

Student and Teachers' Challenges in Rural Elementary Schools in the Perspective of Bessie Head's Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind

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Abstract—Born in 1937 in South Africa, Bessie Head wrote most of her books in Botswana, where she was exiled. Bessie Head's rich bibliography includes *Serowe, Village of the Rain Wind*, published in 1981. The Novel offers a wide span of educational functions in rural locations involving the villagers' cooperation. Serowe demonstrates how the students cope with restrictive learning materials, unfinished buildings, and corporal disciplinary measures included in the rules. Serowe is a sample of many village schools in Africa with similar learning conditions concerning the children's socio-economic challenges affecting the students and the teachers. When unable to overcome issues, many students drop school to seek a different way of surviving in the future, leaving those tenacious learners to pursue their education. This article analyzes the contextual perception of rural elementary education from the colonial rural perspective and in regard to both students and teachers' responsibilities and safety and learning environment.

Keywords— School, safety, lacking, materials, salary, performance.

I. INTRODUCTION

African authorities promote massive early schooling for young citizens. Elementary Education is mandatory in many places, depending on the country's educational constitutions. However, many perceive teaching and learning in rural elementary schools as noble work and experience but hardened by academic management or human resources dysfunctions. The students and teachers have to cope with unavailable or defective materials and inadequate buildings. Based on Bessie Head's observations in the village school of Serowe, the author explains the students' toilsome learning atmospheres where teachers find themselves constrained to volunteering without any sustainable allowance. The lack of financial support jeopardizes their relationship with students, possibly leading to a loss of patience or resorting to corporal punishments. This article intends to analyze the villagers' perception of education and demonstrates how the lack of economic potential and teaching materials affect the teacher's and students' relationship and practical effective learning.

II. THE RURAL PERCEPTION OF EDUCATION

Academic education proves to be relieving in many ways, and the more one gets educated, the more opportunities open for better-respected positions and jobs as Head observed. For the illiterate women, there was farming; and housework; for the literate teaching nursing and clerical work. (Head, 1977. 39). When defining illiteracy, Winthrop Talbot from the

Department of the Interior Bureau of Education emphasized the fundamental ability to read and write and qualifies "the lack of it as a handicap, and illiteracy implying ignorance. (Talbot, 1916, No. 35. P.5). Such statements are standard and often indicate high esteem for education due to the numerous disadvantages of illiteracy. To show a different facet of the advantages of education despite feeble means, Bessie Head introduced the missionaries taking the initiative to build a school for the villagers who appreciate the teaching method reputed to be of quality and available for the children with less opportunity. Serowe, *The Village of the Rain Wind* in Botswana exposes a village that inhabits people who perceive illiteracy as the source of their feeble income and limited opportunities for self or collective development. Regarding the concepts of worth and dignity, Bessie Head compares poverty associated with lack of education to cogs. « Poor illiterates are cogs in the wheels, and given authority, they indulge in the reign of terror. And because of this, she believes that 'it's going to take years and years for enough schools to be built » (Head *Gesture of Belonging* P.30). The disadvantages of illiteracy often became manifest through regret and blame or even indifferent unawareness of how poverty sticks to the deprived 'like glue' (Head, 1969. 139). As poverty does not keep a lifelong stickiness on its subjects, illiteracy can also be temporal or permanent depending on individuals' dispositions to overcome it. One can acknowledge Serowe villagers' determination to give their children a more valuable life with education. One retired cattleman, Lekoto Digate, reports his major achievements in constructing many elementary schools in Serowe 'but never attended school' himself. (Head 1981, P. 110).

Alongside climatic realities, which probably impact education, a considerable part of Botswana is dependent on the generosity of the rain for agricultural work performed on semi-desertic land. The initiatives for elementary school building stand as a reference in places accustomed to long-term drought as "years of drought in" Botswana "and famine conditions." (Head, Serowe, P. 120). Elizabeth T. Marshall's *The Harmless People* estimates the drought in the country to be "four hundred miles of the central desert of Bechuanaland where there was no water at all..." (Marshall, 1989. P.15). Despite this phenomenon, Serowe villagers' collaborate with Missionaries pioneering schools for all social classes. On the one hand, the missionaries' contribution indicates that not

everyone affords a standard quality of education. And people with academic certificates may not be aware that illiteracy is far more costly than education. Chimamanda Ngozi perceives the gap between the learned and the illiterates practically as the educated leaving "the weak (the tyrants) behind." (Adichie, 2003. 245.) Again, alluding to the uneducated as weak or tyrants reminds of the several times the term illiterate is associated with poor. Since "The poor and illiterate are slowly building up their economy" (Head, 2001. P. 180.).

