

Emotional intelligence and learning among learners with emotional and behavioral disorder at Mwila special school in Zambia

Penda Annie

Kwame Nkrumah University P.O. Box 80404, Kabwe –Zambia.

Abstract

This manuscript is a research carried out on learners with emotional and behavioral disorder who were helped with emotional intelligence in order to manage their emotions and behavior. It was carried out at Mwila special school in the Northern part of Zambia. The name of the school is not real for the purpose of observing ethical issues of anonymity and confidentiality. The study established the emotions and behavior of the learners under study and the extent to which emotions foster or inhibit their learning and how emotional intelligence was of help to them in order to enhance their learning.

Keywords: Emotional, Behavioral, Disorder, Learning and Emotional Intelligence

Introduction

In this study the three objectives were reflected in the literature review. This was followed by the findings then discussion of findings and finally the conclusion. The study was mainly qualitative and information was collected using interviews and observation checklist in order to generate qualitative data from four teachers who were teaching these learners and from 20 learners with emotional and behavioral disorder. The questionnaire was also used for the generation of quantitative data as a supplement. Thus the sample size was 24.

Literature review

In this literature the following are taken into consideration. The emotions, behavior, emotional intelligence and learning.

Emotions, behavior and learning

Emotions are lived as integral part of people's experiences of their daily life. Emotions fall under effective domain and are found to be key factor in all aspect of human development such as personality, physical, cognitive, social, motivation, stress and so forth.

Kundu and Tutoo (2003) [4] defined learning as modification through experience. This is where learning calls for reflection on learners experiences and modify them in order to understand new knowledge. Mangal (2004) [6] argued that, emotions are one of the important of various dimensions involved in learning. This implies that emotions have to be taken into account in order to have effective learning. Mangal (2004) [6] further purposes that, for learning to occur a learner has to be involved physically. In other words physical aspects such as receptors, afferent nerves carrying sense impression, nervous system, brain, spinal cord, glands, motor processes and so forth have to be involved actively in order for learners to participate in the learning process in order to yield positive results academically. Furthermore according to Mangal (2004) [6] perceptual operation cognitive aspect are required for learning to occur. This is the correct interpretation of academic information and it calls for intellectual aspect of a learner.

Learning will as well require behavioral aspect for it to occur (Mangal, 2004) [6]. This mean that, a learner need to have intra and inter personal skills for interpersonal relationship and active participation in the learning process. This will result in fulfilling the requirements for learning which will bring the value of a learner which leads to self-actualization.

Emotional issues are series of various emotions. James and Betty (1987) [2] stated that, emotions are physiological, psychological and behavioral responses that influences perception, learning and performance. It simply means that emotions are subjective feelings which influences perception, learning and performance of a learner. It is subjective because to the same situation different learners can react differently to it because the way the situation can be perceived and interpreted differ from one individual to another.

Emotions are categorized as positive or pleasant, helpful to the normal development of a human being also negative, unpleasant and harmful to the well- being of human development (Mangal, 2004) [6]. The examples of pleasant emotions are joy, care, love, happiness, amusement while unpleasant emotions are for instance fear, anger, jealousy and the like. Mangal (2004) [6] confirmed that experiencing the two categories of emotions are neither good nor bad the fact that matters is frequency, intensity, situation, occasion and nature of the stimuli that arouses them. In other words the two categories of emotions when experienced in excess becomes harmful but if not experienced in excess emotions becomes helpful towards normal human development and learning. For instance a bit of fear before exams will make a learner do well in exam than when a learner has excess of joy. Therefore, the frequency, intensity, situation, occasion and nature of stimuli which arouse emotions can affect learning negatively. However, emotions either bad or good at normal level effects learning positively.

Any emotions has three components or domains, the cognitive, physiological and behavioral (Donald *et al.* 1997) [1]. The emotions are experienced in three ways. For example, cognitive domain involves thinking, making interpretations of academic knowledge and situations. For instance if a boy tells a girl-friend as well as a blood sister that "I love you" the

interpretation will be different. Physiological manifestation of emotions involves the overt and covert reactions such as goose pimples, bulging of eyes, increased such as pulse rate, blood circulation, heart-beat, adrenaline. Other physiological parts involve the ascending and descending reticular actuating systems, hypothalamus, cortex, amygdala as parts of the brain and many more other examples.

