

Sources of Positive Stereotypes: Perspectives of Junior Secondary Students in Botswana

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Abstract

This paper focused on the positive stereotypes junior secondary school students have of nationalities outside Africa. In addition, the paper examined the sources of the positive stereotypes as perceived by the students while implications were drawn for teacher education. A sample of 105 students matched some positive stereotypes to some nationalities, using the Princeton Trilogy. According to the findings, ten nationalities appeared mostly when the positive attributes such as scientifically-minded, intelligent, industrious, efficient, sportsmanlike, democratic, straightforward, alert, pleasure-loving and patriotic were matched by the students with various nationalities from their perceptions. The sources of information of these positive stereotypes were attributed by the students to the Internet, stories, television programmes, textbooks, friends, newspapers, radio, teachers' interaction, and other minor sources in that order. Some implications were drawn from the findings for teaching and teacher education which included the effective teaching of decision making processes, diversity through multicultural education, and the globalization of the teacher education programmes across the world.

Keywords: Teaching, Stereotypes, Nationalities, Information, Globalization

INTRODUCTION

The use of stereotypes whether in a negative or in a positive form is part and parcel of the global society, and inclusive of the school environment. It is not uncommon for students to refer to themselves using various forms of positive and negative 'name-calling' bordering on stereotypes, particularly when those students come from different parts of a country or another continent. In any multicultural setting, the use of stereotypes to categorize a major or a minor ethnic group is not new. Stereotypes are generalizations that are made about a group of people, a section of a country or 'having a mindset picture' in the head by a group of another group (Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman, 1997). Stereotypes tend to be the thinking or the beliefs of the perceivers regarding the way other human beings behave. These beliefs become generalizations or assumptions which in most cases are incorrect, that people have about other people or places far or near. These assumptions may be within a country, between countries, continents or on the basis of other diversities (Peffley *et al*, 1997).

Some stereotypes are positive and may include complementary descriptions of a people such as caring, hardworking, smart, cooperative, happy, civilised and generous. Some stereotypes may also include uncomplimentary remarks such as lazy, poor, violent, hungry, dangerous, polygamous, shrewd and unintelligent. In any setting, some

people may exhibit some of the positive remarks, some of the negative remarks or a combination of some of the positive and the negative remarks. Drawing a clear-cut boundary of people who totally fall into either category is difficult (Selwyn, Saunders & Farmer; 2010). It is safe to say that a people may exhibit some of the attributes of either category of both the negative and the positive stereotypes.

Stereotypes or generalized beliefs about people in the social world may be gender-related, race-related, class-related or historically related and may lead to prejudice and discrimination. At any setting involving people; home, school, workplace, or a social gathering, there is bound to be individual differences within and among people. Because this study focuses on the school setting, it concerns itself with the positive stereotypes students at some selected junior secondary school level in Botswana have of other people outside their national boundary. The choice of locations outside Botswana is deliberate so as to further enhance the knowledge of students since one of the aims of the *Three-Year Junior Secondary Social Studies Programme* is to enable students to have the knowledge of the world around them (Republic of Botswana, 1996). This implies knowledge or assumptions of what is happening in other parts of the globe. An upcoming paper will focus on the negative stereotypes the same sample of students have of other places.

The junior secondary students in Botswana are generally between 13 and 17 years old, having spent 7 years at the primary school level and are now spending 3 years at the junior secondary level before the duration of 2 years at the senior secondary level. After the third year at a junior secondary school, a graduate of such a school, among other aims is expected to have gained the necessary knowledge and ability to interact with and learn about their community, the government of their country, and the world around them (Republic of Botswana; 1996). This aim calls for the study of other places apart from Botswana. In the course of the teaching-learning situations, students tend to learn of other places through a variety of resources which may include textbooks, Internet, teachers, library, friends, radio, television, newspapers and other prints. Although there are positive and negative stereotypes about people and places, this study involves the positive views of students. As said earlier, efforts will be made to research and document the negative stereotypes in another paper. Therefore, what positive stereotypes do junior secondary students in Botswana have of farther environments, their sources, and the implications for teaching and teacher education?

