

ZJER

ZIMBABWE JOURNAL OF EDUCATIONAL RESEARCH

Volume 20 Number 1 March 2008

ISSN 1013-3445

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CONTENTS

The Emotions Of University Lecturers As Root Causes Of The
Brain-Drain in Zimbabwe
Fred Zindi & Cribert Munetsi.....1

Early Childhood Education And Development In Malawi:
Major Challenges And Prospects
Foster A. C. Kholowa and Dixie Maluwa-Banda.....11

Language, Science, Technology, Mathematics (STM) and
Poverty Alleviation in Africa: A Case for Nigeria
Uju Clara Umo.....22

Africanizing the School Curriculum: A Case For Zimbabwe
Pharaoh Joseph Mavhungu.....30

Should Traditional Medicine Practised In Chivi,
Zimbabwe Be Included In School Curricula?
Takawira Kazembe and Dominic Mashoko.....49

Staff Supervision as a Tool for Organizational Success in
Ghana
Eric Nyarko-Sampson.....70

Students' Career Aspirations versus Occupational
Environments in The Economy of Ghana
Frederick Ocansey.....88

THE EMOTIONS OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS AS ROOT CAUSES OF THE BRAIN-DRAIN IN ZIMBABWE

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Abstract:

The views of the emotional experiences of 32 University of Zimbabwe lecturers are explored in this paper with a view to finding out the root causes of brain-drain in Zimbabwe.

Interviews based on the lecturers' emotional experiences and centred around the themes reflecting the extent to which the lecturers found their working environment filled with experiences of distress or of pleasure and the extent to which they felt their professional development was affected by their emotions were conducted.

Suggestions on how professional development could address the issues arising in order to allow lecturers to contribute to a fuller emotional commitment to education are made.

Introduction

Many people, even those with little interest in Psychology, have heard of Sigmund Freud. They have also heard about current controversies on repressed memories of emotional traumas, of child abuse, or false memory syndrome. The thinker who hovers behind all this is none other than Sigmund Freud. Freud devoted his time understanding how people felt and behaved. He founded psychoanalysis, a prototype of all therapies based on the idea that we can change emotional personality traits by understanding ourselves better. One of his lasting accomplishments was to show us how thoughts and feelings of people in states of emotional crisis can be taken seriously. His method was quite simple. All he did was to listen and to observe behaviour. It is with this method in mind that we set out to listen and to observe the behaviour of University of Zimbabwe lecturers.

Zimbabwe is in a social, political and economic crisis. These researchers have had time to listen to and observe the emotional behaviour of lecturers in response to this crisis.

Freud established what today's thinkers, writers and researchers on emotions now believe to be true: that there is something both profound and non-obvious about how emotions arise, about how to understand them, and about how to deal with them..

First of all let us recognize the fact that human emotions are universal. For instance the same patterns of facial movements occur in all human groups as evidenced by Russell's 1994 experiment where Western and Non-Western societies were asked to recognize six facial expressions of emotions i.e. "happy", "surprise", "anger", "sadness", "fear" and "disgust". It was demonstrated that both Western and Non-Western observers conform to prediction to a greater degree than would be expected by chance.

Other examples which are central to human life include the way we express love - in sexual relationships, in parent/child relationships and in Friendships; *Fear* e.g. of offending others in our social groups; *Anger*, *Sadness*, *Hope* and *Pride* are also emotions which are universal and found among all cultural groups in the world.

The academic study of emotions is now pervasive in all subject areas such as psychology, psychiatry, education, sociology, linguistics, philosophy and other related disciplines. However, it must be pointed out that there is a distinction between emotions, moods and dispositions. Emotions are usually sudden. For instance, we suddenly become angry at someone who behaves badly towards us, or we suddenly get terrified when riotous students begin to throw stones at us. Moods are not usually so sudden.

Emotions are in such a way differentiated from moods, which are vague overall feeling states, and from sensations, which are sensory experiences.

It is hard to see how education could be conceived in order to meet with any success without lecturers and students exhibiting a number of qualities indicative of their commitment to the educational enterprise. Among these qualities are: **honesty**, since dishonesty creates mutual suspicion and inhibits trust; **openness**, since guardedness or lack of transparency creates defenses against self-examination; **vulnerability**, since educational change cannot come about where personal defenses have been erected; **a certain kind of innocence**, since guilt or shame

prevents an authentic response to experience. An educational situation is one in which lecturers and students in variously appropriate ways commit themselves to one another and, what is the same thing, to their mutual development as persons. When these values disappear, the Education system begins to disintegrate and human emotions are set alight.