Parent willing to be intentional about their children's school fees payments calls for hard work and budgeting by selling « plenty of corn, pumpkin, and mealies. » (Serowe, P.82). Significantly hoping that things to change, the learning happens mostly under moral obligation or pursuit of success for the parents' honor. While there may be exceptions, the kind of schools in the villages reflect the inhabitants' standard of life, which means modest pupils attend modest schools. To this effect, Marshall says of the Bushmen, (The Botswana Kalahari Desert dwellers) that "They now have access to schools and hospitals, but poverty is their overwhelming lot." (Elizabeth Marshall Thomas THE OLD WAY, 2007. 243). One of these people's first causes of deprivation is the longtime inaccessibility to education.

One can come across the sacrificial dynamic for Education. Besides financial handicaps, in line with the mentality that People who are poor have no choice. » (Serowe, 75), the author puts Serowe village parents display an unusual determination to the extent of taking risks on their children's environmental safety. Serowe demonstrates a genuine love for education by setting up a school with nonexciting buildings compelling the teachers to hold their classes outdoors. Besides, releasing the children for academic purposes implies losing their helping hand in daily fieldwork, which supports the family's immediate condition but not long-term development. Seeing education from the same angle as the villagers, Crofts reports a 2010 Collaboration Agreement with the University of New England promoting "education for sustainability, and means to stimulate awareness and local participation in the work." (Crofts Roger Healing the Land 2011. 165). Parenting profile and duty description in African views include training children to relieve them from poverty, ignorance, dependence, limitations, and shame.

For this reason, the students expected to succeed often experience family pressure to bring change by lessening illiteracy, which many uneducated people perceive as disgraceful in multiple ways. For instance, requesting a neighbor to read a letter and explain the content is one of the most embarrassing favors to ask from a person not susceptible to knowing one's private correspondence with others. In the same context of valuing a learned child, The Fula Boy provides an example of a "literate schoolboy assigned on request to help the Second Regiment's mail officer in distributing "mail exchanged between the tirailleurs at the front and their wives who had remained behind in Kati." (Hampate Ba. 2021 P.328). Today, the invention of advanced system communication has endowed applications such as WhatsApp with facilitating audio options by discarding so, the necessity of reading or typing messages. Nevertheless, without

audio options, many adults remain trapped in illiteracy, maintaining in neediness: their families, communities, and tribes aspiring for change. In this stand, one may realize that communities with high education suffer less from poverty and are prone to quicker development in various areas than a community with a low education level.

III. NEED FOR ADEQUATE LEARNING ENVIRONMENT AND MATERIAL

Education is challenging in the village schools where many struggle to meet the basic material needs of parents and children. Bessie Head in many of her books demonstrates the value and benefits of education. Yet, it is difficult to discard the conditions, desires, and ambitions that contribute to the well-being of learners. The well-being also consists of the availability of classroom supplies, adequate environment, food, and social relationships to encourage the learners. The need of physical materials seems to vails the other lacks. Many African schools in rural areas use basic and non-technological types of equipment such as (blackboards, chalk, pen, pencil and paper, notebooks, textbooks, wooden measuring sticks, straight Edge or rulers, sponges, and erasers); all necessary but sometimes unafforded by parents. In such insufficiency, the learners find themselves compelled to share classroom supplies and stationaries. Before the similar problem of material deprivation Manzoor Ahmed and Gabriel Carron remark that "schools in deprived areas of the developing world" lacks the "minimum equipment for efficient teaching." (UNESCO, Zaghoul Morsy -1989 (72) P.564). Elementary village students from modest homes often experience limited access to technology devices such as computers or laptops, projectors, and printers. Therefore, where city schools possess whiteboards and expo markers, the rural school learners in the deprived zones would have to contend with chalkboards; wooden blackboards nailed on the wall; and sometimes in need of replacement.

