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SOCIAL ACTION LEARNING: APPLICABILITY TO COMRADES IN ADVERSITY IN NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

The paper considers the learning of former abductees in Nigeria who enrolled on the New Foundation School University Preparatory (NFSUP) programme at the American University of Nigeria (AUN). The research question is: Can action learning enable a holistic evaluation of the student learning experiences of former terrorist abductees on a university preparatory program at the American University of Nigeria? The methodology employed is based on the praxeology of action learning, combined with Grounded Theory. Literature relating to abduction, stigmatization and exclusion are considered along with coverage of the Boko Haram abduction of Chibok school girls in Nigeria. Findings are presented that show action learning enables; student engagement, confidence, social and emotional learning and provides a forum for feedback from NFSUP students. This paper could also be relevant for preparatory and transformational courses in a wider community that includes; refugees, internally displaced persons, child soldiers, teenage victims of trafficking and sexual grooming circles. Action learning probably enables a holistic evaluation of NFSUP course student learning experiences. Furthermore, action learning provides a more holistic evaluation of student learning than Course Experience Questionnaires. A hybrid of both approaches should be considered, by educational institutions as an assessment tool.

Terrorist Abductees, Action Learning, Grounded Theory, Action Learning Research

I INTRODUCTION

Since 2013 over 1,000 teenage girls and boys have been abducted by terrorists in Northern Nigeria (UNICEF, 2018). Many abductees when released or rescued enroll on university preparatory programmes in educational institutions, in Nigeria. To assess the impact of these preparatory programmes, educational institutions generally make use of Course Experience Questionnaires (CEQs). CEQs are the traditional tool used by educational institutions for the assessment of student

engagement, course delivery and design (Ramsden, 1991; Munns and Woodward, 2006). CEQs have been criticised for not adopting a holistic approach to the assessment of student learning experiences outside the class room, especially in diverse cultural settings (Griffen et al., 2003). Where course evaluation is not based on a holistic approach, the data collected does not capture fully the contextual, cognitive, social and emotional learning experiences of students. Consequently, improvements to student performance, course delivery and design may be limited and sub-optimal. This paper seeks to answer the research question:

Can action learning enable a holistic evaluation of the student learning experiences of former terrorist abductees on a university preparatory program at the American University of Nigeria?

To answer to this question we employ an action learning methodology, inspired by Revans (1971) and expounded upon by Coughlan and Coughlan (2010), that when combined with grounded theory may generate actionable knowledge which addresses the research question (cf. Pauleen et al., 2007). Two action learning (AL) sets (consisting of four former terrorist abductees) met on three occasions in April and May 2019 to discuss learning problems and proffer remedial actions. Furthermore, AL set members, through the medium of a focus group (held in October 2019) were used reflexively (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2008) in the interpretation of data and the validation of working hypotheses and grounded theories. We start by briefly considering the circumstances surrounding abduction, stigmatization and exclusion of victims of social conflict. Then we explore action learning in education, student engagement and the utility of CEQs. We further outline the background to the study with reference to Boko Haram terrorist activities in Nigeria and the methodology employed in this study, before the development of a number working hypotheses or grounded theories that attempt to answer the research question. We conclude with comments on how former abductees and teachers benefited from action learning sessions and how Action Learning Research, based on the learning experiences of NFSUP students, may have implications for the wider community of victims of war and social violence.

II LITERATURE REVIEW

Abduction Stigmatization and Exclusion

There is a dearth of psychological models, in extant literature, that anticipate fully the novel circumstances, history and teaching needs of students in Nigeria, who were former terrorist abductees (Adepelumi, 2018). However, the accounts of abduction experienced by young Ugandan girls, during a brutal civil war in Northern Uganda (that raged on for twenty years from 1987) may provide some insight into the teaching and needs of girls abducted, more recently, in Nigeria. Following abduction by competing armies during the Ugandan civil war, many girls became sexual slaves of their abductors and approximately thirty percent had children for army soldiers (Allen, 2005). In instances where young girls (and their children) escaped or were rescued and returned to their homelands they were stigmatized and excluded from community life owing to the legacy of their horrific experiences while in captivity. In addition, their children were discriminated against and some labelled 'children of the enemy' because villagers were fearful their fathers might return to claim them or they were afraid that male children would grow up to claim village property rights, especially where the soldier's child was the first born male in the family (Namanya, 2013). Even in cases where former abductees were accepted back into local communities they faced immense economic challenges in supporting themselves and their children because they had missed out on completing their formal education and acquired only nascent vocational skills, prior to their abduction. Owing to stigmatization the chances of formerly abducted girls marrying were very low and some former abductees, in a bid to improve their chances of marriage, abandoned their babies (Kalla and Dixon, 2010).

Action Learning and Education

In relation to social action learning, the definition of action learning proposed by Revans (1982) envisaged helping people resolve complex challenges in the sparsely researched fields of social conflict and education, as well as the frequently researched fields of leadership and organisational development.

