

Learners Cease to be the Pride of their Society: Effects of a Conditioned Mind

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ABSTRACT The paper aims at generating fresh insight on why current African secondary school learners care less about their own schooling. Such knowledge could provide a direction on what to do to salvage the future of such learners which is currently in jeopardy. The paper is conceptual and empirical in nature within the qualitative research paradigm. Three of the principal observations are that educators regard learners to be operating with chained minds. Parents view learners to be grossly indifferent towards schooling. Learners regard educators and parents not to be understanding them exactly how they are. The researcher concludes that neglecting schooling by learners is a complex issue requiring more stakeholders for overcoming and resolution.

INTRODUCTION

Every educational journey has a destiny. In spite of that, there are many of Limpopo African secondary school learners, who care less about their own schooling. That is attributable to many within the school factors. Ntandane (2015: 70) asserts that a streetwise principal and a merry band of committed teachers are all that is needed to catapult a failing rural school into a performing one. This implies that learners could neglect schooling on the bases of how a school is being led and managed. Mathebula (2013: 52) observes that Africans are drifting back into servitude. Verhagen (2015: 20) laments that the ailing schooling system has a share in the manner in which schools are attended and lessons offered are either seriously or lightly taken by learners. The observation of the researcher is that current secondary school learners relegate schooling to the background at the expense of the rest. Failing to take charge of their educational destiny by learners, could be equated with self-servitude which is difficult to address unless by self-reformation being done by learners themselves.

The behaviour of current African secondary school learners points out to unpleasant mental conditioning of failing to see what is beneficial and useful to them (Olivier 2012: 18). That is why Freire (1990: 168) emphasises that unchaining a person who is mentally fettered is more difficult compared to having to release a person who is physically shackled. This is to imply that

emancipating a person who is mentally conditioned, begins with the victim demonstrating a desire to overcome the shackles. The involvement of learners in their own mental decolonisation, is indispensable (Mukaddam et al. 2015: 33). Since it takes a village to raise a child, it is deserving that society at large be active participant in reversing mental conditioning suffered by the society's learners (Clarke 2009: 3; van Deventer and Kruger 2010: 4). Given the consequences of not taken one's schooling seriously, Watson (2015: 15) discloses that most of the evidence suggests that the majority of South African learners are between one and two years behind the curriculum. This signifies that most learners go to the next grade having not learnt enough in the previous grade.

Objectives

This paper sets out to generate fresh insight on why current African secondary school learners care less about their own schooling. The second objective relates to getting a direction on where to begin when salvaging the future of the present African secondary school learners through overcoming their neglect of schooling.

METHODOLOGY

The Phenomenological Approach and the Learning Organisation Philosophy underscore this paper. These perspectives enabled the re-

researcher to frame the study and to make meaning from not taking one's educational destiny seriously. Mueller (2011: 8) advises that learners who are mentally conditioned, are likely to be indifferent to their own schooling. The theoretical frameworks assisted the researcher to access learners in their world of mental conditioning and discern them (Mncube and Harber 2009:37; Sebola and Tonga 2009: 42). The theoretical frameworks helped in generating a fresh insight on the degree to which mentally fettered learners showed signs of negligence about their educational destiny. The frameworks acknowledge the subjectivity of the question of being-mentally fettered as experienced by learners. Mental conditioning, is not in any way universal in the sense that it occurs within some unique circumstances. Being mentally chained accounts to why learners display little regard to their educational destiny (Bottery 2011: 9; Thody 2011: 24).

Out of the population of 13 secondary schools of Kgakotlou Circuit in Capricorn District of Limpopo Province, three were conveniently sampled. Lehlaha (2011: 27) maintains that a relatively small number of participants selected, can provide the researcher with an adequate degree of probability and true reflection of the sampling population. This is and has been the conviction of the researcher when resorting to this kind of manageable sampling (Babbie 1992: 220). The problem under study, namely, of learners caring less about their own educational destiny owing to their mental conditioning, necessitated a convenient purposeful sampling. The sampling type is in line with the research paradigms and data construction techniques for the study. The researcher had an interview schedule containing questions for each category of respondents (Mouton 1996: 19; Creswell 2010: 143). A developed interview schedule was piloted with learners who were not part of the three sampled schools. The aim of piloting was to identify weaknesses and remedy them timely. Literature study as partnered with in-depth interviews, helped immensely to corroborate and triangulate the secured responses from respondents (Higgs and Smith 2010: 73).

