

The relevance of lay knowledge application in an educational milieu: A critical analysis of Students' behaviour at the University of Fort hare, Alice Campus.

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Abstract: The rationale behind the conduction of this study was to emphasise the importance of the use of lay knowledge by students in a higher learning institution, at the University of Fort Hare. When students leave their homes for varsity, they tend to forget to apply conventional way of living and practical wisdom they acquired from their ecologies. Instead, they develop dogmatic behaviours owing to learned behaviour at varsity. Such negative behaviours result to negative repercussions on the psycho-social wellbeing of students. The study employed qualitative research methods. Participant and non-participant observation, face-to-face semi-structured interviews and systematic literature review were adopted as instruments for data collection. Purposive sampling was opted to recruit 12 students who experienced some of the repercussions for not using lay knowledge. The data was analysed through the use of thematic analysis. The ages of research participants ranged between the ages of 20-40. The participants comprised of 6 male and 6 female students. Each and every one of them freely participated on the study. The results of the study revealed that some of the students consume large numbers of alcohol; associate themselves with wrong people, academically perform badly; suffer from depression and are at high risk of crime. Reflecting on the results of this paper, there is a need for interventions aimed at restricting students in engaging to unconventional behaviours. Such programmes could prevent students in engaging to behaviours that put their psycho-social wellbeing at risk.

Key terms: Lay knowledge, Students, University, Behaviour, repercussions.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Throughout the world lay knowledge play a pivotal role in the educational milieu among students. Each and every individual joins educational setting with lay knowledge which allowshim or her to understand different situations. This kind of knowledge is acquired through interaction with environmental creatures, then learning and practice. It is also attained through socialisation by significant others (Giddens, 2013). Lay knowledge enables people to deal effectually with their daily activities in all spheres of life. This knowledge has value as scientific knowledge. No scientific inquiry can be executed in the absence of lay knowledge (Mouton, 1996). It gives us a great thinking on how to deal with the complex world. This sort of knowledge is individually and socially constructed by human beings for their own existence. Thus, this essay informs us about students' behaviour and the importance of applying lay knowledge in various spheres in an academic setting by the students. It concludes by agreeing with Giddens in that lay knowledge is neither less sophisticated nor useful over empirical knowledge (Giddens, 2013).

In terms of data collection for this essay, the author has made a use of participant and non-participants observation, students' perspectives, online articles and newspapers, and journal articles.

Objectives

The objectives of this research are described as follows:

- (i) To bring into light the plight the students get into when not applying practical wisdom in an educational milieu.
- (ii) To emphasise the relevance of lay knowledge use among varsity students.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is underpinned by Albert Bandura's social learning theory. This theory posits that people learn from one another via observation, imitation and modelling (An, 2011). In this instance, when students enter the varsity, they usually learn new behaviours from their peers and perceive them as conventional yet they are not. After learning them, they model them on their own. Subsequent to modelling of such behaviours, they suffer from negative repercussions in their psycho-social wellbeing. Thus, this framework better explains how this behaviour may occur, hence the researcher has opted for it.

Students' behaviour in academic context

Lay knowledge contributes a lot in a manner in which students should behave in diverse occasions on campus. This could be evident in various spheres such as academic work, political actions, social life and security system, where people behave in various ways. The following discussion informs on how students behave and how they should behave at all above mentioned spheres:

Research

Whenever someone undertake a study, the use of lay knowledge is very important especially in a qualitative study where people are the subjects of scientific inquiry. It starts in engagement phase, where the researcher has to create rapport with the research participants. The researcher has to be bilingual and be able to use the language of the participants or have someone to translate (Harzing and Feely, 2008). Once the researcher starts to undermine his or her participants by using English to people who do not know it, there will be a huge problem. The researcher has to possess what Giddens termed knowledgeability of people (Giddens, 2013). The researcher has to journey with the research participants and not be an expert so as to maintain the relationship of trust. Not all attributes the researcher should possess are achieved, some are ascribed, such as respect, therefore they should be applied in research. During data collection, where interviews are used as instruments for data collection, the research becomes fully depended on lay knowledge. All the data that the researcher gather from the research participants is lay knowledge, hence this kind of knowledge is not less sophisticated than scientific knowledge. After data collection, lay knowledge gets interpreted and substituted to scientific knowledge. Thus, scientific knowledge comes after lay knowledge. In the final phase of research, which is the publication of findings, the research has to use common sense and thank people who took part in the study by granting them a copy of publication. Therefore, such gratitude will leave people with an eager and be willing to take part in the next research. Thus, practical wisdom is much important to apply in research.

