack of essay writing skills among the candidates as one of the main reasons behind the high failure rate in JC History. In recognition of the situation's implications for 'quality' teacher education, this study proposes (1) rigorous pre- and in-service training in the teaching of History essay writing, and (2) vigilant monitoring that ensures constant practice and dedicated delivery of the required skills by trainees to JC History learners in order to improve the examination results.

Introduction

In Lesotho, History is the most unpopular subject in the Social Science group that also includes Development Studies, Geography and Religious Knowledge.² For example, the number of schools teaching History dwindled so much that in 2006 - out of 230 and more Lesotho Secondary and High Schools³ - only 17 were still offering the subject mainly because their Principals have a major in History. Several reasons have been advanced for this disastrous state of affairs but those commonly quoted have to do with policy making⁴ and the candidates' poor examination results.

As could be expected, in Lesotho, as elsewhere in the world, the issue of examination results in general - and those of the core subjects in par-

ticular - is of great concern. In the case of the Lesotho History teachers, the real struggle is to attain – let alone maintain - good results in an atmosphere where, up to 2007, government was not promoting the subject enough, and parents continue to discourage their children from doing History because of the high failure rate in a subject they already regard as valueless. In other words, on the basis of the Junior Certificate (JC) examination results, it would seem that there is no ‘quality’ teaching and learning of History in Lesotho. This, in turn, leads to an urgent need to determine what the real problem or contributing factor is and how it can be solved.

The aim of this study, therefore, is to present the findings that are taken from the examiners’ commentary on the 2000-2003 JC History examination results and the performance patterns in 2004-2006. Based on those findings, the paper draws conclusions regarding the poor performance of JC History candidates, and makes recommendations for better results. The study’s main suggestion for improvement is the acquisition of cross-curricular essay writing skills in all History-teaching Secondary Schools and teacher-education institutions in Lesotho, namely, the National University of Lesotho (NUL) and Lesotho College of Education (LCE). In other words, this strategy of improving JC History results has to target both pre-and in-service teacher education.

Conceptual Framework

In recent years and at various forums, there has been an overwhelming quest for quality education for all and in all subjects. For example, members of the Lesotho History Teachers Association (LHTA) are convinced that History is being made a scapegoat of a situation where JC candidates consistently perform poorly in three out of the four core subjects: English, Mathematics and Science, the exception being Sesotho. Thus, the Association is determined to make sure that what the country lacks in the numbers of History candidates is compensated by effective History teaching that delivers impressive examination results. In other words, given a choice between quality and quantity in their subject, the teachers have openly declared - and passionately so - that they would rather have the former every time. This is why since 2000, the Associa-

tion has kept its own record of the History results for each school in order to monitor and maintain the signs of gradual improvement which has been quite phenomenal in some schools.

Sharing the sentiments of the LHTA's strong desire for quality in school History, in 2004, the new Head of Language and Social Education (LASED) in the Faculty of Education at NUL called for a concerted effort by all teacher educators to help the Lesotho JC (and COSC) candidates to obtain good results. Similarly, the theme - 'Quality Education and Research locally, regionally and internationally' - of the biennial BoLeSwaNa (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia) Symposium of Educational Research that was hosted by Namibia in July 2004 - started everybody thinking about and aiming for quality in the teaching and learning of the respective subjects, with special emphasis on initial teacher training.

In addition, the themes of both the forty-seventh (47th) session of the International Conference on Education and World Day of Teachers in 2004 called for the pursuit of quality education: 'Quality Education for All Young People: Challenges, Trends and Priorities', and 'Quality Teachers for Quality Education: Training for a Stronger Teaching Force' respectively. What is even more interesting about the two themes is the fact that Workshop #4 at the International Conference on Education was devoted to 'Quality education and the role of teachers', the same idea that came to mind when the BoLeSwaNa theme was first announced. Coincidentally, in the foreword of the newly formulated Lesotho Policy on Teacher Education and Training (2005), it is stated that 'The prime thesis of this policy framework is that the competency and professional dedication of the teacher and the trainer determine the ultimate quality of education provided.' Then, in December 2006, at the 16th Conference of Commonwealth Education Ministers (16 CCEM) held in Cape Town, parallel groups of ministers, teachers and the youth reflected on the theme: 'Access to Quality Education: For the Good of All.'

