

Restorative justice ideology among High School teachers in Ghana: Investigating the role of collectivism and personality

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Abstract

Studies on Restorative Justice (RJ) ideology in school settings have largely focused on Western societies, to the neglect of African societies. This means that variables relevant to the Ghanaian setting that might be associated with RJ ideology have not been examined. The current study investigates the association between High School teachers' Collectivism, Openness to Experience (OE), and their idea of Restoration. Analysis of data from 191 (Male=128, Female=63) teachers in Accra indicated that Collectivism and OE both predicted the idea of Restoration. This suggests that both Collectivism and OE are important resources that may help teachers embrace the idea of restoring a student offender to morally acceptable behaviour. This and other findings are discussed. Keywords: Restorative Justice (RJ), Restoration, Collectivism, Openness to Experience (OE)

Introduction

Van Ness and Strong (2006) have asserted that Restorative justice (RJ) is a unique theoretical perception of justice that focuses on resolving criminal behaviours by mending harms. This is often done through inclusionary processes with the involved parties. RJ processes are aimed at benefiting both the victim and the offender (Mangena, 2015). Mangena (2015) has asserted that the biggest beneficiary is usually the victim. In consonance with Van Ness and Strong (2006), Jenkins (2006) puts forward that RJ seeks to repair damaged relationships between victims, the community and offenders through the payment of reparations by the offender. In the resolution of conflict, the offender and the victim are brought into contact with each other, usually in the presence of an arbitrator or a mediator. RJ is said to have the merit of holding offenders to

ransom without stigmatization (Green, Johnstone & Lambert, 2013). Moreover, RJ seeks to placate victims with a fulfilling experience of the justice system (Green et al., 2013). Although findings on offender recidivism after RJ processes are inconclusive, they have however consistently displayed higher levels of approval from victims (Choi, Bazemore, & Gilbert, 2012; Sherman & Strang, 2007). Considering the benefits of RJ practices, Wenzel, Okimoto, Feather and Platow (2008) have advocated for the use of RJ as a viable alternative to traditional Western justice systems.

Restorative justice practices demand communication processes between the parties involved in the conflict (Gavrielides, 2014). Albrecht (2010) has postulated that “This process can be expected to be exacerbated when participants from different language groups and cultures, with their distinct sets of behaviour, rituals, and values meet in mediation” (p. 4). Restorative justice advocates like Johnstone and van Ness identify with such a stand, arguing that “The ultimate goal of RJ should be to transform the way in which we understand ourselves and relate to others in our daily lives” (quoted in Vlaemyneck, 2008, p.3). Restorative justice therefore has the possibility of enhancing social integration, understood as the capability of diverse groups in society to live with each other in cooperative and productive harmony instituted on mutual trust (Vlaemyneck, 2008).

Albrecht (2010) has argued that although there have been a number of issues concerning diversity, power dynamics among facilitators and participants (Charkoudian & Wayne, 2010; Gavrielides, 2008; Schiff, 2013), hate incidents (Gavrielides, 2012a; Walters, 2012), and adequate training of mediators (Davidheiser, 2008), the association between race and RJ is still largely unexplored both empirically and normatively (Hamer, Jenkins, & Moore, 2013). Nevertheless, the few studies on the interaction of race with RJ posit that the potential to generate an understanding of the perspective of

minority groups makes RJ programmes appealing (Charkoudian & Wayne, 2010; Gavrielides, 2012a; Walters, 2012). However, Howard Zehr, “the grandfather of restorative justice” stated that although some successes have been achieved by the use of RJ, the bureaucratization of RJ programs and clear racial disparities in the prison system and court are currently the key challenges facing the RJ movement (Gavrielides, 2014). Critical race theorists corroborate Gavrielides’ position on what a RJ process seeks to restore (Gavrielides, 2014). As suggested by Gavrielides (2014), RJ as a complementary and voluntary practice often finds it difficult to gain a place within the criminal justice system, since its practices often have to contend with deep-rooted practices and the prevailing punitive mind-set of criminal justice agents (Gavrielides, 2012b; Pavlich, 2009). This brings to the fore some concerns as to how pragmatic our expectations can be in association with its role in race equality.

