



Exploring Teachers' Current Practices of Using Local History Projects to Develop Learner's Historical Skill

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore teachers' current practices of using local history projects to develop learners' historical skills. The teaching of local history projects has the potential to develop learners' historical skills, as it forces one to compare perspectives, reflect and re-conceptualise the past people and events and locate their places in the present. The study uses critical pedagogy as a conceptual framework, coaching the study with an interpretive paradigm to guide the qualitative approach. The study purposefully sampled five participants from five different schools. Semi-structured interviews and document analysis were employed to collect data. Thematic analysis was used to make sense of the data. The findings show that Social Science teachers who participated in this study create adequate opportunities while teaching local history to develop learners' historical skills even though they limit learners to their school and family histories. There is a need for teachers to be more explicit on the skills that need to be displayed by the learners. Furthermore, alternative ways of finding information, such as ICT, should also be explored.

Keywords

History teaching, Local history, Local history project, Historical skills

INTRODUCTION

History teaching in schools has evolved beyond the focus of content in the form of dates and names of people to a more comprehensive approach that addresses content, critical thinking, and historical skills (Boadu, 2020). This move also influenced the adoption and use of other forms of assessment and learning activities that could be used in schools (Cohn, 2020). Initially, the focus was on writing tests, assignments, home works and examinations that were reliant on what was covered in the classroom and mainly in textbooks as dictated by the different curriculum policies to include out-of-classroom activities such as research, oral history projects, creating documentaries, and the local history projects amongst others (Gulluhan, 2022) These are usually used as part of continuous assessment and go a long way in developing other critical thinking and historical skills. This paper will focus on local history as one of such essential projects used in teaching history to develop historical skills (Avianto, 2023).

The teaching of the local history approach has been adopted and used in many countries, such as the United Kingdom, the United States of America, and Turkey (Goksu & Somen, 2019). The main focus of this approach is to ensure that history teaching involves the development of historical and critical thinking skills (Bertram, 2020). In pursuance of this objective, curriculum content, aims, objectives, and assessment were adjusted to reflect these changes.

During the local history project, learners learn more about the content under investigation and develop skills such as project planning, investigation, interviewing, report writing, communication and presentation, to name but a few (Eesman et al., 2021). To achieve the intended outcome, history teachers must be able to teach and assess the local history project. Learners must be thoroughly prepared to enable them to learn and develop their skills. Failure to do it properly often results in poorly formulated research projects that miss the local history project's real aim and focus (Thomas, 2022).

Different scholars focused on using and teaching local history projects as a powerful pedagogical tool that can be used in the classroom to develop historical understanding and learning (Bhar, 2018). In the study by Cronin (2022), he asserts that local history projects bring history alive to learners by capturing personal stories and connecting them to individual and historical events. Learning local history projects can help learners realise the grand scheme of historical change of countless individuals, like learners and those around them, who contributed to their community's ongoing story (Cameron, 2021). Teaching local history projects can be an excellent way to foster learners' sense of identity and connectedness to their community; such activities can help learners develop historical skills (Bartholomew, 2022). The study aims to explore history teachers' current practices of using local history projects to develop learners' historical skills.

While the above study by different authors has positively contributed to the study of local history, there is no evidence of the teachers' current practice of using local history projects to develop learner's historical skills in the classroom. The caption (Dere, 2018) clearly states that the effectiveness of curriculum implementation can only be realised if teachers, in their preparations, presentation and assessment, are expected to present local history effectively in their subject area. Conversely, Kabapinar (2018) writes that the effectiveness of teaching local history depends on the teachers' ability to present teaching materials that learners can access. The study addresses that what teachers do in the classroom does not mitigate the development of learners' historical skills in a Social Science classroom.

PROBLEM STATEMENT

The use of local history as a project has been in the CAPS document for a few years. However, there is still a concern about learners' ability to display specific historical and cognitive skills (Rosyad et al., 2022). History learners seem to struggle when dealing with local history projects to demonstrate the required historical skills such as research, narrative, interview and ability to arrange facts chronologically (Dutt-Doner et al., 2019) which is supported by Goksu (2019) who maintains that learners are not able to develop the skills to analyse and comparing similar events.

This can be attributed to teacher inability to teach and formulate meaningful local history projects by administering local history projects, different assessment forms, and the multidisciplinary teaching of history and geography as identified by various scholars (Rasulov, 2022). On the other hand, teachers also have the challenge of planning, implementing, and assessing local history projects in a manner that addresses curriculum expectations and the acquisition of a variety of historical skills (Nevenglosky, 2018). Bertram (2020) writes there is a concern that teachers do not possess a deeper understanding of core historical skills and concepts that preclude learners from acquiring relevant historical skills. Nevertheless, it has been noted that the teachers continue to focus on only academic textbook objectives without addressing the required skills of the projects (Graham, 2019). This poorly formulated results in teachers missing the opportunity to use the local history project meaningfully to address curriculum aims and skills.