The other dimension is behavioral. Behavioral expressions are either verbal or non-verbal such as expressions of emotions through spoken word or speech such as shouting and the tone of the voice in case of verbal expression and non-verbal expressions such as facial expression, body movement and the expression in the eyes. For example expressions such as smiling, walking briskly, laughter indicate happiness whereas dragging of feet will signal sadness, high pitched voice is a sign of anger then maintaining eye contact shows love, interest and attentiveness during the learning period. Donald *et al.*, (1997) ^[1] found that, all learners are born with emotions for promoting learning. In other words emotions are vital for mobilization of the body in order to respond to different learning situations without showing apathy which is a state of lacking interest, motivation or concern during the learning situation.

Emotional intelligence

Emotional intelligence is a successful combination of three domains discussed above which results in integrating feelings, thoughts and behavior necessary for effective learning because it helps to maintain emotions and behavior at normal level and control them not to go to the extremes of either low or high levels. Certainly, learning requires emotional intelligence for the purpose of successful learning. As stated by John (1997) that emotional intelligence is the ability to identify and manage your own emotions and the emotions of others or the ability to harness emotions and apply them to tasks like thinking and behavior.

Emotions either inhibit or foster learning

Emotions definitely can either inhibit or foster learning in these three areas, the cognitive, physiological and behavior in several ways depending on the intensity, frequency, occasion and nature of stimuli which may arouse the emotions. Excessive emotions inhibit learning to the following extent: for instance upsurge of emotions adversely affect the process of reasoning and thinking (Mangal, 2004) ^[6]. Learners in this condition think irrationally because reasoning and sharpness in terms of intellect are restrained. Another example according to Mangal (2004) ^[6] was that when feelings which are the core of emotions are aroused on account of cognition of perceived stimuli it can give birth to a sort of impulse act. For instance the learner will act spontaneously with temper tantrums without analysis or not thinking deeply or having an alternative response because of being stimuli bound and this leads to decreased academic achievement. The other example is that, if the brain is under stress the extent it will reach is not helpful to a learner because he or she will start operating in limbic system rather than higher level neo-cortex thus making learning more difficult (Laura, 2003). In this case due to stress, information fails to reach cortex the thinking part of the brain rather remain in limbic system thus affect learners performance and perception.

The brain of a learner who is upset and insecure due to excess emotions leads to lower levels of thinking and learning (Laura, 2003). This is due to the fact that up-setting conditions kills motivation and confidence the key factor for learning to occur. Another extent is where academic taught in class may not be implemented by a learner if the emotions are frail (Laura, 2003). Thus a learner may fail to write, read the class work or even ask or answer questions because the learner is physically weak. When there is shrinkage of hypo-campus it result into memory impairment due to emotions, certainly it affect learning (Laura, 2003). For instance a learner will fail to memorize or remember skills leant such as multiplication facts. Laura (2003) added that, memory of hypo campus is affected by hormones and proteins released due to emotional responses. Learners will easily forget what is taught which affects their academic success.

Emotions affecting behavior

Emotions affects behavior in classrooms as James and Betty (1987) ^[2] had put it that high level of anxiety prevent learners from participating in classroom activities. The following are the signs or manifestations of behavior and emotional disorders that can be observed. Nelsen (2002) stated that, behavioral characteristics of being disturbed emotionally are hyperactivity, short attention span, inconsistency of behavior or anxiety, low frustration tolerance, aggression, self-injurious, withdrawal from interaction with others, inappropriate social skills, immaturity, poor coping skills, unfocussed and unexplained mood shifts. This implies that, learners who are hyperactive will do a lot of activities at once and are not focused. For instance the hyperactive learner can start solving the second question before even finishing the first question. To those who have short attention span they may fail to pay attention for a long period of time. Those with low frustration tolerance may also fail to tolerate difficulty school tasks. Those with anxiety problem they may start crying while in class. Those with withdrawal behavior will not participate in classroom activities such as writing of classroom activities or may quite school or drop out. Those with unexplained mood shifts will be moody. Those who are aggressive will fight in class with others and steal items for their friends. The learners also may lack social skills hence they may be unfriendly. When learner's emotions affect them in these manners, it adversely affects their learning.

