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REINVENTING STUDENTS' SELF-ESTEEM IN CLASSROOMS: THE NEED FOR HUMANISTIC PEDAGOGY

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Abstract. Lack of self-esteem among students makes them believe that they are not proficient enough or do not have the needed skills to succeed academically. The perceived lack of self-esteem seems resulting from the observed anti-humanistic teaching and learning system bedevilling all levels of classrooms. Literature confirms that students lack critical thinking skills, relationship skills, and communication skills, which affect their self-esteem. This study is positioned to respond to the issue by presenting humanistic pedagogy as a teaching approach that develops students holistically. It is lensed within the purview of the transformative paradigm since it focuses on how students could be transformed towards gaining the needed self-esteem that will promote their academic, social and societal development. Humanistic Pedagogy theory was presented alongside its principles and assumptions to achieve this. How the assumptions are related to the teaching of humanism and building students' self-esteem was also presented. This study concluded that student-centred classrooms, students' feelings and values, creativity and innovation, and humanising humankind are dimensions of self-esteem development among students. This study recommends that teachers at all levels of education adopt humanistic pedagogical processes in their classrooms.

Keywords: Students' self-esteem; classrooms; humanistic pedagogy; transformative worldview; humanising humankind

I. INTRODUCTION

Students today are under immense pressure to succeed. They are juggling multiple responsibilities, including academics, extracurricular activities, and social obligations (Denman, 2019; Wilson, 2013). As a result, many students feel they are not meeting their full potential. This can lead to feelings of low self-esteem and inadequacy, and classrooms can be particularly challenging for students with low self-esteem. Lack of self-esteem among students makes them believe that they are not proficient enough or do not have the needed skills to succeed academically. This perceived lack of self-esteem from observed anti-humanistic teaching and learning system is bedevilling the classrooms (Browning et al., 2021; Ramón-Arбуés et al., 2020; Rubio, 2021). Literature confirms that students lack critical thinking skills, relationship skills and communication skills, which are significant to building self-esteem (Al-Husban, 2020; Din, 2020; Kavenuke et al., 2020). Students need all these skills to succeed academically because it enables them to participate in class discussions, ask questions and collaborate with their classmates (Akpur, 2020; Tus, 2020). However, students who lack confidence (self-esteem) in their abilities may be

reluctant to speak up in class, and this can impact their grades and overall academic performance (Sander & de la Fuente, 2020).

The persistent low self-esteem among students has led to many recommendations, among which is that teachers should create a positive and supportive learning environment where students are not under pressure to be perfect, rather than to learn when they make mistakes and provide students with feedback that is both positive and constructive (Kulakow, 2020; Yan, 2020). In the same vein, Lavy & Naama-Ghanayim (2020) also argue that instructors can help students build relationships with their classmates because students who feel connected to their classmates are more likely to participate in class discussions and collaborate on projects. Furthermore, communication among peers has also been found to indicate self-esteem (Gebregergis et al., 2020; Ogunyemi & Olagbaju, 2020). That is, students who can communicate their ideas and thoughts effectively will feel more confident in their abilities. The argument here is that such students may be better equipped to handle difficult situations and relationships, which is in line with Goh et al. (2020), who confirms that communication is one of the ingredients of interpersonal relationships.

Literature also confirmed that low self-esteem is often a barrier for students when it comes to academic performance (Arshad et al., 2015; Farhan & Khan, 2015; Raskauskas et al., 2015) because academic achievement comes with determination, but students with low self-esteem believe they are not smart or capable and are less likely to take risks or put forth the effort necessary for success. In consonance, Filippello et al. (2020) and Han and Park (2020) also found out that low self-esteem is one of the leading causes of students underachievement in school because these students may not put in their best effort in school, which can lead to poor grades and an overall decline in academic performance. This argument further confirms the need to reinvent students' self-esteem, which could be done by adopting humanistic pedagogy in classrooms. This type of pedagogy focuses not only on academic success but the person (Drew, 2021) and helps students feel more valued and appreciated (Barrett et al., 2016), which will help boost their self-esteem. Therefore, this study explores humanistic pedagogy as a way in which self-esteem could be developed among students towards a holistic development.

Research objectives

In order to promote humanistic teaching and learning that could enhance students' self-esteem, the following objectives were raised to guide the study. That is, the study: (1) presented humanistic pedagogy as a pedagogical process capable of bringing capacity to students; and (2) explored the assumptions of humanistic pedagogy and its relevance to the development of students' self-esteem.

II. METHODOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

This study is a theoretical paper tailored towards transforming students with low self-esteem in the school system. Hence, the study is lensed within a transformative worldview because the paradigm is based on the belief that research should be used to solve problems and improve the human condition, not simply to generate new ideas or produce academic publications (Fazey et al., 2018). The transformative paradigm emerged in response to the growing recognition that the world is facing unprecedented challenges, including economic inequality and social injustice (Cram & Mertens, 2016; Denzin, 2017), which could be responsible for students' ability to gain self-esteem and social efficacy in their academic lives. Therefore, this study argues that transformation among students can happen when both teachers/lecturers/instructors and students can use their strengths to resist and challenge oppressive systems by learning and teaching how they can change their lives for the better. Among which is humanistic pedagogy. However, the strength of the article is derived from humanistic teaching and learning, which I otherwise refer to as humanistic pedagogy and the theory was presented and analysed using the principles of thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is relevant because it enables the researcher to break down the undying assumptions of humanistic pedagogy into themes for meaning-making, which is consistent with the definition of Glaw et al. (2017) and Nowell et al. (2017) that thematic allows data to be broken down into smaller themes for easy

interpretation. On the other hand, it also allows researchers to go beyond simply describing issues and instead begin to understand the underlying meanings that inform them (Castleberry & Nolen, 2018; Vaismoradi et al., 2016). That is, themes can be identified at multiple levels, from broad overarching themes down to specific sub-themes for detailing purposes. This level of detail also assists the researcher in providing insights into how different aspects of a phenomenon (humanistic pedagogy and student self-esteem) are related to each other. Below is the systematic presentation of the theory, along with the assumptions.

III. PAGE STYLE

Theoretical Presentation of Humanistic Pedagogy

Humanistic teaching and learning, sometimes known as person-centred pedagogy, is a method of educating based on the ideas of humanistic psychologists such as Abraham Maslow and Carl Rogers (Joseph, 2020; Maslow, 1959). Humanistic psychology was founded by Rogers, who spent much of his time applying the findings from his psychological research to person-centred teaching (Rogers, 1965). Both of them believe that the humanistic approach to teaching and learning focuses holistic development of a child (Rogers, 1965; Maslow, 1966). They also agreed that a humanist method would prioritise student emotional well-being and believe children are inherently good at their core. This is also in line with Madsen and Wilson (2012) that humanistic pedagogy is centred on how human values, interests, abilities, needs, worth, and dignity are built and sustained. It is a faith in people's limitless potential for growth and progress as well as their inherent goodness and an idea that people have limitless potential for growth and improvement and that they are inherently good on their own (Lowry, 1973; Maslow, 1970). Perhaps this is why Magolda (2020) argued that students should be given the opportunity to learn in various ways and explore their interests and passions, which helps them individualise learning and find their unique path in life.

This kind of pedagogical process is an approach that focuses on the individual student and their unique needs while also helping them to develop a sense of self-efficacy and confidence (Gol & Aaleabbas, 2016). From the argument of Walters and Kidman (2015), it helps to prepare students for the real world, where they will need to be able to think for themselves and express themselves effectively. Based on this, one can then argue that humanistic pedagogy is one of the most effective ways to help students build self-esteem to reach their full potential. However, this theory covers both teaching and learning. Humanistic teaching is an approach to education that emphasises the importance of the individual learner. It is based on the belief that all students have the potential to grow and learn and that instructors should be geared towards helping individual students reach their full potential (Haidet et al., 2016). Humanistic educators believe that everyone has unique gifts and talents and that it is important to nurture these gifts in order to help students achieve their fullest potential.

On the other hand, humanistic learning is based on the idea that students learn best when they are actively involved in the learning process (Firdaus & Mariyat, 2017; Illeris, 2018). This

means that learners should be given opportunities to explore, experiment, and discover new things for themselves. In these perspectives, students believe that this type of active learning helps them develop a deep understanding of the material and a sense of ownership and responsibility for their own learning (Tolstova & Levasheva, 2019). Hence, when humanistic teaching and learning is engaged among students, it allows them to explore their unique talents and abilities. They are encouraged to be expressive and creative towards developing a strong sense of self-efficacy and prepare students for the real world by teaching them how to think for themselves, work for themselves, and express themselves effectively. Based on this, one can then argue that humanistic pedagogy is significant to building students' self-esteem through student-centeredness in the teaching process, recognising students' feelings and values, promoting creativity and innovation, and humanising humankind.

Assumption of Humanistic Pedagogy

Based on the above theoretical presentation, the following were deduced as the major assumptions of humanistic pedagogy: Student-centeredness, students' feelings and values, creativity and innovation among students and humanising humankind. These four cardinal assumptions were conceptualised below.