Objectives

The objectives of this study are to:

1. Investigate the positive stereotypes junior secondary school students in Botswana have of other nations outside Africa;
2. Find out the sources of such stereotypes; and
3. Draw implications from the findings for teaching and teacher education.

Research Questions

To give direction and guide this study, the following research questions are derived from the objectives of this study.

1. What positive stereotypes do students have of other nationalities outside Africa?
2. What are students' sources of stereotypes?
3. What are the implications of the stereotypes to teaching and teacher education?

SOME RELATED STUDIES ON STEREOTYPES

Stereotypes or over-generalised beliefs about people in our social world begin to form at a very early age, which are initially and usually based on gender. Stereotypes based on gender occur at this stage because this is the one of the dimensions along which children are able to categorise the people they encounter (Steel, Choi & Ambady: In Press). When the children grow up, they view stereotypes as more descriptive and form generalized beliefs of society. Later on in life, children begin to develop views about people and places beyond their immediate environments Selwyn, Saunders & Farmer; 2010).

Burgess (2003) surmises that giving stereotypes to a group based on an image are often wrong. Burgess goes further to give an example of a study on stereotypes which reveal that Americans are generally considered to be friendly, generous, tolerant but arrogant, impatient, and domineering. In the same study, it was also revealed that Asians are shrewd and alert, but reserved. This generalization may not be correct. In a related study, Burgess countered the generalization by referring to Breslin's (1991) stand that not all Americans are friendly and generous; and not all Asians are reserved.

Peffley, Hurwitz & Sniderman (1997) in a study hold that whites holding negative stereotypes are substantially more likely to judge blacks more harshly than similarly described whites in the areas of welfare and crime policy, and that whites with strongly negative perceptions of blacks respond quite favourably to them when confronted with individuating information that clearly contradicts their stereotype.

Social psychologists believe initially that stereotypes reflect faulty mental processing; however, in recent years the argument is rife that stereotypes are actually necessary and quite normal for our cognitive functioning (Steel & Aronson, 1995). It is the view of Steel & Aronson (1995) that stereotypes can in a way affect the academic performance of members of negatively stereotyped groups. Further, Steel & Aronson (1995) reported in a test described as diagnostic of ability, African-Americans performed worse than Caucasian students, after controlling for differences in SAT scores, but those in non-diagnostic condition did not. The result by Spencer, Steele and Quinn (1999) was also reported of a mathematics test to test gender differences where women under-performed relative to men.

Stereotypes on social constructions may also be based on socio-economic conditions, history, customs, myths, and values of a culture. For instance, Osunde, Tlou and Brown (1996) found that many individuals in the United States still have a narrow-minded view of Africa south of the Sahara. Africans are stereotyped as primitive and the nations as backward, underdeveloped, and covered with jungles. Osunde *et al* (1996) attributed this view to the learning materials used in the US public schools. Osunde *et al* (1996) noted that the stereotypes people have of one another may after all not be correct as not all individuals in the target groups share the same opinions whether in the developed or in the developing countries. In any society, people share all forms of stereotypes to a certain degree. Therefore, people sharing both positive and negative stereotypes can be found in any given society.

Africans also have positive stereotypes of the Western countries which may not be entirely correct (Adeyemi, 1984; 2006). Some are based on exaggerations and dreams. A typical response from an interview conducted by Adeyemi (2006) with an African student studying at a University in the United States is produced below unedited:

I am from one of the African countries studying for my master degree. I came here on the assumption that I would work and pay for my tuition, buy a car, send money home to my parents, send for my wife and children to spend their vacation here, and in fact live like a king. Life here is not what I thought it to be. I do all sorts of menial jobs to keep body and soul together. I am so stressed. If I had known, I would have opted to do my master degree in my country. People in my community think that you are automatically a wealthy person the moment you are living in a Western country.

The lamentation above may be as a result of the 'sweet' news based on exaggeration or over-flogged description of places, people and phenomena. The statement is an indication that there is a gap between fact and fiction. Experience is also said to be the best teacher. Depending on personal circumstances, a majority of the friends of the speaker above would find it very difficult to believe his story unless they also experience the same circumstances. However, positive stereotypes are capable of developing friendship and mutual respect between and among nations. At the same time, teaching students to be aware of the dangers inherent in either incorrect positive and negative stereotypes or views may also be beneficial in terms of enrichment of knowledge.