A dictionary definition of quality is 'the standard of something when compared to others like it; how good or bad something is; a high standard or level....'⁵ In the context of education, it is possible that there are as many definitions as there are authors on the subject, but the over-

all denominator in all of them will be the pursuit of and factors that fulfill what is good, better, best, or otherwise in the process of teaching and learning. Hawes and Stephens demonstrate best the complexity of defining quality education in their use of one very illuminating analogy called 'the quality wheel' which is meant to unpack quality teacher education. In that 'wheel' they identify people trainers as a very crucial factor in achieving quality education, and have accordingly devoted a whole chapter to this factor.⁶

Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the quest for quality is not only in Lesotho's History education in general, but also in teacher training and History essay writing skills in particular.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative analysis of data collected from a seven-year documentation of JC History examination results, particularly the introductory section of the 2000-2006 pass lists compiled by the Examination Council of Lesotho (ECOL). The process involved combing the documents and highlighting in Table 1 below the various concerns that ECOL's documents have identified as contributors to poor performance in school History over the years, while Table 2 highlights the patterns of performance. The paper then suggests the initiatives that NUL's and LCE's teacher educator(s) could implement at the initial and in-service teacher education levels in order to help the schools improve their poor History results.

Data

The tables below capture the core information taken from the pass lists of the ECOL from 2000 to 2006. The relevant section consists of (1) tabular information – especially Table 2 ; (2) comments and/or remarks made by the respective examination officers on the performance of the candidates in general and in subject groups; (3) subject specific remarks under the 'Examiners' Eye' section, and (4) Performance patterns. Comments/remarks on performance in History appear under both the Social Sciences group and the 'Examiners' Eye' but, due to inconsistencies explained below, the paper only reflects information from the latter section.

One observation to make regarding the ECoL tabular information described above is that, over the years, there have been inconsistencies in the titles used for Table 2 (in the pass lists) and its columns, possibly as a way of improving its presentation and content. Therefore, it is not possible to quote everything the tables of the seven years contain without creating confusion and/or even distorting the original information. Thus, for the purpose of this study, Table 1 (below) only reflects the comments and remarks from ‘The Examiners’ Eye’ section although at times it, too, was just as inconsistent and even incomplete in highlighting the year-by-year strong and weak points of performance.

Table 1: Comments/Remarks from an ‘Examiners’ perspective on Lesotho JC History Results, 2000-2003

Year	Strengths	Weaknesses
2000 ⁹	Improved candidates’ performance in History has been phenomenal	
2001	History (Old) showed a general improvement in the quality of scores History (Alt.) was the most accessible and there were more very high scores compared to last year History Trial had some good scores	even though there were fewer high scores that last year but performance was not as good as last year in terms of general performance and high scores
2002		In History, performance has dropped with 63% & 72% of the candidates obtaining E and above in Trial (514) and Alternative (513) respectively. The greatest concern is that candidates still fail to write coherent well thought-out essays in response to questions but instead throw some points without any explanations . The tendency is to still to write without carefully selecting relevant, specific information in addressing the task at hand. This affects the performance adversely.

2003	The performance this year is encouraging with the mean of 100. ⁷ Let us strive for an even better performance next year.	Candidates showed weaknesses in relating the Current Affairs issues to their historical background and were, therefore, disadvantaged.
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Source: *The Examination Council of Lesotho, Junior Certificate Results (Maseru: Government Printers), printed at the end every year.*

N.B.: The bolded words/phrases highlight the nature of weaknesses related to essay writing.

Another data-related observation to be mentioned is that from 2004 onwards, the ECoL pass lists have dropped the general and/or subject-specific 'Examiners' Eye' section. Instead, the available tabular information consists of Table 1 titled 'Patterns of Candidates' Performance' and 'Comparative Grade Analysis Report in All Subjects' in Table 2. Further restructuring of the presentation of results is seen in the 2006 record that has the former and not the latter of the tables. Therefore, the whole situation has necessitated inclusion of another table in the present study to indicate performance percentages in the years 2004-2005 instead of comments and/or remarks for 2000-2003.

