

Geography in the Botswana Secondary Curriculum: A Study in Curriculum Renewal and Contraction

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Curriculum reviews during the past two decades in Botswana have had mixed fortunes for geography in secondary schools. While the subject has modernised over the years it has at the same time shrunk in terms of its spread over the entire secondary schooling period. This paper describes this contradictory development, teasing out some of the most salient forces that have shaped the geography curriculum in secondary schools in Botswana. It argues that the subject's future is precarious and uncertain. Deliberate and concerted effort to promote and 'sell' the subject is required of those with vested interests in it.

Introduction

Ever since it first appeared as a school subject in Botswana, geography has undergone transformation both in content and methodology. This paper is an attempt to understand the nature of the transformation and what it means for the future of the subject. It aims to tease out and isolate some of the salient forces that have shaped the geography curriculum at the senior secondary school level of the educational structure. Developments in geographical education in Botswana can be understood much better if they are evaluated in both their local and global contexts. As the paper demonstrates, the modernisation of the geography curriculum in Botswana and its simultaneous shrinking have been influenced by forces both internal and external to the Botswana education system. Because of these forces, the future of geography in the school curriculum in Botswana is set to become uncertain and precarious. Geography teachers and educators should be concerned about this likely development. Instead of dampening their spirits, the concern should spur them into action to make sure that their subject does not make a premature, and perhaps even an undeserved, exit from the school curriculum. But it has to be action informed by a awareness of the past. Knowing where the subject is coming from and how it has evolved since its introduction is the first step in charting a way forward for the subject. Thus, the focus of this paper is the description of the evolution of the geography curriculum in Botswana and how this evolution has been shaped, among others, by changes in the structure of the discipline itself.

Geography in the Senior Secondary School Programme

Botswana has a centralised education system with a national curriculum followed by all students. All subject syllabi are standardised. The education

structure has changed over time. Primary education has been of seven years duration since the late 1960s. It is the secondary education level that has seen more changes. The entire duration of secondary education is five years, divided into two levels; the Junior Certificate (JC) and the Senior Certificate (SC) levels. Until 1985, the JC level was three years and the senior certificate level two years. In 1986 it was decided that the country should offer basic education of nine years to all students. The entire schooling system was to be restructured from the 7-3-2 year cycle of primary (7 years), junior secondary (3 years) and senior secondary (2 years) education structure to a 6-3-3 pattern, the first nine years comprising basic education. Because the pattern could not just jump from the 7-3-2 structure to the 6-3-3 structure, it first had to go through a transitional stage of a 7-2-3 pattern. However, before this restructuring could be completed another decision was taken in 1994 to increase basic education from nine to ten years. In essence, this meant reverting to the old 7-3-2 structure. This is the structure currently obtaining in the country. These changes in the structure of the education system have had implications for geography.

Until very recently senior secondary candidates took the Cambridge Overseas School Certificate (COSC) Ordinary Level examinations run by the University of Cambridge Local Examinations Syndicate in the United Kingdom. The Syndicate planned syllabi not only for geography, but for all subjects offered at the Ordinary level. It influenced 'standards', content quality and teaching methods. It also set and marked examination scripts. Although these activities have recently been localised (that is, the setting and marking of examination scripts is now done locally in Botswana) the Cambridge still acts as a quality assurer. Thus the Syndicate remains a powerful change agent at the Senior Certificate (SC) phase of secondary education in the country. A discussion of curriculum reform at the senior secondary level in Botswana would, therefore, not be complete without recognition of the Syndicate as a powerful change agent at that level.

For a long time, geography has always been an optional subject in the same category as history and literature in English in the senior secondary school programme. Each major curriculum review has seen the category of optional subjects expanding. The most recent curriculum review has seen the rise of new vocational and technical subjects as well as the vocationalisation of existing ones. This paper also looks at what this expansion and vocationalisation of the curriculum might mean for geography.

The Geography Curriculum: 1965 to 1982

An inspection of the geography syllabus that was in place before 1983 reveals two distinctive features:

- (1) It had a strong regional flavour.
- (2) It had a heavy emphasis on the Northern Hemisphere.

The syllabus had no stated aims or objectives. Its structure was defined in terms of the examination papers candidates were to take. It had two examination papers: Paper 1 had three sections: Mapwork, the Elements of Physical Geography, and Elements of World Geography. Paper 2 was on Regional Geography

and also had three sections: Africa (with special reference to southern Africa), Western Europe, and North America. Thus only one section in the entire syllabus was directly concerned with Botswana and the sub-region; the syllabus neglected the students' home area in favour of the Northern Hemisphere.