Some researchers (e.g., Hudson, 2006; Maruna, 2011; Simson, 2012) argue that RJ practices are capable of resolving power inequalities within the community amidst race-related tensions. None of these researchers have however proffered a methodical, operational mechanism by which to do so. Aside from this, others (e.g., Schiff, 2013; Yiallourides & Anastasiadou, 2013; Gavrielides & Artinopoulou, 2013) have advanced the position that it is impossible to detach the successful application and exercise of RJ from the social, political, cultural, and economic context within which it is planned, operated, and implemented. In effect, without tackling the balance of power embedded in and necessary to sustain western legal and sociopolitical institutions, flexible and open inclusive approach offered by RJ may be a false assurance.

Payne and Welch (2018) with a nationally representative sample of schools, investigated the possible influence of some school characteristics: exogenous school structural conditions on one’s RJ techniques and practices often used within a RJ

framework. They reported that school structure partially predicted the use of some individual restorative techniques. Though the grade level taught does not influence the implementation of RJ practices, larger schools are inclined towards the use of peer mediation, but less likely to use the other techniques. Astonishingly, schools in which teachers handle a lot of students are less inclined towards offering peer mediation. Moreover, schools with correspondingly more Black students are less inclined than schools with more white students to oblige student violators to offer community service or restitution. However, the composition of Black students seem to have no effect on whether student conferences or peer mediation are used.

Additionally, Suzuki and Wood (2017) sought to look at challenges associated with the use and delivery of RJ in Victoria Australia. They highlighted problems associated with administrative ‘co-options’ and ‘constraints’ in conferencing with respect to preparation of conference participants, referrals, and victim participation. Their findings corroborated other studies (e.g., Laxminarayan, 2014), showing that there are struggles in gaining referrals due to scepticism of referral agencies.

In spite of some of these challenges, a number of schools all over the world have subscribed to the use of RJ practices as a means of instilling discipline and enhancing good school culture (Porter, 2007). Over the past decade, RJ approaches have been used in dealing with conflicts and misconduct in schools (Green et al., 2013). Johnstone (2011) has indicated that the idea of RJ and its application in handling problems in schools has received some level of acceptance. Littlechild (2011) observed that the application of RJ concepts in schools has explored processes in residential conflicts and criminal incidents. Hitherto, these had been addressed with some disciplinary modes like detention and suspension (Green et al., 2013). The implementation of RJ approaches in Hull demonstrated reductions in detentions, bullying, suspension and

truancy in schools (Mirsky, 2009). Benefits gleaned from its introduction in schools extended to creating a conducive atmosphere for studies in schools (Varnham, 2005). The STARR project in USA helped students caught in any disciplinary offense to make up for their offense and to remain in school (Karp & Sacks, 2014). Previously, Fopiano and Haynes (2001) had established that RJ approaches encourage a sense of belongingness, self-esteem, social status and connectedness among students.

As noted by the International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP), school boards need to efficiently ensure that schools are safe for students, and relationships (IIRP, 2010). Additionally, they are supposed to guarantee efficient management of conflicts for a harmonious community (IIRP, 2010). However, the IIRP has cautioned that this could be made possible if these school boards embrace RJ into their schools (IIRP, 2010). In view of this, Roland, Rideout, Salinitri and Frey (2012) advocated for the building of necessary structures conducive for RJ culture in schools. They contended that, to build RJ culture, teachers' RJ ideology must be taken into consideration. Roland et al. identified three dimensions of RJ ideology: Restoration, Cooperation and Healing. To them, these dimensions of RJ ideology all reflected RJ ideals. The Restoration dimension explores how to restore the offender to socially acceptable behavior. Cooperation embraces the idea that, in dealing with offenses and their outcomes, there should be a collaborative effort between offenders, victims and the community. Moreover, Healing seeks to accord the offender respect and dignity with the aim of curbing stigmatization.