Table 2 Performance patterns, 2004-2005

Year	High Achievers with Grades A & B	Mediocre Achievers with Grades C & D	Low Achievers with Symbol E
2004	289 (25%)	458 (40%)	195 (17%)
2005	282 (25%)	521 (45%)	183 (18%)

Source: *The Examination Council of Lesotho, Junior Certificate Results 2004-2005 (Maseru: Government Printers)*

Data Analysis

Year-by-Year Findings

The inconsistencies notwithstanding, one is still able to identify the main areas of concern that should be targeted by the History Education Unit and other Departments at NUL, LCE, and History teachers in the schools. For one thing, when the examination results are an-

nounced, different interest groups in Lesotho usually speculate about the reason(s) for the high rate of success or failure in each level and per subject, especially in external examinations like the JC level. What Table 1 does, therefore, is to indicate that a close look at the 'Examiners' Eye' section provides a more informed picture and the real reason(s) for the candidates' good or poor performance.⁸

To start with, Table 1 clearly demonstrates that the History syllabus review was necessary and worthwhile because 'Improved candidates' performance in History has been phenomenal'. The remark refers to the first group of the JC candidates to write the Trial Syllabus in 2000. However, this is only part of the History examination results because there is no reference to the candidates who wrote the Old and Alternative syllabi which were being phased out at that time. All three syllabi are addressed in the 2001 remarks and performance in History was generally good because the one common weakness that is raised refers to lower or fewer pass scores. The year 2002 seems to have been very bad for JC History because there are no good points recorded in the results. In 2003, all JC History candidates wrote the same examination, and their performance was described as 'encouraging' although there was still a weakness of failing to connect the past and the present.

For the following years, Table 2 shows a slight improvement in the performance percentage patterns of the higher and lower achievers, and even better performance by the mediocre group in 2004-2005. Even without the Examiner's Eye' remarks, the argument here is that the performance patterns in Table 2 are also informative in their own way in that they were what they were because of more or less the same kinds of strengths and/or weaknesses reflected in the comments/remarks raised in years before 2004. At the same time, ECoL's new format of reporting the results without any additional remarks by the 'Examiner's Eye' will make it hard to detect the contributing factors to poor performance as exemplified in the 2004-2006 pass lists.

Main reason behind poor performance in JC History

On the basis of the information in the 'weaknesses' column of the table above, one can safely conclude that the overarching problem that seems

to have consistently contributed to the candidates' poor performance in the JC History examinations in 2000-2006 has been their (candidates') lack of essay writing skills and other related aspects. The other side of this problem is that the History teachers seem to have been ineffective in their teaching in general. In particular, they failed to prepare the candidates in the acquisition of satisfactory essay writing skills by the time they sat for the examinations. What makes this problem even more crucial is the fact that the essay format is dictated by the JC History assessment format or the examination question papers.

One examiners' remark in 2002 captures the overall essence and extent of the problem with the JC History results thus, '[T]he greatest concern is that candidates still fail to write coherent well thought-out essays in response to questions but instead throw some points without any explanations! When taken together with similar remarks that are phrased differently in the years before and after 2002, the statements point to one pervasive problem: the JC History candidates have difficulty writing/ answering as required by the questions and expected by the examiners. Put differently, on the basis of the weaknesses highlighted in Table 1, in all seven years, there was neither effective (quality) History teaching nor effective (quality) learning of the subject.

One can even add that, for the problem to recur and affect the examination results as adversely as it did for so long, it must have been obvious during the course of the two years of study before the final (examination) year, but without being given satisfactory attention to rectify and even eradicate it. In fact, a cursory look at the ten years covered by the on-going larger study, and as confirmed by Seotsanyana, shows that the problem goes quite far back.⁹

The nature and extent of difficulties and barriers in History essay writing

The bolded operative words/phrases in the 'weaknesses' column of Table 1 constitute the breakdown and, therefore, specific nature and extent of the problem of History examination essay writing at JC level in Lesotho. The main concerns include the candidates' failure, inability, inefficiency and/or weaknesses in fulfilling the requirements of the questions and/

or task(s) asked of them, and these have recurred over the years. These weaknesses seem to be universal because they correspond with Counsell's five examples of pupils' difficulties that are quoted by Haydn:

Many pupils find it difficult to:

- classify information
- organize information and deploy it for a specific purpose
- argue and analyse (as opposed to describe and narrate)
- support their arguments with appropriate detail
- distinguish between the general and the particular.¹⁰

Similarly, in a section on 'Students as writers of history', Taylor and Young recognize Counsell's contribution of research on this issue. They first start by identifying the narrative and non-narrative kinds of historical writing she has outlined. They then hone in on and discuss at length the statement that '[B]oth require similar technical know-how, but to develop this we have to break through several barriers,'¹¹ thus covering several aspects that correspond with the 'weaknesses' in Table 1.