The aim of the syllabus seemed to be presenting the student with a massive quantity of facts about the prescribed regions. There was no attempt to involve students in problem-solving activities. The organisation of the subject matter did not seem to have been based on any educational considerations of how children learn. In the 1960s, pedagogic considerations were perhaps not a priority for a discipline that was still struggling for academic acceptance. It was not that curriculum theory was not developed – Dewey's progressivism had been in vogue since the early part of the century, particularly in North America. However, it had minimal impact in Britain, where it was seen as inimical to the teaching of subject matter. Because of the prevalence of what Goodson (1985) terms the 'academic tradition', children were plunged into 'the academic whirlpool without much concession. Here the influence of the discipline held sway' (Marsden, 1988: 340). It is therefore not surprising that the geography syllabus showed no evidence of the application of educational theory in its design. Thus the Botswana geography syllabus was reflective of its times.

Furthermore, the syllabus bore most of the hallmarks of the traditional regional approach in geography. One example of how this approach was utilised in the teaching of the syllabus shall suffice. North America will be used to illustrate this observation. The continent was sub-divided into distinctive regions such as New England, The North West, California, the South and many others. Each region was to be studied as an individual unit, with emphasis on the uniqueness of each region. But before any region could be studied individually, the relief, structure, climate, vegetation, soils of the whole continent were studied. A similar pattern would be followed in the study of each region, with agriculture and other human economic activities coming last. This structuring of content was also reflected in the structure of the examination questions. Consider the following examination questions:

Write an account of British Columbia under the headings (a) relief and drainage, (b) climate, (c) occupations. (UCLES, 1968:6)

Illustrating your answer by a sketch-map, write an account of Botswana under the headings:

- (a) Relief and drainage
- (b) Climate
- (c) Farming
- (d) Chief towns. (UCLES, 1972: 2)

Such sequencing of syllabus content and of examination questions (starting from the physical aspects moving to the human) could only make sense if the underlying assumption was that the physical environment in some ways determined human responses to the landscape. Some examination questions were explicit on this belief:

For each of the following, state the chief farming activities and show how their nature and importance are influenced by geographical conditions in the area: Florida; Texas; The New England States. (UCLES, 1977: 9)

A survey of geography examination question papers of the 1960s and 1970s shows no evidence of questions that centred human agency in the nature-humanity relationship. Such was the nature of the traditional regional approach in geography. The primacy of regional geography was reflected in the allocation of marks: Paper 2 (Regional Geography) carried 60% of the total marks for the subject.

It was to be expected that the syllabus would reflect a strong regionalist flavour since it was designed at a time when the regional approach held sway. In Great Britain, for example, the approach only loosened its grip on secondary school geography with the appearance of the School Council's geography projects in the 1970s: 'Geography for the Young School Leaver' (GYSL) project; the 'Geography 14-18' project; and the 'Geography 16-19' project. In Beddis' (1983: 15-16) view, these projects 'were a significant and probably the dominant influence on geography teaching in secondary schools in the middle and late 1970s in England and Wales. The projects injected 'much-needed new ideas, resources and teaching methods into school geography' (Boardman & McPartland, 1993 as cited in Binns, 1999: 71). Not only were these projects carriers of the 'new' geography, they also reflected the influence of the general curriculum reform movement of the 1960s and 1970s.

The 'Relevance Debate' and the 1976 Commission on Education

In Botswana, the 1970s witnessed the emergence of a national debate on the relevance of the education provided in the schools. There was general concern that the education system was not meeting the human resources needs of the country. Immediately after Independence in 1966 Botswana started exploiting its diamond and copper-nickel deposits. These generated immense wealth for the country and the economy burgeoned, but the local human capacity to run the country's administrative machinery was under-developed. There was therefore need to expand the education system and improve access if capacity development was to be achieved. A National Commission on Education was appointed in 1976 to look into ways of improving education. The Commission presented its report, *Education for Kagisano (Social Harmony)* in 1977. The implementation of some of the Commission's recommendations led to an unprecedented expansion of school places. Between 1979 and 1991 primary school enrolments rose by 91%. In secondary schools and at the University of Botswana, enrolments rose by 342% and 315% respectively (Republic of Botswana, 1994: 3).

The Commission described the curriculum as irrelevant to the needs of a changing Botswana. The content in many subjects was described as too abstract and far removed from the student's context. The Commission came down heavily on geography and history in particular on this score:

The Cambridge syllabi for history and geography now in use have been specially modified for southern African countries ... There is still heavy emphasis in the syllabi upon the Northern Hemisphere and little attention

to the problems of economic development. (Republic of Botswana, 1977: 112)

The Commission recommended that emphasis should be placed upon Botswana and her relationship to the world, with particular emphasis on aspects of development studies. This set the stage for the revision of the geography curriculum with the clear aim of addressing the relevance issue.

