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Economic Transformation and Emancipation through Active Citizenship Education

Abstract

The transition from apartheid to democracy necessitated radical transformation within the South African political, socio-economic and education landscape. Black and coloured students were only fit for unskilled or semi-skilled occupations resulting in under-qualified and poorly trained professionals. Since the inception of democracy, there was a need to respond to the needs of a modern democratic South African society. The need for economic transformation emerged from the inheritance of an economy built on exclusion due to racial division and inequalities. There was a need for curriculum and economic intervention to include fundamental principles of citizenship education to promote human rights, democracy and active citizenry. This paper discusses the manner in which active citizenship education can bring about economic transformation in a modern developing democracy in South Africa. Through a conceptual framework, the paper also demonstrates the evolution of citizenship with the notion of critical emancipation through active citizenship education.

Keywords: active citizenship education, global citizenship education, South Africa

Introduction

Since 1994, South Africa has undergone radical transformation making it possible for people to stand together and build one country that belongs to all who live in it. During this period, previously disenfranchised South Africans were enfranchised embarking on transformation from apartheid to a democracy. South Africa celebrates 24 years of democracy embedded in Chapter Two of the Constitution, the Bill of Rights, the cornerstone of democracy in South Africa. It enshrines the rights of all South Africans and affirms the democratic values of human dignity, equality and freedom (Constitution of RSA, 1996, p. 6).

Democracy brought about a need for radical economic transformation due to the inheritance of an economy built on exclusion due to racial division and inequalities (DPME, 2014). The legacy of apartheid still haunts us today in the form of skills shortages and the immense challenge of transforming the education and training system to one capable of producing the skills required by a rapidly growing economy amidst the fourth industrial revolution. Providing young people with economic and social environments that facilitate prosperity, and the skills to thrive in them, impacts the lives of individuals and the communities in which they live (CYFI, 2012).

Education reform became the vehicle for radical transformation responding to a need for the education system to make many curriculum changes (Schoeman, 2006) including principles of citizenship education promoting active citizenry, equality, non-sexism, non-racialism and non-discrimination (Arendse, 2014).

Conceptual framework

Economic transformation

Transformation means to dramatically change in form, appearance or structure (Daszko & Sheinberg, 2005). Economic transformation can be defined as a dramatic change in the economy of a country. Apartheid restricted the majority of South Africans from meaningful participation in the economy. It was shaped by apartheid policies built on systematically enforced exclusion linked to racial division (DPME, 2014). This radically changed in 1994 since the main economic objectives of government was job creation, elimination of poverty and the reduction of inequality. The State of the Nation Address reiterates that political freedom is incomplete without economic emancipation (SONA, 2017). This demonstrates commitment by South Africa to continue driving socio-economic transformation for the good of the country, directly linking to the notion of active citizenry. The state acknowledges that transformation has been slow despite the implementation of legislation relating to the transformation agenda. Despite the slow pace, there is a focus on sustainable economic growth, reiterated in legislation and policies, as captured in the National Development Plan (NDP). The NDP is a 20-year plan for the country, which includes operational plans dealing with socio-economic and political development (NDP, 2012). Radical economic transformation remains a priority (SONA, 2018) with education as a pre-requisite to empower and educate the children to break the cycle of poverty. The ideal is to strive for an equitable society through education especially for the marginalised. The State of the Nation Address (SONA, 2018) adopts the notion of ‘becoming agents of change’, speaking to the teachings of Paulo Freire stating that schools should become agents of change. For radical economic transformation, citizens should all strive to be agents of change.

Citizenship education

Citizenship can be defined as a set of relationships between rights, duties, participation in the civic community and identity (Delanty, 2000) regarded as a social contract between the individual. It is expressed when individuals participate in the political framework relating to public affairs (Giroux, 1995). Citizens are thus members of a state with access to civil, political and socio-economic rights. Citizenship in developing democracies are challenged with issues such as race, class and represents a complex dynamic involving these social constructs, as they relate to changing social, political and economic imperatives (Spren & Vally, 2012).

The education system should thus be responsive to the need whereby citizens be informed about their rights and responsibilities that goes with the inherent state membership as a citizen (Schoeman, 2006) for people to contribute as citizens of a democratic society within political and socio-economic contexts.

Education should go beyond the confines of the school and the internet and find its way into homes and the broader community including the global society (Philippou, Keating & Ortloff, 2009). Teaching citizenship in schools empowers citizens from a young age to make meaningful contributions to society and thus becoming responsible and active citizens. Through education, citizens become aware of their environment and the social and economic options available to them (Kuye, 2007).

Citizenship education rooted in knowledge, understanding, skills and competencies, develops capabilities for responsible participation in political, socio-economic and cultural life. Empowered and capable citizens may therefore understand their roles within society, be able to make informed decisions about matters pertaining to their own well-being, and contribute politically and socio-economically to the broader community. The education system, through curricular, is the ideal platform to introduce and nurture the knowledge, skills, values and attitudes of good citizenship by reaching the masses of the children of the nation. Giroux (1995, p. 6) reiterates that public schools must assist in the work of preparing citizens for self-governance in an evolving political, socio-economic environment.

Global citizenship education

Global citizenship refers to a sense of belonging to a broader community and common humanity with an emphasis on political, socio-economic and cultural interdependency and interconnectedness between the local, national and global (UNESCO, 2015). A global citizen is someone who identifies with being part of an emerging world community and whose actions contribute to building this community's values and practices (Israel, 2012). It is about shared identities that cross boundaries and is practiced through voluntary association (Schattle, 2007).