Although RJ practices are embraced in schools in some countries, it appears that it is not practiced in schools in Ghana. There is an impression that less attention has been given to juvenile justice administration in Ghana (Hoffmann & Baerg, 2011). Hoffmann and Baerg (2011) have postulated that juvenile justice administration has

seen little changes in policy for young offenders. Further, they have indicated that there has been a lack of enthusiasm on the part of government to develop the juvenile justice system in Ghana. For instance, it seems that one of the main ways of dealing with student offenders in Ghana is through suspension. An example is the suspension of thirteen students from Wenchi High School for acts of vandalism (Joy News, 2011). They were also denied the opportunity of writing their final exams. This demonstrates the neglect of juvenile justice issues by the government of Ghana. Currently, there are no known RJ boards in place to deal with some of these issues.

Though there is no known RJ culture in schools in Ghana, some authors have opined that RJ ideals are not new to Africans (Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012). Onyeozili and Ebbe (2012) further contend that, previously, offenses such as stealing and robbery did not attract imprisonment, but rather restitution, compensation, shaming, a fine or sale into slavery. The goal of punishing the offender was to reintegrate him/her into the collectivistic society (Cokley & Williams, 2005). Cokley and Williams (2005) have explained that the idea of collective work and responsibility is derived from the concept of Ujima. Thus, people of African descent are expected to make the problems of some members of the community a collective problem that should be solved together. This is what they termed Collectivism (Cokley & Williams, 2005), which is linked to Afrocentric cultural behavioural norms and values (Kambon, 1996). On that basis, Ame and Alidu (2010) have argued that traditional African Ethnic dissemination of justice is compatible with the ideals of peacemaking criminology and RJ concepts. Moreover, they have suggested that, traditional Ghanaian societies see crime as being against the entire membership of the community and the victim, as supported by other studies (Adeyemi, 1990).

Jenkins (2006) suggests that RJ practices are founded upon the Afrocentric understanding of justice, emphasizing values and community compared with control and individualism. He advances the position that the Eurocentric understanding of justice is depicted in the latter. Likewise, Schoeman (2013) has stated that the foundation of RJ is the African concept of 'Ubuntu'. In a sense it could be said that both indigenous justice practices and modern RJ have a lot in common. Thus, the principles and values that are core to the African concept of *Ubuntu* are contained in RJ practices (Gavrielides, 2014). This intersection of the concept of *Ubuntu* and RJ is of larger relevance as it depicts how African philosophies have the ability to add to restoration as well as conflict resolution in different societies globally (Schoeman, 2013).

Broodryk (2004) has advanced the idea that Ubuntu is an African worldview influencing much of South Africa's social thinking and values. *Ubuntu* has also been understood as an African concept and an exact depiction of Africa's legislative, social and cultural system. In addition, it is considered as a responses to conflict resolution as well as RJ (Anderson, 1999). *Ubuntu* is expressed in *umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*, showing the vital role of group solidarity on survival issues, so pivotal to the existence of communities (Bennett, 2012). Although it encapsulates the core values of compassion, group solidarity, human dignity, respect, conformity to collective unity and basic norms, it primarily denotes morality and humanity (Bennett, 2012).

Though *Ubuntu* is a South African philosophical concept, the essential epistemological elements of it are shared by all African societies, with some diverse peculiarities (Genger, 2018). Murithi (2006) has argued that the problems of Africans pertaining to economy, politics, social development and conflicts can be addressed using *Ubuntu* as a strategic framework. Personhood, one of the fundamental elements of *Ubuntu* signifies the integration of relational process, existence, and moral integrity

(Genger, 2018). Genger (2018) adds that true personhood is lost when an individual detaches from the community or harms it. Community, personhood and harmony are strongly associated such that the abuse of one leads to the abuse of the others. African RJ seek to reconcile, renew relationship and promote harmony within the community. However, Genger (2018) notes that RJ traditions in all indigenous societies have come under criticisms. For instance Laura (1997) earlier pointed out that RJ system lack legitimacy since it inhibits human freedom, denies human rights, distorts justice, trivializes crime, skews outcomes, and promotes power imbalance by emphasizing rehabilitation, restoration, and harmony. In spite of the challenges encountered by indigenous RJ, Morris (2002) predicted that it will definitely surmount such obstacles and efficiently benefit the African community. Davidheiser (2008) later accused antagonists of RJ system for being “theoretically stultifying and factually inaccurate” (p.294). He asserted that African communities still see the need for the use of RJ.