Dreading recess time, daily teasing leads a learner to feel frustrated and lose full attention in class (Laura, 2003). In this type of learning situation learners will be resentful, with low self-esteem and anger, with problem of social relationship and unable to participate during co-operative learning. In return academic performance of the learner may be affected. Learners who are emotional give-up easily because of resentment from friends, educators and dabbled brain (Laura, 2003). Learners with emotions will doubt themselves and may give-up school because their nature of interest is affected. When friends, problems, home issues, feeling bad about being teased and unworthy if prolonged causes physical problems (Laura, 2003). Kundu and Tutoo (2003) ^[4] explained that, excessive disintegrated emotions affect physical condition, health, intelligence, classroom environment and relationship. For instance emotions can bring about poor health, fatigue and lead learners to be absent from school and do poorly.

Emotions are capable of bringing about social deviant behavior (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4]. A classroom is a social setting, in this setting a deviant learner faces problems during learning period due to mismatch between self and learning environment. Emotional maladjusted learners fail to complete work or any tasks of responsibilities such as social tasks in classroom and getting along with peers and it leads to failing of academic work (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4].

How moderated emotions or emotional intelligence foster learning

Moderated emotions foster learning to the following extent. In general terms moderated emotions foster learning because emotions strengthen the opportunity to remember the academic concepts and events (Laura, 2003). Learners easily remember materials taught in class due to ability to comprehend and retention of concepts which help them in terms of performing well academically. Secondly, moderated emotions drive reactions and help learners make decisions (Laura, 2003). The learners may use their reasoning aspect to come-up with positive decision in order to overcome difficult tasks and which later promotes learning. Thirdly, full experience of moderated emotions involves physiological changes and cognitive processes (James and Betty, 1987) ^[2]. This type of experience promote accurate interpretation and perception during learning period.

The fourth benefit is that being emotionally secure, brain instinctually creates best climate for higher level thinking, learning, having higher scores due to self- motivation, management and awareness of emotions (Laura, 2003). Learners will perform well due to higher level of sound thinking and will be highly responsible. The fifth benefit is that, the human brain will learn effectively through collaboration with others (Laura, 2003). Due to moderated emotions the learner will acquire empathetic and relationship management skills to maintain appropriate relationship in learning environment. Moderated emotion or emotional intelligence skills help develop learners who are satisfied and better prepared for learning through-out their lives (Laura, 2003). These skills are awareness, management, motivation, feelings of empathetic and relationship management.

Another benefit is that moderated emotions improve learner's behavior and social well-being (Laura, 2003). The learners are seen participating fully in classroom activities such as co-operative learning because emotions clear path ways to competence and create meaningful relationship which is supportive, rewarding and productive due to care for each other.

The other benefit is that, self-esteem and emotional wellness are necessary these help them to reach one's potential as learners and as a human person (Laura, 2003). Self-esteem helps learners who feel strengthened and participate fully in classroom activities. Self-esteem helps with the building of gross-grade-level in a more diversified way (Laura, 2003). This means that learners from lower grades can learn from learners of higher grades and this can bring about academic achievement.

Furthermore, the other benefit is that because of moderated emotions learners come-up with brighter ideas, positive and executive thoughts in Meta Cognitive activities and share new learning in a unique and creative manner. The learners usually feel comfortable socially as another form of benefit. Socially,

in a classroom the sense of community brings about feelings of acceptance, self-esteem and collaboration (Laura, 2003). When learners feel accepted in class they can cultivate more interest for learning and perform better academically.

The other benefit is that, emotions facilitate the productive positive relationship and team work through group practice (Laura, 2003). The sharing of ideas facilitates learning.

Further benefit is that, emotional wellness help learners acquire conflict resolution strategies thus they cope up with consequences in classroom (Laura, 2003). This is where learners may easily follow classroom rules, bear pain and suffering, incidence of problems, change their behavior and can be resilient.

Emotional wellness can help learners to complete academic tasks in an orderly way (Laura, 2003). In this case learners due to emotional stability learners focuses attention on tasks given without being derailed or skipping the first academic tasks before finishing it and go to the second task. Emotional stability can make the learner feel the pride and enthusiastic for learning which is essential for learning because it creates and fosters responsibility in learners (Laura, 2003). In this case learners are seen to be dedicated to class work and learning in general.

Another benefit is good rapport. The good rapport among learners and between the teacher and learner due to moderated emotions makes learners celebrate learning because of learning being fun, powerful and invigorating. Then learners are respective, caring and enthusiastic about learning (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4]. In other words learners value learning with much eager and learn actively with greater respect for learning diversity.