The unavailability of educational materials seems exclusively to be the students' concern. The attention paid to children's safety is worth pages outlining the directory ways for schools, teachers, and administrators to measure-taking for students' safety. At the same time, the teachers work with little means as the debate on teachers' safety would sound ridiculously unfamiliar. Due to such uncommonness, Bessie Head displays Serowe with a sample of elementary teachers with no teaching materials, and no pay and therefore restricted from enjoying the noble vocation of being a teacher. The essential dispositions to motivate teachers I acknowledged when they appreciate the remuneration and the equipment at their disposal. Yet, in most African rural areas, teaching fails to stand among the respected occupations. And people often resort to teaching positions while waiting for what they believe is a better job. Far from prioritizing the vocation that accompanies the nobility of teaching, but makes full sense when the salary is consequent. In remembrance of his contribution to the progress of Serowe missionary school, a teacher regrettably testified that there was no "paid a salary." And to one understanding, "It was the rule of Khama that teachers should not be paid." This seems decision shows a

verbal decree that the teachers concluded to be the same as killing them with the perception of how educators should earn their living. "You are working for your country to improve it, not working for money. All teachers must live on their cattle, goats, and plowing of corn." (Head 1981, eBook P.44)

Having to live on cattle herding while fulfilling the teaching role signifies that one of the two occupations must be on the second plan. The cattle-raising activity must be suffering due to two reasons. First, according to Serowe, Khama was the president who brought in the rule of not paying the teachers. That means, there must have been very little to do to change such a decision. Secondly, a teaching position proves to be time-consuming and tiring, especially in particular conditions of shortage of materials, which is very common in the rural areas of many African regions. In the same path, Head intends to present how "teachers suffered a lot. «Having "no classrooms" and no other alternative than gathering the learners under "the big tree" or simply canceling the classes when threatened by "rain or freezing windy days" (Head 1981, eBook P.44). There is sensitivity to the problems in education between students and teachers as it is common to forget that the teacher plays the central role in the learning process as teachers. When deprived of textbooks the teachers' creativity and experience have proven to take the students to the academic level far from the initial. "We had a blackboard, easel, box of chalk and duster – those were supplied all right – but we had no textbooks." (44,45). This statement indicates that teaching happens without textbooks but instead with the considerable implication of talents, creativity, and vocational passion. However, the teachers' concern about how to feed their families without salary may not prevent the teaching to happen but rather the learning. In other words, The teachers' teaching does not automatically guarantee the students' learning especially when performed under a dissatisfactory mood as one can observe from Serowe: "I began to feel a grudge at the low salary because I was a married man with children, and I left teaching in 1940 when I was about forty-eight years old." (Head 1981, eBook P.45). In addition to experiencing a financial imposed crisis, the teachers are in charge of students whose parents cannot afford to purchase the textbooks and workbooks. In similar conditions, the learners result in squeezing to fit at the desks to share reading with desk mates. Besides the shortage of materials, the learning space limitation leads to crowded classrooms compared to the standard number of students per class, which causes learning somehow challenging for both students and teachers.

The challenge of basic education for all, in the UNESCO: Prospects; Quarterly Review of Education, Manzoor Ahmed and Gabriel Canon report under the subtitle Mobilizing Resources "a study carried out in 1986 in a rural district of Mozambique." According to this study, "less than 3 percent of the pupils of primary schools were provided with seats or desks and that only 17 percent of the classrooms were equipped with a desk for the teacher and 53 percent with a blackboard." Zaghoul Morsy (Ed. SDI) Vol. XIX, No. 4, 1989 (122). This study report does not differ much from for picture Bessie Head portrays of the school of Serowe as one can discover in many other parts of the rural areas in Africa.

Besides the lack of learning materials and salary, safe places with hygiene stand as need. Many people desire to live in the villages with modest single-room mud wall huts with straw roofs believed to cool indoor temperatures. Indeed, the mud-walled village houses have proved their resistance to the storm, roof-leaking when strongly built. But, Bessie Head demonstrates that Serowe's mud-wall homes and schools school need safety regards due to the absence of sanitarianess. "... Each homestead has a neat pit toilet in the yard (which is something Serowe lacks" (Serowe P. 112).