Given the nature of research problem for this paper, and the kind of data the researcher emerged with, content analysis was selected to analyse the raw constructed data. Nieuwenhuis (2007: 101) as quoted by Lehlaha (2011: 31) con-

tends that content analysis is a systematic approach to qualitative data that analyses, identifies and summarises the message content. Using content analysis as part of Phenomenology and the Learning Organisation Philosophy, focused more on generating fresh insight rather than dwelling on explaining social actions and events within their particular settings and contexts.

The analysis of data was never handled as a separate stage, from all other research steps. In the process of constructing data, data analysis was performed and it entailed sorting and constructing information into categories, formatting the information into a story, creating themes out of the data, and actually writing the text. Data analysed was generated for a specific purpose, derived from particular methodologies, looked at from a particular perspective and discussed from a particular point of view (Maykut and Morehouse 1992: 127). Data analysed for this paper was the one constructed being about caring less about educational destiny in relation to being attributable to learner's mental conditioning. It is mental conditioning that prevented learners from seeing the need for urgency as regards their own schooling. Data analysed included capturing, coding and analysis into themes. An inductive approach to analysing the responses from the research informants was undertaken to allow patterns, themes and categories to emerge rather than being imposed prior to data collection and analysis. Similar responses were grouped together into categories which were subsequently utilised for the discussion of the paper's results. This identification of themes, provided depth to the insight about the individual views of educators, learners and parents pertaining to poor scholastic performance being ascribed to learners' mental conditioning that led to them caring less about schooling. The researcher analysed data pertinent to the study, utilising the constant comparative method. This an approach which complements content analysis in the sense of first requiring that as the first step, all tape recorded data be transcribed and typed verbatim. Copies of transcripts were made to be used in data analysis. Data pages were coded to their sources, that is either from educators, from learners or from parents. Ultimately, the researcher emerged with themes and categories and applied them to discuss results of the paper (LeCompte and Preissle 1993: 163). Data analysis entailed dissecting, pulling into

pieces and tearing apart the constructed data (Leedy 1993: 87).

RESULTS

The Challenge of Mental Shackles

The research question guiding the study is: to what extent is the shrunk desire and passion for educational achievement by present African learners, attributable to their mental conditioning? One of the findings is that current learners are suffering from self-hate and self-rejection due to being mentally shackled. This influences their attitude towards schooling. Learners mistake failing to take charge their own educational destiny to doing some people a disavour when in fact they delay themselves. Neglecting educational destiny could only be explained in terms of being bereft of self-love and self-acceptance. This is attributable to their mental fettering, a condition which is blinkering them from noticing that personal advancement is closely tied to taking one's schooling seriously. Learner progress through schooling, is centred on breaking down the mental shackles that subjugate and domesticate learners against educational prosperity and mental decolonisation (Meyer 2008: 226; Bottery 2011: 13; Mngxitama 2013: 11). Parent 1 of School A laments that "20 years into democracy, it is unimaginable to still feed learners apartheid-like education". Teacher 1 of the same school proclaims that "it takes a while to completely overhaul schooling and make it emancipatory in content and substance". Learner 1 of School A articulates that "the ushering in of a transformational schooling environment could have all learners behaving in an acceptable manner".

