

THE STATUS OF HISTORY TEACHING, LEARNING AND EXAMINATION RESULTS IN LESOTHO, 2000-2004: IMPLICATIONS FOR TEACHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This paper addresses the issue of History teaching and learning in Lesotho which is at its lowest ebb. Very few schools teach the subject and their poor performance, particularly in the senior classes, exacerbates the situation. On the basis of the examiners' comments in the last five years, the study has identified lack of essay writing skills among the candidates as the main reason behind the high failure rate in History. It also suggests pursuit of quality pre-service & in-service teacher education as well as constant practice of the basics of essay writing skills by student-teachers, teachers and learners alike.

Background

In Lesotho, History is the most unpopular subject in the Social Sciences group that also includes Development Studies, Geography and Religious Knowledge. Over the years, many schools have dropped it to the point that, presently, only 17 out of 230+ Secondary and/or High Schools¹ teach it. Furthermore, it is mostly the schools with Principals who majored in History that still teach the subject; thus, most of the time, whenever there is a change of guard in these schools' administration, the future of History tends to be in jeopardy.

My interest in the status of the teaching and learning of History in Lesotho was first triggered by the dwindling numbers of students in the History Department at the National University of Lesotho (NUL) from the mid-1990s. On investigating the issue, it soon became clear that the

¹ In the Lesotho Education system, the first three pots- primary years constitute Secondary or Junior Certificate (JC) level known as Form A/B/C or Form/JC 1/2/3 classes, at the end of which candidates write a final examination. They then proceed into the next two years of Form D/E of High School where they write the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) which is the required entry into University.

problem lay not only in the few number of History teaching schools but also in the poor History results which led to the students' (and parents') negative attitude to the subject.

Therefore, the two areas that seemed to need immediate attention were, first, the lack of correlation between the relevant NUL departments, namely the History Education Unit of Language and Social Education (LASED), History and the schools. Second, there was a need for concerted effort by all concerned to undertake research on all aspects of the teaching and learning of History in Lesotho at all levels.²

Thus, I began to participate in the school History Panel meetings and workshops as an observer, and I also spent my 2000/2001 sabbatical leave at the then National Teacher Training College (NTTC - now renamed Lesotho College of Education - LCE) to help establish a History Department in 2001 for the first time in its twenty-five years of existence. The following year, I took an even more dramatic action by changing Faculties from Humanities to Education with the intention of contributing to the History teaching and learning situation in the Lesotho schools by becoming a teacher educator in LASED.

On the side of the schools, members of the Lesotho History Teachers Association (LHTA) are convinced that History is being made a scapegoat of a situation where Junior Certificate (JC) and Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) candidates consistently perform poorly in the English, Mathematics and Science, and examinations of the three and two of the of core subjects respectively, namely, with the exception of Sesotho. Therefore, 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

2 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 educators in LASED have not put to much use (in terms of publication) a collection of curriculum-related extended essays up 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 M.M. Khoiti, "A critical evaluation of the Lesotho Junior Certificate Alternative history syllabus" (unpublished M.A. Ed. Dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 2000) and M.M. C. Seotsanyana, "Factors affecting the teaching and learning of history in the Lesotho High Schools" (unpublished M.A. Ed. dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 1996).

performance in the examinations. In other words, given a choice between quality and quantity, the teachers have openly declared - and passionately so - that they would rather have the former every time. Since 2000, the Association has tried to keep its own record of the History results for each school to monitor and maintain the signs of gradual improvement which is quite phenomenal in some of the secondary level but performance continues to be poor with the senior group.

Thus, buoyed by my experiences, the teachers' spirit and quest for quality (as well as several other related factors), I embarked on a History teaching and learning situational analysis project that is only at a proposal stage and still seeking financial support.

Introduction

This paper is part of an on-going situational analysis of the extremely unsatisfactory status of History teaching and learning in the Lesotho Secondary and High Schools from 1996 to 2005, but it only covers the 2000-2004 examinations results. Two of the indicators of this status are the dwindling number of schools – and therefore of learners - that still offer History and the poor performance of the candidates in the final (external) examinations, especially at High School level.

