Emotionalized learning experiences: Tapping into the affective domain

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A R T I C L E   I N F O

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A B S T R A C T

The experimental study was undertaken to examine the effect of emotionalized learning experiences on the academic achievement of students at Preston University. The major objectives of the study were to identify the effect of teaching methods on students' academic achievement and to evaluate the relationship between affective learning conditions and students' academic achievement. Based on four intact semesters, the population of the study comprised 140 students from the Bachelors of Business Administration Program. The whole population was considered as the sample. The control group (28 students) was taught through the interactive lecture method, whereas, the experimental group 1 (35 students), experimental group 2 (46 students) and experimental group 3 (31 students) were taught through the activity method, reflective learning method and cooperative learning method respectively. Results indicated a significant difference between the pretest and posttest scores obtained in the achievement test as a result of the effect of teaching methods used for offering the emotionalized learning experiences. There was also a significant relationship between affective learning conditions and students' academic achievement. Furthermore, it was found that students' academic achievement in the affective domain was highest with regard to workshops 1, 2 and 3. It was concluded that the emotionalized learning experiences offered to the students via the four teaching methods helped students in enhancing their knowledge, changing their attitudes and developing their skills with regard to living a happy, healthy and meaningful life. However, the reflective learning method proved to be the most suitable followed by the interactive lecture method, the cooperative learning method and the activity method.

A C K N O W L E D G M E N T S

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1. Introduction

Plato declared several hundred years ago that all learning is based on emotions (Thayamani, Fathima, & Mohan, 2013). Emotions play a critical role in the teaching-learning process. Emotions “affect” the process of learning, as they enable learners to process information, develop a concrete understanding of what they experience and deal with various feelings and social relationships within the classroom (Stanford University, 2003). Way back in 1985, Sinclair stipulated that “affect” relates to: motivating learners’ behaviour; sustaining and enhancing their self-esteem; achievement motivation; learning anxiety; developing curiosity, intrigue, a sense of inquiry and an overwhelming desire to examine and figure out things; and a need to be acknowledged, praised and attended to (as cited in Main, 1992).

Emotions can either stimulate or hinder learning (Dirks, 2001). As suggested by Pekrun in 2005, emotions affect the sociology of the classroom by: enhancing students’ academic achievement; increasing their interest and engagement in the content; and contributing towards their personality development (as cited in Gläser-Zikuda, Stuchliková, & Janík, 2013). Emotions are crucial for promoting learning, as the inability to take into account the emotional aspects of a subject actually robs learners of substance and meaning (Caine & Caine, 1991). Therefore, emotions are deeply associated with potentially all aspects of the teaching-learning process (Schutz & Lanehart, 2002).

A gateway to learning, the affective domain incites and inspires students’ engagement and secures their cooperation towards learning. The affective domain engages learners emotionally (Shephard, 2008), as it addresses matters associated with learners’ attitudes, beliefs, points of view, impressions, temperaments,
sentiments and feelings (O’Donnell, Reeve, & Smith, 2009). The affective domain addresses the emotional aspect of learning, as manifested through such behavioural attitudes as “awareness, empathy, interest, attention, concern, responsibility and the ability to listen and respond” (International Training and Education Center for Health [I-TECH], 2010). Teachers who influence values, beliefs and attitudes are those who address the affective domain in their teaching strategies. Therefore, any behaviour that has an emotional component lies within the affective domain (Pierre & Oughton, 2007).

Furthermore, affective characteristics, such as motivation and desire form the very core of learning; signifying that learning does not occur if students are not willing to learn or are unable to learn (Stiggins, 2005). Furthermore, the affective domain has the “potential to bring to light the multi-faceted nature of learning” (Brockbank, 2009, p. 18) and to get students excited and enthusiastic about what they are actually learning (Miller, 2009).

Penetrating the innermost recesses of the heart, affective education attaches greater meaning to what students learn and makes the overall learning experience more memorable, fulfilling and relevant to the real world. Kasilingam, Ramalingam, and Chinnavan (2014, p. 27) assert that affective education “focuses on attitude, motivation, willingness to participate, valuing what is being learned, and ultimately incorporating the discipline values into one’s real life.” Thus, affective education enhances and sustains the process of learning, as it “is not just a simple catalyst, but a necessary condition for learning to occur” (Perrier & Nsengiyumwa, 2003, p. 1124).

