

Gibbons straddles the Mozambican public education system: Critical literacy challenges and moral dilemmas in Mozambican new curriculum

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Abstract

While the concept of literacies has been heavily contested in the last two decades in Africa, the monumental studies on the concept have emphasised micro climate settings of classrooms and insignificant attention has been devoted to examining the connections between classroom practices and national policy imperatives. We therefore attempt to contextualise a particular genre of literacy (critical literacy) within the realm of a national education system policy. We marshal critical literacy and position it against the Mozambican educational landscape to unravel the extent to which the national curriculum captures and informs this genre of literacy. The social pressures on the contemporary education systems, rapid technological advancement and the need for socially relevant knowledge have necessitated educational systems to revisit the genres of literacies they offer, and specifically, to foreground critical literacy. Drawing on Gibbons' mode 2 knowledge production systems that emphasises practical application of knowledge in the contexts of its production, we examine the extent to which the current knowledge production systems and the new curriculum in Mozambique reflects critical literacy practices that foster self-critical, responsible learners who contribute significantly to the society. Drawing on Mozambique's policy statements, education system, and academic literature in the field, we argue that the educational landscape and new curriculum in particular have not only undermined possibilities for Mozambican learners to become self-critical, but have compromised the quality of education against regional and international standards.

Introduction

The Mozambican education system is one of the most complex landscapes to characterise with precision. This complexity is predicated on the country's tumultuous history of civil war, exogenous pressures precipitated by unsystematic provision of aid that foster corrupt practices, mounting international debts, crippling poverty levels, rising levels of unemployment, and lack of adequate training and limited deployment of public personnel to underserved communities. Mario (2002) has aptly developed a

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taxonomy of the literacy development trajectory that seems to be a prototype of the landmark political developments as they impacted the Mozambican education sector. The taxonomy comprises the period of national reconstruction, marked by the growth of adult education nationally (1975–mid 1980s), the reduction in adult literacy and the disbanding of national adult training institutions due to civil war (1977–1995), and the period of rediscovery of an adult education system that emphasises sustainable development and gender equity in a post conflict state (1995 to the present).

Using a critical and reflective-practitioner approach, we draw on our professional experiences of teaching and training in this country to explore the complexities of educational delivery in a postcolonial and post-conflict context. As Khin and Fatt (2010, p. 2) articulate, in the reflective-practitioner approach, a researcher draws on “personal experiences, a personal story of his [sic] development as a heuristically critical reflective practitioner [and] search [es] into his past so that he can account for his values and actions in the present.” In our case, one of the researchers was formerly a Mozambican philosopher, an active researcher, educator, who lectured at Mozambican public and private schools and universities for approximately seven years. Consequently, this research draws primarily on his reflective professional development journey as an educator, his stock of practical knowledge of the educational terrain, personal reflections and experiences of teaching in this educational system. We also draw on our rich understanding of policy documents, reports from international aid agencies and contemporary surveys to provide a consolidated account of the literacy situation in the country. More importantly, we construct this critical narrative with a view to explore ways of bringing quality education that embraces ethical practices in a troubled postcolonial and post-conflict landscape.

To fulfil the above imperatives, we employ Gibbons et al's (1994) mode 2 knowledge production, give a portrait of post-war reconstruction of educational delivery, render the nation's conception of literacy and their limitations, and dissect the current curriculum in conjunction with the moral dilemmas that continue to plague the contemporary education system. We deploy critical literacy and Gibbons et al's (1994) mode 2 knowledge production, which values practical application of disciplinary knowledge across diverse contexts to inform the inadequate construction of literacy and the education landscape in Mozambique. A functional definition of literacy that is advanced in the national education documents is complex to operationalise as superficial guidelines are provided in the national legislation to guide its adoption and implementation. Literacy is shallowly conceived as the acquisition of a set of technical skills, reduction in illiteracy and by extension, contributing to the reduction in poverty. This conception neglects abstract conceptualisation, consideration of multiple perspectives in examination of textual structures and the application of logical thinking (critical literacy). In the ensuing paragraph, we provide a theoretical discussion on the nexus between Gibbons et al's (1994) mode 2 and the practice of critical literacy, particularly in the context of Mozambique's fragile educational system.