Several reasons have been advanced for this disastrous state of affairs regarding the teaching and learning of History in Lesotho, but the most common and outstanding ones have to do with policy making and the candidates' poor performance in the examinations. The latter has been of great concern for a long time now, mostly to the teachers who feel that their efforts have failed to bear the expected fruits, and to the parents who discourage their children to do History because of the poor performance in a subject they regard as valueless. In other words, since there seems to be no 'quality' in the teaching and learning of History in Lesotho, there is a need to explain the sad reality by taking a close look at the results themselves, and the examiners' commentary in to determine where the problem lies.

Therefore, what this study does is to scrutinize the results of external examination candidates in the last five years, highlight History essay writing as the problem area, and suggest the role that the History teacher trainers at NUL and LCE - and in collaboration with the other trainers

- should play in order to achieve quality in the teaching and learning of the subject in Lesotho schools. Because of the staffing realities of History teaching in Lesotho, the study also shows why the strategies of improving school results have to address both pre-and in-service teacher education.

Conceptual Framework

In recent years (especially in 2004) and at various forums, there has been an overwhelming quest for quality education for all and in all subjects. For example, in accordance with the LHTA's strong desire for quality in school History, the new Head of LASED in the Faculty of Education at NUL called for a concerted effort by all trainers to help the Lesotho JC and COSC candidates obtain good results. Similarly, the theme - 'Quality Education and Research locally, regionally and internationally' - of the biennial BoLeSwaNa (Botswana, Lesotho, Swaziland and Namibia) Symposium that was hosted by Namibia in July 2004 started one thinking about quality in the context of History teaching and learning, with special emphasis on the initial training of [History] teachers.

In addition, the themes of both the forty-seventh 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. Similarly, 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.'

The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary (2000) defines quality as 'the standard of something when compared to others like it; how good or bad something is; a high standard or level....' In the context

of education, it is possible that there are as many definitions as there are authors on the subject but the overall 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 (1990) demonstrate best the complexity of defining quality education. The most illuminating analogy used in the book to unpack quality teacher education is called 'the quality wheel' that identifies the people trainers as a very crucial factor in achieving quality education, and goes on to devote a whole chapter to this factor.

Methodology

The study is a qualitative analysis of data collected from a five-year documentation of examination results. The larger study looks at a wide range of both written and oral evidence, but this paper is strictly based on the introductory section of the 2000-2004 pass lists of the JC and COSC from ECOL. The paper starts by highlighting in tabular form the various concerns that ECOL's documents have identified as contributors to poor performance in school History over the years. It then suggests the initiatives that NUL's teacher educator(s) could implement at the initial teacher education level in order to help the schools remedy their poor History results.

Data

The table below displays the core information of the study and it is taken from the pass lists of the ECOL institution from 2000 to 2004. The relevant section consists of tabular information – especially Table 2 - as well as comments and/or remarks made by the respective examination officers on the performance of the candidates in general and in subject groups while those recorded under the 'Examiners' Eye' section are subject-specific. 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 important to point out from the outset regarding the table 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 was not possible to quote everything the table contained 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 was just as inconsistent, mostly in terms of the availability of the information and provision of the strong and weak points in performance for each year.

Table 1: Comments/Remarks from “Examiners’ Eye” on Lesotho JC & COSC Results, 2000-2004

Year	Level	Strengths	Weaknesses
2000	JC	Improved candidates’ performance in History has been phenomenal	
2000	COSC	...there was an improvement because fifty (50) candidates obtained credit compared to 28 credit passes in 1999	Due to weak language background , many candidates could not understand the demands of all sections of a question and failed to provide relevant historical evidence to address the question satisfactorily. In most cases, candidates did not observe regional and time limitations of a question, resulting in loss of marks by candidates
2001	JC	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
2001	COSC	At 20% credits this year, candidates have done better than in 2000 when 155 credits were recorded	In responding to some of the questions, candidates failed to adhere to regional and time limitations and as a result list valuable marks
2002	JC		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.
2002	COSC		Candidates did not read questions for comprehension. Instead they treated all questions like ‘answer all you know about what is asked’. They failed to select relevant information required and ignored the key features and components of questions. They could not compare and contrast, they also failed to show similarities and differences thereby losing marks. They also failed to use the facts to pass their own judgement. Candidates’ performance for 2002 is fairly similar to that of 2001 at 21% and 20% credits respectively
2003	JC	The performance this year is encouraging with the mean of 100.9. 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.
2003	COSC		In History, candidates failed to select, organize facts and information into logical and well thought-out ideas in responding to given tasks.... They showed lack of preparedness for the examination, failed to identify the crux of questions and could not adhere to the required tasks. The problem of English was evident when candidates failed to communicate ideas clearly but presented incoherent pieces of writing . Only 48% of the candidates have obtained grade E and above
2004	JC*		
2004	COSC**		