In addition to the universal difficulties or barriers mentioned above, Basotho JC learners struggle with keeping to the specified region and time in the questions. Above all, because they are Sesotho speakers first, they also face problems with English as a second language (or even third for the Nguni-speakers of Lesotho) as a medium of instruction and having to understand and answer questions in a foreign language under examination conditions. Granted that the programme gives the learners three years before they get to the final examination, but the results indicate that their essay writing skills have consistently let them down. The present paper points to Lesotho's Teacher Education to address the problem.

Essay writing in History teaching and learning

The place and importance of essay writing in History is included in many – if not all - sources that deal with History teaching and learning, and is discussed at length in textbooks and study guides. For example, the History Study Guides for Grades 8-12 by Vorster begin with an introduction of Guidelines for both students and teachers,

and the section alerts the latter about what Historical skills to instill in the students. Essay writing is listed as the fourth among thirty-five skills, and one would regard the high ranking as an indication of the skill's significance in History teaching and learning.¹²

In concurrence, Mathews, et. al. state that, "Essay writing is a very necessary skill for history pupils as they need it for assignments, tests and examinations. But, it is probably one of the greatest weaknesses and a reason why many of them never achieve good marks in tests and examinations."¹³ Similarly, in his discussion of the issue of writing as aspect of learning strategies and the use of language, Haydn declares that,

Of the range of activities, which take place in the learning of history, writing is one of the most important and, at the same time, the least popular among pupils. Yet, it is principally through their writing that their knowledge and understanding is usually assessed. Writing is an issue of some concern.¹⁴

These sources, and many others on History education, do not only indicate the main areas of concern but also give suggestions of how to deal with them. Therefore, it is important to understand the statements quoted above as clear indicators of a universal and immediate need for quality History [teacher] education with special emphasis on essay writing skills. The stated concerns also point to the fact that it is incumbent upon teacher educators to produce the kind of teachers that will guarantee quality [History] education by way of teaching essay writing skills properly in order to achieve good examination results, the kind of teacher that the Head of LASED wanted his staff members to produce.

Teacher education strategies in developing trainees'/pupils' History essay writing skills

Knowing what the problem is and where it lies is one thing, but deciding on how to rectify it could be just as, if not more, problematic. In this paper, poor essay writing skills have been identified as the main problem leading to poor performance in JC History, and the title points to teacher [History] education as the target in the Lesotho higher edu-

cation system that should tackle the problem at hand.

Target group

Making teacher education bear the brunt of the remedial task needed in JC History is in recognition of and agreement with what Haydn regards as the critical and peculiar responsibility of History teachers in a quotation taken from one Aldrich: “[I]n the long run, success or failure in history teaching, perhaps more than in any other subject, depends on the ability and interest of the individual teacher”.¹⁵ Therefore, for the purposes of the present study, the pursuit of quality History teaching and learning in Lesotho in order to improve JC History examination results requires regular in-service workshops for History teachers and improved pre-service training for student-teachers.

The above suggestion foresees a three-front approach where the Lesotho teacher training institutions, the History teaching schools and, at times, a combination of the two, are all geared to address the problem. The approach also points to a situation of intensifying what is already being done and also introducing new strategies to instill proper History essay writing skills during the training of the student-teachers at NUL and LCE, and also working closely with the History teachers in the schools. That way, when the newly qualified teachers join those on the ground, they will all be speaking one language of essay writing skills, and pulling together to improve the JC History examination results.

Language competence

In Table 1, the JC History examiners have raised a very strong concern regarding the candidates’ standard of English in general and essay writing in particular. Therefore, the first issue to consider and pay special attention to should be the mastery of the language and essay writing skills by both the student- and History teachers in the schools.

