

SOUTH AFRICAN HISTORY ONLINE'S EDUCATION PROGRAMME

Varushka Jardine

SAHO Researcher

varushkaj@gmail.com

Abstract

This paper outlines South African History Online as a NGO that focuses on the enhancement of history especially at school level. The advent of digital and social media platforms has changed the way scholars learn and the way they perceive their world. The book, paper and journals should no longer provide the exclusive model for historical knowledge to be passed on. With this in mind, SAHO has developed a comprehensive online programme that focuses on the current curriculum as laid out by the Department of Education. The development of this website into an online classroom will assist both teachers and learners.

Learners should be exposed to the wonders of digitisation and have the advantage of viewing primary source documents in their classrooms. This turns a normal classroom into a virtual archive making the learners instant historians who can now investigate their own case studies. Teachers have the opportunity of telling stories in new ways and in different means, and can use various materials from SAHO's online media and library section to give the learners the opportunity to relive the story.

SAHO has various projects such as the development of the online curriculum material and aids for history from Grades 4 to 12. The aim is to build up this project into a comprehensive online encyclopaedia. An Arts and Culture classroom will soon be developed in a similar format. SAHO's teacher outreach programme, online support and e-learning focuses on the development of an online forum for both teachers and learners. Other campaigns include the 'history matters' campaign which is aimed at increasing interest in history at school and tertiary level. Monitoring and evaluating SAHO's classroom support will be done through counters on the web pages.

Keywords: South African History; Online; Curriculum development; Largest South African history website; Strengthening history teaching; Curriculum material; Online resources; Active learning; Digitisation.

Who is South African History Online (SAHO)?

SAHO (South African History Online) is a Non-Profit Organisation founded 10 years ago. The organisations' flagship project is the largest website on South African History and Culture. This organisation has over 300 000 pages of information.

SAHO has also developed a comprehensive educational programme, which has been run in partnership with the Department of Education since 2001. In this time a great deal of experience and knowledge was gathered in using the internet to provide support to the education sector.

Currently, SAHO publishes the South African history curriculum from grades 4 -12 on the website; this material is available for free download.

Furthermore SAHO also runs exhibition and publication programmes. This includes the production of: arts and culture exhibitions, toured nationally and abroad; the co-ordination and hosting of history conferences and seminars; and the publishing of publications; which to date totals over 15 major publications.

Why use the Internet to teach?

Many educators favour using printed media in the classroom. Learners are trained to critically analyse the printed word and reproduce it. This is a useful skill and always will be, however, the time has come for teachers to embrace technologies beyond the book. Digitisation initiatives and the emergence of a global education market-spawned by the internet has had consequences for learning and teaching. History or the humanities are no exception.

The majority of South African learners today are comfortable with technology and the latest methods of accessing information and online communication. Teachers should embrace and use these technologies as well. The result will be that teaching becomes more learner-centred, more active and more three dimensional. It will result in a change in the way learners conceptualize history.

Thus, it is important for teachers to be a part of the process of building online education archives, classrooms and portals. Increased involvement will ensure that quality online products are produced, and that materials fulfil curriculum needs.

Benefits for the teacher

For the teacher, there are many benefits of using online resources such as the SAHO in the classroom, of which the following are a few:

- One can access various resources on a particular topic, ensuring that multiple points of view are represented. This ensures that learners become more critical in their approach to the topics.
- If lesson plans and ideas are shared online, teachers will be able to download lessons decreasing lesson planning time.
- The study of history is largely resource based – be they written documents, images, objects, oral histories or other forms of history. Learning, including e-learning is always located in the various formats of resource material. Unfortunately, financial constraints and physical restrictions do not enable schools access to these materials, but in a society becoming ever more digitised, schools can now have access to these documents using digital methods. More and more materials relevant to the study of history are best accessed by means of information technology.
- It gives learners the opportunity to be historians by using primary documents, challenging their investigative skills and developing their research skills.
- Learners will be exposed to the wonders of digitisation and have the advantage of viewing primary source documents in their classrooms. This turns a normal classroom into virtual archives making the learners instant historians who can now investigate their own case studies. Teachers have the opportunity of telling stories in new ways and in different means, and can use various materials from SAHO's online media and library section to give the learners the opportunity to relive the story.
- Learners can be drawn into historical research by accessing SAHO's newspaper clippings, photographs and diaries. These resources amplify the learners' insight into major elements of life in the past. Such material, bring history alive for all of us. The imagination of our learners must be extended so that they are not merely learning but experiencing history.
- Internet accessibility, allows accessibility to material and resources, which finally, promotes active learning.
- Teachers can access an entire store of pictures, cartoons, posters, and other imagery on a portal like SAHO's. One example of our media and library boasts documents such as the summons given to Oliver Tambo (<http://www.sahistory.org.za/archive/forced-resignation-letter-sap-walter-sisulu-1953>) by the police to discontinue his membership to the ANC. Educators can use this to design case studies whereby learners interact with such documents thus making history

transparent.