METHODOLOGY

In order to achieve the objectives set forth in this paper, the description of the methodology used in the study is hereby presented.

Sample

Botswana was stratified into three regions, the north, the central and the south. From a list of junior secondary schools in Botswana, one junior secondary school was randomly chosen from each of the regions, resulting in the selection of three junior secondary schools from the country. A final year class (Form 3) was again randomly chosen from each of the three schools and earmarked for the study. For ease of identification, the three classes were coded Class A, Class B and Class C. It should be noted that social studies as a subject is compulsory for all students up to the final year of junior secondary school. Therefore, irrespective of subjects being offered by the final year students, they must also offer social studies as a compulsory subject. An investigation of the *Three-Year Junior Secondary Syllabus (Social Studies)* (Republic of Botswana, 1996) depicts that the following modules related to knowledge of other parts of the world have been taught by teachers:

- Socialisation: Local and International; and
- International Relationships and foreign policy.
- Trade and Communication, among others.

An observation of some of the topics related to the two modules above include national and international citizenship, foreign policy, Botswana's external involvement with the world, the world environments, trade and communication, and population, to mention a few. From the foregoing, students may have picked up positive impressions of other people of the world from their social studies lessons, in addition to other sources which may include stories, television programmes, instructional materials, hearsay, pamphlets and others.

All the students in the three randomly chosen classes were used in this study. There were 34 students in Class A, 38 students in Class B and 33 students in Class C, from Schools A, B and C, making a total of 105 students used in this study.

Instrument

The instrument used in this study was *The Princeton Trilogy* which lists some positive and negative stereotypes. The instrument has been used a number of times on studies associated with ethnic and national stereotypes (Madon, Guyll, Aboufadel, Montiel, Smith, Palumbo and Jussim, 2001). The trilogy contains 52 attributes randomly mingled with one another. The attributes include such descriptions or views associated with particular people or nationalities as industrious, intelligent, materialistic, ambitious, progressive, pleasure loving, alert, aggressive, individualistic lazy, arrogant, efficient stubborn, cruel, boastful, straightforward, primitive, extremely nationalistic, adventurous, and so on. The investigator picked only the positive stereotypes for use in this study e.g. some nations are democratic, scientifically minded, industrious, patriotic etc.

There were 30 positive stereotypes contained in the instrument (extracted from the study of Madon *et al*, 2001). One hundred and five (105) copies of the 'new' *trilogy* were printed and distributed respectively for administration to the teachers in School A, B and C in the following order depending on the numbers of students in Class A, B and C: 34, 38, and 33. They were administered by the three social studies teachers during the social studies lessons in their respective schools and classrooms. The junior secondary school students were requested to match the positive stereotypes as many times as possible in the world with some nationalities they think possess the positive attributes, apart from their continent of Africa.

Finally, the students were asked to list the sources of the impressions they have of the peoples or nationalities they have matched with the positive traits anywhere in the world. The stereotypes or traits were counted for each nationality and recorded in percentages and ranks for the first most occurring nationalities. Descriptive statistics in terms of absolute numbers, percentages and rank orders were employed in answering the three research questions generated from the objectives of this study.

FINDINGS

Altogether, 105 subjects made up of 34, 38 and 33 junior secondary school students drawn from three stratified regions in Botswana participated in this study. The 10 most chosen positive stereotypes and the corresponding nationalities by students were utilized for this study. Table 1 shows the 10 most chosen positive stereotypes with the corresponding nationalities.

Table 1 shows the responses of the 105 students who matched positive stereotypes to some nationalities. The figures are in percentages while the figures in parentheses are the ranks for the nationalities according to each positive attribute. It should be noted that each attribute or stereotype may be interpreted not to be entirely positive or negative depending on the culture. For example, pleasure-loving may be positive or negative depending on some cultures. In Africa for instance, pleasure-loving may be negative as if one does not want to work but likes enjoyment, whereas the *Princeton Trilogy* regards it as a positive stereotype. Again, only the first ten nationalities are extracted from the study on positive stereotypical views because others seemed insignificant.