In the Lesotho education system, English language is the medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary schooling, and it is also one of the core (and usually most failed) subjects up to high school.¹⁶ Emphasis on English Language continues at NUL where the Common First

Year's Communication Skills Course (CSS100: 8A/B) has to be passed before one can proceed to Third Year.¹⁷

Over the years, many student-teachers have had to repeat CSS100 at Second Year, thus making the English Language Education (LED) Unit worry about the possibility of language incompetence that may be passed on to the learners' regular schooling and poor performance in English and other subjects' examination results. These concerns have forced the lecturers in the Unit to lead the way in several language-related remedial strategies.

Therefore, not only do the lecturers concerned address the issues of effective teaching of English Language and Literature as a whole, they also look into the specific reasons behind the high failure rate of JC English. Second, in recognition of the fact that the problems run across the curriculum, the lecturers also liaise with their counterparts in other teaching subjects to supply them with subject-specific language examples for emphasis and/or problem eradication. Third, it has been suggested that all student-teachers who choose English Language as one of their teaching subjects should be forced to take Literature as well, more so because the two are taught as one subject at JC level. Fourth, members of the NUL Faculty of Education (FED) have long felt that the Communication Skills section in the Teaching Practice Assessment Tool should give credit to student-teachers who encourage pupils to ask and answer in full sentences.

At institutional level, there is a widespread call on the NUL campus - led by the English Department and FED - for cooperation in strict observation of the correct way of writing essays. The call also includes insistence on complete sentences, correct grammar and spelling in all courses, and the use of English during consultation with lecturers. For its part, the History Department has a reputation of being a very tough unit on campus mainly because of the staff members' insistence on both subject-matter and proper language.¹⁸ Overall, the main idea is for everybody in the teaching profession to constantly harp on, immerse the students in and saturate them with correct English Language practices until these become part and parcel of their educational journey. For student-teachers, the language competence in their own stud-

ies should be guided to also translate into effective teaching/learning and good examination results.

Subject-specific language use

Closely related to the teachers' mastery of the English language in general is how the language is used in the teaching and learning of the respective subjects, with particular emphasis on essay writing. In the case of History, Haydn has devoted a whole chapter to what he calls 'Learning Strategies and the Use of Language in History', and not only is it fascinating to read but it also presents examples that are easy to detect and implement in any History classroom.¹⁹

As indicated in Table 1, the Examiners' Eye has used a variety of expressions (and repeatedly so) to indicate the link between the weaknesses and poor performance in JC History examinations. Overall planning for and implementation of strategies to prepare student-teachers in History - and refresh their certified counterparts - in teaching essay writing skills should start with their assumed knowledge in the seven categories identified by Shulman.²⁰ In other words, it will be necessary to determine and take into account what student- and History teachers bring into the task at hand that will facilitate and/or hinder success, and this will then be integrated into what they need to know in order to teach History essay writing skills effectively.

All discussions of essay writing skills underpin the understanding of the question as the first step of the process. What this means is that teachers should instill in the learners that every question or topic of an essay has instruction words which state what the question or topic wants the learner to do – the task at hand - and that there could be as many as such words as there are ways of asking or re/phrasing questions.

Usually, the same instructions words are used in both the general, specific and assessment objectives that appear at the beginning of a syllabus and as instructional objectives of a lesson. For example, the 'user-friendly' format of the Lesotho JC History syllabus has a column of one hundred and twenty-four (124) End of Level Objectives for the three Forms A, B, and C²¹ which are dominated by such words as 'describe,

discuss, define, outline, explain, compare, and the like. Therefore, in what one source has titled: 'Teach about Question Meanings: How do I know what the question means?', the teachers are advised how to help the learners understand the instruction words by defining the requirements of each one of them as opposed to the others. In fact, most, if not all, sources that discuss essay writing skills usually provide a glossary of the 'question' words to help establish a common understanding of what they mean.

What this means, therefore, is that History teachers and those still in training should maintain a constant familiarisation with the JC syllabus Assessment Objectives and Scheme as well as previous examination question papers, all of which contextualize the instruction words. For example, the assessment objectives²² read as follows:

By the end of the course [three years] candidates should be able to:

- Explain historical terminology and concepts.
- Recall, select and explain the relevant content.
- Analyse and interpret information or evidence to make coherent and logical decisions.
- Demonstrate knowledge of historical developments in Southern Africa and selected themes in the history of the World.
- Empathise with the past, and interpret events and decision-making of a particular period in the light of information and conditions prevailing at that time.