Gibbons et al's mode 2 knowledge production

The winds of change experienced in education on a global scale and nationally is exerting immense pressure on governments and national education institutions to shift their conception and forms of knowledge production at basic education and at higher education levels. Drives towards interdisciplinarity, internationalisation, collaboration and engagement are increasing pressure on researchers to produce socially relevant, accountable or transferable knowledge that is useful to society in addressing and responding to concrete socio-economic problems (Gray, 2008). This new conception of knowledge makes critical literacy a vital catalyst for the production of socially relevant knowledge in situated contexts. Socially relevant and accountable knowledge necessitate students' capacity to construct, deconstruct and reconstruct knowledge through understanding the hidden meanings of texts and the power structures that

underlie them. In contexts like Mozambique with high teacher-student ratios, limited deployment of teachers in resources constrained communities and limited training of educators, the use of critical literacy practices to overcome poor quality educational delivery can not be over emphasised. Critical literacy is crucial for this nation's education as it "helps teachers and students expand their reasoning capacities, seek out multiple perspectives, and become active thinkers" (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 52) who seek practical solutions to the problems they identify in situated contexts and who use their authentic personal voices to (in)validate literary texts.

Gibbons et al. (1994) argue that there have been major shifts in the conduct of research and knowledge production in higher institutions of learning caused by changes in society such as technological advancement, demands for social relevance of knowledge to contemporary problems and the shifts towards internationalisation in education. This shift in knowledge production, they assert, is from mode 1, characterised by discipline specialisation and institutional autonomy, to mode 2 that emphasises transdisciplinary research and adhocacies (small research task forces) comprising academic researchers and private researchers identifying problems and applying knowledge in context. We argue that the application of knowledge in the Mozambican context demands the academic fraternity to take cognisance of the complexities of post-colonial dominant discourses that often marginalise non-middle class poor students from actively accessing and contesting hegemonic discourses. The continued use of colonial language, Portuguese, as the language of mediation and discourse also perpetuates the power of these privileged discourses and this essentially precludes the indigenous students from using their vernacular languages, interpretation schemas and cultural backgrounds in meaning making and knowledge production. Such students need to have the linguistic flexibility to switch from their first language to the foreign language to access the meaning making processes and to appropriate good ethical practices in education.

The above articulations demonstrate the complexities of the application of knowledge in resource constrained postcolonial environments. This augers well with mode 2, knowledge mode that assesses knowledge production according to its relevance to society, in particular its capacity to address social problems and not necessarily through an internally logical process of peer review by academic oligarchy. With mode 2, problems arise and are formulated in the context of application and communication and application of knowledge takes place in the context of its production (Gibbons et al., 1994; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001; Jensen, 2005). This shift has fundamentally strong implications for critical literacy given its emphasis on critical thinking in problem-solving, contextualisation of acquired learning skills and informed reasoning. In terms of critical literacy, the application of mode 2 would encapsulate particular engagement with 'literary' texts through detailed analytic interpretation to address questions of tone, style, artistic structure and figurative language, accompanied by an insistence on textual scrutiny (Prinsloo & Janks, 2002).

In the Mozambican educational system, critical literacy practices would entail dissecting text to unravel subtle meaning, explore the perpetuation of dominant discourses, articulate problems of poor literacy practices and to eradicate unethical/unprofessional behaviour that frustrate practical criticism of texts. These corrupt and hidden malpractices that pervade Mozambique and other African states include: the provision of teaching licences /authorisations on false grounds/corrupt means; teacher recruitment and postings influenced by bribes; ghost teachers; high absenteeism that trigger high student teacher ratios; teachers' demands for bribes from students to secure good grades or exam passes; and staff abuse of students physically and sexually, to name a few (The Anti Corruption Resource Centre, 2006). The production and application of knowledge in its context, which mode 2 knowledge model advocates, is relevant to critical literacy education. This is because critical literacy is deeply rooted in learners' psychological access to learning resources and overcoming the language of *domination*. As Janks (2002) suggests, *access* deals with how people

gain entry to privileged spaces and this entails access to dominant genres, to powerful institutions and to modes of production. We argue that for impoverished students coming from deprived backgrounds, their capacity to grasp the fundamental assumptions underpinning dominant discourses is constrained by the way these discourses are constructed and sustained. Such discourses tend to privilege middle class learners because in a corrupt educational system where educators are motivated by the pursuit of rents and underhand deals rather than supporting access to quality education, students are deprived both of “epistemological access” (Morrow, 1994) to these discourses and opportunities to embrace diversity in their articulations.