In a learning situation if emotions are moderated, any arousal in this case makes a spark on the production of particular hormones and proteins. Then the proteins settles around the synapses which strengthen the connection of learnt materials towards long term memory. In this case if the learners biological make-up responds in this manner emotionally, the important academic content learnt in school is likely to be permanently remembered (Laura, 2003). This is because the information is stored in long term memory.

Emotional development bring about maturation essential for mental development and result in effective learning (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4]. Intelligence and self-concepts are influenced which foster learning, feeling of knowing once positive results will as well foster learning (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4]. In the long run this improves attitudes, mannerisms, efforts and promote sense of achievement. Emotions which are moderated create conclusive and happy learning environment which is full of fun, safe, nurturing, a best place for a human brain to develop and learn from (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4]. Learner tends to put more effort towards learning in a more relaxed classroom. Emotions motivate learners to learn (Kundu and Tutoo, 2003) ^[4]. Motivation is a key factor for learning it surpasses intelligence in terms of academic performance and is crucial for academic success.

In other words moderation of emotions is termed as emotional intelligence.

The findings

The findings were as follows;

This study found that, learners were lacking social skills and interpersonal relationship about ten of them. Five learners

were reported having anti-social behavior. They were observed disturbing peers, hitting or fighting with their classmates and ignoring the teacher. Five learners had withdrawal behavior. The teachers stated that these learners seldom played with children of their own age, were lacking many social skills to make and keep friends. They retreat into day dreaming. They were fearful of things without reason. They frequently complained of being sick or hurt and were easily brooding and going into deep bouts of depression.

It was also reported that, generally all children with emotional and behavioral problems also were characterized with environmental conflicts, personal disturbances, academic deficit, social deficits and irresponsibility.

To start with in terms of *environmental conflicts*, this was noticed through aggression and/or self-injurious behavior such as fighting, bullying, violating rules, overactive, impulsive, stealing, truancy, and other socially maladjusted behaviors.

Secondly, under *personal disturbance*, what manifested as signs of personal disturbances were; Anxiety disorders such as crying and statements of worry. The pupil were withdrawing from social activities, from classroom activities such as group discussion. In addition, some learners exhibited excessive fear. Thirdly, under *academic deficits* learners' performance in basic academic skills and educational achievement was typically below expected grade level.

The fourth aspect was *social deficits*. These were pupils who were unpopular and were actively rejected by their peers during classroom activities.

The last aspect was *irresponsibility*. Acts of irresponsibility was common among these learners. For instance, learners would deny they did anything wrong when actually they did such as not writing their home-work and when confronted with evidence they blamed other pupils and even the teacher.

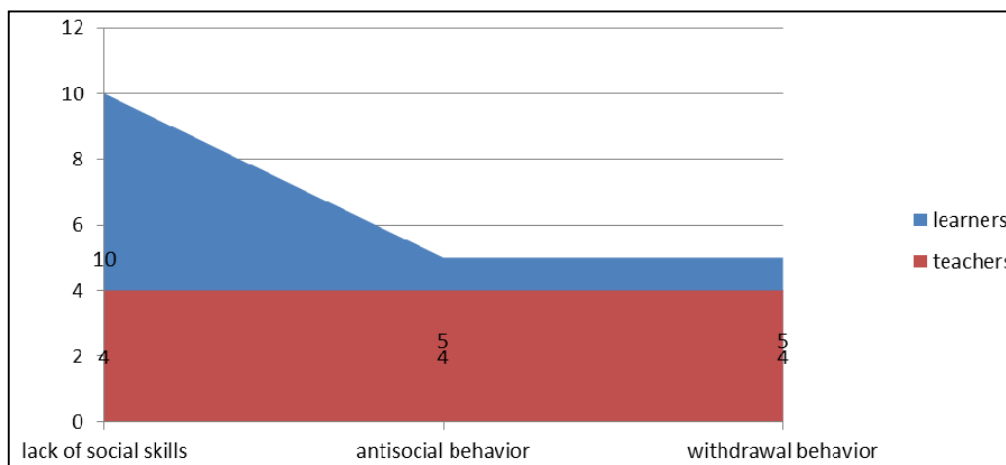


Fig 1: Teachers' responses and number of learners with emotional disorder

Learners with emotional disorder training concerning emotional awareness and intelligence.