The assessment objectives are immediately followed by the Scheme of Assessment in four sections (A, B, C, and D) that constitute the three hour examination paper.²³ The first two sections consist of multiple-choice and ballad questions respectively but the last two sections require the candidates to display essay writing skills thus:

SECTION C: Short Essays

Twelve (12) essay questions are asked in this section. Candidates are expected to answer in five to ten (5-10) lines any six (6) questions.

SECTION D: Long Essays

Six (6) essay questions are asked in this section. Candidates attempt two (2) essays of thirty (30) lines each.

A quick look at past JC History examination question papers confirmed that the format was followed to the letter, and that the instruction words would have been familiar to the candidates. However, as indicated in the 'weaknesses' column of Table 1, doing exactly as asked in the essay questions is problematic for the candidates.

Regular Use of Relevant and Appropriate Resources

There is a need for constant reference to and practice with History essay writing suggestions that are provided in History education texts, textbooks, and tons of essay writing guidelines posted on the internet. This activity should start with the very first History essay that that student-teachers write, and they should continue with the practice until it becomes a habit they carry beyond their graduation into their teaching career and professional development.

History Education Sources

As far as History education sources are concerned, one good example is the brief chapter by Mathews, et. al. in which they discuss the four steps of teaching essay writing, and their views represent many other teacher training sources that deal with this topic. The four steps include selection of a topic and working out a plan for the essay; discussion of the question with the pupils and guiding them to find out exactly what the question is asking; writing the requirements of the question on the board in point form, and extending (together with the pupils) the basic plan into a more detailed scheme for the essay. The chapter provides specific examples for all of the steps, thus making it a possible handout for all learners to use when they work on their own essays.²⁴

Regarding school textbooks, it is encouraging to see that they are now paired off with corresponding teachers' guides which go hand-in-hand with methodology/pedagogy courses. For example, there is a section on 'How to approach essay writing' in the Teacher's guides of the Oxford History textbooks series.²⁵ That way, teachers can photocopy the relevant page(s) for students to refer to time and again in order to sharpen

their essay writing skills until these come to them naturally.

School Textbooks

In Lesotho, the Ministry of Education and Training (MOET) has embarked on a textbook loan scheme that ensures accessibility to textbooks for all learners up to JC and in all subjects, including History. By so doing, the Ministry is trying to eliminate one of the commonly-quoted culprits of quality education, that is, lack of textbooks, especially among the poor majority. Another positive outcome of the new policy is that it has attracted local authors to write more relevant textbooks in the respective subjects. The availability of textbooks and teachers' guides means that teachers will have many options of learners' activities based on the textbook. However, the Textbook Evaluation Tool that is used places more emphasis on teachers' and learners' activities than it does on writing skills. Therefore, it is for the History teachers in particular to write²⁶ and/or insist on the use of textbooks that pay special attention to writing in History as discussed at length by Haydn.

For the learners, regular use of the textbooks should, in turn, resuscitate the diminished reading culture among the Basotho youth and also improve their writing skills. In fact, because History is a reading subject, there is a general belief among History (and even English Literature) teachers that lack of reading skills is one of the factors that lead to poor examination results. This view is confirmed by Harris and Foreman-Peck who identified and addressed the need for appropriate study skills by 'focus[ing] mainly on reading strategies as I wished to make students more independent in this area.' The effort was a great success but the 'students still appeared to find problems extracting relevant information from books, which suggested they needed more help to create a tighter reading focus' because 'where students had a focus when reading they were able to pull out key ideas and pieces of information on topics, which helped them generate understanding and conviction in their views.'²⁷

Internet Resources

One other very informative example is on the internet and, although it is meant for students, it is just as useful for teachers. Not only does the author provide the general rules for writing an essay and the steps

of writing an effective essay, but he makes the process easy to follow follow by breaking it into twenty-one items. Each one is followed by succinct discussions of essay writing skills using History examples, and there are sample papers.²⁸ Thus, once downloaded²⁹, this source, too, can be used by learners at their own convenience.

Workshops

Running workshops for History teachers usually banks on an aspect of assumed knowledge on the part of the participants regarding the issue of History as a discipline and a subject. The expectations also rely heavily on the understanding that when History teachers graduated, they had - just as the student-teachers will have - 'perfected' their own essay writing skills accordingly, and familiarized themselves with the relevant materials in school History essay writing so as to eliminate the problems described above. Most crucial in this respect is the teachers' ability to impart the said skills to their pupils.

