



## Research Article

# INTRODUCING AGRICULTURE AS A SUBJECT IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM IN ZIMBABWE: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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### ABSTRACT

The study aimed at investigating challenges faced introducing agriculture as a subject in primary schools in Zimbabwe. The study was carried out in urban primary schools in Zimbabwe. Data were generated through interviews open-ended questionnaires and data were qualitatively analysed. The study found out that the schools had a challenges in introducing agriculture because the lacked human and material resources. The study concluded that schools were not ready to teach agriculture at this stage. The study recommended that schools need to be assisted with resources and training of teachers to ensure effective teaching of agriculture in primary schools.

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## INTRODUCTION

Agriculture was introduced as a subject in the primary school curriculum in 2014 and will be an examinable subject at Grade 7 level with effect from 2015. Agriculture will become the fifth examinable subject at Grade 7. The primary schools have an Agriculture syllabus from Grade 4 to Grade 7. The introduction of Agriculture in the primary school curriculum is a welcome move considering that the Zimbabwean economy is anchored on agriculture. According to Moyo (2014), student should have an appreciation of agriculture at an early age. The introduction in the primary school curriculum was recommended by Nziramasanga Commission (1999) as a way of improving the quality of education offered in Zimbabwean primary schools. Agriculture is now a compulsory subject in the primary schools (Lupahla 2014). The main question is do schools have the capacity to teach agriculture?

### Research Questions

- What are challenges are faced by teachers in teaching agriculture in the primary school?
- What are the challenges faced by schools in introducing agriculture as a subject as a subject?

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## Literature Review

### History of teaching agriculture in Zimbabwe

In Zimbabwe, attempt to introduce Agriculture dates back to the 1950s were gardening supported nature study. According to the Lewis Taylor Report (1974) gardening was recommended for the Primary school Curriculum. The Lewis report 1974:102 says.

*“We have much evidence and discussion, the matter of school gardening and Agriculture and we have come to the conclusion that school gardening should be retained because of its value in improving quality of the environment.”*

The Lewis report highlighted the need to develop gardens that would be a source of materials for science based activities rather than emphasize repetitive manual labour (Lewin and Bajah 1991) The committee recommended (dropping from the primary school curriculum agriculture due to the problem of teaching, location of school plot and general lack of success in producing school crops.

In 1982, the Environmental and Agricultural Science (EAS) was introduced in the primary school curriculum. The main objectives included:

- To make pupils aware of relationships amongst the physical biological and human aspect of the environment.
- To foster a positive interest and appreciation of a well-managed environment.
- To develop basic concepts and skills in agricultural practices, (Environmental and Agricultural Science Syllabus for Primary Schools 1982).

One of the key topics of the EAS syllabus included agricultural production.

The element covered included plant production, animal husbandry and land preparation. An evaluation report by Lewin and Bajah (1991) made a survey of personnel in primary schools. Nearly 70% teachers had 'O' level qualifications and 25% were ZJC graduates and 41% had a certificate in education and the rest 17% were untrained. Schools did not have qualified staff and learning materials to teach agriculture.

### **Teacher Training in Teaching Environmental and Agricultural Science**

In Zimbabwe primary school teachers go through a three year programme. Their curriculum covers syllabus which is the professional studies syllabus which covers such topics as classroom management theories of teaching, condition of service. The syllabus B covers areas such a subject content, subject methodology, scheming and planning as well as micro-teaching. Syllabus C covers action research and syllabus D consists of National strategic studies (NASS), information communication technology (ICT) and health and life skills education. Environmental science teaching element is covered under professional studies. The emphasis is in science teaching as opposed to teaching agriculture (DTE Handbook, 2012). The quality of teachers produced in Zimbabwe has been criticised (Nziramasanga 1999). The teacher education curriculum has been considered to be narrow in the scope and not meeting the needs of schools and society (Lewis 2004). The teacher education programme is failing to impact important skills to teach in primary school (Stuart and Tadoo, 2000). Schools lack equipment and laboratories and even land to teach agriculture effectively (Lewin 2004)

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

### **Research Design**

This study employed the qualitative research methodology. This methodology had the advantage of soliciting the views and opinions of teachers who are implementing subject specialisation. A case study design was used in this study. According to Best and Khan (1993), a case study enables the researcher to examine a social unit of institution in a given context to be able to understand it better. The case study design was employed and two schools were selected as cases. [Interviews and open-ended questions were used to generate data. The study focused on Bindura urban primary schools. Data were qualitatively analysed.

### **Sampling**

The purposive sampling technique was used to identify the participants to this study. The participants included teachers involved in subject specialisation in the primary schools selected.

The purposive sampling technique enabled the researcher to pick individuals with the vital information to ensure relevant data would be collected.

### **Data Generation and Analysis**

To generate data interviews and open-ended questionnaires were used. The researcher was able to clarify complex questions and follow up on the responses made by the participants. Ten teachers were interviewed and 40 responded to questionnaires. The interpretative study analysis was used to analyse the data. During data analysis the following steps were followed coding, categorising. The researcher had to structure the categories of data so that they would be meaningful. Analysis also involved selecting the categories and relating them to other categories. The researcher had the task of integrating the categories to generate meaning and understanding, this involved describing recurring views and feedback of the participants

## **RESULTS**

The research found the following as challenges faced by primary schools introducing agriculture as a subject:

- Lack of land, equipment and resources for practical aids.
- Lack of pedagogy and knowledge of faculty of agriculture.
- Lack of background study of high school and teacher's college on teaching agriculture.
- Lack of knowledge and the scientific hands on approach to science teaching.
- Lack of basic training in teaching agriculture.
- Lack of general support with human and material resources to teach agriculture in schools.

## **DISCUSSION**

The study found out that most teachers had not studied agriculture at high school or at teacher's college. This contributed to their ability agriculture as a subject. These teachers indicated that they were not able to teach agriculture effectively. The curriculum was overloaded and teachers felt by introducing another subject increased their workload and compromised quality of teaching and learning. Teachers felt there was a lot of duplication of topics between Environmental and Agricultural Science and Agriculture. The schools did not have land especially in urban areas to do practical work and they did not have the equipment or resources to support teaching of agriculture. They were not well prepared to include agriculture in the curriculum. Schools did not get a special government support to start teaching agriculture at primary school level and the teachers were not staff developed on how to teach agriculture effectively at primary school level.

### **Conclusion**

The study concluded that urban primary schools were not well positioned to introduce agriculture because they did not have the land, the resources and the expertise to teach agriculture effectively.

### **Recommendations**

The study made the following recommendations:

- Schools need a funds to introduce agriculture
- Teachers need to staff development on teaching agriculture
- Teachers' Colleges need to introduce agriculture as a subject

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