In effect, houses and schools have the same style, structure, and conditions if one refers to Hampate Ba's description. "It was a set of round huts with cob walls with conical thatched roofs." (Hampate Ba, P.377). And, Ngugi Wathiong'o perceives with surprise the unchanged state of African villages from the colonial years, mainly in 1963; « grass thatched roofs and mud-walls » though « some of the huts crumbled and a few pulled down.» (Wa Thiong'o 1967, 5). The state of the village houses displays similar precarity, which Bessie Head qualifies in The Collector of Treasures as desolation. « The thatch of the mud huts have patches of soil over them where the ants had made their nests; the wooden poles that supported the rafters of the huts had tilted to an angle as their base had been eaten through by the ants. » (Head 1977, 37). While there is a concern about the standard learning place and sufficiency of materials, many elementary learners live under stressful expectations to work harder and succeed for the progress of their families. Before such constraints, practical teaching and creating an atmosphere for understanding concepts require adequate equipment in materials and indoor and outdoor learning spaces. Some intellectuals outside Africa sometimes express skepticism about the teaching quality in African schools. One can explain this educational learning system suffering from undervalue due to the outward aspect of the school not responding to the security criteria demands and learning style. One remarkable comment comes from Asemeglou's Why Nations Fail, which provides some robust comparisons based on Education in African schools with that in developed countries on the quality of teaching performance and the student's creativity. The author calls to, "Now imagine a different society, for example, the Congo or Haiti, where a large fraction of the population has no means of attending school, or where, if they manage to go to school, the quality of teaching is lamentable, where teachers do not show up for work, and even if they do, there may not be any books." (86 Daron Asemeglou, James A. Robinson 2012). From Daron Asemeglou's standpoint, poverty-stricken schools provide workers with poor performance compared to most developed nations' education and employment standards. Meanwhile, prudence on behalf of deprived school certificates stemmed from elementary failure to provide the learners with the necessary materials and adequate conditions for learning performance. Equally, students' and teachers' dissatisfaction can jeopardize the transmission of knowledge and the teacher-student relationship.

IV. TEACHING METHODS AND TEACHER-STUDENT RELATIONSHIPS

The teacher and student share an interdependent relationship as they need one another mutually and both need facilitation in their different roles. This is the relationship Bessie Head's Serowe portrays through a challenging educational system with limited learning space. Having classes outdoors compels the teacher to summon the students under the tree shade or cancel classes when the weather disfavors. A constant deficiency of basic learning materials and adequate space is reliable to create distrust and a situation where learners think of their teachers as incompetent and insensitive to their concerns. In certain circumstances when after the teaching is over and the learning does not happen, students tend to either think of themselves as unintelligent or of the teacher as incompetent. Though professionally trained, the teacher is unable to explore the full potential pedagogy to transfer knowledge with insufficient materials. In this reality, the students are often unable to afford textbooks and other major supplies and yet, do not understand why the teachers do not possess their teaching tools. Before such challenging conditions, the teaching methods often center around routine starting from copying to memorizing and from learning by heart to reproducing lessons in their assessment. The teacher may use primary verbal resources and activate the prior knowledge with the fundamental concepts of the big ideas. The preliminary step is often monitored through the oral interaction of questions and answers otherwise written on the walled blackboard and responded to on mini chalkboards. Amadou Hampathe Ba explains a similar learning system from the colonial time when the student had to memorize the words, sentences, texts, or the entire lesson. (Hampete Ba, 2021 246 ebooks). The students presented in Amkoullé, The Fula Boy expressed their satisfaction in being capable to memorize their lessons at the end of several repetitions. This method of learning does not seem to gain ground on all learners mainly when the texts appear difficult to understand and read without help. Chimamanda Ngozi mentions the gap in comprehending the textbooks, which to certain students appears senseless, and resort to rather memorizing the teacher's explanation "because the textbooks would not make sense." (Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie 2003. 52). The learning system of memorization is not recent in African schools due to its effective results when teaching in foreign languages with unillustrated books. The unabundant vocabulary specific to naming things with confidence and fluency can explain the teaching with gestures, and lesson memorization, which becomes the logical way of transmitting knowledge as both students and their teachers interact in their second or third language. For instance, in a former English colony, the teachers may teach in English and encourage the students to cooperate through individual and collective repetitions of lessons. While many students may dislike memorization, Amadou Hampathe Ba upraises the effectiveness and efficiency of this method of learning. "My method of study was particularly effective. I irritated everyone in the household by reciting at the top of my lungs word pairs that shared the

same sound, such as au loin, du foin, un coin, [...]." (Hampete Ba, 2021. 250 ebooks).