It is unfortunate that the prevailing conditions of education in Zimbabwe do not make it easy for lecturers to commit themselves fully as persons to the established practices of educational institutions. The reasons vary, the major one being economic as salaries are too low. The second one is political where politics affects the individual lecturer's job satisfaction. The working environment such as dilapidated buildings, lack of water and electricity may also affect the emotional well-being of lecturers. This may cause them to leave their jobs or to seek for greener pastures.

Method

Subjects

For these reasons, we are attempting in this paper to discern the emotional life of University lecturers through a review of evidence provided in interviews by thirty two (i.e. 6 female and 26 male) established lecturers.

Design

An attempt is also made in trying to find answers to the following questions:

- (a) To what extent are the emotions of lecturers driving them into leaving their jobs?;
- (b) To what extent are emotions developed in professional life? What gives the lecturers joy or distress?
- (c) How might professional development address the issues arising?

Because personal experience, including emotional experience, is structured by instructional as well as personal characteristics which have historical and biographical origins, we shall argue that educational development must proceed at the level of the whole staff, as well as at the level of individual lecturers.

A view of the emotions

According to Michael Golby (1996), most of us think of emotions as always unruly or disruptive, for there are continuous satisfactions and pleasures in the daily round, the small glows of minor pride at a meal well cooked or the news of a salary increment. This continuous emotional tone we tend to relegate beneath conscious attention so long as it does not spin out of control and threaten the orderly conduct of our lives. The everyday transactions of life are premised on a certain steadiness of conduct that belies the minor and sometimes major turbulence beneath. This is by all accounts is true of universities as of any other institution. Indeed, the special concern of universities with social order may mean that quite large emotional sacrifices must be made by lecturers in universities...

Instruments

The 32 university lecturers were formally interviewed, though in a discursive and semi-structured way. That we have considerable knowledge of almost all of them having worked with them in the University made these interviews all the more rewarding and, inevitably, we have edited and interpreted what they said to us in the light of that background knowledge. In the course of the interviews we asked them direct questions about their feelings towards and emotional reactions to university life. What gave them joy, and what gave them distress at work? For the very reason that emotions are always related to understanding and judgment, their replies inevitably raised substantive matters of organisation and management.

The Task

As mentioned above, interviews with the 32 lecturers were conducted in a discursive way in order to find out their emotional experiences at work. Subjects were asked to respond to only two questions on what gave them joy at work and what gave them distress.

Results*Distress at Work:*

- ❖ The conflicting demands that are often made on my time, not by students but by Faculty administration which often schedules meetings of very little
- ❖ importance and sometimes completely irrelevant at the expense of tutorials with students.
- ❖ Being a department chairman and at the same time a lecturer do not neatly fit into the prescribed slots. I get interruptions while I am teaching to make some impossible decisions on departmental matters. This is frustrating as it makes me feel totally dissatisfied with the way I am forced to manage my job.
- ❖ Peer evaluation is a waste of time, yet a requirement in university Ordinances. It does not depend on how good a teacher one is but who you know in the department.
- ❖ Staff turnover; unceremonious departures cause havoc in departments as extra demands are made on the remaining staff without any extra remuneration. Many are forced to
- ❖ teach more hours than the stipulated 240 hours per semester.
- ❖ Employed general hands are not doing their duties. For instance, why should the toilets remain in such a mess when the university employs cleaners? What happens to toilet paper as many toilets do not have it? Unkempt environment is a microcosm of general decline of standards at the U.Z.

Fred Zindi & Cribert Munetsi

- ❖ There are no loan facilities e.g. car, housing or school fees loans in order to ease financial burdens on staff in this hyper-inflationary environment.
- ❖ The only way one can afford to buy a house or a car these days is to go and work abroad.
- ❖ Site and Transport service makes unnecessary trips for non-University business. The money which is being wasted by this department could be better used by giving the rest of staff transport money.
- ❖ Students Health service is not fully functional as basic drugs such as penicillin are not even available. HIV positive staff and students need anti-retroviral drugs, but the University does not have plans in place to assist sufferers.
- ❖ Students' Union building should be re-opened. Extra curricula activities for students are as important as academic activities and should be encouraged.
- ❖ Imagine a professor selling *maputi* on campus in order to supplement his income!
- ❖ Closure of access to Internet most of the day is very frustrating
- ❖ Unavailability of basic equipment such as computers and photocopiers is a cause for concern.
- ❖ The toilets are never cleaned. They often do not have water, making unhygienic conditions. This, coupled with power cuts does not make a conducive environment.
- ❖ Overcrowded classrooms often compromise marking standards.
- ❖ Inadequate office space. Why do junior lecturers have to share offices?