The LHTA's annual workshops that used to be run by Lesotho's MOET through its inspectorate unit were suspended for a long time, but they have now been resuscitated by a non-governmental organization, the TResource Centre (TRC). At these workshops then and now, the tendency is to present content-loaded papers that barely touch on how to teach that content. There have also been very brief sessions that highlight some of the weaknesses behind the performance patterns, but hardly any time to pick and dwell on one problem such as lack of essay writing skills. The gatherings could also be used by the schools that consistently perform well in or improved their History examination results to share their secrets.

Action Research

In their preparation for the requirements of the JC examination, the Lesotho secondary schools that offer History usually introduce learners to writing History essays from the very first post-primary year of study. They also organise mock examinations in the year of the third year but, according to the results in Table 1 and 2, more concerted effort needs to be put into those practices. Therefore, one way of enriching participation in workshops and cutting down on the content papers would be to introduce action research presentations on essay writing activities

and experiences in the teachers' respective classrooms, and the learners' performance in the mock examinations. The Lesotho History teachers could learn a lot from one very good example of a successful action research remedial effort that was conducted by Harris and Lorraine-Peck.

Overall, most of the strategies suggested above, with a few exceptions, are not new as such which then begs the question 'why raise them at all?' The main difference this time is that, in the dearth of History education research in Lesotho, this study is a call for a concerted effort and campaign by all stakeholders to refine and intensify the strategies already in place, and also combine the known with the new suggestions in the teaching and learning of History essay writing skills. This seems to be the main problem that hinders good performance in JC History, and the issue of rectifying the situation constitutes the crux of this study. Meanwhile, the larger study considers many more possible problems such as 'out-of-field' teaching,³⁰ afternoon scheduling and the length of the examination question paper, Principals leaving most of the History teaching to junior staff, and the like.

Conclusion

Every year since 2000 (and before), the History examiners in Lesotho have stated their main concerns about the poor JC History examination results in the remarks that appear in introductory section of the pass lists. On the basis of those comments and remarks, this study has highlighted the overall problem as the candidates' lack of essay writing skills, and also made suggestions about how to help rectify the situation in the context of teacher education. The idea is to instill proper History essay writing skills in the schools teach and in teacher education institutions. That knowledge is to be turned into a habit by following the suggested strategies so as to make the JC learners think about the skills and practise them constantly during the three year continuous assessment in preparation for examination purposes.

References

- 1 This is a revised version of a paper that appears in the Proceedings of the South African Society of History Teaching Conference (SASHT) held in Durban on

24-25 September, 2005: *Yesterday&Today* Special Edition 2006 (Potchefstroom: Northwest University), pp.109-126.

- 2 The class ranking of the JC examination results includes only two social science subjects and, for years now, whenever the schools felt the need to drop a social science subject, History was usually the first to go.
- 3 In the Lesotho Education system, the first three post- primary years constitute Secondary or Junior Certificate (JC) level at the end of which candidates write a final examination. They then proceed into the next two years of High School at the end of which they write the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) examination which is a requirement for entry into University.
- 4 Starting in 2007, the policy is that all new secondary schools that were built to accommodate the influx of the Free Primary Education school leavers should teach History.
- 5 *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* (Oxford: OPU, 2000).
- 6 H Hawes and D Stephens, *Questions of Quality: Primary Education and Development* (Burnt Mill, Harlow: Longman Group UK Limited, 1990).
- 7 The JC History candidates wrote three different papers in 2000-2002 (Old, Alternative and Trial) as chosen by the schools and the syllabus review process. From 2003, all schools taught one national syllabus that had been trialled from 1998.
- 8 At lot of times, parents and learners blame the teachers for poor results but when their children pass, the parents attribute the success to some supposedly 'brilliant' member of the family. So, the teachers never win!
- 9 MMC Seotsanyana, "Factors affecting the teaching and learning of history in the Lesotho High Schools" (unpublished M.A. Ed. dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 1996). The one source that would reflect the status of performance in JC History before 1996 but has proved hard to find is a dissertation by KT Chimombe, "An Analysis of History Teaching and Learning in Lesotho Secondary Schools" (unpublished M.ED. Dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 1980)
- 10 T Haydn, J Arthur and M Hunt, *Learning to Teach History in the Secondary School* (London and New York: Routledge/Falmer, 2001), 83
- 11 T Taylor and C Young , *Making History: A Guide for Teaching and Learning History in Australian Schools* (Monash University, Australia, 2003).
- 12 LW Vorster, *History of South Africa, Grade 12* (Standard 10), Guidelines Study Aids (Bramley: Guidelines (PTY) LTD, 1996).
- 13 J Mathews, K Moodley, W Rheeder and M Wilkinson, *Discover History: A Pupil-centred Approach to History Method* (Cape Town: Maskew Miller Longman, 1992), 7.
- 14 Haydn, *et.al.*, *Learning to Teach*, p. 83.