In a book review of action learning in schools, based on one hundred teacher case studies, Kath Aspinwall (2011) noted that a cycle of four processes was proposed for the effective implementation of action learning in schools, especially where there was an emphasis on the professional development of teachers. The first process was 'reflection', which involved thinking through a problem. The second process was 'community' and the sharing of issues within the set and beyond. The third was 'action' which involved the exploration of ideas and actions generated. Finally, the fourth was 'feedback' from students and teachers affected by actions taken (p.173). Although the one hundred case studies, examined in the book (Aubusson et al., 2009), highlighted how action learning could enable the professional development of teachers in schools, there was no significant examination of the link between action learning, student engagement and achievement – an under researched area this study attempts to shed light upon. Educational experts argue that for students to be fully engaged in productive learning then it is essential to incorporate individual and collective student self-assessment into a teaching programme (Perry et al., 2002; Munns and Woodard, 2006). McFadden and Munns (2002) emphasise that

'it is the students themselves who will be able to tell us that they are engaged and who will say whether education is working for them in a culturally sensitive and relevant way'.

Ten proposals for action to improve student engagement are recommended by Zepke and Leach (2010, p.169), namely: Enhance student beliefs, encourage autonomous working, recognise that teachers are central to engagement, create collaborative and active learning, Challenge students to extend their academic abilities, encourage diversity, provide support services for special needs, be adaptive to student expectations, enable students to become 'active citizens' in curriculum building and enable students to develop their social and cultural capital.

Since action learning incorporates individual and collective self-assessment, specifically for students, the process provides opportunities to engage in discourses on; what they are learning (knowledge), what they are achieving (actions), teaching practices (pedagogical spaces), their view of themselves as learners (self-esteem) and, their say over the direction and evaluation of learning (their voice). Furthermore,

where set members, in an educational setting, are drawn from different ability levels then action learning sessions may facilitate the transfer of knowledge between students with different ability levels and those experiencing similar challenges, in different contexts (Conklin et al. 2012). Finally, action learning may promote life-long adult learning and aid students in solving work or organization related problems collaboratively, in their career after graduation (Zuber-Skerritt, 2013).

Course Experience Questionnaires

Course Experience Questionnaires (CEQs) are the traditional tool used by educational institutions for the assessment of student engagement, course delivery and design (Ramsden, 1991; Munns and Woodward, 2006). The CEQ attempts to collect information on the quality of teaching and courses. It assumes a strong association between the quality of student learning and student perceptions of learning. Student perceptions of teaching effectiveness in higher institutions are used to create a performance rating system for academic organizational units in different institutions - a useful benchmarking tool for funding organisations. In addition, CEQ performance indicators assist educational institutions with the internal monitoring, evaluation and improvement of course quality and delivery - a useful guide for educational organizations (Ramsden, 1991). Although CEQs benefit primarily funding and educational organisations, students also receive useful information and feedback that may aid them in choosing which educational course and institution to attend, through the publication of 'Good University' guides (Ashenden and Milligan, 2000).

However CEQs have been criticised for not incorporating a holistic approach to the assessment of student learning experiences and life outside the class room, especially in diverse cultural settings (Griffen, Coates, Mcinnis and James, 2003). CEQs have also been criticised for not emphasising the assessment of social and emotional learning (Zins and Elias, 2007). If course evaluation is not based on a holistic approach and data collected does not capture fully student course experiences then improvements to student performance, course delivery and design may be limited and sub-optimal. Areas not included in traditional CEQs include; the social and emotional dimensions of learning, the learning climate and intellectual environment,

a contextual approach to student learning, guidance and support to boost confidence and encourage independent inquiry (Griffin et al., 2003). This paper seeks to examine how action learning might enable a holistic evaluation of student learning experiences. The next section discusses the background to the study and the methodology employed to answer the research question.

III BACKGROUND TO STUDY AND METHODOLOGY

This study considers the abduction of Chibok School Girls in Nigeria by the Islamic State in West Africa (ISWA), commonly known as Boko Haram, a jihadist terrorist organisation based in North Eastern Nigeria with tentacles that are active in neighbouring Chad, Niger and Cameroon. The term 'Boko Haram' has been variously translated as 'Western education is forbidden' or 'Western influence is a sin or sacrilege or fake' (Newman, 2013). Boko Haram was founded as a non-violent religious organisation, by Mohammed Yusuf in 2002, it was then transformed into a terrorist organisation by Abubakar Shekau in 2009 and has been strategically aligned with the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant, since 2015.

