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An exploration of the lived experiences of our personal educational trajectory from naivety to critical conscientization

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Abstract

In this paper, we explored our personal experiences of our educational journey. We employ Freire's concept of critical conscientization to provide a much better understanding of our educational lived experiences from our own personal stories and reflections in the manner that captures how we both contributed to and resisted various forms of educational oppression; from Ghana and Tanzania. At the same time we finally, explain the mechanisms we were exposed to that enabled us to become aware of our own conscientizacao. We argue that critical conscientization is through this bond that teacher and students are getting chance to interact, dialogue, cooperate, share and argue each other so as to arrive in a true knowledge. Based on our personal experience we argue that meaningful learning is greatly dependant on the extent to which teacher and students cooperate in

Introduction

Critical conscientization is a result of a strong bond between teacher and students (Freire, 2005; hooks, 1994). We argue that it is through this bond that teacher and students are getting chance to interact, dialogue, cooperate, share and argue each other so as to arrive in a true knowledge. Based on this argument it is obviously that meaningful learning is greatly depending on the extent to which teacher and students are cooperate in the teaching and learning process. However, the situation was different in our education trajectory. Therefore, this work explains our educational trajectory as a student where we experienced varied forms of oppressions and how we contributed and resisted. It is during this year (1995-2005) when Tanzania implemented teacher-centred curriculum.

The curriculum in Tanzania and that of Ghana we strongly argue places the teacher as the sole source of knowledge and who have the authority over everything in the whole process of learning. We argue that it was the curriculum that did not provide the necessary environment for the teacher and students to share knowledge, experience as well as learning from each other; this is because the curriculum in our various countries are structured and mandates teachers to complete. It was the time when students were supposed to receive the lesson and obey the teacher without arguing, contribute or ask anything from what teacher provide to him or her.

In this paper we conceptualise oppression as a situation when the teacher in the classroom does not offer opportunity to students to show their talents, capacities and knowledge which leads to rote learning (Freire, 2005). Denying the chance to students to share and make dialogue(s) with the teacher during classroom instructions we argue is synonymous to refuting liberty in education. We further argue that it is through dialogues that we question the status quo and critical minds are nurtured. This stems from the fact that dialogue(s) involve reasoning and making strong arguments. Following Freire (2005) line of thought, oppression is an obstacle to prepare critical mind students and achieving a meaningful learning. This paper sought to explain some of our educational lived experiences from our own personal stories and reflections in the manner that captures howwe both contributed to and resisted various forms of educational oppression; from Ghana and Tanzania. At the same time we finally, explain the mechanisms we were exposed to that enabled us to become aware of our own conscientizacao. We are of a strong assertion that in current times this topic or issue we have reflected on this paper is high on the radar of policy maker and various educational agencies in both countries from both the global south and north with the aim of ensuring the best possible way to allow for teaching and learning in schools that will ensure critical minds in the current global knowledge society.

Different dimensions and forms of oppressions experienced in our educational trajectory

Education is a process of acquiring knowledge, skills and values in order to bring acceptable transformation to a person or the entire society. It is called acceptable transformations because the aim is to make a person suitable in the society in a particular time and context. In this regard, it is

projected goals and objectives.

To relate the role of education and my ten (10) years' experience as student as well as a teacher in Tanzania, I argue that the curriculum did not pay attention to students' self-ability, freedom and talent in which I believe is appropriate changes and can be achieved. This means that the curriculum and teachers were not considered students' interests and freedom which resulted into imposition of knowledge. This is what Freire (2005) pointed out as banking system, the system give more authority teacher to impart knowledge to their students and students become the receiver of the knowledge.Furthermore, one of the authors recounted that;

During this time of banking system I have experienced oppressions in education either by participating or witnessing. One of the unforgettable moments I remember was when our examinations were in a form of memorization of what the teacher imposed unto us. I remember it was difficult for me and other students who were not good in memorization. I regard this as oppression because memorization does not provide freedom for students to display other talents like skills application kind of competencies.