Indifference to Schooling

The starting point for mental emancipation is the possession of a sense of worth by one. One of the findings in this study is that African learners are indifferent to schooling and what it represents. This aggravates their mental arrest in the sense of disregarding the need to take charge their own educational destiny. As per the finding of this study, it is worrisome, to realise that current learners are so mentally enslaved such that they do not accept the value of schooling. Little do they notice that with schooling,

they can attain their own mental emancipation. Learners do not realise that becoming indifferent to schooling is tantamount and commensurate to self-subjugation and self-oppression (Yukl 2006: 8; Freire 1990: 58). Teacher 2 of school B contends that "the holier than though attitude by current learners is behind their disregard for schooling". Parent 2 of School B states that "the removal of corporal punishment is the source of all learner ill-discipline in schools including failing to take schooling seriously by scholars". Learner 2 of the same school reminds that "as long as teachers are not obsessed about emancipatory teaching and learning processes, then it may take long to attract learners back to loving schooling". Ramukumba (2015: 11) emphasises that if nothing is done to rescue such learners, naturally they will join the expanding ranks of the unemployed.

Misunderstood Victims

Schooling could enable a learner to climb a ladder of knowledge. This hinges upon the availability of a learner to aspire to change for the better and being ready to soil his hands for his novel dream. One of the findings is about current learners claiming that their own parents and teachers unfairly misconstrue and misrepresent them (Meyer 2008: 78). The implication is that, such learners are not ready to employ education to move from their working class status to the upper middle class. When a learner resists learning, then schooling loses its purpose. In the grand scheme of things, no educator has to tolerate learner resistance to schooling because such has unpleasant consequences for the learner and the nation at large. As long as learners display signs of being mentally fettered, they may not notice efforts made to assist them to become better citizens of admirable stature in their communities (Kutsyuruba et al. 2011: 84). Teacher 3 of School C disputes the point that "current adults, teachers included do not understand the present day learners". Parent 3 of School C concurs when cautioning that "it is tantamount to putting the cart before the horse to expect learners to be veterans of life more than their parents". Learner 3 of the same School reiterates that "what learners aspire from the current schooling is simply a participatory and emancipatory schooling atmosphere which frees learners and teachers alike".

Acting Out of Educational Expediency

No educator worth his salt awaits to have learners who are unchanging to match the epoch they find themselves in (Naidu et al. 2012: 190). Educators delight in having learners who despite growth stages, continue to put schooling before all other youthful activities. One of the findings reveal how the present African learners persist to act out of educational expediency instead of acting out of principles. Such was noticed as learners comfortably compromised great learning with side-issues that were far detached from scholastic advancement. Such a kind of learner behaviour is not only discouraging, but also setting a precedence for future similar behaviours which do not promote scholastic learner achievement. Compromising schooling is a bad practice deserving to be nipped on the bud (Ngidi 2009: 22). Learner 1 of school A remarks that “21st century learners are unstoppable in terms of demanding the total dismantling of colonial and apartheid-like schooling and replace it with an emancipatory one where the voices of all learners matter”. Teacher 1 of School A comments that “today’s learners are just weak and lazy and always looking for scapegoats to protect their deficiencies and defectiveness”. Parent 1 of School A concedes when stating that “point to me a single thing which today’s learners excel with, nothing, nothing at all, except their big mouths to shield their indolence, irresponsibility and resistance to schooling”.

Supporting Ideologically Irrational Position

Research evidence confirms that, the present African public secondary school learners are lazy readers. The genesis of that is the state of the psyche of the society learners are an integral part of. Evidence indicates that owing to the spirit of laziness engulfing current learners, they end up attempting to gloss over the realism of their laziness through supporting their irrational stance with ideologies that are far-fetched. This is precipitated by these learners’ attraction to amateurish behaviour of reasoning out almost everything, including those that are indisputable. It does not matter how hard one attempts to explicate something which is fallacious, it will remain wrong. Current public secondary school learners lack awareness that without pursuance

of schooling, they do not stand a chance of prospering educationally. The degree of being mentally conditioned is meddlesome towards taking charge of their educational destiny. In view of the intensity of mental conditioning, completely obliterating it may take a while (van Niekerk and van Niekerk 2009: 9, Higgs and Smith 2010:3; Chikane 2011: 245). Parent 2 of School B argues that “the nature of a democratic society our children grow up in is just not healthy enough to groom an orderly and disciplined learners”. Teacher 2 of the same institution agrees in mentioning that “as teachers, as long as we are mere curriculum implementers, we cannot always succeed in influencing learners to fully take charge of their educational destiny”. Learner 2 of the same institution attests that “there is everything wrong with today’s schooling much as there are countless things that are faulty in our own communities that spill over to schools”.