On 14th April, 2014 Boko Haram abducted 276 school girls (aged 15 years and older) from the town of Chibok, in Borno state, North Eastern Nigeria. Today, 112 school girls from Chibok are still missing. 164 school girls were either rescued or escaped captivity. 130 of those girls, who were either rescued by the Nigerian government (106) or escaped (24), enrolled (from 2014) on a predominantly government sponsored university preparatory program at the American University of Nigeria's New Foundation School (NFS), based in Yola, the capital of Adamawa state, North Eastern Nigerian (AUN, 2018). A handful of the 130 of the former abductees, who were initially enrolled at NFS, subsequently withdrew and returned to Chibok – with some taking up offers of marriage. A Boko Haram propaganda video of abductees and their children, released in 2018, featured some of the 112 missing young ladies from Chibok. A few young ladies, featured in the video asserted they no longer wished to be brought back home from captivity. The extent to which they were coerced into making propaganda statements or succumbed to the 'Stockholm Syndrome' could

not be independently confirmed (Reuters, 2018). The 'Stockholm Syndrome' refers to a situation where abductees form psychological alliances with their captors and in some cases express sympathy for their causes (Jameson, 2010).

The methodology employed in this study is based on the praxeology of action learning outlined by Revans (1971) which identified three interlocking systems, namely: Alpha, Beta and Gamma. Revans called 'System Alpha - the use of information for designing objectives; System Beta - the use of information for achieving objectives; System Gamma - the use of information for adapting to experience and to change' (1971, p.33). In Figure 1, adapted from Coughlan and Coughlan (2010, p197/198), System Alpha is depicted as 'problem investigation', System Beta as 'implementing decisions' and Gamma as 'learning and self-awareness'.

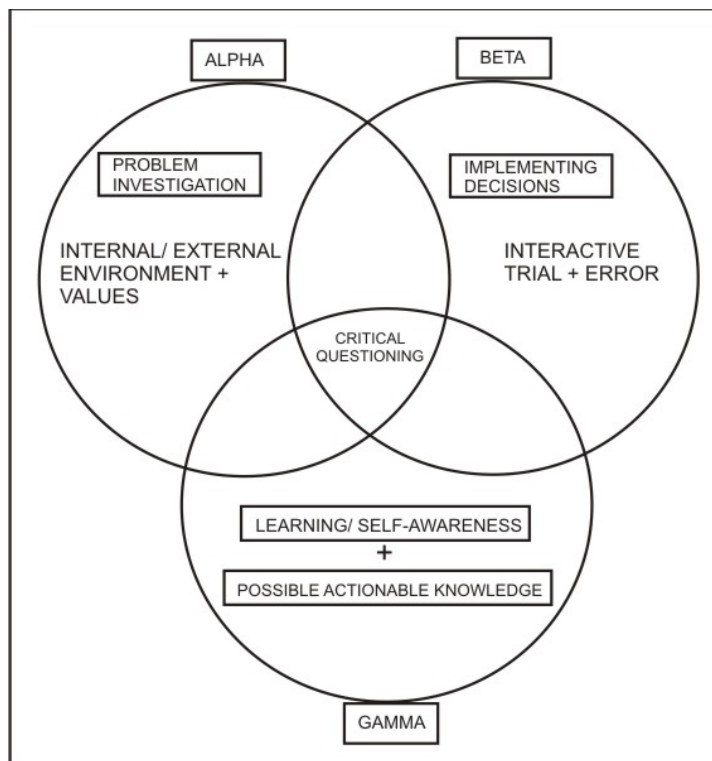


Figure 1. Action Learning Systems Alpha, Beta and Gamma (adapted from Coughlan and Coughlan, 2010)

System Alpha focuses on diagnosis, in relation to the internal and external environment and values associated with the problem. In contrast, System Beta focuses on the interactive trial and error process associated with implementing actions. Whereas, System Gamma focuses on learning and self-awareness and 'how

thought processes... adapt to and evolve with actions directed towards solving the problem' (Coughlan and Coughlan, 2010 p.198). The critical questioning of power relations, politics and learning assumptions is, depicted in the Figure 1 as a prominent sub-section within each system. As argued by Coughlan and Coughlan: 'In action learning research, the researcher is involved in system gamma... clarity on the nature of the involvement, the interpretation of that involvement and the evaluation of the impact of that involvement underpins the presentation of the actionable knowledge' (p.198).

In order to bring clarity to researcher involvement, interpretation and evaluation of action learning data related to potentially actionable knowledge, Grounded Theory (GT) (Corbin and Strauss, 2008) was deployed, in an attempt to bring rigour, transparency and reliability to the process of formulating actionable knowledge, within System Gamma. The combination of GT and Action Learning to produce a Grounded Action Learning approach to actionable knowledge generation has been endorsed by Pauleen et al., (2007) and Rand (2013). In an attempt to validate actionable knowledge generated within System Gamma, set members participated in a focus group (along with other stakeholders) to reflexively examine research findings and validate the interpretation of results (Alvesson and Skoldberg 2008).