According to Freire (2005) education needs to develop student with critical mind by giving a freedom to discover knowledge on their own.Moreover, one of the author recounts his personal reflectionthat the curriculum does notgive a chance for students to discuss and explore truth or knowledge on their own. For example, many teachers were using lecture method since they imposed what they thought was suitable for me and rest of the class. This is different from what hooks (1994) suggested in her book;that the teacher needs to collaborate with students during classroom instructions. Cooperation between teacher and students in class is very important because it brings two parts together by sharing experiences and knowledge for meaningful learning to occur. For example:

I remember when I was in primary school I used to not accept knowledge given to me by my elder brothers and parents just because I thought my teacher's knowledge was absolute. Therefore, I regard this is as oppression because students have right to express and share what they are believing in; denying this opportunity is like to pinch students' right to express and show their feelings on a particular subject. At the same time I have witnessed the oppression in writing assignments and other classroom activities.

This is very common in my country context as one of the authors of this paper clearly recounts his educational experience; for teacher to influence or sometimes to force students to write on their styles. According to Burke (2012), barriers in education apart from infrastructure and financial can also include exclusion to writing. I personally see this as oppression because it is a barrier to education since those students who have different styles of writing are denied their rights to display their writing talents and discover knowledge. For example, Burke (2012) pointed out academic writings can written in different forms such as short writings, fictions, music and acting.

learning is important since it create a strong bond between teacher and students. Additionally, dialogues are found in a class where teachers use participatory teaching methods, a method that is inclusive and comprises of a number of classroom activities. Consequently, students are rejected the opportunity to cooperate with the teacher so as to ensure meaningful learning. In this regard, I personally consider this as oppression because no chance for dialogues was provided as it was postulated by Freire (2005) that dialogues encourage self-confidence and meaningful learning.

Oppression in education has been one of the hindrances and a factor for poor academic achievement in our various countries, i.e. Ghana and Tanzania. This is clearly shown in the curriculum structure since it has prescribed teaching and learning activities and content that teacher needs to adhere to regardless of the context and time. This is one of the oppressions that the curriculums implement to teacher and students because in some circumstances teacher need to be flexible so as to suit with the environment and time. Studies revealed that teaching process is a science as well as arts. Apart from adhering the prescribed rules and procedure teacher needs also to be creative and innovative when facilitating teaching and learning in order to ensure meaningful learning. Therefore, by being creative and innovative it widens the chance for discovering new teaching and learning techniques as well as knowledge which can foster a critical mind and discover new things (Freire, 2005). I also argue that forcing teachers and students to adhere only on prescribed contents and learning methodologies is another form of banking system which can lead to rote learning.

Moreover, the relationship between teacher and students under this curriculum is like master-disciple kind of relation. The curriculum has delegated all authorities to the teacher in such a way that it is teacher-centred curriculum. Students have no right to raise their voices, argue and have strong dialogues with the teacher. This kind of relationship of one being a master and another person a disciple is like what Freire (2005) called pedagogy of oppressed. It is the same relationship that exists between oppressors and oppressed as Freire (2005) divulged, since the oppressor will try to impose and deposit anything, while the oppressed has no choice to accept what oppressor gives to them. This relationship is not healthy for active learning to take place. For active learning to take place there is a need for mutual relationship that will provide freedom for both parts to share knowledge so as to achieve the true knowledge.

We can agree with both sides that some of our personal experiences either contributed to and in some few ways resisted against oppression in schooling experience. It was because of the situation that led us not to align in one side either to contribute or resist. We argue that from our personal stories we had no option than obliged to cope with the situation because the curriculum was teacher-centred but, at the same time we also acknowledge some few teachers who gave us give space for open discussions.

From our own personal experiences, one of the authors of this paper narrated, how for several times he contributed to the oppression by adhering to what his teachers were asking him to do or to

and writing essays without even considering other styles from students.

Therefore, by agreeing and accept those skills from teachers without questioning or sharing his own styles we assumed he has contributed to the form of oppression. We argue that such situations are not healthy for students because it make students as an empty basket which is contrary to what Freire (2005) argue for that students need to discover knowledge on their own so as to create a critical mind. In this regard what happened was rote learning and memorization instead of meaningful learning.

Furthermore, following this scenario he contributed to oppression when he knew he had his views but because he thought it was a 'taboo'; in the sense that it was against our African culture to go against his teachers' knowledge. This was caused by our tradition that is not appropriate to go against with an elder or teacher says, even if he believed what he know was right. Therefore, this led him to accept anything what his teachersaid in class. Another author of this paper described that;

I remember one day I read notes from the internet which I believed were good and talk almost the same with my teacher's notes. I tried to show teacher the notes I retrieved from the internet, to my surprise the teacher shouted and said not to take notes from outside sources rather than his own notes, therefore I left myself keeping quiet and not arguing or say anything because it was regarded as a I am disrespectful to my teacher. Looking this example it clearly revealed that I contributed to the oppression because I kept quiet as a result I accept what my teacher forced me to accept.