Sixteen percent (16%) of the junior secondary school students under study hold the view that Americans are scientifically-minded and ranked first among the ten nations in Table 1. This is followed by the Israelis. The

Russians, Japanese and Germans tied for the third positions while the British, Indians and French also tie for the sixth rank. Finally, the Chinese and Australians tied for the tenth rank.

On being intelligent, the Japanese were ranked first by 14% of the 105 students, followed by the Americans with 12%, the British with 11%, the Chinese, Indians, French and Israelis tied fourth with 10%, the Germans with 9% and scoring the seventh rank, the Russians and Australians having 7% and 4% with the ninth and tenth ranks respectively.

Table 1: Positive Stereotypes (Attributes) of Some Nationalities

Nationalities/ Attributes, % of Mention and Rank (R)	Americans % (R)	Russians % (R)	Chinese % (R)	Japanese % (R)	Indians % R	British % R	Germans % R	French % R	Israelis % R	Australians % R
Scientifically-Minded	16(1)	10(3)	4(10)	10(3)	8(6)	8(6)	10(3)	8(6)	13(2)	4(10)
Intelligent	12(2)	7 (9)	10(4)	14(1)	10(4)	11(3)	9(4)	10(4)	10(4)	4(10)
Industrious	10(4)	6 (5)	24(1)	20(2)	4(9)	6(5)	6(5)	4(9)	14(3)	5(8)
Efficient	15(2)	8 (6)	26(1)	12(3)	2 (10)	8(6)	8(6)	10(4)	10(4)	8(6)
Sportsmanlike	18(3)	4 (3)	3 (8)	--	10(5)	25(1)	21(2)	15(4)	--	6(6)
Democratic	30(1)	--	--	--	6(7)	20(2)	10(5)	12(4)	15(3)	10(5)
Straightforward	10(2)	4 (6)	12(1)	8(3)	--	2(9)	4(6)	5(5)	6(4)	4(6)
Alert	20(2)	6 (6)	5 (8)	10 (3)	4 (9)	8(4)	7(5)	6(6)	25(1)	2(10)
Pleasure loving	35(1)	--	--	--	2 (6)	15(3)	12(4)	18(2)	--	10(5)
Patriotic	20(2)	4 (9)	10(4)	12(3)	--	8(5)	5(8)	6(5)	26(1)	6(6)
Average % of Positive Attributes	18.6	4.9	9.1	8.6	4.2	11.1	9.2	9.4	11.7	5.9
Overall Rank	1	9	6	7	10	3	5	4	2	8

Twenty-four percent (24%) of the students were of the view that the Chinese are industrious and therefore ranked first. Second in percentage are the Japanese with 20% and ranked second while the Israelis scored 14% and ranked third. Other nationalities are as follow: Americans; 10% and ranked fourth, British, Germans and Russians scored 6% and ranked fifth; Australians scored 5% and ranked eighth, while the Indians and the French tied with 4% and ranked ninth.

On efficiency, the Chinese were first with 26%, the Americans came second with 15%, the Japanese third with 12%, the French and the Israelis tied with 10% and ranked fourth, the Russians, British, Germans and Australians tied with 8% and ranked sixth while the Indians scored 2% and placed tenth. While the details of the findings are contained in Table 1, further reports are provided on the first best three nationalities, according to the views of the students. On being sportsmanlike, the British scored 25% to be in the first rank, the Germans in the second rank with 21% and the American in the third rank with 18%. On the basis of democracy, Americans are regarded as the most democratic with 30% of the students positively stereotyping them to be so, the British scored 20% and ranked second while the Israelis scored 15% and ranked third.

Twelve percent of the students were of the view that the Chinese were straightforward and ranked them first, followed by the Americans with 10% and the Japanese with 8%. On being alert, the Israelis came first with 25% and followed by the Americans with 20% and the Japanese with 10%. When it comes to pleasure-loving, the Americans were rated first by 35% of the respondents to be pleasure-loving, second were the French by 18% and the third were the British by 15% of the students. On patriotism, the Israelis were ranked first with 26%, second were the Americans with 20% and the third were the Japanese with 12%.