Having articulated the marriage between mode 2 knowledge production and the propagation of critical literacy, it is logical to interrogate critical literacy as it affects Mozambique.

Critical literacy approach

Critical literacy emphasises objectivity in the dissection of academic texts to distil the hidden power and ideological values that underlie textual constructions. Janks (2010) contends that literacy and power is closely related and as such it is important to deconstruct and reconstruct textual meanings and analyse both the influence that texts have on society as well as the societal interests at work. Structural dysfunctions such as corrupt practices (demanding bribes from students to pass exams/tests, appointments influenced by rent seeking behaviour, teacher absenteeism, poor instruction) in the education sector frustrate the delivery of quality learning outcomes. The Republic of Mozambique Interministerial Commission on the Public Sector Reform's Anti-Corruption Strategy (2006) suggests that the chief causes of public sector corruption are public institutions' weak control and supervisory mechanisms, failure to apply laws and regulations, weak commitment by public administration managers to fight corruption, lack of accountability of institutions and the practice of nepotism, favouritism and clientelism. As such, Mozambican policy statements and national anti-corruption campaigns remain high ideals in light of weak implementation and/monitoring mechanisms for ensuring quality educational delivery. Fundamentally, national literacy levels are insufficiently measured in terms of quantitative calibrations such as reducing illiteracy, increasing the numbers of female and adult students who access education, and gender mainstreaming. These measures are void when taken out of the context of inducting students into specific genres of literacy, particularly critical literacies.

Literacy in formerly colonised societies such as Mozambique often unfold through privileged hegemonic discourses that less sophisticated students often fail to unpack to expose the hidden meanings ingrained in texts. Students might feel compelled to accept or might have limited psychological will power to expose hidden agendas and interests. Where educational budgets for teacher training are limited, there will be limited primary educational resources (books, periodicals and journals are outdated) and weak supervision of teaching personnel. In such educational contexts, weak literacy practices persist and students' capacity to dissect texts for hidden meanings will be severely compromised. Mulkeen (2005) reports that in Mozambique teacher deployment is done at the provincial level but provinces often have insufficient funds to recruit all of the newly qualified teachers and this leads to high teacher-student ratios. This also leads to under staffing in some isolated areas.

Most importantly, critical literacy foregrounds the use of multimodal texts to engage critically with texts in context. It portrays language, signs and symbols as semiotic resources deeply embedded in the social agent's ideological interests and motives for expressing positioning, identity and social power.

That said, it is clear that critical literacy practices emphasise drawing on multiple perspectives in the analysis and interpretation of textual constructions, and expose students not only to the exercise of power through language but to its abuse as expressed through diverse ethical misconduct. Critical literacy “helps teachers and students expand their reasoning, seek out multiple perspectives, and become active thinkers” (McLaughlin & DeVogd, 2004, p. 52). Students become agents of change as they are capacitated to use texts as materials for social transformation to challenge not only dominant discourses but also desist/resist educators’ unethical practices that jeopardise their critical and responsible citizenship.

Having mapped the theoretical framework and established a firm base for understanding critical literacy in resource-poor contexts, it is logical to render a brief account of the landmarks in Mozambican educational landscape so that its critique can be adequately appreciated.