The shift to global citizenship recognizes the relevance of education in understanding and resolving global issues in political, cultural, socio-economic and environmental areas (UNESCO, 2014). In a globalized world, education is putting more emphasis on equipping individuals from an early age throughout life, with the knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours they need to be informed, engaged and empathetic citizens (UNESCO, 2014).

Citizenship education has evolved within the global context with an emphasis on cultivating a notion of allegiance beyond one's country to universal principles of justice, diversity, and the worldwide community of human beings (Banks, 2004). Education for meaningful democratic citizenship therefore requires citizens to share a subjective sense of national citizenship membership whilst cultivating a common allegiance to the global citizenship (Williams, 2003). Global Citizenship places greater responsibility for the world in the hands of ordinary citizens to ensure it becomes central to the political and economic development of society (Penner & Sanderse, 2017).

South Africa as a member state of various unions economically participates in international trading and has international treaties and agreements with other countries, which inherently makes us global citizens. We therefore participate in global initiatives such as the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) with its Agenda 2030 focusing on Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Sustainable development is about ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promote life-long learning opportunities for all, by ensuring that learners acquire knowledge and skills needed to promote sustainable development for sustainable development and sustainable lifestyles (Osborn, Cutter & Ullah, 2015).

Furthermore, the United Nations Agenda 2030 vision speaks to aspects relating to human rights, respect, equality, education, climate, poverty, health and inclusivity, economic, social, political and environmental objectives. It is encouraging to note that as a member state, South Africa pledged to conform to the

UN Agenda 2030 to ensure key education elements such as quality education for all whereby all citizens should have access to life-long learning opportunities that help them acquire the knowledge and skills needed to exploit opportunities and to participate fully in society (UN, 2015).

Active citizen education

Citizenship is about membership, legal status and practice (Honohan, 2005) and regarded as members of a state who have access to civil, political, socio-economic rights. Active citizenship is not just about access to rights and obligations. It recognises self-reliance, defending social and economic rights and includes wider responsibilities to actively participate in society and democratic processes (Honohan, 2005; Pinnington & Schugurensky, 2009). Education becomes pivotal in that citizens would be able to make meaningful contributions in society when they are well informed and educated which brings about a renewed interest, locally and internationally, in learning for active citizenship (Halpern, John & Morris, 2002). Learning for active citizenship includes access to skills and competencies that young people need for effective economic participation under conditions of technological modernisation and economic globalisation.

Curriculum reform in South Africa has taken the lead in the transformation agenda with its main objective to equip learners with knowledge, values and skills that they can apply meaningfully in their daily lives to participate optimally in society, and is a curriculum based on the fundamental principles of active citizenship education (DBE, 2010). The transition from apartheid to democracy required radical education and economic transformation with new policies and mechanisms to address the inequalities of the past (Smith & Arendse, 2016). The Life Orientation subject was introduced and became compulsory after 1994 to deal with aspects relating to transformation (Sedibe, 2014). Life Orientation is the study of the self in relation to others and society which addresses skills, knowledge, and values about the self, the environment, responsible citizenship, a healthy and productive life, socio-economic engagement, recreation and physical activity, careers and career choices (DBE, 2011a; 2011b; 2011c; 2011d).

Citizens need to be equipped to manage their lives in the cultural and political environments in which they find themselves. By acquiring an education and developing skills, citizens young and old are enhancing their economic competitiveness. Every citizen can do something useful for the development of their country and do everything we can to live in better conditions (Shakaia, 2016).

Conclusion

Economic transformation can be achieved through active citizenship education despite the slow pace of transformation. This is evident in the South African context since embarking on democracy there has been many strides to achieve democratic socio-economic transformation. Since 1994, transformation is evident in almost every aspect with emphasis on curriculum reform based on fundamental principles of active citizenry, human rights, democracy and redress. Education as a prerequisite for any meaningful participation is evident in political, socio-economic emancipation demonstrating the value of active citizenship education beyond the classroom. Citizens will only be able to make meaningful contribution to society if

they are well informed and empowered to do so. In fact, many authors agree that education is a prerequisite for active and meaningful participation in democratic processes and society (Hooper, 2013; Kisby & Sloam, 2012; Cecchini, 2003; European Commission, 2007; UNESCO, 2005; Nelson & Kerr, 2005; Honohan, 2005; Houtzager & Acharya, 2010; Meyer, 1995; UNESCO, 1998; McKenzie, 1993).

Every citizen should be empowered and equipped to participate in political and socio-economic processes and activities that affect their daily lives (Arendse, 2014). Paulo Freire's theory of critical emancipation highlights this need and seeks to empower individuals so that they have the ability to actively participate in and contribute meaningfully to society (Freire, 1971). For people to become active citizens, education and access to resources are required to assist citizens to make their contributions to processes and society whether it be political or socio-economic resources.

Transformation in South Africa heavily relies on citizen participation to build a more equitable society where opportunity is not defined by race, gender, class or religion. This means taking radical steps to build people's capabilities through access to quality education and enabling access to employment and transforming ownership of the economy. This can be achieved through active citizenship education with its primary objective to develop human potential, of the whole person, enabling all citizens to participate as fully as possible in cultural, economic, political and social life (European Commission, 1998). Ultimately, active citizenship aims to educate, equip, develop the learner holistically to empower citizens to participate in a just society by improving and sustain their lives as active citizens politically, economically and socially.

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