Six action learning set meetings were held at New Foundation School University Preparatory (NFSUP) programme in 2019 for approximately 130 young ladies abducted from the village of Chibok by Boko Haram terrorists in 2014. Two sets, consisting of four students, met on three separate occasions in April and May 2019. AUN. All six action learning sessions were conducted in English and were tape recorded. A written summary of the content of the set meeting was produced by each adviser after each meeting. In October 2019 following data analysis, a focus group of stakeholders was used to reflexively validate the working hypotheses and grounded theories. The stakeholders included: Two academic and two administrative staff members, two set advisers and two other set members.

The primary role played by GT in this paper was the analysis and articulation of experiential data, discovered by set sessions. GT is not a theory but a methodology to discover theories dormant in data produced, for example, in action learning

sessions (Legewie and Schervier-Legewie, 2004). GT is particularly useful in situations where there is; little previous research in an area; a focus on human experience and social interaction; a high degree of applicability to practice; a strong need for cultural and contextual interpretation (Yoong, 1996). Action learning set data, used in GT, is systematically gathered and analysed until concepts and dormant theories emerge during the research process through the researcher's continuous analytical interplay between analysis and data collection. The interplay between analysis and data collection ends when central themes reoccur frequently - the point of 'theoretical saturation' (Strauss and Corbin, 1990). As data emerged from set meetings, it was analysed utilising Corbin and Strauss's (2008) version of GT, involving their recommendation for 'open' 'axial', 'selective' and 'theoretical' coding. 'Open' coding involves: 'breaking data apart and delineating concepts to stand for blocks of raw data' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008 p.65). 'Axial' coding involves 'crosscutting or relating concepts to each other' (Corbin and Strauss, 2008, p.195). 'Selective' coding is conducted after identifying -through an iterative process of engagement with data - the 'core variable'. The core variable attempts to make explicit the experiential learning of set members as they strive to resolve challenges related to the NFSUP programme and implement actions. 'Theoretical' codes weave together incomplete concepts into working hypotheses that attempt to form a theory that reconciles some of the concerns of participants.

In summary, this paper proposes that action learning provides an established way of discovering tacit knowledge, embedded within student programmed learning experiences, through the use of collaborative and problem based questioning, action and reflection (Berns and Erickson, 2001). GT provides a rigorous method for articulating emergent knowledge through a systematic process of abstraction, concept development and theory building. The results of action learning sessions, GT building and a reflexive focus group are presented in the next section.

IV PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

In this section results from action learning set meetings are transformed from disparate primary data, via integrative 'mind maps' (Buzan, 1993) into core variables that give rise to several working hypotheses or grounded theories that shall be

reflexively validated in a focus group involving set members. The 'mind map' below was developed from set data (tape recordings and contemporaneous reflective notes written by advisers) taken from six meetings in April and May 2019 and attempts to facilitate the identification of codes and concepts. The concepts, derived from a review of action learning set data, are listed below. Concepts include; the conflict between learning English (in order to advance studies) and being criticised by class mates for abandoning Chibok culture by speaking English outside the classroom, the stigma of being labeled a 'Chibok Girl', past experiences producing a negative self-image, the puzzle of managing time demands and the benefits derived from actions taken by students following set meetings (concepts are depicted in 'boxes' in Figure 2).