In this paper, we attempt to understand the current teachers' practices of using local history projects to develop learners' historical skills in the classroom.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

The conceptual framework underpinning this study is Critical Pedagogy. Critical pedagogy found its roots in a Brazilian educator and activist, Paulo Freire, using the principles of critical theory as its primary sources and is deeply rooted in Hengel's Kant's critical philosophy (Gendron, 2022; Mackernan, 2013). Freire defined crucial pedagogy as a vital approach to education, highlighting the importance of having learners engaged actively in their learning process and being able to find and develop their own opinions and positions (Kaya & Kaya, 2017). Critical pedagogy effectively enhances students' critical thinking capability and generates positive behaviour change in students' lives (Gibson, 2020). This strategy enhances students' consciousness, current practices and judgement. It gives students a voice to speak in a classroom (Serrano et al., 2022).

For the purpose of the study, CP and its principles will be viewed as relevant to the study because they play an integral part in the classroom. The two most essential principles are Curriculum and Authentic Materials and the Role of the Teacher and Students. Curriculum and authentic material (Giroux, 2020) are found through students' experiences and the realities of their lives. It further states that students had to bring their experiences for their study and place that knowledge in the context in which it occurs. Teachers in this approach are viewed as problem posers; they must empower their students by raising their awareness to offer societal institutions (Lynn, 2022). Students in this regard are active participants in that they correct curricula with the teacher, share their ideas and learn to challenge assumptions (McLarren & Bosio, 2022). CP gives the researcher the lens to zoom in on how teachers present their work and assess the learners in a classroom. The researcher believes that what the teacher does in class could be understood in data obtained through interviews and document analysis.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Local History and Local History Project

The following section will address local history and local history project concepts. The two concepts can be viewed and understood similarly but differ in context. Local history is the study of history in a geographically bounded area such as a region, a state, a country, a town, a village or a neighbourhood (Stapleton, 2022). Furthermore, Morris (2022) defines local history as the history of our place, including the history of our families, description of traditions, country cuisine and

folklore. On the other hand, Buckingham (2023) adds that local history reflects the unique places that shape our lives and that our physical place is a significant determinant of our lives. Local history matters because it is not a community without understanding its past. The traditions, stories, and civic commemorations transform our city into a community. Telling these stories and continuing these traditions help strengthen our community (Healey, 2012).

On the other hand, local history projects are defined by Yasin (2022) as teacher-directed collaboration projects in which learners research the history of their community and share their findings with their global peers. On the other hand, Rickmann (2018) further add that through local history projects, learners study their neighbourhood and particular buildings, conduct interviews with local people, take historical photographs and analyse various local documents (Metcalf & Downey, 2021). Eisman et al. (2021) summarise the previous assertions well when saying that local history projects are an effort that involves a series of activities, sources, and resources aimed to achieve specific outputs that will relate to historical content skills. Local history project further allows learners to contextualise their historical thinking, such as source analysis, deliberation of issues and connecting to prior knowledge and in-life experience (Clarke & Lee, 2020).

Charamba (2020) emphasises that local history projects' value helps learners better understand their community and their immediate world. One of the values of teaching learners local history projects is to care about their places, appreciate historical and cultural environments, care for and respect older generations, and understand and appreciate past and present historical heritage (Duff, 2019). Rittidet (2011) writes that the local history projects research results show that our society needs excellent and responsible citizens who value and love their community and its members. Furthermore, research has shown that local history projects should be taught in the history curriculum because it enables learners to develop skills such as investigating and learning history to form a connection between the past and present, and learners gain essential life skills (Goksu & Somen, 2019). Over and above, Aktekin (2020) and McCoy and Sabzalian (2021) point out that society can know itself and their family history by engaging in local history projects.

Learners must demonstrate knowledge of local history, develop and understand research skills, and analyse, interpret, interview, and conduct research with primary sources (Aktin & Tekir, 2018).

Teaching the Local History Project

A local history project is a very complex activity that requires sound, meticulous planning and implementation. The teacher plays an important role in designing and planning the activity (Goksu, 2019). Different steps can be used to ensure meaningful use of the local history project to develop historical skills. Aktin and Tekir (2018) and Crocco and Marino (2017) suggest that teaching local projects can be divided into three steps: planning, implementation, and conclusion. This view is further supported by Judson-Whitehouse (2023), who asserts that the teacher should deliberately take the learners through these steps; they are not presented as a single presentation. They happen through the project to emphasise certain aspects and clarify what is to be covered in the project. These steps will be elucidated in the following part of the study.