- **Student-centeredness:** From the above analysis, one can argue that humanistic pedagogy complements the student-centred teaching approach where students are at the forefront of the pedagogical process. This is consistent with the argument that humanistic education is all about making the student the centre of attention by shifting the focus from teachers and administrators to the needs of learners (Chong, 2018). According to Rider et al. (2018), it means creating an enabling environment where students feel comfortable, supported and confident in their learning. This means that a humanistic teacher is the one that puts the interest of the student at the centre of the classroom process, input and outputs, from lesson planning to assessment. This is very productive to students because it provides more opportunities for students to direct their learning and take responsibility for their success and holistic development (Bykov & Leshchenko, 2016; Shakirova & Valeeva, 2016). The argument here is that when students are made the focus of teaching and learning efforts, it creates an environment that is more conducive to learning and makes students feel valued and respected, and they are more likely to take ownership of their development.
- **Students' feelings and values:** From the above theoretical presentation, it is shown that the humanistic teaching and learning process places more emphasis on recognising students' feelings and that they should be valued. That humanistic pedagogical process is that the students' opinions, views, and perspectives should not be jettisoned but rather tailored and shaped for them to feel inclusive in the teaching and learning process. This is in tandem with Baroutsis et al. (2016) argument that when students feel that their voices are heard and that their perspectives matter, they are more likely to engage in a productive learning process that increases their trust boldness to challenge their problems. With this, it is not out of place to argue that humanising education creates a more positive and inclusive environment for students' self-development. Therefore, the humanistic educational process takes cognisance of students' feelings via their perspectives and opinions coupled with recognition and respect through inclusivity in classrooms. Hence, humanistic pedagogy is not only concerned with the cognitive development of students, but also with their emotional and social growth by allowing them to express their feelings and discuss topics that are relevant to them.
- **Creativity and innovation among students:** based on the above theoretical analysis, one can also argue that humanistic pedagogy is the one that promotes and recognises creativity and innovation among students. It emphasises that all individuals have creative capacities and strives to help students realise their creative potentials (Putra et al., 2020; Wadaani, 2015). This approach to teaching aims to produce creative citizens who can think for themselves and solve problems in innovative ways (Taylor, 2018; Weis et al., 2017). Ultimately, this approach helps students become well-rounded individuals who are prepared to contribute positively to society (Perales & Aróstegui, 2021). This further confirms that the ability to be creative and innovative is not something that only belongs to a select few; it is a quality that all humans possess but only needs to be activated but often undervalued informal education settings. However, humanistic pedagogy seeks to change this by emphasising creativity and innovation to help students become more confident and self-assured, think outside the box, and become more engaged with their learning.
- **Humanising humankind:** From the above presentation, it was also deduced that humanistic pedagogy is all about humanising humankind by helping students to learn to think for themselves and become more self-aware. This level of humanism encourages students to question their assumptions, explore new possibilities, and take risks. In a humanistic classroom, students are not merely receptacles for information; they are actively engaged in the learning process (Schramm-Possinger, 2016). Teachers facilitate learning by posing questions, encouraging debate, and providing opportunities for students to explore different points of view. This type of pedagogy leads to a deeper understanding of the subject matter and allows students to develop their own critical thinking skills. This could be tagged as a supportive and nurturing

environment where students feel safe to take risks and explore new ideas. This is not far from the assumption of ubuntu philosophy, which preaches love, oneness, togetherness, where communality is the other of the day (Diarra, 2018; Le Grange, 2018). That is, the intention of humanistic classrooms does not only increase commonality between the teachers and the students but could also create a more just and humane world.

Nexus between the Assumptions and the Development of Students' Self-esteem

This section discusses the assumptions of humanistic pedagogy and its relevance to the buildup of self-esteem among students in classrooms. This was done under the following sub-headings: student-centeredness and development of self-esteem, feelings and values and development of self-esteem, creativity and innovation and development of self-esteem, humanising humankind and development of self-esteem.

Student-centeredness and Development of Self-esteem

Student-centeredness in this study is argued as one of the ways which students' self-esteem can be developed in classrooms. That is when lessons are planned to accommodate students' interests by creating an avenue to develop their critical thinking skills, collaborative and participatory skills, relationship skills, among others. In turn, this enhances their self-esteem. In order to justify the relationships between student-centeredness and development of self-esteem among student, the argument that student-centred classrooms are important in fostering the all-round development of students because it promotes a positive teacher-student relationship, mastery of skills and knowledge, and a sense of belongingness (Cedillo & Bratta, 2019; Kaput, 2018; Jony, 2016. The argument proves that there is a positive relationship between the students-centred classroom and students' self-development, including the development of self-esteem (Hossein & Maryam, 2017). Thus, it is clear that student-centeredness plays a key role in developing self-esteem in students. While other factors are also important, student-centeredness is a crucial element in creating an environment that is conducive to the development of a positive self-image. Therefore, humanistic pedagogy from the student-centered classroom perspective is essential in ensuring students' self-esteem.