The 1983 Geography Syllabus: Features and Emphasis

The revisions were completed by the Syndicate in 1983 when a new syllabus was introduced to replace the existing one. This syllabus represented a break with the past in that it brought about some fundamental changes in school geography in Botswana. This is clearly shown in the aims of the syllabus, which aimed at allowing the candidate to obtain knowledge and understanding of:

- the basic geographical character of the locality in which he/she lives;
- the systematic geography of the 'home' area as part of a more general study of the wider region of which the home area forms a part;
- major problems of geographical nature arising from man's relationship with his environment (University of Cambridge, 1983: 2).

Each one of these aims represented a qualitative development of the geography curriculum. For the first time geography students in Botswana were to study a syllabus with clearly stated aims using content that was meaningful and relevant to their context. All three aims, to varying degrees, addressed the relevance issue stated above. The geographical character of the student's locality, as already indicated, was a neglected area in the old syllabus. The new syllabus centred Botswana within the African region south of the Sahara.

The second aim in particular signalled a paradigm shift to systematic geography. This is evidenced by what the syllabus expected to be emphasised:

In this syllabus emphasis is placed on making candidates aware of *principles and concepts*. These *ideas* should be applied to a *systematic study* of the topics listed in the syllabus content but *should not be studied along traditional regional lines*. (University of Cambridge, 1983: 2) (emphasis added)

The syllabus was sub-divided into six sections. These can be grouped into the three branches of systematic geography, namely: Physical, Economic and Human Geography. What clearly distinguished this syllabus from the one preceding it was not so much the content as the approach to the study of the topics – the use of thematic and case-studies approaches instead of the traditional regional approach. Emphasis on 'concepts', 'principles' and 'processes' demonstrated that the syllabus did not regard the teaching of geographic facts as the ultimate goal of geographic learning. To emphasise the latter point, the syllabus recommended teachers to use their own examples to illustrate concepts and principles. Examination questions were also to be framed to reflect this. Consider this question from the 1995 geography examination paper:

- 9 (a) Study Fig. 6. It is a model of the layout of a city in a developing country.
- (ii) Why do some people prefer to live near to the CBD (Central Business District) in large cities whilst others prefer to live away from the city?
 - (iii) Why do some people live in squatter settlements?
 - (iv) Give reasons why many buildings in the CBD are tall with many storeys.

The question is not specific to any city. Regurgitation of material learnt during the study of a particular city in class would not be of much help to the candidate. The candidate is being asked to apply principles relating to the internal organisation of cities to answer the question.

The third aim can be seen as an attempt to underscore the interdependence between human beings and their environment. The syllabus, for example, argued for the recognition of the human impact on the environment. Recognition of this reciprocal relationship was a rejection of the environmental determinism that characterised much of traditional regional geography (Wrigley, 1965). In the old syllabus, for example, the study of the topics on climate and climatic regions of the world did not factor in humanity's influence on the former. Climatic regions were studied in a manner that seemed to suggest that environmental factors largely determined human activities. The 1983 syllabus, in contrast, argued for the recognition of the human impact on climate. For example, students studied the effect on climate of large-scale modification of natural vegetation (University of Cambridge, 1983: 8). Examination questions too reflected this concern with humanity's influence on the environment. Parts of two questions from the 1999 examination paper shall suffice as illustrations:

- 4 (c) Show how the development of mining in the Boleswa countries has changed the appearance of the landscape.
- 5 (b) (ii) Explain how human activities may have helped to cause soil erosion.

Recognition of the role of agency in the humanity–environment relationship is both relevant and meaningful to a student in Botswana. Studied in the context of Botswana the people–environment relationship, for example, would show how the government's noble effort to improve beef production in the country has negatively impacted on the vegetation, leading to a problem of a geographical nature – desertification – which in turn not only affects the climate of the region but also undermines the very same government effort to boost beef production. Such an approach is meaningful and rewarding to a geography student in Botswana in that the content is contextualised and focused on problem-identification and solving.

Emphasis on concepts, principles, ideas, processes, explanation and an eagerness to disabuse geography of environmental determinism were some of the characteristics of the New Geography of the 1960s and 1970s. This stress on principles and concepts in the 1983 syllabus was reflected in the weighting in the

examination papers: Paper 1, which consisted of 40 multiple-choice questions, carried only 30% of the total marks of the subject, whereas Paper 2, which demanded application of principles and concepts, carried the remaining 70%.

Thus, what I term the 'relevance debate' provided an opportunity for the modernisation of the geography syllabus. But this was not an isolated development since it was reflective of changes that had earlier taken place in school geography elsewhere, in particular changes that were brought about by the appearance in Great Britain of the School Council's geography projects mentioned above.

The Advent of Social Studies: A Threat?