Even though not all the nationalities were scored for the ten positive stereotypes, an average of the overall percentages as found in Table 1 for the traits indicate the following in rank order as found in parentheses: (1) Americans 18.6%; (2) Israelis 11.7%; (3) British 11.1%; (4) French 9.4%; (5) Germans 9.2%; (6) Chinese 9.1%; (7) Japanese 8.6%; (8) Australians 5.9%; (9) Russians 4.9% and (10) Indians 4.2%.

The results emanating from this study may not be the same in other environments depending on many factors which may include content or syllabi of subjects being taught in schools, television programmes and other sources of information as tabulated in Table 2. The junior secondary school students chose as many

sources as possible; hence the percentages and the ranks were calculated from the frequencies of the mentions of the sources. In other words, a student may choose as many sources as possible.

Table 2: Sources of Stereotypes

Source	Number of Mention (N=105 Respondents)	Percentage (%)	Rank Order
Textbooks	30	28.6	4
Internet	50	47.6	1
Teachers	10	9.5	8
Friends	26	24.7	5
Television	32	30.4	3
Radio	18	17.1	7
Newspapers	24	22.8	6
Stories	34	32.3	2
Others	2	1.9	9

Table 2 depicts the sources of the stereotypes held by students. A finding indicates that of the 105 students, 50 or approximately 48% of them identified the Internet as a source of their views or stereotypes about other nationalities. It means that the internet is a powerful source of information going by the fact that the students ranked it first as their source of information. Access to the Internet in schools in Botswana is high and students may form their views while surfing through the internet. Students expressed the views that the internet is a common source of information as they surf through various websites on routine basis.

Other sources of information regarding stereotypes are in this rank order and percentage: Stories (2) with 32.3%; Television (3) with 30.4%; Textbooks (4) with 28.6%; Friends (5) with 24.7%; Newspapers (6) with 22.8%; Radio programmes (7) with 17.1%; Teachers (8) with 9.5%; and other minor sources as written by students such as pamphlets and newsletters, (9) with 1.9 %.

This being the case, stereotypes, whether positive or negative derive from the Internet, stories, television programmes, instructional materials particularly prescribed textbooks, comments from friends, newspapers, radio programmes, classroom interaction with teachers and pamphlets and newsletters. The views held by students concerning certain nationalities and the sources of the views or stereotypes have implications for teacher education.

Some Implications of Stereotypes for Teaching and Teacher Education

The views held by students or people in countries around the world about themselves in the same global village may be important in the understanding of world peace and order. Further, the sources of stereotypes whether positive or negative about people near and far are important in 'correcting' the wrong views we have of one another through miscommunication of ideas and beliefs. Thorough knowledge of the facts and the fiction on global stereotypes and their sources may minimize the wrong conceptions about people and places all over the world

Since teachers are the *loci parentis* of the students, it becomes necessary to provide some implications of this study for both pre-service and in-service in the colleges and faculties of education in Botswana, Africa and beyond. The emphasis of the suggestions may go a long way to enhance the development and the awareness of the knowledge of global citizens and reduce the wrong conceptions we have of ourselves and others within the planet. Below are some considerations for teaching and teacher education.

Decision making Processes

As Adeyemi (2007) suggests, the teaching of content of social studies, history, development studies, geography, political science, economics and other related subjects on other nations of the world at the colleges of education, must reduce stereotypical attitudes among students. A thorough strategy of teaching decision making processes may enhance the development of global-wide cultural awareness among students in their day-to-day activities and the way they view the global citizens. This may also lead to the development of the perception that all human beings are members of the same family living together in harmony in a global village irrespective of colour, religion, nationality, race, gender, and other alignments.

Students should be able to make decisions based on their ability to discover and make inferences and not rely on hearsay and other sources of bias. Decision making according to Engle (1978) and Gallavan (2003), is said to be the heart of social studies. In fact, it ought to be the heart of any discipline. Therefore, instructional materials used in schools, television programmes, history being passed from generation to generation and stories being taught to students must imbibe a culture of decision making so that students would be able to question the validity of information. Teacher education programme should be able to afford teacher candidates with the ability to present reasoned arguments based on given information, the ability to collect data through personal observations and ask questions, comprehend and evaluate various kinds of evidence. This teacher education programme being advocated for must foster and equip future teachers with the curriculum and the knowledge for the awareness of the increasing complexities and interconnectedness of the world.