Mozambican educational system: A historical perspective

The literacy landscape of Mozambican educational system has generally been split into distinguishable phases although there is little consensus on what each of these historic epochs constitutes. For example, Mario and Nandja (2006) identify three main phases that summarise the Mozambican education system and education provision namely:

1. *The reconstruction phase* (1975–mid 1980s) – this immediate post-independence phase was characterised by the national reconstruction project and the building of a coherent adult education infrastructure (adult education and training schemes) to support adult literacy and education campaigns nationwide.
2. *The Destabilisation phase* (mid 1980s–1995) – was characterised by internal instability accentuated by civil war insurgences that destabilised the existing adult literacy and educational activities in the country. This phase was marked by human emigration to neighbouring war-free zones, destruction of academic infrastructure, the scaling down of literacy efforts and adult literacy programmes in the rural areas and the disbanding of National Adult Education Department.
3. *Resuscitation phase* (1995 to date) has emphasised the re-emergence of the adult literacy initiatives and education in the context of social and economic development with a focus on the use of education as a vehicle for poverty eradication, national unity, and providing the population with moral values and social empowerment.

While there were a series of national interventions aimed at supporting teacher training and the alleviation of their economic status to expedite pedagogical delivery, it should be emphasised that the education sector is poorly remunerated. As such, teacher wages are not typically fully responsive to local labour market conditions or to individual characteristics, so many teachers receive substantial rents (Chaudhury, Hammer, Kremer, Muralidharan, & Rogers, 2006) in the form of illegal private tutoring to supplement their incomes. Such transactions can be two-way, where a teacher corrupts a student by demanding a bribe or parents offer bribes to educators to secure students’ progression to another grade or pass an exam, thus diluting professional integrity and educational quality. Rent seeking behaviour and lack of commitment to professional instruction can be partly explained by abject poverty in the country. Mozambique has high levels of poverty (54.1% in 2008) and child (0-59 months) malnutrition (46.2% in 2004) and currently faces escalating staple food prices (US Government, 2009). This is further compounded by differential levels of educator training across the country. Rural and outlying areas often have less access to

educator development and support services than their urban counterparts, and fewer opportunities to attend in-service courses, which leads to lower quality education provision (Mulkeen, 2005). In many cases, these communities also have difficulty in accessing books and materials. In such an environment, teachers' motivation to teach and to be innovative in the provision of quality instruction is eroded. The historical antecedents to the Mozambican educational landscape articulated above sets the stage for our informed critique of the nation's schooling in general and literacy in particular.

The Mozambican literacy landscape: A sympathetic critique

In this section, we provide a review of the Mozambican literacy landscape with a view to support five central arguments that we raise and defend, namely that:

1. The Mozambican education system has coherent structural policy interventions for the attainment of higher literacy but is fragile at implementation level. The weak institutional structure fails to support and monitor the implementation of policy to ensure that literacy considerations do not overlook quality considerations. Mulkeen (2005) suggests that the provision of monitoring and inspection mechanisms in outlying areas in Mozambique are constrained principally by multiple responsibilities, lack of accessibility of some schools to outside inspectors and weak power structures and monitoring mechanisms by rural communities. The USAID Corruption Mozambique Report (Spector, Schloss, Green, Hart & Ferrell, 2005) also echoes similar sentiments from a structural perspective, arguing that the government has established few effective accountability mechanisms in the educational sector.
2. The educational policy imperatives locate literacy first as the attainment of a set of immutable, generic skills that can be acquired and transferred across different contexts. The curriculum foregrounds skills acquisition, ability to participate in public life and contribution to the national development agenda and there is no mention of critical literacy. The Literacy Curricula Plan states that:

Literacy is regarded, on the one hand, as the acquisition of the basic notions of reading, writing and numeracy and, on the other hand, as a process that stimulates participation in social, political and economic activities and lays the foundation for continuing education. The concept also reflects a form of functional literacy that is an integral part of local development. (MINED, 2003, p. 57)

We infer that the Mozambican national policy locates literacy not as a set of fluid, contested, social-cultural practices mediated by social power and agency but rather as a set of decontextualised skills predisposed for acquisition. The deliberate focus on functional literacy embodied in the three Rs (writing, reading and (a)rithmetic), and adult education forecloses opportunities for accommodating other principal forms of literacies such as critical literacy and critical pedagogy that facilitate critical engagement with text. In light of these challenges, the functional definition of literacy that emphasises acquisition of generic skills and negates criticality in the production of knowledge in contested spaces drawing on multiple disciplines becomes acutely inadequate for addressing these issues.