While the senior secondary school geography curriculum was modernising, the subject faced certain extinction at the Junior Certificate level (Forms 1 to 3). Education for Kagisano had also recommended the introduction of an integrated social studies curriculum at the JC level (as part of the Basic Education Programme) to replace geography and history as separate subjects. The recommendation was accepted by government, but the introduction of social studies was delayed until 1986 when finally it replaced history and geography at the JC level.

A number of forces influenced the introduction of social studies in Botswana. These will not be rehearsed here. For a full discussion of these forces, see Mautle (2000). Here I just want to touch on one dimension of the relevance debate in Botswana which favoured integrated social studies. Having just attained independence, nation-building became a top government priority. Relevant education was defined as that kind of education which contributed to nation-building. The title of the 1977 Commission on Education's report, *Education for Kagisano (Social Harmony)* was testimony to the centrality of nation-building in government policies. Social studies was viewed as having the potential to contribute towards nation-building. It thus resonated with the relevance debate.

However, the introduction of social studies to replace history and geography at the JC level did not go down well with teachers of these subjects. In their view Social Studies represented a lowering of standards and a dilution of the more robust academic subjects of geography and history. It was to be expected that geography and history teachers would be against the introduction of social studies given that they had 'invested [their] intellectual capital in one or other of the subjects and naturally preferred to teach either history or geography' (Graves, 1968: 391). Ball and Lacey (1995: 96) observe that when new subjects rise or are 'invented'

the existing patterns of preferment are disturbed, and new struggles and disputes develop. Changes like these threaten certain teacher interests and advance others. New career opportunities open for some, and existing avenues are closed down for others.

It is not surprising therefore that geography and history teachers were against the introduction of this new subject: social studies represented a deskilling process and a threat to their 'vested interests, territories and career bases' (Goodson, 1997: 132).

This tension between social studies and geography teachers in Botswana seemed like a re-play of the tension between geographers and integrationists in Britain in the past century. On a number of occasions in the 20th century British geographers had to fight off onslaughts by integrated studies. First, it was social studies in the inter-war period. This continued after the Second World War. Geographers took exception to this move which they perceived as a threat to the existence of their subject. The Geographical Association (GA) and the Royal Geographical Society (RGS) mobilised their forces to thwart the onslaught. The RGS wrote in 1950 that social studies would 'destroy the value of geography as an important medium of education' (RGS, 1950, as cited in Goodson, 1997: 118). It was described in pejorative terms, as an 'amorphous hotchpotch' and was likened to the 'useless rind and fibres' that remain when the juice has been squeezed from the lemon. Next came the threat from Environmental Studies in the 1960s. Professional bodies and practising geographers had once again to defend geography. The situation in Botswana was, however, markedly dissimilar. In the first instance there were (and still are) no independent professional bodies which could mobilise their resources to defend geography.

Thus, although the subject was on one hand modernising it was on the other hand contracting. No longer was geography a five-year offering. This contraction partly resulted from the changes in the structure of the education system (for example, the introduction of the Basic Education Programme). Geography teachers, however, could take solace in the fact that their subject's place in the senior secondary school curriculum was assured.

It was not until the mid-1990s that geography teachers would start worrying again about the future of their subject.

The 1990s and Beyond

The major educational development of the 1990s was the implementation of the recommendations contained in Government White Paper No. 2 of 1994 termed the Revised National Policy on Education (RNPE). The latter was government's reaction to the recommendations of the Kedikilwe Commission on Education (named after its Chairman) which was set up through a Presidential Decree in 1992 to establish ways of improving the quality of education. The thrust of the RNPE was its emphasis on the need to relate education to the world of work by vocationalising the curriculum. This was to be achieved in two basic ways; first, by giving all academic subjects (such as geography) a vocational orientation, and secondly, by introducing new technical and vocational subjects, thus broadening the curriculum. The effect of this development on geography was paradoxical; while vocationalising subjects made possible the review of and further improvement on the geography syllabus, curriculum expansion posed a threat to the existence of the very same modernised and vocationalised subject. It is therefore crucial to take a more detailed look at this paradox. But before this can be done, I would like first to place the RNPE's emphasis on vocationalism in its local as well as broader, if not global, political and economic context. It should be appreciated that 'buzz' phrases such as the 'world of work' and 'work-based learning' which characterised the RNPE also characterised educational innovation in Europe (for example, in Britain) and other parts of the world in the 1980s

and 1990s. Great Britain will be used as a reference point given its historical ties to Botswana