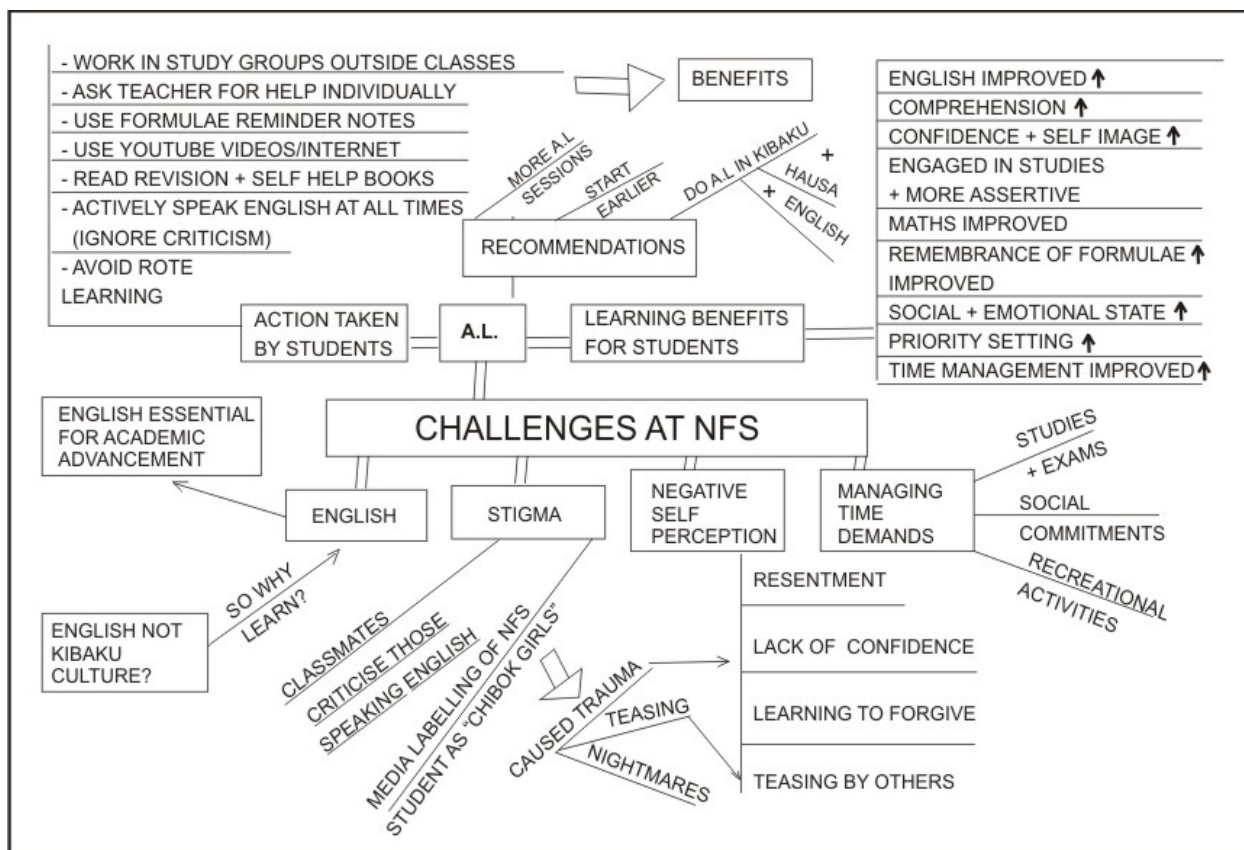


Figure 2: Themes related to concepts produced from action learning set data

In Figure 2, the focus of action learning sessions was the resolution of challenges encountered by students during the NFSUP programme. For example, many students practiced speaking English to their kinswomen outside class but were criticised, by a

minority, for denigrating Chibok culture - which promoted the native language of Kibaku. Figure 3, highlights four core working hypotheses or grounded theories as emanating from the concepts featured in Figure 2. The first working hypothesis suggests the sessions empowered students by enabling them to voice their assessment of the NFSUP programme and share their learning experiences. The second suggests that action learning sessions and resultant actions increased student engagement and improved student performance in English, mathematics, self-assertiveness, time management and exam preparation. The third suggests that the process of 'comrades in adversity' sharing their experiences (of translating programmed course knowledge into local contextual practice) is therapeutic and beneficial, in terms of social and emotional learning (Zins and Elias, 2007). The fourth suggests that action learning builds student confidence, as evidenced by; action learning set members enthusiastically requesting (in Appendix 1) for more action learning sessions to be instigated and for those sessions to be more frequent with wider student coverage.