- ❖ Rumour mongering within the departments where cliques are often formed on tribal basis is not a good thing.
- ❖ Poor salaries, which do not even cover transport costs and poor conditions of service, affect our motivation to work. Sometimes the salaries do not even come on the stipulated dates.
- ❖ Lack of foreign currency for contact leave is very frustrating. Contact leave is a contractual obligation, but how does one fight the authorities to realize this?
- ❖ Heads of departments often walk away from things which they cannot control. If a colleague has a complaint against another who may be a friend of the head, the complaint is often ignored.
- ❖ Tenure requirements, such as publications, bring about anxiety. Alternatives should be sought.
- ❖ Bureaucracy sometimes limits progress as professional innovations are often turned down due to strict and often unnecessary procedures.
- ❖ Corruption regarding appointments to higher positions is rife. It is often who one knows that gets one the job.
- ❖ There are no proper guidance and counseling services in place for students who come to us with problems.

The Joys at Work:

Lots of free time for personal business.

- ❖ Interaction with people from different societies.
- ❖ Personal growth academically through the use of library facilities, exemption in paying fees and availability of research funds.
- ❖ Seeing one's students' progress well in their studies is a joy.

- ❖ Although the good old days when one could even come to work at night and during weekends are gone, the campus-wide network which provides ICT facilities has made academic life and work experience a little easier.
- ❖ I just enjoy being with my class. I enjoy being able to influence the way my students think. That is my contribution to society. By the end of the year they have learned the sort of things I appreciate and I've learned the sort of things they appreciate.
- ❖ It gives me pride and joy to be associated with the University of Zimbabwe as there is still respect of the institution by the society at large.

Discussion

As can be seen from above, a wide selection of emotions were expressed here. Most of these are on the negative. Even given that the above is a selection from the many aspects of the reflective interviews conducted with only 32 lecturers, any particular discussion points will appear reductive. It is admitted that these are selective discussion points. Even so, the interviews do provide a sort of empirical basis for a number of theoretical considerations. The main observation made here is that lecturers are generally not happy in the present environment at the University of Zimbabwe. The biggest challenge for the University is how to address these emotions in order to stop the rot.

It must first be noticed that these 32 participants are highly competent and committed lecturers. As such, they are certainly not representative of all lecturers, male or female.

Listening to these thirty two lecturers talking, one receives the very strong impression that they are faced with innumerable occasions that engage their emotions. Their dissatisfaction and joy, particularly in their work with authority, is at times intense. Yet there is a marked sense also that they are exercising close control of their emotional lives, particularly at times when their sense of what is appropriate and right is challenged by

'outsiders'. Indeed the theme of control, inner and outer, seems predominant.

So complex and powerful are the forces in the university that bear down on the lecturers' educational work that it verges on the impertinent to suggest that they could or ought to be emotionally otherwise than as they are.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The researchers and authors of this article do not have the answers which will address these emotional needs, but it may be possible to engage the lecturers in an analysis of their working situation and the emotions that arise in it.

A cognitive approach would try to identify the underpinnings upon which the lecturers' emotional reactions are based. Encouraging lecturers to talk through their understanding of their situation would aim to challenge their deeper assumptions. At times, lecturers do forget what counts as

good and bad behaviour. Often, there are those who challenge established rules or challenge departmental chairpersons who may wish to implement certain administrative directives the lecturers disagree with. In this regard it is often wise to listen to what one's peers are saying instead of being individually head-strong. Thus peer challenge might be appropriate in areas where a central issue lies in this area of collective responsibility. The implications of this for professional development are that work needs to be done collectively and in terms of the educational judgments that lecturers share. Very much a part of such an approach would be the search for areas of disagreement.

When attempting to work in such a way we would have also to call upon the most subtle interpersonal skills, precisely because issues of collective responsibility do raise emotional levels. Persons skilled in facilitating staff development of this kind are few. The University's Teaching and Learning Centre hold seminars once a year for new lecturers and departmental heads, but evaluation of work conducted there shows that the centre has no capacity to handle the complex problem of lecturers'

emotions. In addition, there is little opportunity in the pressured life of this university for the kind of deeply reflective and mutually respectful development work of the kind required.

Yet this cognitive approach should not be seen as personal or professional 'therapy'. Rather, because it would centre on staffs' understanding of the structures in which they work and the traditions they have inherited. It has the considerable advantage of being directed to the lecturers' outer professional world. Emotional development within professional development consists of hard analysis of the situations that provoke emotional pleasure and distress. Gut reactions have to be understood as originating in the head. The hand comes into play in making adjustments, where possible, to the paramount realities of university organisation and management. Staff development conceived and carried out in these terms would go some way towards the unification of learning which it is increasingly difficult to achieve in colleges and universities.

The intelligence, capacity to reflect and emotional resilience of these 32 lecturers give some reason to believe that there is a constituency in the practicing profession for work which takes the emotional lives of lecturers as a serious and fundamental element of professional development and educational practice. If such emotions are not addressed, they become a source of frustration which provokes the search for greener pastures. There is therefore a need for further research into this area.

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