Learner Performance being Eclipsed by Underperformance

Learners are at school to learn and be made autonomous and magnificent citizens that perform decent jobs that reward admirably. They have to take charge of their educational destiny earnestly. Literature review discloses that learners do forget themselves at school to the level of replacing learning with non-learning activities. That leads to learner underperformance eclipsing learner performance (Sebola and Tonga 2009: 58). This is an antithesis which is not supposed to be witnessed in schools. Failure by learners to be themselves and the habit of not taking a school as a place of learning, but of whiling away time, is the cause. Mental colonisation prevents learners from taking their educational destiny seriously (Thody 2011: 25). Learner 3 of School C in reference to the crop of teachers populating schools, contends that “it takes the liberated to liberate others”. This signifies that current teachers are as mentally fettered as their learners. Parent 3 of the same institution emphasises that “it takes the devotion of all the school’s internal and external stakeholders to mould a learner to regard her studies to be priority number one”. Teacher 3 of School C articulates that “as long as teaching is a stakeholder profession, the unity and harmony of learners, parents, teachers, government and the broader community matters to influence today’s

learners to take their educational destiny seriously". With a spirit of oneness within the stakeholders being in place, learner performance is likely to eclipse learner underperformance.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this paper is to generate fresh insight on caring less about their educational destiny by current African secondary school learners. Khanare (2008:37) remarks that these days teaching is about touching the souls of learners. He is supported by Khumalo (2011:8) who advises that one ought not fix learners alone, but teachers as well. This is to imply that when learners disregard schooling, teachers are indirectly responsible. This is sensible because schools are populated by learners, educators and other stakeholders. Research evidence keeps on confirming that a good teacher makes an uncommitted learner to become devoted and a good learner to become superior and best (Ngidi 2009:23). On that basis, the researcher contends that to save African secondary schools from being paralysed by consistent underperformance and dysfunctionality, it is not always correct to find fault only with learners when things do not pan out well in schools. Institutional make-up could lead learners to resist schooling. For instance, Nkosi (2015:35) reminds that the fact that some schools resort to multi-grade teaching where learners from different grades are taught in one room, it is problematic. Some learners could lose interest of schooling on the basis of that. Watson (2015:15) supports that when advising that just because children are enrolled in school, does not mean they are learning. This precisely implies that where secondary school learners get a sense that they are not benefiting enough from schooling, they are likely to reject and snub schooling. That is why it is essential that regularly learners be alerted about the value and significance of taking their schooling seriously (Ntandane 2015: 7).

Bernstein and McCarthy (2011: 8; Ramphele 2011: 21) aver that scholastic underperformance orchestrated by caring less about one's schooling deserve to be combatted before becoming legendary especially in Limpopo. On the basis of that, this paper places super focus on the failure to take charge of one's educational destiny by learners because of those learners being being prisoners of their own chained minds. No

doubt, perennial underperformance of learners is directly linked to their fettered minds (Moore et al. 2011: 68). The researcher notes that African learners largely originate from communities that are mentally colonised and find themselves learning in schools where the bulk of educators are not mentally emancipated (Zaleznik 1991: 87; Kutsyuruba et al. 2011: 88; Maake 2011: 129). On this, Mgxashe (2011: 15) and Levin (2012: 8) caution that one cannot give what one is not in possession of, implying that, it takes the mentally emancipated educator to liberate or decolonise learners and make them take their schooling seriously. Where both an educator and learners are under mental shackles then it is a disaster.