Planning

In this section of the study, the focus will be on the four most crucial parts of planning, which are the aim of the project, the introduction; the sources needed for the project, and the form of assessment. The planning stage of the project can be referred to when the teacher is planning the entire project, thinking about the focus of the activity, where and how it will be conducted, and what it will entail and be assessed (Fewing & Christian, 2019). Therefore, it is imperative that when the teacher and the learners are discussing the planning of the project, the following stages must be considered.

The Aim of the Project

The project's aim, as Ataro (2020) outlined, should be simple, brief, and a factual statement regarding what learners should achieve at the end. In this regard, the aim of giving learners a local history project is to develop their historical skills in the classroom. The project must have a specific aim and focus; the aim and focus is to develop learners' historical skills. Literature has shown that learners struggle to display the required historical skills and self-reflection, as explained by McCall et al. (2018). CAPS (2013) emphasised the significance of history as a subject on empowering learners with critical historical skills and knowledge.

The Introduction of the Project

To prepare learners for this type of project work, the teacher needs to know how and where to get learners started. The teacher should be able to explain what the project is all about. It should include key details about the project, giving the reader enough information to understand its purpose and scope (Naicker, 2020). The teacher needs to generate a comprehensive list of suggested topics that learners could carry out at home, at school, or in the community, eliminating some of the frustrations that learners feel when first confronted with such a project. The critical aspect that learners should make is the choice of the relevant topic for the project (Smith, 2019). Different studies have shown that learners are not given the luxury of choosing a topic for their project (Dorn & Hancock, 2020). The best way for a learner to select a suitable topic is to identify a researchable topic (Hoyt & Morris, 2022).

The Sources Relevant to the Project

A source is anything that might inform a person about something or provide knowledge to somebody (Flynn, 2020), and it may be observation, people's speeches, documents, pictures and organisations. To properly research a project, a learner

must use primary or secondary sources (Bickford et al., 2020). The teacher needs to know what sources are available in school and the community. Once the topic has been decided, learners have to match the topic with available sources of information (Waring & Hartshome, 2020) and thus have to identify the community resources and places such as libraries, museums, schools, and local history societies.

The Form of Assessment

Assessment helps the teachers, learners, parents and other relevant stakeholders to understand the depth and breadth of learning undertaken so that progress can be discussed and planned (Mafuga, 2021). Teachers are challenged to assess local history projects in a manner that addresses curriculum expectations and various historical skills (Nevenglosky, 2018). Bertram (2020) writes that teachers do not possess a deeper understanding of core historical concepts and skills to assess learners to develop their historical skills. For the teacher to assess the project, the teacher needs to develop a rubric or a marking guide alone or with the learners so that learners know what is expected from them (Ruberto, 2023). Depending on the project learners will be doing, the assessment will be guided by the assessment tool or the marking guide (McConlogue, 2020). The following aspects will be expected from the learners: analysis and presentation of information from photographs, drawings, illustrations, newspapers, interviews, visiting the library, and how learners interact with different sources. The marking guide or the rubric will guide the marking of the project, and the following steps can be followed: layout, creativity, neatness, interviews and design.

Implementation

There are factors teachers need to take into consideration concerning the implementation of local history projects. Local history provides especially fertile ground for improving learners' ability to contextualise their historical thinking skills (Clarke & Lee, 2021). During the project's implementation stage, the following topics will be explained: choosing the topic, time frame, interview schedule, and the primary sources needed. The use of local history projects in teaching history allows learners to briefly experience the work of the researcher scholar (Jackson, 2020). Marino (2020) states that allowing the learners to follow these steps shapes their understanding to achieve the intended historical skills.

Choosing the Topic for the Project

The study of local history enriches the life and times of the community of a particular place by providing information related to the historical sites and societies (Bhar, 2018). Choosing a topic for the project must connect to learners' lives; hence, there are opportunities for more hands-on, real-world learning experiences outside the classroom (Crocco & Marino, 2017). The first critical choice that the learners should make is to decide on a topic, and the best way is to select a researchable topic (Adhikari, 2020). Teachers tend to ignore the ability of learners' ability to decide on the topic choice for their project, which limits their understanding (Hoyt & Morris, 2022). It does not matter what learners choose as long as it is relevant to their community and people are likely to know something about it (Sharrow, 2022). Learners should select the topic they will focus on and genuinely spark their interest (Claunch, 2020). Subsequently, the teacher must ensure that learners will remain relevant and interested in the topic (Megyesi, 2020). What types of sources are relevant to the topic, such as books, historians, people to interview, and documents learners should choose from?