The World Economic Recession and the Rise of Vocational Education

The late 1970s witnessed two interesting events in world politics and economics – the enduring economic recession which to some (e.g. Gamble & Walton, 1976) signalled a ‘crisis of capitalism’, and the rise of neo-conservative governments in the USA (the Reagan Administration) and in Britain (the Thatcher government). The economic crisis led to hyper-inflation and a stagnation in production (Boron, 1995). This in turn led to high and rising unemployment. This was blamed, among others, on welfarism which characterised the ‘Keynesian consensus’ of the post-1945 period. The solution, in the view of the neo-conservative governments, lay in free-market economics. The role of education in the ‘New World Order’ had to be re-conceptualised. Progressive education was, for example, viewed by the Far Right in Britain as anti-competition. This, it was argued, negatively affected Britain’s global competitiveness. There was, therefore, need to re-configure education so that it could serve the needs of the national economy and workplace. One way was to vocationalise the curriculum, and this was carried out in the form of the Technical and Vocational Education Initiative (TVEI) in the 1980s and the General National Vocational Qualifications (GNVQ) system in the 1990s. In essence these innovations were intended to link education to, and prepare students for, the world of work (Bash & Coulby, 1989). Whether there, indeed, is a causal link between education and the performance of the economy is a hotly debated issue (see, e.g. Avis *et al.*, 1996). This debate notwithstanding, the belief in the existence of the link, and the rhetoric of the ‘world of work’ underpinned the work of the Kedikilwe Commission. In its *modus operandi* the Commission visited countries in three continents (Africa, Europe and Asia). Among the countries visited were Great Britain, Ireland, Denmark, Sweden, Malaysia, and South Korea. All these countries have education systems that link education with the world of work. It is, therefore, not difficult to see where the Commission’s emphasis on the world of work came from.

At the domestic front, government was under pressure to act on the perceived decline in education quality. It was acknowledged that the ‘success in quantitative development of the school system [spurred by Education for Kagisano] [had] not been adequately matched by qualitative improvements’ (Republic of Botswana, 1994: 3). Faced with what was to emerge as its toughest election challenge in its entire history in 1994, the ruling Botswana Democratic Party seized upon the ideology of vocationalism as the solution to the problem of poor education quality. Politicians explained the soaring rate of unemployment not as a result of an ailing economy but rather as a result of an education system that was failing to produce people with the requisite skills to take up available (and/or generate) job opportunities. This is clearly captured in the following quotation from the White Paper:

In the past decade rapid economic growth and the resulting changes in the structure of the economy have resulted in shortages of skilled personnel.

However, the education system was not structured to respond to this demand. In addition to responding to the needs of the economy, the development of an expanded technical and vocational training system will further increase access to education for school leavers. (Republic of Botswana, 1994:3)

In order to link education to the world of work the senior secondary school curriculum among others, was to 'have a practical orientation which [would] allow students to have hands-on experience and the opportunity of applying knowledge and skills acquired to real life situations' and would also 'seek links with industry and the private sector to prepare learners for the world of work' (Republic of Botswana, 1999a:3). The over-arching aim of these innovations was to 'offer individuals a life-long opportunity to develop themselves and make their country competitive internationally' (Republic of Botswana, 1994: 3).

To enable the education system to accomplish this all subject syllabi were to be extensively reviewed with the aim of producing skills-based syllabi. Each subject was to justify its inclusion in the curriculum by cogently demonstrating that it was capable of imparting skills that would prepare the learner for the world of work. This was yet another opportunity to extensively review the geography syllabus.

The Geography Syllabus and Vocationalism

A task force was set up by the Ministry of Education in 1998 to develop a skills-based geography syllabus. At its first meeting the Education Officer responsible for geography reminded the task force members of the primary purpose of the meeting and the others that were to follow: it was to design a curriculum which 'addresses Botswana's industrial concerns, caters for life-long education and enables Botswana children to join tertiary training institutions' (Republic of Botswana, 1999b:2). The Task Force started its work in January 1999 and developed a syllabus that was implemented in January 2000. It was instructed to develop a syllabus that clearly showed the kind of skills that were to be promoted in the learners. Only content that promoted a particular skill or set of skills was to be included in the syllabus. In other words, knowledge/content was not to be covered just for its own sake. It was to act as a medium through which the learner acquired skills. Content was to be subservient to the skills to be developed. In this we might be witnessing the retreat of the academic tradition in favour of the utilitarian tradition. Indications are that this is most probably the case. Naish (1996: 68) observes that since the 1960s there has been a 'relentless move towards an economic [or utilitarian] view of education' with its emphasis on the world of work.

The development of the syllabus was a deductive process based on the behaviourist objectives model of curriculum development. The Task Force started by developing general aims of the subject. These had to be in tandem with the aims of the senior secondary programme as laid out in the Curriculum Blue Print. Then general objectives pertaining to the specific topics were generated. These defined in general what the student should be able to do after completing a topic. Specific objectives were then generated from the general objectives: these were specific skills which the learner should be able to demonstrate as a result of

having undergone instruction, and to be stated in assessable and measurable behavioural terms. The pitfalls of such an approach are obvious: values and attitudes of students are not accommodated; knowledge is atomised, and too many objectives are produced (Naish, 1996), not to mention the problem of identifying geographic content that is vocational in nature.