Political actions

Crowd

On campus, law-abiding individuals in a crowd can become a law-breaking mob (Schweingruber, 2000). This behaviour is characterised by a recent riot that took place at Fort Hare University, where students torched the staff centre, causing destruction worth approximately R200 000; looting of laptops, tablets at student centre and Van Schaik; cutting of power; Stoning and stopping of vehicles; killing of a pregnant cow (de Villiers, 2017). According to students, these actions followed after the University Vice Chancellor, Professor Buhlungu failed to show up to receive students' memorandum which contained their demands. In terms of Professor Buhlungu, the strike was not motivated by his failure to pitch, but by the influence of some members of Student Representative Council who work with the University's corrupt staff, pushing their agenda. He further stated that there are people who are on the ground to receive memorandum, e.g., student developer, dean of students and the deputy vice chancellor, therefore there was no need for him to come and collect the document himself (Interview that was held at by Professor Buhlungu and Algoa FM presenter on radio). In all these instances, the writer is of the view that students did not use lay knowledge or practical wisdom. They failed to foresee and consider negative implications of their deeds. Most of the issues they have tabulated in the memorandum require money, yet they torched the staff centre that will require an estimated amount of R200 000 in order to be fixed. So, definitely the money that was going to solve their issues has to fix the staff centre. Same applies to the lootings of shops and other damages, the University has to pay to fix the damages.

In the third damage, the very same power they cut enables them to perform many vital tasks, such as using electricity for cooking, lighting and Wi-Fi connection. Seemingly, they chose to starve themselves because they cannot cook without electricity; they cannot utilise their electric appliances such as laptops for academic tasks; they cannot study at night because of darkness, therefore lamps are just useless; they cannot be able to do their research online due to the unavailability of Wi-Fi. The fourth instance, which is the stoning and stopping of cars, firstly the road is off campus and drivers have a right of way, yet students attack them. What if they stop the car of someone sending a dying person to the hospital? What if the stone breaks the window and land on the face of a newly-born baby?.

The final incident, in which a cow of a neighbouring village was slaughtered by the crowd of students, firstly, the cow was pregnant, therefore it would to produce milk for its owner after giving birth to a calf. Secondly, maybe the cow's fur was used during the performances of traditional rituals such as (Imbeleko and Ukwaluka). Students have to employ their practical wisdom so as not to be controlled by the 'crowd mind', which eventually leads to vicious and destructive behaviour (Schweingruber, 2000). Thus, they failed to use their lay knowledge they acquired from their homes. Students should use their common sense and ask themselves some questions first before they act.

III. DATA AND METHODS

A qualitative, phenomenological approach was adopted to investigate the relevance of lay knowledge application among students at the University of Fort Hare, Alice Campus. Qualitative research is an approach for exploring and understanding the meaning people or collections attribute to a social or human behaviour (Creswell, 2013). Research process included questions that evolved. Data was gathered in the subject's context, data organisation was inductively constructed from specific to general themes, and the researcher made interpretations of the meaning from the data collected.

Purposive sampling technique are non-probable means of making sure that certain classifications of cases within a population are represented in the absolute sample of a research (Robinson, 2014). Similarly, the study by Etikan, Musa and Alkassim (2016) reveal that purposive sampling method, also known as judgment sampling is the careful choice of a participant by the researcher because of the attributes the participant has. It is a non-random method that does not rely on theories or a specified number of participants. The researcher concludes what should be executed and seeking out people who can and enthusiastic to give information because they know or experience the phenomena. This study adopted this type of sampling. The logic behind the use of purposive technique is that the researcher anticipates that particular people could have different and important views on the phenomena being studied. The size of a sample employed for a qualitative study is influenced by both theoretical and practical deliberations. The pragmatic truth of research is that many projects necessitate a provisional judgement on sample size at the preliminary design stage. If the sample is not pre-determined, the length and the time frame for the study cannot be reached. Nevertheless, prior sample size specification, instead of a fixed number, an estimated sample size can be assumed, with a minimum and maximum (Robinson, 2014). In this explorative study, a group of about 12 students was recruited as participants. The setting was the University and was conducive for interviewing. Face-to face individual interviews with students were held to collect data and data was tape-recorded by the researcher. Questions in those interviews were asked according to the interview guide though some questions emerged as the interviews progressed. Isixhosa language was used during interviews as all the research participants belonged to Xhosa ethnic group. The researcher employed coding to analyse the data collected.