Time Frame for the Project

A local history project time frame allows the learners to schedule tasks to see what needs to be done and when and keep an eye on the project's overall performance and time frame (York, 2023). Ultimately, a project time frame is about time management, which may be essential for every project a learner can be involved with (Ceylan et al., 2020). According to Hancock et al. (2021), time frames help learners understand the chronology of historical events and help learners situate newly encountered events and figures concerning those already studied. They allow learners to recognise how historical events, areas, and topics overlap. A historical project must have a time frame; all those proposals are essential. Collectively, they help learners develop a long-range understanding of historical chronology as a skill. Every day, a history teacher begins a history lesson with a review of the time frame and learners give an account of what they have done (Crocco & Marino, 2017). Learners do not need to account for every element of the project; they should just tell a story about a particular event or theme (Cebula, 2020).

Interview Schedule

Preparing in advance will offer an opportunity to become familiar with the project's content, get to know and build trust with the person to be interviewed, and test your recording equipment, if there is any (Sommer & Quillan, 2017). Teachers need to guide learners on how to interview, the most essential skill in studying history (Thomas, 2021); learners cannot interview without being adequately guided on how to do it. (Bratt, 2021) emphasised that the following techniques can be expected during the interview: how long the interview will take and who will be attending the interview besides the learner. Consent forms are a vital part of the interview when conducting project fieldwork (Leavy, 2022). The interviewer and the narrator must understand the intended purpose of the project. Learners have to write a report of the whole interview. A good interview schedule should have the following parts: the opening, the body, and the closing (Smith, 2022). The opening should always make the respondent feel welcomed and relaxed. Interviews require learners to listen, write, focus, communicate and react appropriately to what the respondent is saying; by so doing, learners will develop the much-needed skills.

Basic Sources Needed for the Project

When investigating our local past, we need to look at various sources and resources that can assist us in understanding who we are (SAHO, 2019), and those sources can play a prominent role in the completion of the project. For the learners to complete a project, they need different sources such as books, pictures, people, objects and writings (SAHO, 2019). Pictures are a great source to learn about local history (Barret, 2020). Learners will be developing visual literacy skills through the analysis of images (Mujiyati et al., 2019). One of the easiest ways to learn about local history is by looking at what has been written about it. Learners can go to a library and read about local history that has been documented, and by so doing, learners will be developing their reading skills, which the study seeks to achieve. In history, we do not rely only on written records and pictures to help find information about the past; objects left behind play a prominent role in information and are called artefacts (Findlen, 2021). People look for these artefacts and can tell much about those who left them behind. In this regard, learners develop the skill to be archaeologists.

This part of the study attempted to demonstrate how Social Science teachers, when following the correct steps of, planning stage, implementation stage, and the conclusion in teaching local history projects, can assist in developing learners' historical skills. As an enrichment lesson with the topic of a local history project, the purpose was to grow learners' interest in local history to improve their knowledge and develop their historical skills; on the other hand, teachers must make sure that the project is attractive and interesting (Sago, 2023). The study thus focuses on exploring teachers' current practices of using local history projects to develop learners' historical skills in a Social Science classroom.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

To achieve the aim of this study, we grounded the study in the interpretive paradigm as this paradigm resonates with the characteristics of phenomenology. Interpretive study generally attempts to understand phenomena through the meaning people assign them (Chen et al., 2021). Because the study is interpretive, a qualitative research design was employed. According to Leedy and Ormrod (2019), qualitative research is concerned with answering questions about the relationship among variables being measured to explain phenomena. The researcher found this approach relevant to describe the teachers' current practices of using local history projects to develop learners' historical skills.

Participants in this study were five Social Sciences teachers from five different schools in Motheo District, Free State. The chosen schools were diverse and from other locations and different classifications. Data were generated through interviews and document analysis. Semi-structured face-to-face interviews were conducted to gather data from five Social Science teachers who narrated their understanding and experience in the study. When the participants could not understand, probing and clarity were given to the participants. The interview took place after school and on Saturdays. As a researcher, we met once with all participants for only two hours. The researcher digitally recorded the interviews where the participants were giving their views and experiences, and the themes were formed from the two sources of information. When the researcher was unsatisfied with the answer, probing and follow-up questions were made (Paseka & Schwab, 2020).