Observance by educators that current secondary school learners are suffering from mental shackles, is one thing and doing something about that condition is another. The challenge of learners being indifferent to schooling could be ascribed to many factors one of which may be the dysfunctional families or community those learners are from (Mukaddam et al. 2015 : 33) Overcoming such has to take both the family and the community of the learner into account. The predicament of learners thinking that adults, inclusive of educators and parents do not understand them, relates to the developmental growth stages the majority of learners pass through, enroute to adulthood. That view by learners is more of a perception than a reality. Despite the age gap between learners and adults, the latter deserve to be reminded that disregarding schooling is a supreme error whose consequences are too ghastly to contemplate. The same applies to learners acting out of educational expedience other than out of principles. Such also has unpleasant results for learners (Nkosi 2015: 35).

In short the argument of misunderstood victims by learners, as they reject and snub schooling, is as irrational as it is immaterial. Learners have to learn that for them to occupy positions of prominence in life in future, begins with them embracing schooling. Pleading ignorance by current African secondary school learners by not shouldering their responsibility for their own schooling because of being guided by irrational schooling ideology, has to be dismissed as a charade by all adults of substance and consequence (Watson 2015: 15). The argument that a great learner makes a great school and not the other way round remains ever valid. This be-

comes visible where when learners of mediocre character reject and snub schooling, learner performance in those schools will be eclipsed by learner underperformance. John (2015: 34) reminds that union meddling and the gross mismanagement of staff has dire effects on learning and teaching in the classroom. This emphasises that schooling is so much complex such that whenever there is learner misbehaviour, such as snubbing schooling, that has to be comprehended in the context of where that misbehaviour is occurring. Modiba (2015: 2) articulates that schooling on the brink of cataclysm requires rescuing for the sake of saving the vulnerable future of learners. That is why Mukaddam et al. (2015: 33) are emphatic that this is the time to base South African schooling on South African ethos and experiences to have schooling always being attractive to current learners. When learners stop taking charge of their educational destiny, it could be implying that a new schooling or education order is needed. The one that delivers solutions since the current schooling order delivers more problems than solutions especially to learners (Verhagen 2015: 20).

CONCLUSION

As it has been displayed in the discussion of the research results of this paper, both the review of literature as well as the theoretical frameworks undergirding the paper played a critical role in talking to the results of the paper. In addition, in this paper, literature study and the two selected theoretical perspectives, provided the better context within which the entire paper had to be located and comprehended. Small wonder that educators were exposed by research results to be hopeless about learners under their tutelage whom they viewed to be possessing chained minds that prevented them from noticing and grasping the value and significance of schooling.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Kgakotlou Circuit in Capricorn District of Limpopo Province has African secondary school learners who do not take charge of their own educational destiny. Research evidence ascribes this to mental conditioning. On the basis of that, the researcher recommends that this challenge be opposed and defeated in the interest of

salvaging the future of many learners. In addition, persuasion to admit that their behaviour is an educational hurdle worth overcoming is as well recommended. Current learners have evolved to the degree of aspiring to achieve, without working hard. Based on that, the researcher recommends deconditioning of these learners followed by re-conditioning and re-humanising. On top of that, the researcher recommends that it be determined from other Educational Districts, how they deal with this predicament and the level of progress and success made in containing it. Another recommendation relates to teachers reminding learners that schools exist to help them craft their future. Regarding the inclination by learners to act out of educational expediency, teachers could play a key role in alerting them to learn to act out of principles not expediency. To the point of learners endeavouring to promote irrational stances, teachers could become handy in alerting those learners that attempting to justify a fallacious statement does not help in the long run. To the amazing occurrence of learner-performance being eclipsed by underperformance, the researcher recommends that learners be strongly cautioned to remain studious. The researcher finally recommends that further studies deserve to be undertaken on this challenge of learners neglecting their educational destiny due to being mentally shackled.

LIMITATIONS

The limitation of this paper is that it mainly concentrates on generating a new understanding on why the present African secondary school learners disregard the value of schooling. It would have been proper that the paper proceeds to place adequate attention to what next after a fresh insight has been uncovered. Even if the paper attempts to disclose that the purpose of having a new understanding is likely to inform what to do about the tendency of neglecting schooling by the present African secondary school learners, that is but, not enough.

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