Personality traits have been shown to influence individuals’ perceptions (e.g., Lilly & Virick, 2006). John and Srivastava (1999) have identified five personality traits which are deemed to be stable over a period of time. They are Openness to Experience (OE), Conscientiousness, Extraversion, Agreeableness, and Neuroticism. These personality traits are seen in the light of certain characteristics in an individual. For instance, Agreeableness manifests itself in characteristics that are perceived as kind, sympathetic, warm, cooperative and considerate (John & Srivastava, 1999). OE is identified in a person’s tendency to engage in active imagination, aesthetic sensitivity, attentiveness to inner feelings, preference for variety, and intellectual curiosity.

Moreover, the Collectivism of Ghanaians could equally be associated with teachers’ idea of restoring student offenders to morally acceptable behaviour. This is plausible given that the concept of RJ is not entirely new to Africans (Ame & Alidu,

2010; Onyeozili & Ebbe, 2012). However, this association has not been examined. Additionally, the possible influence of OE on the association between teachers' Collectivism and concept of restoring the student offender to morally acceptable behaviour has not been investigated. The study sought to examine the associations between teachers' Collectivism, OE, and Restoration (restoring the student offender to morally acceptable behaviour). Further, the study aimed at investigating the moderating effect of OE on the association between teachers' Collectivism and concept of Restoration. It was therefore hypothesized that:

- (1) Collectivism would predict Restoration.
- (2) OE would predict Restoration.
- (3) OE would moderate the association between Collectivism and Restoration.
- (4) There would be significant differences between males and females on Restoration.

Methods

Setting, Population, and sampling Procedure

The population comprised Ghanaian High School teachers within the Greater Accra region of Ghana. Ghana is inhabited by about twenty five million people (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). It comprises over one hundred ethnic groups, of diverse linguistic backgrounds and religious persuasions. The predominant ethnic group is Akan (47.5%), followed by Mole Dagbani (16.6%), Ewe (13.9%) and Ga-Dangme (7.4%). Ghana is predominantly a patriarchal society. Greater Accra region was chosen as the setting for the study due to its cosmopolitan nature (Ghana Statistical Service, 2012). Moreover, it is the second most populous region in Ghana, and most densely populated region. Accra is also home to all the classes of High Schools in Ghana. The High Schools in Ghana are classified into public and private schools (Ministry of Education,

2013). Most of the public High Schools are located in Accra. Teachers from public schools, constituted the sample for the study since they are most likely to teach students from all diverse backgrounds. One hundred and ninety one (Male=128, Female=63) teachers were sampled for the study. These teachers were adults (M=37.81, SD=9.32). The study employed the purposive and convenience sampling techniques.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire captured the demographic data of respondents. Apart from the marital status, and age of respondents, they were also required to provide their level of education which ranged between GCE , 'A' Level and Master's degrees. Further, the religious affiliation, duration of service, and rank within the service was obtained.

Restorative Justice Ideology Instrument

The Restorative Justice Ideology Instrument (RJII: Roland et al., 2012) was used in measuring the RJ ideology of participants. The scale comprises sixteen (16) items and has three sub-components: Restoration, Cooperation, and Healing. Scores on this scale ranges between "1 (strongly disagree)" and "5 (strongly agree)". Of interest to the study was the Restoration dimension. The Restoration dimension achieved a good Cronbach alpha ($\alpha=.71$) (see Table 1). On the original scale, this dimension has seven items. In the current study, the first item was deleted since it reduced the Cronbach's alpha. Six items were therefore retained. An example of items on this dimension is, "I have a moral duty to help students to get back on track"