It is not possible here to describe in detail the various facets of the resultant syllabus. Suffice it to observe that these pitfalls notwithstanding, the syllabus in many respects was a qualitative improvement on the 1983 syllabus. I will just highlight three of its properties that were indicative of a qualitative improvement.

Introduction of course work

This takes the form of geography projects to be carried out by all geography candidates. The grade obtained in the project will contribute to certification. This clears the way for fieldwork – an element that has always been missing in geographical education in Botswana. The project, which will carry a 20% weighting, will be assessed at the centre (i.e. the school) by the teachers and then externally moderated. For the first time geography teachers will make input into the final grade of their students. However, the introduction of course work will be delayed due to lack of appropriate materials. Teachers will also need in-service training on the handling of course work. In the interim, an alternative paper (Paper 3) based on Research Techniques/Skills and carrying the same weighting of 20% as course work will be taken by all geography candidates.

An expanded assessment regime

Unlike the previous syllabi, the new syllabus has assessment objectives. These specify the skills and competencies that are to be tested. Daugherty (1990) observes that part of the growing sophistication of geography examining is the pre-specification of assessment objectives. The four assessment objectives are:

- (1) Knowledge with understanding.
- (2) Skills development and application.
- (3) Awareness, evaluation and decision making.
- (4) Research skills and data manipulation.

Geography candidates are to be assessed in all these four competencies in three papers. Compared to past syllabi the new syllabus tests a wider range of abilities and competencies. The weighting of the papers is shown in Table 1.

Table 1 Weighting of the four papers

<i>Paper</i>	<i>Weighting (%)</i>
1. [Eight structured essay-type questions]	50
2. [Mapwork & Quantitative Techniques]	30
3. [Interim] [Alternative to Paper 4] OR	20
4. [Coursework] [To be introduced later]	20
	100

Conspicuously absent in the papers are the traditional essay and the objective, multiple-choice questions. These have been replaced with the stimulus/data response and structured essay type questions. Examination papers on the new syllabus were made available from November 2001, and release of the new syllabus was accompanied by sample examination papers. Part of a question from one of the sample papers (Paper 1) will suffice as an illustration of the nature of questions to be expected in the examination (Figure 1).