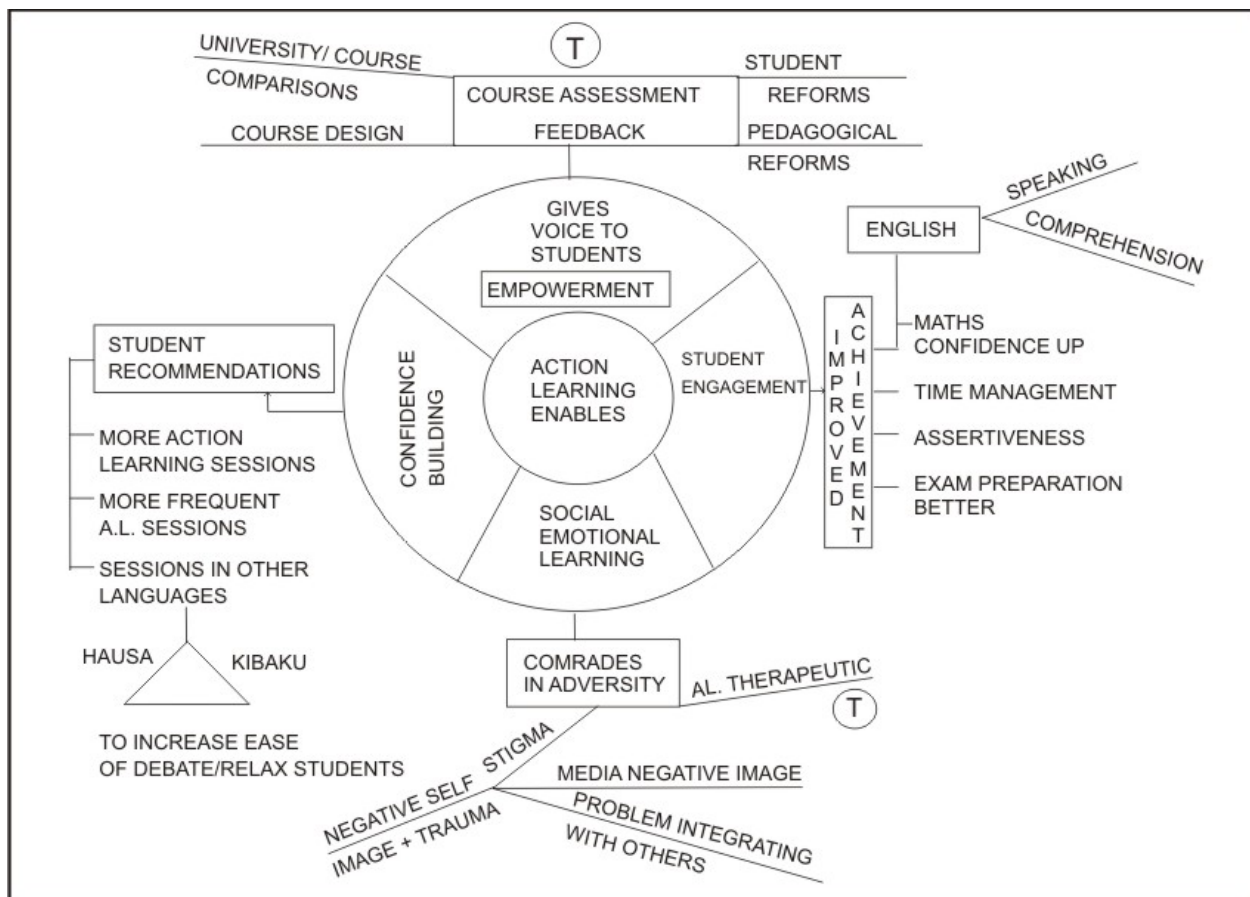


Figure 3: Action Learning enables four working grounded theories/hypotheses

Further research and data from additional NFSUP sponsored set sessions in the 2019/2020 academic year is probably required in order to validate and refine working hypotheses or grounded theories. Some authorities in GT suggest that the process of data collection and analysis only ends when central themes or core hypotheses reoccur frequently – the point when ‘data and theoretical saturation’ is attained (Aldiabat and Le Navenec, 2011)

The results of a stakeholder focus group endorsed the four central working hypotheses depicted in the Figure 3. The detailed results of the focus group are in Appendix 1. The validation of the working hypotheses that suggest; set sessions provide a voice for students to give a course assessment and that action learning enables social and emotional learning, is significant because the hypotheses incorporate GT theoretical codes (denoted by the letter ‘T’ in Figure 3) about therapy, course assessment and pedagogy, suggested by the researchers.

V DISCUSSION

This paper seeks to answer to the key question:

‘Can action learning enable a holistic evaluation of the student learning experiences of former terrorist abductees on the NFSUP course at the American University of Nigeria?’

The four core working hypotheses arising from findings (see Figure 3) attempt to warrant claims that action learning enables a more holistic evaluation of student learning experiences than Course Experience Questionnaires (CEQs), for the following reasons:

Firstly, in Figure 2, set members revealed the learning challenges they faced from fellow former abductees who criticised them for choosing to practice and converse in English, rather than their native tongue (Kibaku), outside of the classroom. CEQs are not designed to illicit such poignant information about cultural clashes. Secondly, in Figure 2, set members confessed to wrestling with their past secondary school habit

of learning material by 'rote' in order to pass exams rather than genuinely exploring and understanding subject matter. CEQs are not designed to encourage students to make such admissions whereas the forum of a set meeting appears to facilitate such important confessions and the discussion of remedial action. . Thirdly, in Figure 2, set members highlighted how their psychological social and emotional struggle with feelings of resentment towards (and a desire to forgive) former captors haunted and influenced their NFS learning experience. CEQs are not capable of capturing such barriers to learning. Fourthly, in Figure 2, set members revealed how they are grappling with the unintended consequences of a global media campaign that, not only highlighted their plight but speculated publicly about their maltreatment while in captivity. The unintended consequences are expressed in the reticence of NFSUP students to initially to use the main campus canteen based on the fear or perception of potential teasing by degree students about their history, as 'Chibok girls'. CEQs are not designed to reveal the unintended consequences of a viral social media campaign.

Results predicted by literature review and findings that were unexpected

The literature review predicted that the Stockholm Syndrome may influence abductee behavior. This prediction is particularly relevant in relation to the cultural conflict caused by some students wishing to practice speaking English to their kinswomen, from Chibok, when outside the classroom (see Figure 2 and 3). The 'Stockholm Syndrome' may offer an explanation as to the motivation of some former abductees to actively discourage fellow Chibok abductees from practicing English, outside the classroom. It could be argued that a few former abductees may have unwittingly been indoctrinated, during captivity into believing that 'Western influence is a sin' (Newman, 2013). Consequently, attempts by the NFSUP programme or fellow Chibok kinswomen to promote the study of English, outside the classroom, may be seen as an affront to Chibok culture – in sympathy with Boko Haram teachings.. An alternative explanation could be that those objecting to the use of English outside the class room have a natural ability to switch between languages and have difficulty understanding why their kinswomen cannot do the same..