Teacher education programmes should take cognizance of the possibility of introducing biased information in the content of curriculum and so periodic review is necessary to update the information passed to students. Television programmes, particularly the schools television programmes shown to students for specific subjects must be edited by subject specialists to determine the trueness of the information shown to students. Teacher education programmes should include aspects of educational technology which may enhance pre-service and in-service students to be able to use the television, textbooks, newspapers and the Internet in an acceptable manner to students in the continuous efforts to reduce incorrect perceptions of places and people.

Diversity

Teacher education programme should also enable pre-service and in-service teachers imbibe the awareness of the diversity of human races. The teacher education programme being advocated for should start with our local diversity in terms of ethnic group, gender, language, religion and even the individual differences in the classroom. Later, aspects of diversity may shift from the local to the national and finally to the international levels. In fact, the teacher education programme must also see the need for teacher candidates to be taught aspects of psychology which may equip teachers with the ability to effectively handle diverse students in the classrooms. This may reduce the wrong impressions we have about other people.

It may be necessary to teach students that colour, whether white, black or brown is as a result of pigmentation and that all human beings are the same anatomically. The food we like and consume depends very much on our culture. There are many religions and beliefs all over the world and they include Christianity, Islam, Buddhism, Hinduism, and other traditional religions. As UNESCO (2009) rightly notes, cultural diversity is a driving force of development, not only in respect of economic growth, but also as a means of leading a more fulfilling intellectual, emotional, moral and spiritual life. In addition to the values mentioned earlier, teacher education programme should also emphasise aspects of human rights to future teachers that every human being is free to practice any religion. Multicultural education should form part of teacher education programme.

Globalization of the Teacher Education Curriculum

As educators, there is the need to teach students the art of decision making. It is established that stereotypes whether positive or negative are learned through hearsay, media, education, history and jokes, among others. Randolph (2008), Facione & Facione (2007) call for educators to carefully examine and challenge knowledge

and assumptions; otherwise our misimpressions can influence the kinds of learning opportunities we create for children and other people. Students tend to learn of other places through a variety of resources which may include textbooks, Internet, teachers, library, friends, radio, television, newspapers and other prints. Teacher education programmes at various schools of education need to include elements of decision making strategies to combat stereotypes that can enable students to distinguish between facts and fictions on a global scale.

An expectation of the education system in Botswana is not only to produce citizens who would be able to contribute their quotas to the development of the country, but also to deal with global issues and be knowledgeable in world affairs. Knowledge on global issues should transcend national boundaries and should involve the interconnection of cultural, ecological, political and technological systems (Thorne & Bonie-Baker, 1993). Since the world is a global village and what happens in one part is likely to affect the other parts, studies on stereotypes people have of one another may be of immense educational benefits so as to correct the wrong impressions humans develop of one another.

CONCLUSION

The training of high quality teachers who are well versed in values education, global education, multicultural education at the junior secondary level in Botswana and elsewhere is necessary if students of today and the future are to be thoroughly educated to differentiate facts from fictions. The education system should endeavour to educate students on how to discriminate between realities and ideas. Teachers of courses dealing with values and psychology need to be equipped with the skills of dealing with wrong generalizations of people and places. During the teaching-learning process, students should be made aware that stereotypes become a problem when they are inaccurate. Textbooks and other teaching materials used in schools should, as much as possible, build positive understanding of people and different cultures all over the world.

In many schools, educational radio and television broadcasts are used to teach topics on various cultures of the world. The media, particularly the television and the prints can help learners understand the complexities of world cultures in a manner that could enhance the appreciation of the beliefs and practices of other people's cultures. The encouragement of international understanding through textbooks, television and movies, radio broadcasts, stories and other sources of information may lead to the appreciation of various cultures in the world.

Further research needs to be conducted by educators on decision making processes and the psychology of correct mental comprehension of happenings in other environments. As stated earlier, a similar research on the negative stereotypes held by students is necessary to strike a balance in the way they perceive many nationalities. A replication using the same subjects or more subjects in any other location is a welcome idea. In essence, these measures may serve a means of re-educating people to have a better perspective of the world and also to dispel myths about people and places.

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