3. A functional definition fails to contextualise literacy as a fluid, contested, socially situated practice tied to human positioning, agency and social power. Janks (2003) suggests that part of the work of critical literacy is to make these workings of power visible, to denaturalise 'common sense' assumptions and to reveal them as constructed representations of the social order, serving the

interests of some at the expense of others. We infer from Janks (2003) that literacy should contribute to the propagation of good ethical conduct and the eradication of abuse of authority by educators. As such, critical literacy practices should open opportunities for a diversity of perspectives and the levelling out of the balance of power between educators and learners. Only then can students fully realise their potential for the exercise of academic curiosity and development of context relevant solutions. Locating literacy as a functional competence and a set of decontextualised skills divorced from personal development is academically simplistic. We argue that this construction of the concept needs augmentation through the raising of critical consciousness of the learners about the dynamics of power and ideological interests that underlie literacies. The over-arching preponderance of elevating literacy levels has subtly downplayed the advancement of critical literacy. This relates with Kostogriz's (2002) argument that conflict and tension across difference provides the energy and resources for "cultural reinvention, transformation and change."

4. Literacy statistics privilege literacy rates to the exclusion of curriculum quality in light of social relevance, critical judgment, synthesis of information and understanding the influence of social power and positioning on textual structures. This narrow perspective on literacy is captured in the reports that downplay the quality of curriculum content in favour of statistics on education in national reports. The recent National Report on the Evaluation of the Brussels Action Plan for the Least Developed Countries (2001-2010) compiled by the Republic of Mozambique Ministry of Industry and Trade's Directorate for International Relations (2005) emphasises that:

- In the 1st Grade primary education (EP1), access to schools increased by 17.9% in 2005 compared to the previous year 2004. The number of schools equally registered an increase of 5%. In terms of school coverage, the net schooling rate in EP1 went from 75.6% to 79%.
- In the 2nd Grade primary education (EP2) in 2005, the number of students increased by 25% compared to the previous year (2004), hence maintaining the tendency of strong growth at this level of education since 1992.

In line with the above, the emphasis on statistics is mirrored by Mozambican Education Minister, Aires Aly (High Commission of the Republic of Mozambique, 2009) who noted that:

- Girls accounted for 44.6% of the pupils in the first five years of primary education in 2002, and this rose to 47.2% in 2008.
- The number of students in technical education rose by 19.3% in 2005 and in 2008 stood at 55,038.

This focus on statistics is misleading to the extent that it masks the existing disparities often under reported in national documents. For example, educational enrolment showed a strong tapering at higher levels. In 1996, 51.7% children aged 7 to 14 years were attending school. In 1997, 66.8% of primary aged children were enrolled, 6.9% in secondary, and only 0.3% in higher education (Mouzinho, Fry, Levey, & Chilundo, 2003, p. 18). This means that a huge number of students are siphoned from the education system upon finishing primary education and do not proceed to secondary education. Similarly, Cabral (2008) notes that although girls represented 49% of the 50% Net Enrolment Rate (6 yrs old) in primary school (EP1) in 2007, their completion rate was still low at 28.8%. The emphasis on enrolment statistics rather than

meaningful academic participation severely undercuts the fostering of education quality (especially critical literacy), academic achievement and student retention.

The new conception of literacy advanced in the 1999 Mozambique Education for All Movement (*Movimento de Educação para Todos de Moçambique*, MEPT) and the PARPA I (PRSP I-2001-05) and PARPA II (PRSP II- 2006-09) locate literacy as a critical vehicle for reducing poverty. The concept falls short of explaining how this can be realised beyond just raising the number of national enrolments, increasing throughput at primary level and adult education. This is articulated without recourse to increasing the resource base (finance, upgrading teachers' skills, adequately assessing curriculum delivery), thus straining an already weak educational system. Government attempts to open educational opportunities to broaden sections of society has triggered what Mulkeen (2005, p. 20) calls "double shift sessions" or even three shifts for urban and semi-urban areas. Moreover, teachers have been encouraged and sometimes forced to divert their specialisation to meet the growing need for teachers in under-served areas where high student-teacher ratios persist.