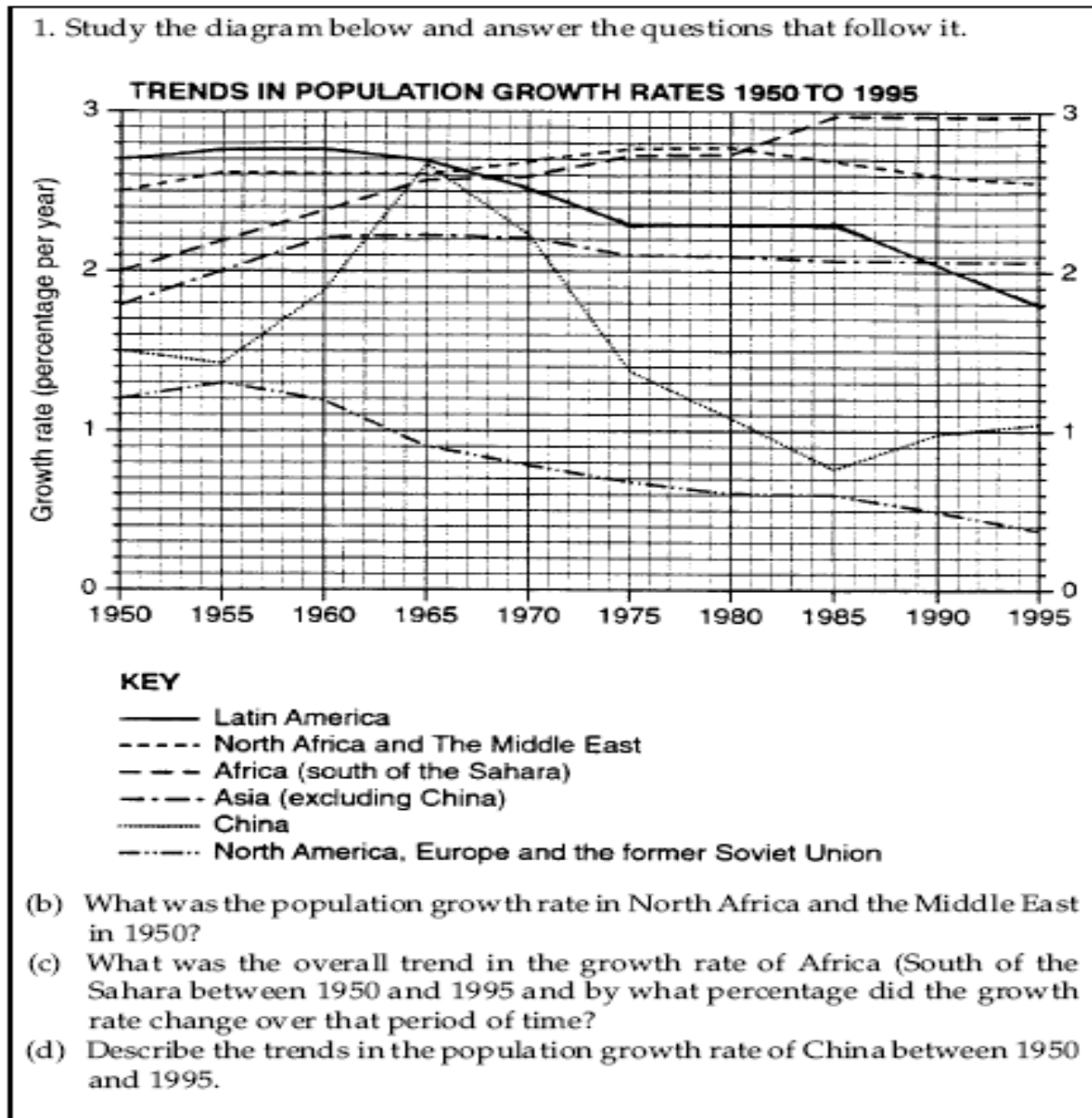


Figure 1 A sample stimulus/ data response question

This kind of question requires the candidate to interpret evidence rather than regurgitate material taught in class. The candidate is expected to apply geographical concepts, ideas and principles.

The connection between the examination papers and the Assessment Objectives is summarised in Table 2.

Table 2 Connection between exam papers and Assessment Objectives

<i>Assessment Objective</i>	<i>Paper 1</i>	<i>Paper 2</i>	<i>Paper 3</i>	<i>Paper 4</i>
1	✓	✓	✓	✓
2	✓	✓	✓	✓
3	✓	✓	✓	✓
4			✓	✓

It is clear that assessment of the four objectives is more or less evenly distributed across the papers.

Innovative teaching methods

Whereas the 1983 syllabus merely cautioned teachers against approaching the syllabus on traditional regional lines, the new syllabus is clear and explicit on the pedagogic approaches teachers are to employ. It prescribes a learner-centred approach. This is in line with the stipulation in the Curriculum Blue Print that the senior secondary curriculum should 'utilise innovative learner-centred approaches to teaching' (Republic of Botswana, 1999a: 3). These approaches purport to place emphasis on skills such as problem-solving, inquiry and hands-on experiences. Teachers are to use a variety of activity-oriented teaching methods such as 'project-work, fieldwork, group discussions, pair work, class presentations, computer-guided learning, and many others' (Republic of Botswana, 1999c: iii).

Thus, on the whole the vocationalisation of the geography curriculum provided an opportunity for improving geographical education in secondary schools in Botswana. Whether the syllabus will help develop the skills and competencies in students it is expected to develop remains to be seen. Again, whether teachers will shift from the currently overly teacher-dominated teaching to the proposed learner-centred teaching also remains to be seen.

Curriculum Expansion

As already mentioned, the RNPE adopted a double-pronged strategy in its attempt to link education to the world of work. One was that of giving all existing subjects a vocational orientation. The second strategy was that of introducing new vocational and technical subjects (such as home management, business studies, fashion and fabrics, computer studies, food and nutrition, art, design and technology) as optional subjects in the same category as geography. Some of these subjects are already being offered while some will be introduced through a phased-in approach. The potential threat of these subjects to geography cannot be under-estimated. It is clear that all these subjects are related to the world of

work, and whether they attract candidates will depend on their perceived utilitarian value. A huge tertiary infrastructure (such as technical and vocational colleges) associated with these subjects is being put into place. Thus, students who take these subjects at secondary school will be able to take the technical and vocational route if they fail to reach university entrance requirements. A subject's utilitarian value will therefore become an important determining factor or criterion as to whether it survives competition or falls by the wayside. It is this criterion that geography may have to satisfy if it is to survive the stiff competition it is likely to face in future. Given the problem of identifying vocational content in geography experienced by the Task Force it is doubtful if the subject would find itself on the same footing with the vocational and technical subjects listed above. Thus, geography might fail to meet the utilitarian criterion, which would make the position of geography tenuous indeed. It follows that the expansion of the curriculum is likely to bring uncertainty to the future of geography as a school subject.