- Teachers can become part of online classroom forums that provides them with support and advice from their peers and colleagues both nationally and abroad.

SAHO's Education Programme

The decline in the number of learners taking history over the past ten years is worrying, therefore earnest efforts should be launched to increase learners, teachers and scholars interest in history, why not adopt innovative methods of technology which are befitting of the current trends in technological development. The advent of social media platforms has changed the way scholars learn and perceive their world. Our youth today are comfortable in this digital age, so – SAHO aims to 'strengthen the teaching of history' and popularise history using the digital and social media platforms to advance our history e.g. the World Wide Web, mobile technologies like Mix it, Facebook and twitter. This does not mean that the printed media is excluded; but it should not be the exclusive model for historical knowledge.

SAHO projects include; the Chief Albert Luthuli Young Historians Competition; the Development of online curriculum materials and aids for history Grades 4– 12; Teacher Outreach Programme, online Support Service and the 'History Matters' campaign.

Each of the programmes is elaborated below:

The Chief Albert Luthuli Young Historians Competition

The Chief Albert Luthuli Young Historians Competition is run in partnership with the Department of Education. This is an annual national oral history project open to all learners and teachers. As part of the competition, participants prepare a portfolio in written form and give an oral presentation or video documentary of his/her oral research to a panel of adjudicators.

All of the heritage knowledge collected as part of the project is digitised and shared online.

The aim of the competition is to increase interest in history and to encourage scholars throughout South Africa to engage with their shared history in addition to exploring their personal and community histories. It also aims to acknowledge – in a significant way – the efforts of promising learners and the dedication of their teachers. By involving learners to undertake these oral

history projects, many local and largely forgotten activists will be acknowledged, and democracy and development in their community will be promoted.

The development of online curriculum materials and aids for history, Grades 4 to 12

SAHO's online History classroom section is used extensively by students, teachers and lecturers at tertiary institutions. However, the continued development of the online curriculum materials and aids for Grades 4 to 12 is crucial to ensure quality and that the materials comply with the changes that the department is presently making to the history curriculum. As this is a free and non-profit resource, SAHO constantly tries to ensure that teachers get involved in updating the content.

The present National Senior Certificate history exam has changed from being 'fact-focused' to understanding a historical event or period, requiring discussion and debate. SAHO's online curriculum materials and aids will assist learners and teachers in delving deeper into the content by creating links and relationships among various online materials. Therefore, part of this project is to build the SAHO website so that it becomes a truly comprehensive online encyclopaedia. For this intent we digitize out-of-print books, official documents, articles and rare photographs.

Teacher Outreach Programme and Online Support Service

Through the development of an online forum and interactive interface SAHO will provide an online support service for teachers and learners. By creating these learning communities teachers can analyse the new curriculum materials as well as ask general questions on matters related to the curriculum. We could even get department representatives to respond to issues that may arise. The platform will allow teachers to share their classroom experiences, and producing and publishing their own classroom materials online. It also affords us the opportunity to link various teaching and learning institutions in order to enhance the subject.

'History Matters' campaign

This campaign's aim is to increase an interest in history, but also to ensure that more teachers and learners know about the SAHO website.

Over the next three years the SAHO team will be developing a schools and university campaign to achieve these goals. Materials for schools will include pamphlets, lessons ideas and career opportunities that the subject offers.

In addition, we would like to roll out a SAHO awareness campaign at tertiary institutions during their orientation weeks at the beginning of the academic year. The focus of the campaign would be to engage with learners who could potentially begin writing new research for the SAHO archive. Through the strengthening of partnerships with various universities, we can draw on their research outputs and look at ways of making more resources available for post- and under-graduate learners. This will encourage and promote new South African and African research at these institutions.

In conclusion

We need to explore fresh ways to teach and learn history. Through our various programmes SAHO hopes to assist in the rejuvenation of learners' interest in history, but it is crucial that we work with teachers and the education sector at large to achieve this. 'Let us work together to keep our history alive'.