After the interview, the researcher asked for the formal assessment documents the teacher uses to assess learners in first-term Grade 4, specifically the local history project. The researcher is explicitly looking at the instruction of the project and the time frame given to the learners by the teacher; the form of assessing is fundamental. Data were analysed utilising qualitative content analysis (Puppis, 2022). The researcher had a semi-structured face-to-face interview to gather data from five Social Science teachers, and they gave me detailed experience on the subject matter. The researcher digitally recorded the talk during the interview, where teachers narrated their stories and experiences. Data were coded and categorised, and themes were identified in conjunction with (Mezmir, 2020). Lastly, I asked for their formal assessment of local history projects to understand the teacher's current practices of teaching local history projects to develop learners' historical skills.

FINDINGS

The study explored the current teachers' practices of using local history projects to develop learners' historical skills. In response to the question: *What do Social Science teachers use the current practices in teaching local history projects to develop learners' historical skills?* Three themes emerged: choosing and deciding on the topic, pre-administering, and fieldwork. An interpretation of each of these themes is provided below.

Choosing and deciding on the topic

In choosing the topic, one has to make sure that the topic is relevant to the subject matter, is within reach of the learners, and develops the learners' interest (Megyesi et al., 2020). In choosing the topic, both the teacher and the learners must reflect on what objectives the lesson seeks to achieve, and what strategies the teacher will employ to develop the most suitable topic for the learners that will develop learners' historical skills. Literature has shown us that choosing an appropriate topic for learners must connect to what is happening inside and outside the classroom (Crocco & Marino, 2017). In selecting a suitable topic for the learners, the teacher first comprehends a list of topics for the learners to discuss, notwithstanding the age group of the learners (Adhikari, 2020). Hence, the teacher knows which resources are available in school and the community, and from literature, the teacher decides the topic (Bhar, 2018).

The teachers were asked: *How do you choose a suitable topic for your learners?* The teacher in school A responded by saying:

“It is the first time the learners in Grade 4 are doing a project; after we have a discussion of different topics, then I make a decision for a suitable topic for my learners and taking into consideration of available resources.”

Similar response from the teacher in school B:

“I will ask learners about the origin of the name of their local area. Different answers come from the learners. Then I will give them a project to find out about the origin of the name of their locality.”

The teacher in School C responded as follows:

“Firstly, I will divide the class into groups; while learners are brainstorming on different topics, learners give feedback about their discussion, then I make a final decision about the topics.”

From the responses above, it is clear that the teachers are the ones who decide for the learners on the project topics. A totally different response was captured from the responses of the teachers from schools D and E, who responded by saying:

“I give learners total control of the project, with the help of their parents. Learners use their parents’ cell phones to capture information about the project.”

The teacher in School D responded as follows:

“I give learners an opportunity to decide on the topic and give learners the time to gather information about their local area. Learners share with the class about their findings.”

By analysing the responses from the teachers, it is evident that both teachers and learners play a prominent role in choosing a suitable topic for the project. Literature has shown that teachers play a critical role in guiding learners’ choice of an appropriate topic for a project; even though learners can come up with their own choices of topics, the final arbiter in this regard is the teacher (Bhar, 2018) which is in line with the principles of CP, which state that the principles have a progressive approach in teaching whose objective is to promote the development of critical thinking in the learners, to generate capable individuals (Namasasu, 2018). The teacher ensures that learners will remain relevant to the topic, what sources are available for the project and the topic that will spark their interest (Magyesi et al., 2020). The following section will be on pre-administration of the project.

Pre-Administering

In this project phase, general ideas germinate (Ashfaq, 2023), and the intent and concepts of the work and the relationship form. It structures the outline and the coming together of ideas about the project (Evgen’ev, 2021). Hence, the intentions and the relations begin to take shape. This part of the project will ensure effective management of a local history project to develop learners’ historical skills.

Teachers were asked the following question: *During the pre-administering process of the project, what was the discussion with the learners?* Three sub-themes emerged from the discussion.

Dealing with Project Instructions

Before learners embark on the fieldwork, the teacher must emphasise what the learners must do, that is, the instructions (Lynch, 2019). The same author emphasises that when a teacher gives instructions on a project, the teacher must be relevant to what they want to achieve with the learners. During this project stage, it is necessary to establish how the teachers instruct the learners. It was fascinating to see how teachers from different schools had a similar view in giving learners instructions. The teacher from school C has this to say:

“I make sure that learners understand the topic of the project, where to find information about the topic and the importance of the project.”

The teachers in schools D and E echoed the same sentiments:

“When we discuss the instructions with my learners at his stage, we talk about the topic and discuss what is been expected of them.”

“We make a thorough revision about the topic of the project and make sure that learners understand their expectations.”