Afrocentric Self-Consciousness Scale

Afrocentric beliefs was measured using the African Self-Consciousness scale (ASCS; Cokley & Williams, 2005). The ASCS consists of 15 items, and has three dimensions: Anti-black individualism, Collectivism, and Communal orientation. Although the scale could be used as a whole, the study utilized the Collectivism dimension since the

teachers could identify with the items on it. Scores on the scale ranges between “1 (strongly disagree)” and “4 (strongly agree)”. The reliability for the Collective dimension was acceptable ($\alpha=.62$) (see Table 1). An item on this dimension is, “. I must do all I can to restore Africans to their position of respect in the world”

(Insert Table 1 here)

Procedure

Prior to the commencement of the study, approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board (Ethics Committee for Humanities) of a University in Ghana. Initially, letters were sent to the public High Schools within the Greater Accra region for permission to conduct the study in those schools. After receiving approval from heads of the institutions, teachers who consented to taking part in the study were administered with the questionnaires. Questionnaires that were completed in the presence of the authors were retrieved. Teachers who were not able to complete the questionnaire in the researchers’ presence were given the opportunity to complete them at their own convenience.

Statistical procedures

Data were inputted directly into SPSSv21 for further analysis. Bivariate correlation was initially performed to establish the associations between the variables. After this, multiple regression analysis was conducted to ascertain if the model (Collectivism and OE) would predict Restoration. Per Faul, Erdfelder, Lang, and Buchner’s (2007) rule, the sample was adequate for multiple regression analysis. Moderation analysis was simultaneously performed to examine the influence of OE on the association between Collectivism and Restoration. Further, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine the differences between males and females on their concept of restoration.

Results

The bivariate correlations demonstrated that the positive associations between Restoration and Collectivism, $r(163)=.23, p=.002$, and OE, $r(159)=.19, p=.008$ were significant (see Table 2). Further, Table 2 indicates that Collectivism is positively associated with OE, $r(164)=.14, p=.034$.

(Insert Table 2 here)

Going by Baron and Kenny's (1986) steps for conducting moderation analysis, the first assumption of Collectivism influencing Restoration was met. Following this, both Collectivism and OE were centered and multiplied to produce an interaction term. This interaction term was entered in the second step of the regression model. The first regression model (without the interaction term) was significant, $F(2, 152)=6.25, p=.002, R^2=.08$ (see Table 3). In this model, Collectivism accounted for significant amount of variance in predicting Restoration ($\beta=.20, p=.011$) as did OE ($\beta=.16, p=.043$) (see Table 3). This goes to confirm the hypothesis that both Collectivism and OE would predict Restoration. The second regression model (with the interaction term) was also significant, $F(3, 151)=4.49, p=.005, R^2=.08, \Delta R^2=.01$ (see Table 3). In this model, Collectivism accounted for a significant amount of variance in predicting Restoration ($\beta=.22, p=.008$) as did OE ($\beta=.16, p=.046$) (see Table 3). However, the interaction term did not account for significant amount of variance in predicting Restoration ($\beta=.08, p=.326$) (see Table 3). Thus, OE failed to moderate the association between Collectivism and Restoration. This refutes the hypothesis that OE would moderate the association between Collectivism and Restoration.

(Insert Table 3 here)

(Insert Table 4 here)

Table 4 indicates that there was no significant difference between males ($M=22.86, SD=3.72$) and females ($M=23.69, SD=3.62$) on their restoration of

offenders, $t(171)=-1.39$, $p=.058$. Thus, the hypothesis that there would be a significant difference between males and females on Restoration is not confirmed.

Discussion

The results indicated that there was a significant positive association between OE and Restoration. A plausible reason that might have accounted for this association is due to teachers' preference for variety, and intellectual curiosity (John & Srivastava, 1999).

Thus, the proposal of using RJ practices to restore offenders to socially acceptable behaviour (Roland et al., 2012) is an idea they are likely to embrace.