On the day of data collection, the researcher gave the research participants an informed consent form to read and sign. The researcher informed the participants that it is on their interest to use their vernacular language freely, but not restricting them from using other languages if needs be. The researcher also asked the permission from the participants to use tape recorder during the interviews to save the time and keep the information safe. The researcher informed participants that during their participation, no one will be subject to any form of harm or degrading treatment. The participants were also updated that they will be given pseudonyms (e.g. Mr A or Mr E to maintain privacy. Lastly, the researcher informed the participants that all the events that will be discussed will be treated in a confidential manner. Anonymity of their details and their choice to withdraw at any stage if they feel uncomfortable will both be respected.

Many researchers have avoided showing enough descriptions in their study reports regarding their suppositions and designs, mainly with data analysis. Such ignorance has led to scrutiny and criticisms of bias from expert schoolers. Trustworthiness, thus works as a tool to show that the researcher has followed all the necessary steps (Gunawan, 2015). The construct trustworthiness includes five elements namely credibility, dependability, transferability and conformability and authenticity. These elements will enable the reviewers to evaluate this qualitative study (Moon, Brewer, Januchowski-Hartley, Adams and Blackman, 2016). Firstly, credibility refers to the certainty of the information collected, sometimes the perceptions of the participant and the analysis and publication of the by the researcher (Polit& Beck, 2012). In this research, the credibility was guaranteed through verification of the research results with research participants. Secondly, the concept dependability denotes the constancy in data for a longer period of time, under diverse conditions. Thus, it is vital to mention the principles and procedure followed to choose research participants and detail their central features to enable the assessment of the findings. This assessment screens whether the results are transferable to other environments (Moretti, van Vliet, Bensing, Deledda, Mazzi, Rimondini and Fletcher, 2011). The researcher in this study assured that other researchers can depend on the findings. Thirdly, the term transferability refers to the possibility of the research findings to be generalised. It encompasses the view that results can be transferred to other populations (Elo, Kääriäinen, Kanste, Pölkki, Utrianen andKynngäs, 2014). Therefore, in this study the

findings can be applicable to all groups of people who share the same experiences as those under this study. On the other hand, confirmability refers to the fairness and the possible truth among several independent individuals concerning data's truthfulness, applicability and gist (Moretti, van Vliet, Bensing, Deledda, Mazzi, Rimondini and Fletcher 2011). In this thesis, confirmability will be maintained to ensure objectivity of the study. Moreover, the abstract term authenticity refers to the capacity and level a researcher possesses in ensuring that the feelings and emotions the research participants experience are expressed in an authentic way (Cope, 2014). Regarding this study, the authenticity will be shown through inclusion of the exact quotes of research participants in reporting of the findings.

IV. RESEARCH FINDINGS

Demographic details of the participants

The researcher interviewed 12 students who range between 20-40 years of age. All the research participants live on campus at the University of Fort Hare, but originate from different towns around the Eastern Cape. All are all Xhosa speaking.

In this research, the data that was tape-recorded was carefully listened twice and thrice, then analysed in terms of themes and sub-themes that arisen from the face-to-face individual interviews that were conducted with the research respondents. Tesch's method of data analysis was used to categorise and discuss themes with relevant quotations from the participants. Themes and sub-themes that emerged from this research are analysed as follows:

Peer pressure

Peer pressure emerged as a persistent aspect that most of the participants have mentioned. Two female respondents revealed the following:

‘Friends here on campus taught me things I did not know before I came to varsity. They influenced me to drink alcohol and I am still drinking because I want to fit within the group. Should I stop drinking, I might lose all my friends’. [Ms G, aged 20]

‘I become elated when there is strike at the campus because we get a chance to loot fancy gadgets that we do not afford in various shops here at campus. Also we get some rest and go to picnic with my friends, things I would not do alone’. [Ms B, aged 35]

Academic failure

Academic failure also rose as repercussion of not applying practical wisdom in an academic setting. Three research participants expressed the following:

‘I failed three modules last year second semester owing to the persistence attendance of bashes here on campus. This worries me a great deal, as a result I cannot cope with my daily activities because I might lose my room’. [Ms H, aged 23]