There seems to be a striking issue emanating from these responses, that is, the discussion of the topic; by that, it means the teachers are emphasising for the learners to master the skill of comprehending the topic before they embark on a project (Marino, 2020). Subsequently, CP, as a conceptual framework of the study, gives learners a voice to speak in a classroom (Serrano et al., 2020)

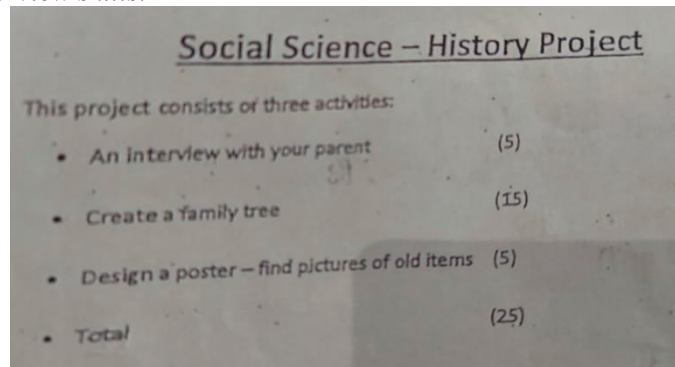
The Skills to be Addressed During Assessment

The local history project aims to develop learners’ historical skills in a Social Science classroom. Therefore, the teacher should travel with the learners to understand these skills, engaging with multiple sources, interviews, chronology, exploring evidence, interpreting the facts based on evidence, and using imagination to have empathy and rationalise its meaning to understand the importance of history in today and future life (Maria, Ahmad & Awang, 2019). The teachers’ view in the study shows that specific skills needed to be addressed even before they could start with the project. The response from the teacher in School B was:

“Before the learners can start the project, I encourage them to brainstorm the topic; by so doing, they learn to acquire knowledge from each other.”

The following is the response from the teacher in school C, who shares a similar idea, and a picture from document analysis supported it:

“I encourage learners to go home and ask their parents some questions about their grandparents; by so doing, they develop interview skills.”



Social Science – History Project	
This project consists of three activities:	
• An interview with your parent	(5)
• Create a family tree	(15)
• Design a poster – find pictures of old items	(5)
• Total	(25)

Picture 1

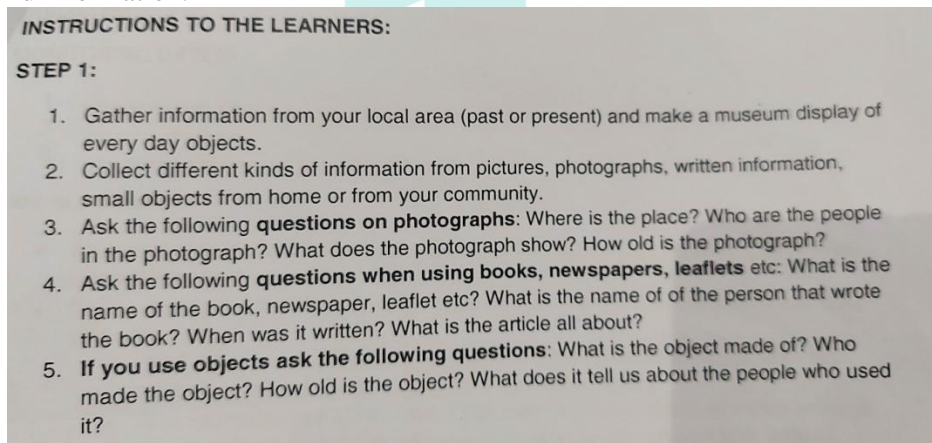
Analysing other teachers’ responses shows that they are trying to develop. Still, it does not clearly show which skills can be attributed to the lack of understanding in giving learners local history projects, which will ultimately affect the desired intended objectives of the project to develop learners’ historical skills.

Multiple Sources

Constructing meaning from multiple sources of information denotes a new form of literacy, which involves location, evaluating, and using diverse sources of information, digital and printed, to construct an integrated, meaningful mental representation of a particular issue, topic or situation (Swarts, 2022). Literature has shown that multiple sources are the primary way to interact with and understand more about what to learn (Noun & McComas, 2021). Learning from various sources is very important as it helps us understand and work out how we got there (Nokes, 2022). From the teacher’s responses in school D, it is evident that the teacher addresses skills that will be assessed. When asked the question, the teacher has this to say:

“I usually make sure that my learners use multiple sources to get information for the project.”

The following picture from document analysis even supported this response from teacher D. It shows learners using multiple sources to find information.