The study further observed a positive association between Collectivism and Restoration. This aligns with Afrocentric thought. Afrocentric morality and jurisprudence puts forward that, the prime objective of punishing an offender is to reintegrate the offender into the community (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). It also aims at repairing the damage the offender's act has caused (Verhoef & Michel, 1997). Besides, when an individual commits an offense, a social disequilibrium is created between the victim, offender, and the rest of society (Adeyemi, 1990). Therefore, RJ in Africa seeks not only to restore the offender, but to also restore the truncated relationship between the victim, offender, and the rest of society (Adeyemi, 1990; Verhoef & Michel, 1997). However, a successful restoration of these relationships will mean that the offender should be restored to socially acceptable behaviour. In this way, when the offender is restored, then he/she could be successfully reintegrated into the collective society. The concept of *Ubuntu* helps us to understand that by restoring the offender, and the broken relationship caused by his/her action, morality and humanity would have been upheld through group solidarity, respect, human dignity, and conformity to collective unity and basic norms (Bennett, 2012).

In addition, the Collectivism of Africans (Cokley & Williams, 2005) suggest that if an individual offends, the image of the person as an African is negatively impacted in the sight of the world. When this happens, this dented image is shared by all Africans due to their collectivistic orientation. By restoring the offender to morally acceptable behaviour, the rest of the community stands to benefit from his or her behaviour. Such socially acceptable behaviour will make others see the offender in a positive light. That would also mean that the rest of the collective society will equally be seen as such. This is in consonance with the idea of Ujima (Cokley & Williams, 2005). They meant that people of African descent are expected to make the problems of some members of the community a collective problem that should be solved collectively. Thus, dealing with an offense is the collective responsibility of the entire society. By restoring the student offender to socially acceptable behaviour, the whole community would also be restored.

Besides, the moderation analysis demonstrated that OE failed to moderate the association between Collectivism and Restoration. This rules out the possibility of OE influencing the relationship between Collectivism and Restoration. It indicates that the significant positive association between Collectivism and Restoration is independent of the personality of teachers. In essence, the African sense of Collectivism could influence teachers' understanding of the need to restore offenders to morally acceptable behaviour. Further, it underscores the likely potent force of socialisation in influencing teachers' RJ ideology.

Differences between males and females on their concept of restoring student' offenders to morally acceptable behaviour was not significant. The study demonstrated that both sexes equally favoured the use of RJ practices in restoring student offenders. This could probably be due to the same kind of socialisation they have had.

Limitations and recommendations

Causal inferences cannot be made from this study due to the research design that was used. However, the results invite further studies that could study causal associations between teachers' Collectivism, OE, and their idea of restoring student offenders to morally acceptable behaviour. The self-report nature of the questionnaires might have led to socially desirable responses. Since the participants had to understand the questions themselves, some items might have been misunderstood. Moreover, the fact that some of the participants had to complete the questionnaires alone gave no opportunity for clarifications of difficult items. Other studies should consider a qualitative approach that would elicit deeper and more explanatory responses from participants rather than the forced choices they had to make in a questionnaire. Some additional factors might also prove useful to include in a later analysis – variables such as teachers' self-efficacy, religiosity and moral reasoning. These could all be investigated in future studies.

Conclusion

In spite of these limitations, the study sets the tone for future studies that could establish causal associations between these variables. The study suggests that teachers who score high on OE and Collectivism are more likely to embrace the use of RJ practices. Further, it is important to underscore the fact that ones' socialisation within a collectivistic culture plausibly influences his/her concept of restoring student offenders.

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Tables

Table 1

Descriptive statistics and Cronbach Alpha

Variable	N	Mean	SD	α
Restoration	6	23.13	3.69	.71
Collectivism	3	10.25	1.67	.62

Table 2

Bivariate associations between variables

	1	2	3
1.Restoration	-	.23**	.19**
2.Collectivism	-	-	.14*
3.Openness to Experience (EO)	-	-	-

** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$

Table 3

Moderation effect of Openness to Experience (OE) on the association between Collectivism and Restoration (N=152)

	Model 1			Model 2		
	B	SE	β	B	SE	β
Collectivism	.45	.17	.20**	.48	.18	.22**
Openness to Experience (OE)	.25	.12	.16*	.24	.12	.16*
Interaction term				.06	.06	.08
F	6.25			4.49		
R ²	.08			.08		
ΔR^2				.01		

** $P < .01$, * $P < .05$

Table 4

Differences between sex on Restoration

	N	M	SD	df	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>
Male	117	22.86	3.72	171	-1.391	.058
Female	56	23.69	3.62			