The demand that teachers be trained in two or three subject areas (out of 11 in the curriculum) but in one discipline, has resulted in fewer teachers being expected to cover all of the subject areas of grades 6 and 7 (Mulkeen, 2005). We contend that the over-stretching of the supply side of the educational curve to meet the growing demand has overburdened an already weak delivery system.

Fragile implementation infrastructure that dilutes literacy quality considerations

Under this new educational regime, several policy interventions were instituted to ensure a cohesive education policy namely:

- National Education System (SNE) that transformed the educational systems in a new political system;
- 2001-2005 Action Plan for the Reduction of Absolute Poverty (PARPA) (in Republica de Moçambique (2001), which defined literacy and adult education as primary goals in the education programme;
- National Strategy for Adult Literacy and Education and Non-Formal Education (AEA/ENF), designed mainly to eradicate illiteracy in the country (Mario & Nandja, 2006, pp. 2–3).

While these are laudable gestures in a poverty ridden nation, these policy interventions remain high ideals in light of a weak implementation and quality assurance regime. Practical mechanisms for monitoring teacher performance, promotion of quality content delivery, and production of context-relevant knowledge need to be instituted to ensure a close alignment of poverty eradication and high literacy rates. Linking poverty reduction to the development of high quality graduates necessitates good professional conduct among educators to minimise educational losses through attrition, school drop-outs, repetitions, and lack of progress through to the next level. Quality can be enhanced by prevention of exam leakages, tightening inspections to avert teacher absenteeisms, student abuse and poor instruction, as well as firm financial management and reporting standards to control embezzlement of funds intended for school resources.

Although the emphasis on increasing enrolments of adult literacy units has recorded marginal overall gains, education structures have failed to close the revolving door of dropouts. Data from the Ministry of Education highlight that 259,435 adults were enrolled in 2002, and at the end of the first level (of the three year course), the dropout rate was 36 % while the pass rate was 76% (Mario & Nandja, 2006). To scale down the dropout rate, the adult literacy and basic primary units (that operate as devolved authorities) have escalated the tendency to manipulate grades or relax the

examination standards to entice more student participation. This compromises the quality of education in the country.

The Mozambican new curriculum

Policies aimed at raising literacy should be conceived in light of the structural challenges that bedevilled Mozambique over the years such as high dropout rates, lack of space (schools) and primary resources (books, desks), qualified teaching staff and inadequate training of staff. Furthermore, Mulkeen (2005) describes a skewed distribution of qualified teachers in Mozambique, observing that in Maputo city, only 8% of EP1 (early primary) teachers were untrained, compared with 62% in Niassa, a province in the far northern side of the country. Rural provinces have both a higher pupil-teacher ratio, and a higher ratio of pupils to qualified teachers. Teachers prefer working in provincial towns and refuse to relocate to rural schools, and the logical distribution of teachers within provinces is undermined by an inability to enforce deployment (Mulkeen, 2005).

In light of these structural problems, the government sought international donor support (in particular Save the Children, UNICEF and World Vision) to address these challenges and these donors imposed conditions on the government as a basis for the disbursement of financial aid for the education sector. The major government strategy for attracting aid was to replace the incumbent curriculum (that was conceivably difficult for learners) with a new curriculum that would ensure and guarantee mass production of both primary and secondary school graduates on a yearly basis. This ill-conceived system resulted in the institution of multiple choice type exam questions and the relaxation of a number of examination questions that demanded conceptualisation, rational argument building, synthesis of ideas and informed reasoning, to ensure that no student fails the examinations.

The Anti Corruption Resource Centre (2006) provides examples of some forms of corruption that relate directly to curriculum delivery in Mozambique and other African countries. These include selling exam papers in advance (and the price tags of exam scripts are often known), removing the consequences of failing exams by (re-) admitting students under false names, demanding bribes to pass tests/exams, sub-standard educational material purchased due to manufacturers' bribes and/or instructors' copyrights, and embezzlement of funds intended for teaching materials and school buildings. It is against these insidious practices that the new curriculum was therefore introduced in 2004 and is still in place today.