‘Last year I lost my room and bursary because I failed four modules. That led me in developing bipolar disorder and I ended up in hospital’. [Mr M, aged 25]

‘Having to add another year of my degree really stresses me out. I now suffer consequences of my bad behaviour. I have to pick up the pieces and adapt to my normal positive state’. [Mr G, aged 30]

Ignorance

Failing to obey to security system which requires everyone to produce a student card when entering the entrances of the Institution and of residences has led to regrets among some students. The belongings of others such as laptops have been stolen. Four respondents voiced out their stories as follows:

‘In 2016, my room was broke and my laptop was taken. Bear in mind, my master's thesis was saved on the very same laptop and I had to start afresh with my research. That occurrence really affected my psychological well-being’.

‘Two laptops were stolen in my room while I attended a bash at pool side. To date, I think I suffer from obsessive-compulsive disorder because I always double check if I have keyed my room’. [Ms K, aged 23].

‘‘I am a victim of a man who duplicated the master key of Kuwait residence and stole laptops. He freely entered the residence as we usually do not produce our student cards to security guards at the entrance. Now we ensure that we all produce our student cards when we enter Kuwait residence as we learnt a lesson since that year’’. [Ms J, aged 27].

‘‘I will never forget the day I way on way from the bash to my room. Two males, allegedly not the students attacked me and demanded that I must sleep with them. I screamed a lot, eventually, they let me off and ran away. I was so scared, and nearly collapsed’’. [Ms E, aged 24].

V. DISCUSSION

Academic pursuits

A person comes from home to the University, knowing the goal he or she wants to achieve. While here, some students tend to forget their purpose that brought them here. They completely forget about their poor backgrounds and families, who put their hopes in this particular individual. Students decide not to attend classes; they do not submit some of their school work, which results to failure. If they fail, will they be able to achieve their goals and satisfy the hopes of their families? The answer is no, all they lack is lay knowledge that will enable them to think effectively about their purposes in life. Failure to achieve their goals results to depression, not only to them but also to their family members. While depressed, they resort to alcohol abuse, having multiple partners and eventually commit truancy. On the other hand, their parents back at home may continue to feel more pain and could even suffer from heart attack. Thus, self-reflection is pivotal in educational setting.

Social life

Some students on campus miss lectures, but they will never miss a bash no matter how cold the weather is. They invest most of their time in social life than academic work. The little money they get from their homes to buy food and toiletries, they choose to misuse it by purchasing drugs and alcohol. They do not think how difficult was for their parents to get the money they misuse. Students at times may even lie to their parents by telling them that the university requires a certain amount of money for a particular event, whereas there is no event at all. By so doing, they do not build their homes but destroying them. Students want to be stylish and fit in to their so called ‘‘top class friends’’, though they do not afford. They allow the pressure from their friends to dictate their thoughts, of which they do not employ their practical wisdom.

Security system

The very same students who supposed to support their safety are the ones who expose it. When securities require students to produce their student cards in the university and residence entrances, students resist doing so. That makes securities to stop requesting the studentcards, and that gives a chance to criminals who are coming from neighbouring communities to enter freely in the entrances. That is where the burglary of rooms and theft starts. To mention one incident, in 2016 a man armed with a master key went from room to room and stole laptops, cell phones and other personal things at GetrudeNtlabathi residence (Nini, 2016). Thus, if students were not resistant against the rule of producing their student cards in residence entrances, such incident might not have happened. It is important for students to use their common sense and adhere to the security rules for their own benefit and safety.

VI. CONCLUSION

To sum up, this study has discussed a lot of ways in which students behave. It is clear that some students in the academic setting do not apply their lay knowledge which stimulates their deductive reasoning. Students only focus on scientific knowledge that is found in the books, though not all kinds of knowledge are there, for instance, lay knowledge. Thus, students should strive to close the gap and make balance between lay knowledge and scientific knowledge as there is neither less sophisticatednor less useful between the two.

VII. RECOMMENDATIONS

Researchers recommendations with regards to the findings of this study is that, the university has to enforce its policies and ensure that every students abide to them. Secondly, the security guards should prohibit alcohol and drugs inside the campus. In addition, student cards should be required to every one before entering the campus and residence entrances. Furthermore, students should not forget the purpose of being at varsity, they have to utilise the practical wisdom in every action they undergo.

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