Learners with emotional disorder who were selected purposefully were given a training of emotional awareness which helped them to have the ability to identify their own emotions and those of others in a relaxed and conducive environment. There was a lot of laughter and they came to know that they were not the only one but that everyone had those emotions which made them to have a bad behavior. Secondly, learners were trained concerning emotional intelligence. As a result of this training learners had the ability to recognize, understand and manage their own behavior. For the first time in their life they appreciated of being aware and learn to manage their emotions and they felt relieved.

Analysis and interpretation of data and discussion of findings

Data collected was mostly qualitative therefore analysis was descriptive. However, quantitative method was just used as a supplement with the use of numbers and a graph only.

This was a study carried out on learners with emotional and behavioral disorder. To start with learners were lacking social skills and interpersonal relationships. They had no ability to develop and maintain interpersonal relationships. Learning required behavioral aspect for it to occur as argued by (Mangal, 2004) [6] and the researcher was in support of

Mangal. This is because a learner needs to have intra and inter personal skills for interpersonal relationship and active participation in the learning process. Developing this ability during childhood and adolescence is an important predictor of present and future adjustment. Many pupils with emotional and behavioral disorders in this study often experienced great difficulty in making and keeping friends as early as childhood. These emotions might have contributed to their lack of having the skills of initiating and maintaining friends. However the training of emotional intelligence made learners gain the necessary skills of creating and maintaining friendship.

Nelsen (2002) stated that, behavioral characteristics of being disturbed emotionally are hyperactivity, short attention span, inconsistency of behavior or anxiety, low frustration tolerance, aggression, self-injurious, withdrawal from interaction with others, inappropriate social skills, immaturity, poor coping skills, unfocussed and unexplained mood shifts. These behaviors might have contributed to their negative behavior. However the training of emotional intelligence made learners gain the necessary skills of having a good behavior.

Secondly, learners experienced antisocial behavior. The most common pattern of behavior consisted of antisocial behavior, sometimes called externalizing behavioral disorders as reported by teachers. For example the children were disturbing peers, hitting or fighting, ignoring the teacher, complaining excessively, stealing, destroying property, arguing, distorting

the truth, and so forth. This might have contributed to their not being social. However the training of emotional intelligence made learners gain the necessary skills of being social. Thirdly, withdrawn behavior of some children being observed was anything but fearfulness. Their problem was that they were having too little social interaction with others. They were said to have internalizing behavioral disorders. They seldom played with children of their own age, were lacking many social skills to make and keep friends, they retreated into day dreaming, were fearful of things without reason, frequently complain of being sick or hurt, and had gone into deep bouts of depression. Nelsen (2002) stated that, behavioral characteristics of being disturbed emotionally are withdrawal from interaction with others. The understanding by the researcher was that, since learners who manifest internalizing behaviors were less disturbing to teachers than antisocial pupils, these withdrawn learners majority of them were in danger of not being identified and helped as reflected in the graph because only few were identified. However, the training of emotional intelligence made learners gain the necessary skills such as having good rapport to help them not withdraw from all the learning activities.

The learners with emotional and behavioral disorder were also characterized with environmental conflicts, personal disturbances, academic deficit, social deficits and irresponsibility. As it was stated that, any emotions has three components or domains, the cognitive, physiological and behavioral (Donald *et al.* 1997)^[1]. These contribute greatly to these characteristics because their emotions were not moderated. For instance some learners were forgetful they could not remember academic concepts learnt. However, the training of emotional intelligence made learners gain the necessary skills to help them manage the observed characteristics.

Lastly, another analysis of findings were that, may be learners identified with emotional and behavioral disorder for being not aware of their emotions and how to manage them was a contributing factor of not behaving well which in the long run affected their academic performance. Thus the use of emotional intelligence during the study period was an appropriate intervention measure to their problem because it yielded positive results.

Conclusion

As educators we need to pay much attention to these type of learners because what they exhibit has deep roots in their being and their lives are deeply affected. Emotions have to be taken into account in order to have effective learning. These learners need emotional intelligence or moderated emotions for them to survive and learn better. James and Betty (1987)^[2] stated that, emotions are physiological, psychological and behavioral responses that influences perception, learning and performance.

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