The new curriculum had two major points of emphasis. The first was the shift system (hot sitting) where students studied at different intervals (some in the morning, some in the afternoon and in the evening in rural and urban public schools). This was to free space for students who could not access education due to limited vacancies. This was aimed to ensure that all age groups could access education and professionals who worked during the day could study in the evenings. Thus a triple number of students could now use the same space/school but at different intervals. As a result, the percentage of literacy rose significantly from 46.4 % of 2003 to 48.1% in 2005 (UN Mozambique, 2008).

A triple number of teachers were to be employed to cater for the increased enrolment; however, additional staff were not available. Understaffing and overcrowded classrooms compromised the capacity of students to engage in critical literacy practices such as complex problem-solving in real world contexts, sustained investigation and reflection on texts using multiple perspectives, informed reasoning and authentic extraction of truths with teachers' facilitation. Possibilities for personal teacher-student interaction were foreclosed by the phenomenal student teacher ratios, thus creating opportunities for institutionalised corruption as students struggled

to gain entry and progress through their studies. Mixed classes and cluster schools have emerged as the small number of teachers try to cover the empty classes, to avoid complaints from parents, or split classes into two and make frequent visits during the same period (Mulkeen, 2005). The pressure to access scarce educational resources such as classes and instructor support has become the seedbed for corrupt practices that dilute quality teaching.

The Assessment Mozambique Report (Spector et al., 2005) paints a gloomy picture of an overburdened educational sector riddled by corrupt practices and breaches of professional practice:

- The shortage of qualified teachers necessitates the operation of 2–3 shifts. To support bribe giving from parents, school administrators often give girls evening shifts which are conceivably risky, in anticipation of 200 to 300 meticals (\$8-10) per student.
- Large sums of informal fees are exchanged among schools administrators during registration.

Some schools have become repositories for paedophile teachers who demand sex from young girls in exchange for good grades. This sex corruption has exposed students to HIV/AIDS, stigma and trauma (Spector et al., 2005).

Such practices negatively impact on the provision of quality education and divert student attention from critical literacy practices. We infer from the above that the new curriculum served as a breeding ground for thriving corrupt practices. Yet Kretovcis (1985) argued that teaching students functional skills should be complemented by giving them conceptual tools necessary to critique society including its inequalities and injustices. This critical interrogation of these structural issues in knowledge production constitutes a central facet of critical literacy and can not unfold in the absence of a competent teacher engaging with their critical faculties.

The second point was an emphasis on *pasagem automatica* (automatic passage to the next grade) along with its continuous assessment method by teachers (even temporary and under qualified teachers). Since examination in Mozambican public schools is by continuous assessment (teachers grade/assess students throughout the year based on their performance in tests, classroom discussions, homework, written and oral work) with the national examination contributing 50% of the final grade (for examined grades – 7, 10 and 12) (Paulo, 2007), teachers are encouraged to pass all students. In fact a 100% pass rate policy along with continuous assessment was put in place in all public schools throughout the country to ensure that literacy levels (in terms of percentages of graduates) were boosted. This means that even illiterate students can pass with such a flawed education system. In many cases (although usually unreported for fear of victimisation) teachers who fail to adhere to this policy or have a record of failing students could face penalties such as being transferred, and in extreme cases, being discharged from the ministry. The weak educational system perpetuates corruption because the expectation for automatic academic progression is rampant among students and the cultivation of weak literacies – the so-called high school illiterates – becomes an inevitable reality. The crippling poverty levels in the face of the stagnant remuneration regime of educators also accentuates rent-seeking behaviour. Hanlon (1991, p. 151) observed that despite the Mozambican government's acknowledgement that teachers earn meagre salaries (and therefore need to supplement their income), teachers were forbidden from conducting private tutoring outside class hours.

In light of these constraints, we argue that the opportunities for fostering critical literacy, in particular developing the student's authentic voice, engaging the critical

thinking of students by critiquing different genres of texts, and developing multiple perspectives on a particular subject by drawing on multiple, and often contradictory sources, are undercut by an educational system that privileges higher pass rates over intellectual development. We concur with Odora Hoppers' assessment (2010, p. 82) that "conception of knowledge development that is mirrored in the Mozambican model of literacy that emphasises the superficial process of increasing the pass rates rather than intellectual, political and moral engagement". This is because emphasis on literacy as a set of neutral, decontextualised skills and the acquisition approach all reinforce the mistaken belief that learning is culture free, ahistorical in orientation, and does not need to be 'contaminated' by immersing it in specific cultural contexts.