The Way Forward

In attempting to chart a way forward for geographical education in Botswana we need to turn to the experiences of geographers in other countries who have at some stage in their history found themselves faced with a challenge similar to the one facing geographers and geography teachers in Botswana today. Here, one has in mind the tumultuous moments geography has been through in Great Britain since the 1980s partly due to vocationalism (see Rawling, 1997). The threat has been thwarted (at least for now) by the efforts of individuals and geographical bodies that have rallied to lobby for, and defend, geography. The situation in Botswana, as earlier stated, is radically different. There are no independent geographical bodies the likes of the Royal Geographical Society and the Geographical Association. Should authorities one day decide to exclude geography from the school curriculum there will be no independent forum to bring together geography teachers and educators to speak with one voice. This void leaves the subject vulnerable.

However, there does exist the Geography Association of Botswana (GAB), one of the many subject associations sponsored by the Ministry of Education. Its general aims are to provide a forum where professionals can share ideas of geographic nature and to raise awareness among students about the importance of geography. It does this by organising geography essay competitions on environmental issues, debates and quiz contests and exhibitions. GAB brings together geography teachers, university geographers and geography educators. Although not autonomous of government control, given the circumstances, it is the only body well-placed to carry out the geographical promotional activities suggested by Rawling (1997). It would be within its mandate, should the need arise, for it to actively carry out geography promotional campaigns in schools. Geography teachers, in particular, must realise that a threat to geography is a threat to their own careers. Geography is at present one of the most popular subjects in its sub-group. Reasons for its popularity have not been established yet. Whatever they are, it is important that students' interest be sustained. Geography teachers (since they are the ones in daily contact with the students and

know the situation on the ground better than anybody else) should take it upon themselves to promote the subject among students and parents. When building a case for geography, teachers will have to convince their clientele that geography has intrinsic value to a child's general education. One question they may have to confront is: what will individual students and the nation lose as a result of the disappearance of geography from the curriculum? The answer(s) to this question would constitute a justification for the need for a geographic education. Possible answers to the question could include the fact that geography is the only subject in the senior secondary school curriculum in Botswana whose focal point is the people-environment relationship. Environmental issues are topical issues in Botswana. This is testified, among others, by the mushrooming of non-governmental organisations concerned with the environment in the country. There is, therefore, need to produce an environmentally aware citizenry. Geography is well placed for this purpose.

However, extolling the virtues of the subject may not suffice to convince students and parents that geography is a subject worth studying. There will be need to cogently demonstrate that geography relates to the world of work; that career opportunities exist in the country for students who decide to study geography. This should be relatively easy to accomplish. A list of possible career paths open for students who study geography could be made, which would, among others, include tourism, meteorology, town and regional planning, and environmental impact assessment consulting. These could be used to 'market' the subject.

As a long-term strategy, an independent body grouping together university geographers, educators, teachers and non-governmental organisations (NGOs) should be established with the express purpose of promoting geographical education. At present, there is very minimal contact between university geographers and geography educators on one hand and geography teachers on the other. The former have never shown interest in what goes on in the schools. They seem not to understand that the demise of geography in the schools would make their own careers just as precarious as that of the school teachers.

Conclusion

In this paper I have attempted to demonstrate that the development of the geography curriculum in Botswana has been contradictory, characterised by renewal and contraction. Renewal was made possible by the two commissions on education both which presented opportunities for curriculum review. For this reason the geography curriculum in Botswana has over the years developed, largely keeping pace with international developments in geographic education. However, each opportunity for renewal also presented challenges for the future of the subject. We have seen that curriculum review occasioned by the 1977 Commission on Education saw geography's fortunes shrinking from being a subject of five years' duration to one being studied over three years. The 1993 Commission on Education, by recommending 10 years of basic education, led to further shrinkage of the subject. The same commission recommended the vocationalisation of the curriculum. This has seen the curriculum expanding,

with new technically and vocationally oriented subjects coming into being. This means more competition for geography.

It is now entirely up to those with vested interests in the subject (teachers, academic geographers and geography educators) to organise themselves and launch rigorous campaigns aimed at promoting the subject among politicians, students and the general public. These interest groups should appreciate the reality that no school subject has a divine right to be in the school curriculum. A subject's presence in the curriculum is only possible through the efforts of those committed to it. They need to make a strong case for the subject.

Finally, there is need to carry out research into the state of geographical education in Botswana. This is a grossly under-researched area of the curriculum. For example, there is need to understand the current popularity of the subject among high school students, as well as geography teachers' experiences with the new geography syllabus. Findings from such studies may lay the foundation for a review of the geography curriculum with the aim of making it more relevant to the interests of the students, teachers and the economy. Only subjects perceived to be relevant by the stakeholders stand a better chance of being competitive in an increasingly overcrowding curriculum.

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