*No comments and/or remarks. ** Copy of results unavailable

Data Analysis

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. For one thing, when the examination results come out, different interest groups in Lesotho usually speculate about the reason(s) for the high rate of success or failure in each level, especially in the external examinations. However, as the table indicates, access to the 'Examiners' Eye' provides a more informed picture and the real reason(s) for the candidates' good or poor performance.

To start with, the table clearly demonstrates the widespread observation that every year the COSC results of Lesotho candidates are worse than those of the JC level. In the last five years, not only has there been nothing positive to say about the COSC performance since 2002 but the negative remarks have also intensified in terms of the nature and number of weaknesses. At the same time, even though the JC candidates seem to have done better in comparison, still the nature of criticisms that have been raised when the performance has been poor match those of their seniors.

At least two factors have given the JC candidates an edge over the COSC counterparts in that, first, they use locally designed syllabuses and write a joint examination of Lesotho and Swaziland.³ Second, there was also the review and consolidation of the two - 'Old' and 'Alternative' - History syllabuses into one national syllabus which was on trial until 2003 when all candidates wrote the same examination. That same group is writing the COSC examination this year (2005) and, in view of the trend of poor performance at this level, they are at an even greater disadvantage because the syllabus review process did not extend to COSC. Therefore, it will be interesting to see if the candidates maintain the commendable performance they achieved at JC in 2003 (see table above).

Reason(s) behind Poor Performance in History

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

³ It is years now since Botswana decided to run its own examinations (separate from the three-some of Botswana, Lesotho and Swaziland) due the practice of standardisation when the results are really bad.

to have consistently contributed to the candidates' poor performance in the JC and COSC History examinations over the past five years has been their (candidates') lack of essay writing skills and its related aspects. The other side of this problem is that the History teachers seem to have been ineffective in their teaching and preparing the candidates in the acquisition of satisfactory essay writing skills by the time they sat for the JC and COSC examinations, especially because the essay format is dictated by the examination question papers. REVISIT

According to the one statement that captures the overall essence and extent of the problem with the JC results of 2002, '... 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...' That same year, the same concern was raised in relation to COSC results thus: 'Candidates...treated all questions like "answer all you know about what is asked"'. In other words, in this particular year (and all other years before and after, though the problem was phrased differently), the candidates did not write as required by the questions and expected by the examiners. Put differently, 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 respective years of study, but without being given satisfactory attention to rectify and even eradicate it. In fact, a cursory look at the ten years covered by the larger study, and as confirmed by Seotsanyana (1996), shows that the problem goes back that far and beyond.⁴

Essay Writing in History Teaching and Learning

The place and importance of essay writing in History is mentioned and also discussed at length in many sources that deal with History teaching and learning, including some textbooks and study guides. For example, the History Study Guides for Grades 8-12 by Vorster (1996) begin with

⁴ One source that would confirm the status of performance before 1996 but is also hard to find is a dissertation by K.T. Chimombe, "An Analysis of History Teaching and Learning in Lesotho Secondary Schools" (unpublished M.ED. Dissertation, National University of Lesotho, 1980)

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.

In concurrence, Mathews, et. al. (1992:71) 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." Similarly, in his discussion of the issue of writing as aspect of learning strategies and the use of language, Haydn (2000:83) 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." 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 above statements as clear indicators of a universal and immediate need for quality teacher education, with special emphasis on essay writing skills. The stated concerns also point to the fact that it is incumbent upon teacher trainers 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.

Teacher Education Strategies in Developing Pupil's History Essay Writing Skills

The title of the study points to teacher education - that is, in-service for History teachers and pre-service for student-teachers - as the target branch in the Lesotho higher education system to tackle the problem at hand. In other words, one way to improve JC and COSC History results in Lesotho is to pay special attention to and concentrate on essay writing skills, starting with the training of the student-teachers at NUL and also working with the teachers in the schools.