Feelings and Values and Development of Self-esteem

Based on the above theoretical assumptions, it is accurate to argue that humanistic education takes cognisance of students' feelings and values in the pedagogical process. A productive humanising classroom where students' feelings are considered and recognised, where they feel valued and respected if the teaching and learning process is productive could build them towards gaining self-esteem. This could be achieved teacher-student relationship that creates a sense of belonging. This is consistent with the finding that one of the factors contributing to the development of self-esteem in

students includes a positive teacher-student relationship, mastery of skills and knowledge, and a sense of belongingness (Dewi & Jimmi, 2018; van Aalst et al., 2021). In the same vein, when students feel valued, supported, and accepted by their teachers, they are more likely to have a positive self-image (Ikiz & Cakar, 2010). Similarly, when students feel confident in their abilities, they can meet challenges successfully and feel like they belong to a community where they are accepted for who they are, their self-esteem is also boosted. Therefore, humanistic pedagogy where the feelings of students are recognised and where they are valued and respected is fundamental to building students' self-esteem.

Creativity and Innovation and Development of Self-esteem

From the above theoretical assumption, one could argue that creativity is a sign of self-motivation, self-concept and self-trust, which are self-esteem factors. Researchers have confirmed that creative and innovative students are mostly self-motivated students and are likely to be operating at a high level of self-esteem (Basco & Han, 2016; Lawrence, 2006). On the same line of argument, when it comes to creativity and innovation, students who have a strong sense of creativity seem to be at an advantage in building self-esteem. They are more likely to take risks, think outside the box, and develop new ideas. In fact, research has shown that there is a strong correlation between self-esteem and creative thinking (Fatah et al., 2016; Yücesan & Şendurur, 2018). The argument here is that creative students feel good about themselves and their ability and are more likely to try new things, even if they fail. They know that they can recover from setbacks and learn from their mistakes. That means that a creative and innovative student could be operating at a high level of self-esteem, self-trust, and self-belief. Since humanistic pedagogy beckons on teaching students how to be creative, innovative, and independent, it also means that such pedagogy will increase students' self-esteem if implemented.

Humanising Humankind and Developing Self-esteem

Based on the above theoretical assumptions, one can argue that humanising humankind, being one of the cardinal assumptions of humanistic pedagogy, is significant to building students' self-esteem. That is, a classroom laced with humanity and humane relationships among the classroom's stakeholders is likely to increase students' self-esteem. This aligns with Mino (2020) that humanising teaching and learning enhances students' holistic development because they feel a sense of communality that creates a sense of brotherliness towards themselves. This is perhaps the reason why ubuntu philosophy (the philosophy of kindness, love, togetherness and unity in diversity) is recommended for teaching and learning (Maphalala, 2017; Quan-Baffour, 2014). Hence, it is important to humanise humankind, and one way to do this is by helping students build their self-esteem. When students feel good about themselves, they are more likely to be kind and respectful to others. Additionally, they are likely to take care of themselves and make healthy choices that create a more positive and productive world. Therefore, being humane to students is a point of motivation that solidifies the

way students think, react to issues and socialise with themselves and even strangers. Therefore, humanistic pedagogy, via humanising humankind, is significant to building students' self-esteem.

IV. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

This study analysed the relationship between humanistic pedagogy and the building of students' self-esteem through a transformative worldview. Based on the argument made above, it was confirmed that humanistic pedagogy is best to promote the students' self-esteem. The factors are initiating student-centred classrooms, recognising students' feelings and values, enhancing their creativity and innovative minds, and promoting humanity among them. That is, student-centred classrooms, students' feelings and values, creativity and innovation, and humanising humankind are dimensions of self-esteem development among students. Based on this, the following recommendations were made:

- Teachers should endeavour to adopt a student-centred approach in their teaching and learning process. This is quintessential because it empowers students to take control of their own learning. This type of environment can result in several benefits, including increased students' self-esteem.
- Teachers should be cognisant of students' feelings, know what they want, and respect their opinions even if they need to be corrected and reshaped. This is important. In such a classroom, students are given the opportunity to direct their own learning. This means that they can choose what projects they want to work on, how they want to present their learning, and others. This can be a great way for students to learn about their strengths and weaknesses, discover how they learn best and increase their self-esteem.
- Teachers should ensure that students are engaged in the classrooms process that could improve their creativity and innovation. One of the ways to ensure this is by providing them with compliments and positive reinforcement when they do something well. They can also give them opportunities to shine by leading a class discussion or presenting a project in front of the class.
- Lastly, classrooms should be made to promote humanity among students, develop their self-esteem, and ensure that they grow to become good citizens where love, oneness and goodwill drive their societal engagement.

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