The literature review predicted (based on the experiences of former Ugandan girl abductees) that Chibok former abductees might struggle to learn, during the NFSUP programme, while dealing with the psychological trauma of their abduction and the understandable resentment still felt against their abductors. Figure 2, highlights the dilemma faced by some former abductees. On the one hand they resent their captors for their maltreatment while, on the other hand, their strong Christian commitment (approx. 95% of the abductees are church-going Christians) urges them to forgive their captors and move forward to take advantage of the educational opportunities afforded by their scholarships at AUN.

It is interesting to note that the literature review did not predict the struggle NFSUP students might face to break free from a tradition of using rote learning to pass exams (their secondary school experience prior to abduction) in order to pursue a genuine understanding of subjects, through persistent individual self-inquiry (see Figure 2). Perhaps the most surprising revelation (not predicted by literature review) was how former abductees might be wrestling with the unintended consequences of the global 'Bring Back Our Girls' campaign that went viral. In detail, the benefits of a viral social media campaign that exerted political pressure on governments to secure their rescue (Njoroge, 2017) are juxtaposed against the stigma (see Diagrams 2 and 3) associated with the notoriety of their experiences in captivity that may hinder integration within the main student population at AUN, local communities and their chances of marriage (Kalla and Dixon, 2010).

Comparison of findings with Ugandan study of girl abductees

A Ugandan study into the rehabilitation of girls abducted and abused during a twenty year-long war highlighted the teaching need for vocational skills to enable the returnees to sustain themselves when returning to their homeland (Namanya, 2013). Set sessions at NFSUP made no mention of vocational training needs or how the young ladies will sustain themselves after the NFSUP course, in the event that some do not proceed onto degree courses. The incidence of pregnancies highlighted in the Ugandan report at thirty percent is higher than those experienced by the young ladies from Chibok. Following the Nigerian government's rescue of 106 young ladies, three years after their abduction from Chibok, they were kept together in isolation from

the media and the rest of the world for another year before joining the 24 escapes already studying at NFSUP, whereas the Ugandan abductees were left to find their own way back to their homelands, without government support.

Although more action learning sessions are yet to be held and data analysed, the initial working hypotheses, depicted in Figure 3, appear to warrant claims that action learning enables a holistic assessment of the NFSUP student learning experiences both inside and outside the classroom. Furthermore, we have tried to show how action learning research, in combination with other methods, provides an important source of data which can be analysed to produce working hypotheses and new avenues for future research that may aid the education of victims of war and social violence..

VI CONCLUSIONS

The conclusion, so far, on our research question is that action learning probably enables a more holistic evaluation of student learning experiences on the NFSUP programme than CEQs. The conclusion is based on the analysis of six action learning set meetings and the triangulation of those results with feedback from a focus group (see Appendix 1) of set members and teachers. However, in practice a hybrid of both approaches should be considered by educational institutions as an assessment tool because it draws upon both the contextual (bottom-up) strengths of action learning and the universal (benchmarking) strengths of CEQs.

In addition, the underlying importance of action learning research, embodied in working hypotheses (featured in Figure 3) - that indicate action learning enables student engagement, promotes confidence, encourages social and emotional learning and enables students to voice their learning concerns - is that other victims of war and social violence may benefit from the learning experiences of NFSUP students. The hypotheses readily lend themselves to being applied in preparatory courses seeking to assist child soldiers, refugees, internally displaced persons and a wider

community that includes the re-orientation of victims of teenage trafficking and sexual grooming circles, highlighted recently in British media.

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APPENDICES

(approx. 1500 words)

Appendix 1: Validation/Triangulation of Grounded Theory by Focus Group

Introduction (

In mid-October 2019 a focus group, consisting of 4 members of staff (2 academic and 2 Administrative) and 4 students (2 set advisers and 2 set members – who participated in A.L. sessions held back in April and May), met to discuss the analysis of results from 6 taped action learning sessions held in April and May 2019. Each of the 6 set meetings consisted of 1 set adviser and 3 set members. Focus group topics were driven by questions derived from working hypotheses/grounded theories featured in Figure 3.

1.

Focus Group Conclusion

Detailed responses to questions, from students and staff (see below), triangulated with nascent working hypotheses or Grounded Theory (GT) depicted in Figure 3. However, there is a future requirement to analyse and incorporate into the GT process new data from the most recent sessions held in October and planned sessions in November 2019 in order to enhance the validity of hypotheses.

Detailed answers that support the focus group conclusion:

Q1. Action learning (A.L.) enabling students to express challenges to learning

Set members made the following comments:

“Now I ask questions, both in and outside the classroom, to help me to understand better problem areas”.

“In between sessions I put into practice some of the recommendations from colleagues and it is improving my learning skills”.

“Following A.L. sessions my set members now request for more tutorials from teaching staff”.