According to hooks (1994) a teacher needs to apply engaged pedagogy that encourages freedom, respect, caring and mutual relation for both teacher and students to participate in knowledge creation. Referring to what hooks (1994) emphasis it shows that our class was not practicing engaged pedagogy because of absence of partnership between teacher and students. An author of this paper vividly recounted that;

I remember at a certain point I resisted oppression by using different ways such as asking questions that could lead discussions in class. It happened at a time when I used to ask questions to teacher for more clarification but I put in such a way that could brought further discussion in class.

Freire (2005) pointed out that dialogues create critical mind in the manner that teacher and students are free to exchange knowledge, arguing each other and later reach in consensus which is true knowledge. Consequently, this way of resisting oppression helped not only me but also other students to give out their views and experiences.

Becoming aware of our own Conscientizacao

One of the factors that have contributed to our conscientizacao was the introduction of the new curriculum. The new curriculum now placed a lot of emphasise on the need for students to

curriculum. The new curriculum according to one of the authors enabled him to realise that it was not proper to deny students' opinions because knowledge can be obtained from different sources. In reference to the above experience, we can relate this with what hooks (1994) emphasised that curriculum and classroom instructions must be centred to ensure students become active and participate in knowledge creation.

Additionally, a seminar from one of the Non-Government Organizations (NGOs) that involved in protecting children's rights in schools was one of the factors that contributed to one of the author's conscientization. It must be emphasised that the old curriculum was heavily criticised by various stakeholders, some of the key criticisms was the fact that the old curriculum was not encouraging critical learning and active learners. This led to different campaigns like seminars and discussions in different areas and one of those seminars was that one from NGO. It was that seminar during one of the author's early stage of secondary education that informed his curiosity about the shortcoming of the teacher-centred curriculum. Soon after I realised that, the old curriculum was harmful to producing critical minds in our country. One of the authors recounted that what one of the facilitator said during an engagement with stakeholders with respect to the advantages of the new curriculum introduced;

.*The seminar facilitator argued that the learning process needed to be handled in a friendly manner which in essence means that the teacher and students need to be friends. Friendship here is about mutual relation, sharing knowledge, cooperation and acceptance. The student centred-curriculum will give more authority and autonomy to students in learning process in the manner that teacher's knowledge will not be regarded as always absolute but allow for knowledge to be constructed within the classroom space.*

Another contributed factor to one of the author of this paper conscientization was stimulated by a motivation speaker in a television program. He recounted that;

I used to watch education related television programs so it happened one day I watched the program and see the speaker talking about classroom environment how is supposed to be. He further made comparison with different areas outside Tanzania how are they operating and organize their classroom instructions as well as referring different scholars such as Freire, Dewey and Rousseau. He insisted much on collaboration and team work among teachers themselves as well as teachers and students in learning process, one of the statements he said "no one has a copyright of knowledge".

To me the author, the above statement gave him strength and a strong conviction that student can be a source and contribute to the body of knowledge. In academic both students and teachers have the same chance to share and contribute in the knowledge body. Following this line of thought, we argue that conscious learning needs to be two way approach or process and uni-dimensional.

taking in curriculum reforms. One of the things that I remember the most was teachers need to prepare themselves psychologically that arguments, discussion and dialogues in academic are normal things. This means that students can question teachers' knowledge or argue against, this has become imperative for teachers to provide evidence rather than taking such questioning from students as a sign of disrespect. The minister added that dialogues and collaboration are effective ingredients for implementing new curriculum. The new curriculum was student-centred, so to him it would be unreasonable if teacher will not provide a platform for students to explore and discover knowledge on their own.

Conclusion

We agree that our educational trajectory was be characterised as a learning processes from our own unconscious or naïve minds to a new state of critical conscientization. This form of naivety featured various forms of oppression and other were featured with resistance. One thing that we realized is that we did not know whether we contributed or resisted until we took a course in politics of education and read very insightful papers such as hooks (1994), Freire (2005) and Burke (2012). We argue that these course readings have enhanced our curiosity on our actions and inactions that were either contributing or resisting oppression in one way or the other, at the same time it has also served as self-reflection that learning is greatly dependant on the extent to which teacher and students cooperate in the teaching and learning process.

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