Making teacher education bear the brunt of the remedial task goes hand

in hand with what Haydn (2001: 9) regards as the critical and peculiar responsibility of History teachers in this quotation (taken from Aldrich, 1991: 97): “in 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”.

Of the two teacher education institutions in Lesotho, NUL has to bear the brunt of the task at hand for two reasons. First, most of the History teachers in the country’s Secondary and High schools with such poor examination results, especially at the latter level, are NUL graduates. Second, the situation is likely to continue because the LCE History department has been experiencing serious problems with staffing and student intake since its inception in 2002. The very first and largest group of eight LCE History graduates only started their teaching career in 2005, and for the next three years, there will be very few History teachers from that institution.

In the Table above, the Examiners’ Eye has used a variety of expressions (and repeatedly so) to indicate the link between the weaknesses and poor performance in JC and COSC History examinations, and the issue of rectifying the situation constitutes the crux of this study. Overall planning for and implementation of strategies to prepare student-teachers in History and refresh their certified counterparts for teaching essay writing skills will start with their assumed knowledge in the seven categories identified by Shulman.⁵ In other words, it will be necessary to take into account what each group brings into the task at hand that will facilitate and/or hinder its achievement, and then state what they need to know to teach essay writing effectively.

Since the examiners have raised a very strong concern about the standard of English used by JC and COSC History candidates, the first issue to consider and pay special attention to should be the mastery of the language by both the student- and History teachers. In the Lesotho schools, English language is the medium of instruction from the fourth year of primary schooling, and it is also one of the core (and most failed)

⁵ These are subject-matter or content, general pedagogical, pedagogical content, curricular, contextual, educative knowledge and knowledge of learners and learning. They are succinctly summarized in *Making History: A Guide for Teaching and Learning History in Australian Schools* by Tony Taylor and Carmel Young (Monash University, Australia, 2003).

subjects up to COSC.⁶

Emphasis on English Language continues at NUL where the Common First Year's Communication Skills Course (E100: A/B), and it has to be passed before one can proceed to Third Year. Over the years, a number of the student-teachers have had to repeat E100 at Second Year, thus making the English Language Education lecturers worry about the possibility of language incompetence that may be passed on to the learners and, thus, lead to poor examination results. These concerns have, therefore, forced the lecturers to lead the way in several remedial strategies.

First, by the nature of their English language Education (LED) courses, the lecturers involved address the effective teaching of English Language and Literature as a whole, but also look into the specific reasons behind the high failure rate of JC and COSC 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, there is also a suggestion that all student-teachers who have chosen 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.

Currently, there is a widespread call on campus for cooperation throughout NUL about strict observation of the correct way of writing essays that also includes insistence on complete sentences, good grammar and correct 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.⁷

6 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.

7 At the same time, there have been a few student-teachers in History who have thanked their lecturers for patiently but constantly taken them through the sentence, paragraph, outline and essay writing which they found useful in their own teaching.

Overall, the main idea is for everybody in the teaching profession to constantly harp on, immerse in and saturate the students with correct English Language practices until they become part and parcel of their educational journey, and also translate into good examination results.

Closely related to the teachers' mastery of the English language in general is how the language is used in the teaching and learning of their subjects, especially in essay writing. 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 states what the question or topic wants the learner to do – the task at hand, and that there could be as many as there are ways of asking or 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 C⁸ 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?', this is where teachers help the learners understand the instruction words by defining the requirements of each one of them as opposed to the others. Several sources that discuss essay writing skills provide a glossary of the words which helps to establish a common understanding of what they mean.

More importantly, History teachers and those still in training should familiarize themselves with the Assessment Objectives, Scheme and previous examination question papers which contextualize the instruction words. For example, the assessment objectives in the JC History syllabus⁹ read as follows:

8 See Junior Certificate History Syllabus 2004 (National Curriculum Development Centre of the Ministry of Education and Training, Maseru, Lesotho).

9 See Junior Certificate History Syllabus 2004, p. 6.

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

1. Explain historical terminology and concepts.
2. Recall, select and explain the relevant content.
3. Analyse and interpret information or evidence to make coherent and logical decisions.
4. Demonstrate knowledge of historical developments in Southern Africa and selected themes in the history of the World.
5. 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 which states the four sections - A, B, C, and D - that constitute the three hour examination paper. The first two sections consist of multiple-choice and ballad questions 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.