“A. L. sessions are helping with confidence and helping the planning of studies throughout the new semester”.

Staff made the following observations:

“I have noticed set members’ confidence and learning skills improving because they are now asking more questions and being more assertive in class”.

"Prior to A.L. sessions I noticed that a set member was experiencing challenges in learning and understanding biological terms but now she asks more questions in class to get clarification and is more confident in expressing herself in public in front of class mates".

"A.L. has given set members a platform, outside class, to debate and discuss possible future career paths or choices".

"I think it is good when set members ask more questions, in class".

Q. 2 The influence of feedback from A.L. sessions on course delivery and design

"As a member of staff the A.L. sessions have given me more feedback on the problems students are having, especially with mathematics. As a result, we have instigated new and more interesting ways to make the learning of mathematics more interesting through the introduction of fun Maths quizzes and 'mathematics mania' – a new programme."

"The feedback from set members on some of the challenges they are facing with learning English has caused the NFS to buy each student a personal dictionary to help them readily understand words and improve their vocabulary. We have also given them tutorials on how to best use the dictionary".

"I picked up from A.L. sessions that some members were posting formulae on bedposts and placing them on furniture around their rooms to help them remember, so during my next lecture to students I recommended that other students do the same to help memorise formulae".

Q.3 Have A.L. sessions improved engagement, achievement, performance

"I used to get angry very easily but discussing issues with A.L. set members has helped me to manage my emotions and study better".

"I used to think that we have too many activities in a week but the A.L. sessions have helped me to set new priorities and improve my time management".

"A. L. sessions have helped with my self-control and helped me to plan goals for the week".

"Following A.L. sessions I now prioritise my work and assignments".

Q4. In what ways has A.L. sessions been therapeutic?

"At the first set meeting members did not want talk very much but with each set meeting they began to talk more about issues and more freely about challenges and we were more engaged".

"Initially my set members were shy but in later meetings they were more engaged and began discussing the planning of their studies and setting priorities".

"As a staff member, I noticed that A.L. set members outside of meetings appeared to manage their emotions better than others classmates – especially when some of them (as well as their class mates) received disappointing news recently".

"As a teacher in class, I noticed that A.L. set members show more belief in themselves and their ability to overcome challenges in their subjects through asking for individual help".

Q.5. Has A.L. has improved confidence, self-assertiveness, English, SEL and discouraged rote learning?

"Following the A.L. meetings, I have more confidence to meet teachers to ask them to help me understand mathematics. Now, when I struggle to understand a maths formula, I ask the teacher to explain the formula to me, in more detail".

"After A.L. sessions I now go to fellow students to ask them to explain to me things I don't understand – and they help me. I used to feel shy about admitting to class mates my lack of understanding but now I don't hesitate to ask for help".

"Before I was afraid of making mistakes with my English, so I did not speak much in case people laughed at my mistakes or teased me. But after discussions in A.L. sessions about others facing similar challenges in English, I am more confident".

"I used to be shy about speaking in English because I wanted to speak at all times correctly but now I just let it flow and 'blow' or shower my words on people freely. Of course I make mistakes but I am happy and relaxed to listen to corrections from others, so my speaking of English has improved".

"A.L. session have taught me to socialise more to learn from how others are overcoming problems".

"A.L. has taught me to share my problems with others".

"The A.L. sessions there is a lot of interaction which helps set members to learn new ways of solving problems".

"After A.L. discussions about 'rote' learning, I understand that cramming is not good. Now I try and understand words and formula in my own way rather than just cram".

"A.L. sessions have made me understand that cramming the night before, in order to pass an exam. It is not good to cram".

"As a teacher I have seen the performance of set members improve after A.L. sessions. In addition, I have seen fewer emotional breakdowns in set members after the sessions compare to their times before A.L.".

"As a staff member I have witnessed set members speaking English more confidently after the A.L. sessions".

"Students are showing more understanding of subjects and have improved their social interaction with one another".

“Following A.L. sessions students are speaking English more confidently, being assertive asking more question in class and requesting tutorials out of class to get clarification. Their social interaction with one another has also increased after set meetings”.

Q.6. How many student recommendations have been implemented by staff?

In response to student requests, staff have increased the number of A.L. sessions this new academic year but have not been able to increase the frequency of set meetings (owing to scheduling constraints) from the bi-weekly meetings arranged last academic year.

In response to student requests, A.L. sessions have begun at the beginning of the Autumn term rather than towards the end of the Summer term (last year) thereby giving students more time to implement actions and learn prior to end of term exams.

In response to student requests staff have scheduled in the Autumn term A.L. sessions in their first language spoken in Chibok (Kibaku) or second language spoken in Northern Nigeria (Hausa) rather than their third language used for all studies at AUN and the NFS course (English). The reason for doing so was to encourage students to speak more easily, freely and articulate more precisely their social and emotional feelings in language which they think in, rather than have to translate into English before expressing.