- 15 Haydn, *et.al.*, *Learning to Teach*, p. 9.
- 16 For example, the 1998 COSC English Language results were so bad that NUL Senate had to deliberate the issue at length and come up with a strategy to insure the regular intake of students into First Year.
- 17 The First Year course is year-long and, among the failures, some students get a mark that qualifies them for two chances to supplement at Second Year (CSS298 3A/ and CSS299 3/B) while others have to repeat it.
- 18 At the same time, there have been a few student-teachers in History who have thanked their lecturers for patiently but constantly taking them through the sentence, paragraph, outline and essay writing sequence which they found very useful and effective in their own teaching.
- 19 Haydn, *et.al.*, *Learning to Teach*, pp. 69-74.
- 20 These are subject-matter or content, general pedagogical, pedagogical content, curricular, contextual, educative knowledge and knowledge of learners and learning. They are succinctly summarized by Tony Taylor and Carmel Young , *Making History: A Guide for Teaching and Learning History in Australian Schools* (Monash University, Australia, 2003).
- 21 See *Junior Certificate History Syllabus 2004* (National Curriculum Development Centre, Ministry of Education and Training, Maseru, Lesotho). All primary and secondary school syllabuses of all subjects have the same format.
- 22 See *Junior Certificate History Syllabus 2004*, p. 6.
- 23 The 2006/2007 Third Year History student-teachers in the 'History for the High School Teacher' course are comparing the JC History syllabus and examination format as part of their pedagogical/content (subject-matter) knowledge (PCK) activity in anticipation of and contribution to the next syllabus review.
- 24 Mathews, *et.al.*, *Discover History*, pp. 71-73.
- 25 Vorster, *In Search of History*.
- 26 Granted, members of the History Department have published in their respective fields of interest, including a joint textbook on the History of Lesotho. However, up to now, none of them have shown interest in linking their work with the schools. Similarly, the History teacher educators in LASED have not put to much use (in terms of publication) a collection of curriculum-related extended essays (dating to the early 1990s) and, thereafter, Action Research projects of their student teachers. Thus, in the last ten years, only two extensive pieces of research have been produced by MM Khoiti, "A critical evaluation of the Lesotho Junior Certificate Alternative history syllabus" (unpublished M.A. Ed. Dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 2000) and MMC Seotsanyana, "Factors affecting the teaching and learning of history in the Lesotho High Schools" (unpublished M.A. Ed. dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 1996).

- 27 R Harris and L Foreman-Peck, "Learning to Teach History Writing: discovering what works" *Educational Action Research*, Volume 9 (Number 1, 2001), p. 105. Although the publication is co-authored by a student and his supervisor, they have maintained the use of the first person in the original action research project.
- 28 See David Sedivy, "Helpful Information for Students – Essay Writing: Essay Format, Writing Skills, and Sample Papers" (http://members.tripod.co/~mr_sedivy/essay.html), accessed on 15/11/05.
- 29 Given the limited access to computers and/or the internet in the Lesotho schools, downloading is open more to student-teachers than it is to History teachers. NUL and LCE will need to alert their trainees to maximize their opportunities in collecting all the relevant materials for future use in their careers.
- 30 In some countries like the USA, the prevalence of 'out-of-field' teaching has been raised as responsible for the learners' poor knowledge/performance in history. See Diane Ravitch, 'The Educational Backgrounds of History Teachers' in Peter N. Stearns, *et. al* (eds.), *Knowing, Teaching, and Learning History: National and International Perspectives* (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 143-155