Unfortunately, the COSC History Syllabus has neither the assessment objectives nor the examination question paper format; only the content is spelt out. However, the instructions in the question papers are very clear about the format of the answers in that because candidates are instructed to answer three questions in both papers of some twelve to eighteen questions. In the cases where they are asked to write on three out of five or more items in a question, the candidates are expected to answer in a paragraph format which is a significant building block in essay writing. Therefore, to have an idea of the standard of answers and, therefore, level of essay writing expected from COSC candidates, one can refer to the 'Letter to the learner' at the beginning of In Search of

History, Grade 10, especially the table of Learning Outcomes (LO1-4) and Assessment Standards.

The Nature and Extent of Difficulties and Barriers in History Essay Writing

The bolded operative words/phrases in the ‘weaknesses’ column of the table constitute the breakdown and, therefore, specific nature and extent of the problem of essay writing at JC and COSC 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 they have recurred over the years. All of these weaknesses seem to be universal because they correspond with Counsell’s five examples of pupils’ difficulties that are quoted by Haydn (2001: 83):

Many pupils find it difficult:

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

Put differently in a section on ‘Students as writers of history’, Taylor and Young (2003) also 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, and then elaborate on how ‘Both require similar technical know-how, but to develop this we have to break through several barriers’ with a discussion of all three which correspond with those mentioned above and, as already indicated, in Table 1.

In addition to the difficulties or barriers mentioned above, Basotho learners struggle with keeping to the specified region and time in the questions and, 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).

Regular Use of Relevant Resources

Knowing what the problems are, where they lie, and deciding on how to rectify them banks on an aspect of assumed knowledge on the part of teachers regarding the issue of History as a discipline and a subject. The expectations also rely heavily on the understanding that when they graduate(d), History teachers had - just as the student-teachers will have - 'perfected' their own essay writing skills accordingly, thus eliminating the problems described above and quite familiar with the relevant materials in History essay writing. Most crucial in this respect will be/is their ability to impart the skills to their pupils. For instance, in preparation for the requirements of the JC examination, Secondary and High Schools that offer History introduce learners to writing History essays right from the very first post-primary year of study.

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

Regarding textbooks, it is encouraging to see a section on 'How to approach essay writing' in the Teacher's guide of the Oxford History textbooks series, *In Search of History, for South African Grades 10-12*. That way, teachers can photocopy the relevant page for students to refer to ever time and again in order to sharpen their essay writing skill until it comes to them naturally.

In the case of 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.

Other advantages of the availability of textbooks are that teachers will have many options of learners' activities based on the textbook. 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. Another positive outcome of this new policy is that it has attracted local authors to write more relevant textbooks. However, the Textbook Evaluation Tool that is used places more emphasis on the teachers' and learners' activities than it does on writing skills. Therefore, it is for the History teachers in particular to write and/or insist on the use of textbooks that pay special attention to writing in History as discussed by Haydn (2001: 67-94) in what he calls 'Learning Strategies and the Use of Language' in History'.

As far as History education sources are concerned, the chapter by Mathews, et. al. (1992:71-73) and the four steps of teaching essay writing it discusses represent the views and format suggested by many others. These 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. This chapter is very short but quite useful in that it provides specific examples for all of the steps, thus making it a possible handout for all learners to use with their own examples.

One other very informative example from the internet is meant for students, but 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 also breaks the process into twenty-one items. Each one is followed by succinct discussions of essay writing skills with History examples, as well as sample papers.¹⁰ Therefore, once downloaded, this source, too, can be used by learners at their own convenience.

Conclusion

Every year since 2000 (and before), the History examiners in Lesotho have stated their main concerns behind the JC and COSC poor History results in the introductory section of the pass lists. On the basis of those comments and remarks, this study has highlighted the overall problem

10 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.

as the candidates' lack of essay writing skills, and also made suggestions about how to rectify the situation in the context of teacher education. The idea is to revisit what the History teachers already know and the student-teachers should know about essay writing skills, and turn that knowledge into a habit by making their learners think about it and practise it constantly during continuous assessment for examination purposes.

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