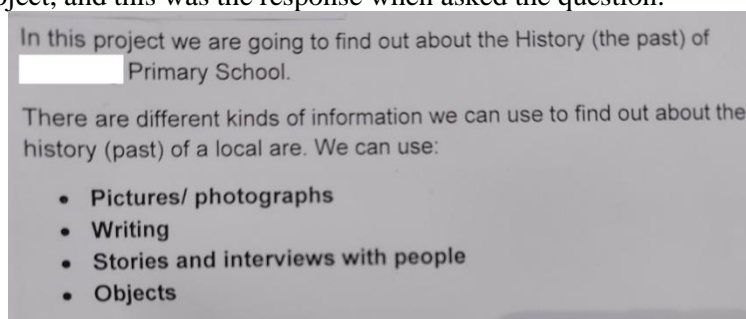
INSTRUCTIONS TO THE LEARNERS:

STEP 1:

1. Gather information from your local area (past or present) and make a museum display of every day objects.
2. Collect different kinds of information from pictures, photographs, written information, small objects from home or from your community.
3. Ask the following **questions on photographs**: Where is the place? Who are the people in the photograph? What does the photograph show? How old is the photograph?
4. Ask the following **questions when using books, newspapers, leaflets** etc: What is the name of the book, newspaper, leaflet etc? What is the name of the person that wrote the book? When was it written? What is the article all about?
5. **If you use objects ask the following questions**: What is the object made of? Who made the object? How old is the object? What does it tell us about the people who used it?

Picture 2

Similarly, from the teacher in school B, during the perusal of the documents, I realised that learners use multiple sources to get information for the project, and this was the response when asked the question:



In this project we are going to find out about the History (the past) of [redacted] Primary School.

There are different kinds of information we can use to find out about the history (past) of a local are. We can use:

- Pictures/ photographs
- Writing
- Stories and interviews with people
- Objects

Picture 3

“I encourage learners to look for pictures, photographs, writings, and objects that can assist them to do the project.”

The responses and perusal of teachers' documents from schools D and B clearly show that they use a strategy of multiple sources that can enhance and develop learners' historical skills, which is the study's aim. Literature has also demonstrated that using various sources allows learners to explore events and information to shape their society and discover what society was back then through interaction with multiple sources (Atari & Henrich, 2023). In the next section, the focus turns to field work's impact.

Field Work

The fieldwork approach helps learners think about how different historical sites represent the past, how they work to convey particular past, and other kinds of reading (Afandi & Baidon, 2021). It also focuses on how history is represented and how it has been used to communicate meaning about the identity of the past, present and future (Nordgren, 2016). Historical fieldwork can help learners become careful and critical readers of artefacts, sites, monuments, historical markers, and museum displays as sources of information to develop learners' historical skills (Levstik & Barton, 2015). Teachers were asked: *What instructions are given when going on fieldwork?* Two sub-themes emerged in fieldwork.

Administering of the Project

In this part of the project, learners are given the instructions to start doing the project because now they have the structure. Learners are given the space to perform their tasks effectively as instructed. The teacher is there to support the learners (Shild, 2019). Teachers regard themselves as facilitators of the project. The teacher from school B responded to the question asked:

“The learners have to start searching for relevant information that will assist them; as a teacher, I will just facilitate the process.”

Similar response from the teacher in school D:

“I will instruct the learners that they must do the project; they must go and look for information. As the teacher, I will check and assist here as necessary.”

A response from the teacher in school E:

“I instruct learners to go out in the field and collect as much information as possible, and I will assist them to organise it.”

Through the responses from the teachers, it is evident that the teachers are giving learners instructions to go out to the field to search for information and come back to class to report to the teacher. Literature has shown that a local history project is a teacher-directed collaboration project in which learners do research and share the findings with their peers (Yasin, 2022). To develop learners' historical skills this is in line with our conceptual framework; according to Freire, he highlights the importance of having learners engaged actively in their learning process and being able to develop their own opinions (Kaya & Kaya, 2017).

Monitoring of the Project

Monitoring aids decision-making and improves the history project impact by maximising learning abilities (Arora et al., 2023). Furthermore, to generate the type of evidence at a particular time, try to use the most appropriate time to assess the effectiveness and quality of intervention (Gelmanova, 2023). Subsequently, Wittrich (2021) writes that monitoring is an ongoing process that is done to see if activities are going on track or not, and it has to start from the initial stage of the project; it provides information about the current status and has to help to make immediate remedial actions.

The following question was posed to the teachers: *What steps do teachers take to monitor the project's progress?* The teachers employed various strategies to monitor progress. For instance, the teacher from school B gave the version of her response by saying:

“I keep my learners motivated by ensuring that I look at how far the learners are with their project once a week.”

The teacher's response shows that the teacher had no tangible plan for monitoring the project. Once a week for two weeks, the project is monitored twice before submission.