Having to cover the curriculum benchmarks and manage plethoric classrooms visibly impacts the educator's potential and patience for the learners. A loss of patience can occur as some learners distract their classmates while the teachers expect attention to maximize their learning skills in understanding the concepts. Many reasons can lead a student to inattention, and uninterest in the lesson. Boredom, poor health, hunger, and family issues to cite but a few, counts as learning demotivators. On the teacher, account, low pay or no pay has no equal demotivator because for the knowledge transfer to occur, teachers and students should be in good spirits. Besides insufficiently equipped classrooms, Head meant to expose the teachers' financial challenges hindering the education system of many developing African countries. For this reason, teachers experiencing discontentment and dissatisfaction with initial no-pay and then low pay evaluate their occupations as not worthy of extra effort for the students. The bigger picture of constraints in teaching implies the frustration that emerges from the student's low performance leading to the teacher correcting by corporal castigation. One of the students' most expected difficulties in schools also implies corporal punishment, while parents' most significant concern is affording school supplies. Though Serowe does not provide further details of the content of disciplinary measures, School policies determine them when there is a rule violation. The students often know their school policies in a general concept but barely specify the contents regulations of corporal punishment reserved for the broken rule. On this bases, Bessie Head's Serowe gives an example of laziness being a motive for beating in the village school of Serowe. "[...] we formed a trainees' disciplinary committee and prescribed corporal punishment to trainees who were lazy to work or misbehaved in any way. (Head SEROWE P.170". Other school children get beaten for not memorizing their lesson, for coming late, for wrong spelling, for getting false results in operations, or for confusing recitation. Teachers may occasionally need reminding that they are prohibited by law from using any form of punishment intended to inflict pain, including 'hitting, slapping, or shaking' a child. About the possibility of experiencing corporal punishment in the classrooms, Serowe's story setting refers back to the years when parents would not oppose the inclusive unwritten rule of corporal punishments reserved for students. This is because biological parents often would exercise corporal punishment on their children. In a large spectrum of African culture, it was quite not an offense that a teacher or any well-known neighbor of the parents' age group to pretend to exercise the same authority on someone else's child. Nevertheless, the students accepted them more from their parents than from teachers who happened to fall into exaggeration in hitting their students and leading them to drop out of school. School dropout refers to someone who abandoned school and did not reach the desired level of education. The causes of dropout manifest in many ways, such as poverty, lack of motivation, laziness, family disputes, distance from school, and violence. Many African education systems include corporal punishments in elementary schools

to enforce disciplinary measures, sometimes leading to many students dropping out for fear of more years of slapping, and flogging for various reasons. For instance, One can see teachers whipping their students for not knowing the answer to a question on a lesson not previously learned or understand.

These gaps often understood as laziness and lack of engaged learning put the students out of the conditions of progress. Bessie Head provided an example of inattentiveness that can anger a teacher. "The trouble was I was inattentive in lessons and used to sit and stare at the ceiling if a lesson did not interest me. I remember my teachers saying: "Lenyeletse, you don't make a noise, but you just annoy me!" (Head Serowe P.96). Serowe demonstrates that students come into classrooms with diverse emotional needs that the teacher moderates to get the required attention from the class to stand the learning pressure. The students express boredom differently during the lesson as many voices it out through disconcerting talking on things unrelated to the teaching. Others like Lenyeletse would sink into the silent distraction of daydreaming. The late start of school can contribute to the students' inattention due to the child's unfamiliarity with school life and rules. The delay can derive from economic powerlessness, health issues weakening, and enabling the child to attend a school or within traditional duty bounds related to gender inequality. Therefore, multiple reasons can determine the students' relationship with their teachers. So when made easy and sweet there is reciprocal respect and free interaction. Otherwise, the students become uncomfortable and often jubilate when the teacher is absent because the deprived schools barely provide substitutes for teachers. Eventually, Serowe village prove to have a consistent regard for a quick development in their education system. "Today, the building of a new school creates no hazards and sacrifices – its place is neatly allocated in a five year plan for district rural development and no doubt, (...), the school will materialize." The hope of Bessie Head envisions the rural schools in process of development probably with a revised regard of safety for teachers.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, people value education and perceive it as worthy of sacrifice for future individual and collective development. However, despite respect for schooling, many rural elementary schools are deprived of equipment. And according to Serowe for lack of classrooms, the teachers resort to gathering the students under the trees exposing the children to distractions and feeble performance. While in many countries teachers claim for increase in salary, Bessie Head brings in a more critical condition of teachers with no salary nor alternative remuneration. Working under constraints of limitations, the teachers become unable to ensure effective

learning and concepts understanding. Furthermore, the tendency of teaching depravedly can result in working unpassionately and losing patience with students' perturbation or destructions. The developing countries' rural schools' reputation often refers students undergoing verbal assaults, humiliation, or corporal punishments in addition to lack of materials. Yet, a reconsideration of needs for both learners and educators can reverse this reputation allowing the teaching to happen without verbal, mental or physical imposed pain on the learners. Regarding the hard work those teachers accomplish with their students, a shift can prove. So, shifting from teaching with materials and a little salary to fully equipped classrooms, and acceptable salary and working conditions can make interesting change in relationships and performance with students. Because education is valued costly, and often long experience, it requires safety equally for teachers because child safety at school does not mean much without the teacher's safety.

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