1.1. Emotionalized learning experiences

Patel (2010) refers to affective education as emotionalized learning experiences, signifying tapping into the affective domain to impart affective content. The originator of the term, Patel believes that emotionalized learning experiences influence students’ behaviour and help them in demonstrating positive behavioural attitudes, such as self-restraint, empathy, fair-mindedness, integrity, etc.

Additionally, affective education promotes affective behaviours such as self-confidence, self-motivation, teamwork, personal grooming, time management as well as etiquette and manners (National Guidelines for Educating EMS Instructors, 2002, pp. 4–5). These are in fact vital for both personal enrichment and professional growth. Much more than a catalyst, affective education is in fact quintessential for promoting learning (Perrier & Nsengiyumwa, 2003), as without desire, willingness and motivation (affective characteristics) learning cannot occur (Stiggins, 2005). Furthermore, research suggests that pleasure of learning, desire for achieving success and satisfaction of an assigned task promote learning (Schutz & Pekrun, 2007). Researchers collectively agree that affective education must be integrated in the curriculum to cater for learners’ professional development (Baker, Andriessen, & Jarvelä, 2013).

Stiff-Williams (2010) refers to affective education as value-based teaching and the provision of character development training that needs to be integrated with the normal course of studies based on the prescribed curricula. According to Kuboja and Ngussa (2015), educational institutions need to be successful in incorporating affective education within the curriculum to contribute towards students’ professional development as well as enable them to become socially responsible citizens.

In addition to motivating students towards learning, educators must be able to engage them to a much deeper level of learning through the affective domain based on suitable methods of instruction and evaluation. This in turn necessitates the formulation of appropriate instructional activities and strategies to cater for all levels of the affective domain as well as enable students to delve into interesting, meaningful, thought-provoking and relevant affective content (Pierre & Oughton, 2007).

The manner in which the affective content is covered has a huge bearing on the efficacy of the emotionalized learning experience. Therefore, suitable training methods must be selected to aptly cover the different aspects of the affective content. Following review provides basic insights into the major teaching methods for facilitating affective education:

1.2. Interactive lectures

These are used to overcome some of the limitations of formal lectures, such as the lack of interaction between the trainer and participants as well as the boredom, monotony and dullness caused by one-way tedious communication.

Following strategies for making lectures more active and engaging:

1. Questions carefully incorporated in the lectures make them more interesting, participatory and personalized. They can be used to assess students’ comprehension at different stages of the lecture through their responses. Additionally, “question of the day” activities are used to engage students to think actively about a key topic as well as to develop higher-order cognitive skills. Additionally, well-planned, well-prepared and well-presented illustrations and demonstrations can engage the participants by attracting their attention and sustaining their interest. Buzz sessions can also be combined with lectures to make them active and meaningful (Vendanayagam, 1994).

2. Interpreted lecture strategy asking volunteers to write in their own words an important concept taught and to support it with an example at regular intervals (Innovative Support for Intellectual Resource Development [INSPIRED], 2015).

3. Using creative “whips” to obtain something quickly from each student. These make use of sentence stems displayed on a slide (United States Agency for International Development – Pakistan Legislative Strengthening Project [USAID-PLSP], 2010). Examples of sentence stems could be: One thing that makes a leader effective is . . . . . . . or Change is good, as it . . . .

4. Particularly suitable for facilitating affective education, structured debate can be used to make lectures more interesting and interactive. It is based on the affective and the cognitive domains to include information based on both value judgement and facts. For instance, students may be asked to present their views either for or against a case, situation or topic given to them (Te Hiwi, 2011).

1.3. Reflective learning

These activities allow participants to deliberate on their strengths, limitations and personal experiences to enhance personal insight. Parrillo (1994) suggests that reflection activities enable learners to gain strong personal insight with regard to their own abilities and strengths as well as provide them with the feeling of intellectual ownership. Action for the Rights of Children [ARC] (2003), a child rights-based training and capacity-building initiative suggests that personal reflections allow participants to develop an empathetic understanding of the situation that others are facing as well as to gain valuable insights into addressing the issues presented in the situation. Furthermore, the initiative suggests that personal reflections may be used for introducing topics that need to be handled in a sensitive manner as well as evaluating personal experiences, situations, or events. Reflective learning makes effective use of the following techniques:
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