Mozambique public education system: An ensemble of a resuscitated educational system or a system in ruins?

Educationalists (teachers and education officers), often unilaterally or in collusion, abuse their public office for private/personal benefit through bribery, extortion and other acts of misconduct, nepotism, fraud, dishonesty and obstruction of justice. These practices point to a system that is gradually crumbling and needs rehabilitation rather than remnants undergoing systematic reconstruction and regeneration. Corruption in the education sector is widespread and weighs most heavily on vulnerable groups such as children, young girls, and the poor (Spector et al., 2005). The Anti Corruption Resource Centre (2009) articulates that corruption hits disadvantaged groups, including women, harder as they rely more on the public system, have less resources to make informal payments to access education services and seek legal protection.

Corruption seems to have surged to unimaginable proportions with the advent of the new curriculum. Gross mismanagement of offices/powers by education officers and teachers has increased drastically. Extortion has escalated at senior levels (education officers) as a major avenue of self aggrandisement as teachers seek upward social mobility and transfers (Plusnews Report, 03/2010). Education officers have entrenched 'pay and work' systems where one has to pay to access employment opportunities. This severely undercuts academic excellence as acolytes or incompetent staff are appointed to teaching positions. In turn, it compromises the capacity of the educational system to generate self-critical, reflexive and socially responsible graduates with a strong moral disposition – itself the holy grail of knowledge production in a developing country economy. Drawing on Gibbons' mode 2 knowledge production that emphasises social relevance of knowledge in resolving complex social problems, it can be inferred that the Mozambican educational system fails to generate context-relevant education. This education system also fails to adequately prepare graduates to tackle complex social problems.

While corruption in Mozambique has become an endemic phenomenon, statistics are hard to come by because no one can publicly condemn the other as many public figures have been involved by design or by default. Hanlon (2002) cites the South African Institute of Security Studies (ISS) which clearly showed that Mozambique was very close to becoming "a criminalised state." Hanlon (2002) also cites the Attorney-General, Joaquim Madeira who, in a brave statement to parliament on 6 March 2002, pointed out that:

The growing tendency for illegality to gain supremacy over legality, the dishonest over the honest...The culture of legality is still a dream, even among leaders who believe they are free not to respond to requests by the Attorney General's office.

The above bears testimony to the fact that if the central administrative machinery is corrupt and corruption has become institutionalised, the educational system will not

be exempt. When corruption pervades all forms of academic life, students' capacity for critical engagement is undermined as they are trained by some dysfunctional academics who were smuggled into the academic spaces. Student academic progression becomes a function of their social relationship with their educators and not their reflexive engagement with pedagogical content/knowledge.

Conclusion

Using Gibbons et al's (1994; Nowotny, Scott, & Gibbons, 2001) mode 2 knowledge production as a theoretical lens, we examined the extent to which literacy has transcended the mere acquisition of skills to embrace critical literacy. We have argued that the conception of literacy in Mozambique remains superficial as it is perceived as the acquisition of a decontextualised set of skills and fails to embrace the contested, social-cultural, and historical situatedness of literacy. Literacy is mistakenly calibrated by Mozambican academic authorities via progression to the next academic grade and through raising demographic statistics on enrolment, and not the intellectual development of the learner and applicability of the acquired knowledge in problem-solving in diverse socio-cultural contexts.

More importantly, we have argued that the Mozambican education system needs to transcend consequentialist arguments of raising literacy levels among the formerly disadvantaged illiterate population, to examine the contribution that the education system makes towards addressing complex global problems (e.g. HIV/AIDS, growing social inequalities, global climate change, rising poverty levels and corruption). We conclude that the intellectual advancement of the learner through critical thinking, reflexive engagement in transdisciplinary contexts, complex problem-solving in situated contexts, and the synthesis of diverse information sources across disciplines, could lay the foundation for a highly literate nation with the social attributes to compete on the world stage.

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