A different version of the response from the following teachers. A response from the teacher in school A:

“I use a rubric or a marking guide to monitor the progress of learners; during the first ten minutes of the period, I do a spontaneous check.”

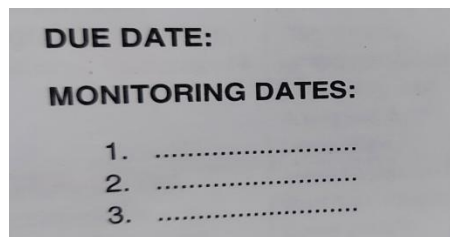
Similar response from the teacher in school C:

“The clear marking guide must be explained to the learners. The learners will be guided through all the steps by the rubric.”

The teacher echoed the same sentiments in school E:

“The project is monitored by the marking tool, and the same marking tool will assist me to check progress of the learners.”

The teacher from school D had the same views, but additional information from document analysis showed the monitoring dates.



Picture 4

“I have designed a monitoring tool, with the assistance of the marking guide; every day during the Social Science period, I monitor the progress of the learners using my monitoring tool.”

A closer look at the teachers’ responses implies that there is an understanding to monitor learners’ progress. At the same time, they are busy with the project in conjunction with literature (Wittrich, 2021) who alluded to the fact that monitoring is an ongoing process. Moreover, teachers are using different forms of monitoring. Therefore, the understanding of monitoring that serves as a vehicle to monitor learners’ progress to develop learners’ historical skills has to be emphasised.

The discussion above shows that teachers know the aims and objectives of giving learners a local history project to develop their historical skills. Because they have different views and approaches, there is a need to explore the teachers’ current practices of using local history projects to develop learners’ historical skills in a structured way.

DISCUSSION

The main research question for this article was ‘to explore teachers’ current practices of using local history projects to develop learners’ historical skills’. Based on the participants’ responses and document analysis, the researcher concluded that there are few opportunities for the learners to be exposed in local history projects to develop their historical skills in a Social Science classroom.

In the first instance, teachers understand that they should expose learners to different topics before starting the project. Crocco and Marino (2017) write that learners should be exposed to various topics. Still, when choosing a suitable topic for the learners, it must connect to what is happening inside and outside the classroom. However, despite the teachers’ understanding of exposing learners to different topics, there are some challenges to some of the teachers who lack knowledge on how to give learners a project. Teachers do not expose learners to various topics so that they can make a choice. Consequently, this limits the learners’ understanding in the development of learners’ historical skills.

In the second instance, learners were exposed to a local history project on what to do during pre-administering the project. Literature has shown that when a teacher deals with the instructions of pre-administering a project, the teacher must be relevant to what they want to achieve together with the learners (Lynch, 2019). The study has revealed that some teachers lacked content knowledge on how to give learners instructions from the beginning of the project until the end of the project. The researcher discovered three steps as the participants responded to the questions: pre-administering, administering, and post-administering. Instructional strategy plays a prominent role in developing the learners’ skills. Therefore, the failure of the teacher to give learners appropriate instructions in this stage can lead to the failure of the intended objective of the project.

Fieldwork is the most critical phase of the project because it is when the learners go out and do the actual work; the project’s success and failure are based on this phase. The researcher observed no proper structure or tool to monitor the project because they relied only on the marking guide. This lack of adequate monitoring structure goes against the idea of Ataro (2023), who asserts that monitoring aid decision and lead to improvement in local history project can impact through maximising the learning available.

Lastly, during the post-administering of the project, it must align with the study’s objectives to realise the development of learners’ historical skills.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This article aims to elicit by exploring teachers’ current practices of using local history projects to develop learners’ historical skills. When data obtained from the output of participants were examined, the findings of this study suggest that Social Science teachers who participated in this study did not create adequate opportunities during the teaching of local history projects to develop learners’ historical skills. The participants’ views on local history studies were analysed, and it was observed that skills that required conducting research and choosing a topic were not adequately emphasised. The quality of understanding of the instructions during the pre-administering the project, skills to be addressed, the expectations during the fieldwork, and the post-administering of the project are effective tools to encourage teachers to provide a deeper understanding of how to deal with local history project to develop learners’ historical skills.

The study was limited to five schools based on the socio-economic background. Similar studies can be conducted at other schools, considering that local history can be utilised at all levels of primary schools.

It will be appropriate for the department to organise in-service training for the teachers to grasp the importance of local history. Various research methods can be used to develop teachers’ awareness of local history and perception of change and continuity as a recommendation.

FUNDING INFORMATION

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

DECLARATION OF CONFLICT

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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