

Will emotional intelligence training enhance social workers' emotional labour in Ogun State Nigeria?

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Abstract: *This study investigated the effect of emotional intelligence training programme on emotional labour competence of social workers. The study adopted a pretest-post-test quasi-experimental design. The emotional labour scale was used to collect data from the forty-eight (48) randomly selected social workers from two Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Participants of the study were randomly assigned to the treatment and the control groups for the purpose of the study. The hypothesis was tested using the Analysis of Covariant (ANCOVA). Results showed that the treatment significantly affected participants' levels of emotional labour. Based on the findings, it was advocated that the teaching of emotional intelligence in organizations and schools is highly important for optimal outcomes.*

Keywords: Emotional Labour, Emotional Intelligence, Social Workers, Surface Acting, Deep Acting

1 Background

The last few decades had witnessed an increase in the demands for the activities of service-oriented organizations. Bowen, Siehl, and Schneider, (2001) noted that the increasing trend of service-oriented organizations has made staff members as well as customers involved in emotional displays. This has led to situations where both clients and coworkers are now being treated as members of same constituency (Witt, 1999). Service-oriented organizations include social work and counselling, which deal with people rather than things. Social work gives assistance to people in need and despair. Social workers help individual or group to manage, cope, and handle relationships, as well as solve personal and family challenges. There are different career areas of social work. These include hospital, families, social service, policy advocacy and research related social workers.

While attending to issues affecting others the social workers are also prone to some emotional challenges which may affect their performance. Social work is an emerging field in Nigeria and social workers need to be emotionally intelligent to achieve organizational goals and objectives of changing human behaviour to attain better performance and height. Thus, understanding emotions in the workplace, particularly those of the social workers, becomes imperative, especially when viewed against the background that emotions of individuals in the workplace, may lead to both positive and negative outcomes (Moors, Ellsworth, Scherer, & Frijda, 2013). Therefore, teaching workers about their emotions and how they deal with others as well as their actions can be very helpful in their daily encounters.

Workplace emotion has become a recognised concept in engendering achievement and interpersonal relations. Barsade, Brief, and Spataro, (2003) submitted that this is moving from cognitive revolution to emotional revolution. In understanding emotions at work, scholars have come up with various explanations; one of such means is the term emotional labour. The concept was introduced by Hochschild (1999) to explore emotion management of workers, especially those workers engaged in care jobs. Such jobs include social work and counselling and all those jobs that enhance human adjustment and relationship. According to Wharton (2009) emotional labour is the process by which

workers are expected to manage their feelings in accordance with defined rules and guidelines of an organisation. It involves personnel-customers interaction that fosters effective and smooth operation of the organization (Meier, Mastracci, & Wilson, 2006). Emotional labour has an add-on value of exchange because it is displayed for a reward. The role of emotional labour is more than the regular service provider-client interaction; it has become concept universally applied in the workplace (Liv, Perrewe, Hochwarter, & Kacmar, 2004).

Most previous studies in workplace have focused on emotional labour (Ashforth & Tomiuk, 2000; Grandey, 2000; Hochschild, 1999; Hartel, Zerbe, & Ashkanasu, 2005). Literature evidence has also shown that emotional labour can shape human unconscious processes (Fabricius, 1995; Smith, Ashburner *et al.*, 2003; Smith, & Gray, 2000), physical nature of emotions (Panksepp, 2001) and the contexts in which emotional labour is displayed (Smith, & Gray, 2000). Literature in emotion genre submit that emotional labour is “faking it”, that is, responding emotionally to suit the situation and the customer being attended to.

While studies have shown the role of emotional labour in emotional management of nurses (Sharon & Bolton, 2000; Smith, 1998; Smith, & Gray, 2000), midwives (Curtis, 1991; Hunter, 2001) clerical workers (Pugliesi & Shook, 1997), flight attendants (Taylor, 1998), detectives (Stenross & Kleinman, 1989) and telephone customer care agents (Taylor & Tyler, 2000), work-family conflict (Nwankwo, Kanu, & Obi, 2012) little is known about its use among social workers, especially in Nigeria. Studies (Grandey, 2003; Hochschild, 1999) had reported that employees’ emotional labour could be expressed in two ways - surface acting (SA) and deep acting (DA).

Surface acting allows for employees to display emotions in conformity with the laid down rules in the organisation. Employees hide the real felt emotions and exhibit the unfeared emotions as far as such suits the customer/clients. This has however been found to be detrimental to organization because employees conform to organizational roles to retain their jobs rather than to help customers (Grandey, 2003). In surface acting employees are trained to exhibit suitable emotions (such as empathy and cheerfulness) in a given situation (Kruml & Geddes, 2000). SA is therefore seen as “faking in bad faith” (Raffaeli & Sutton, 2000). Deep acting (DA) has to do with the modification of internal feelings to correlate with the required organizational display rules. It involves the altering outward appearance. This is what Raffaeli and Sutton (2000) referred as “faking in good faith” because employees’ intentions appear genuine to the client.

One important way of understanding emotions is the role of Emotional Intelligence (EI) in human relationships and performance. Emotional intelligence is the perception, appraisal and regulation of self and others’ emotion towards understanding human relationship (Goleman, 1995; Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, 2008). Emotional intelligence (EI) is the link between cognitive intelligence (measured by intelligence quotient) and emotions (Extremera & Fernandez, 2006; Mestre, MacCann, Guil, & Roberts, 2016). Thus, there has been a shift in understanding the role of emotional intelligence in everyday life.

Mayer and Salovey (1997) popularised the construct emotional intelligence. They posit that it is the capacity to perceive, express, use, understand, and regulate emotions in oneself and other people. Creative thinking and flexible planning have both been associated with the emotional intelligence construct and it is the core of employees’ relationship in organisations (Palmer, Walls, Burgess, & Stough 2000; Raffaelli & Worline 2001). Empirical research has emerged to suggest that emotional intelligence is associated with emotional labour if careful attention is directed at the methodology for assessing emotional intelligence and emotional labour competence (Parker, Summerfeldt, Hogan, & Majeski, 2004).

Empirical evidence (Schutte, Malouff, & Thorsteinsson, 2013; Martins, Romalho, & Morin, 2010; Ogunyemi, 2006) has shown that a nexus exists between emotional intelligence and emotional competence. Studies have reported high emotional demands and emotional control among management staff (Goleman, 1995), emotional intelligence enhanced work performance (Joseph & Newman, 2010). Furthermore, EI had been found to predict both normal and abnormal functioning in the school, workplace, and home (Mayer *et al.*, 2008). In addition, Schutte and Malouff’s (2011) study revealed significant relationship between emotional intelligence and mental health, physical health, mindfulness, and wellbeing. A meta-analytic study reported that EI predicts the emotional regulation (Peña-Sarrionandia, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015). EI has been reported to enhance emotion perception (Schlegel, Grandjean, & Scherer, 2014).

Management literature reviewed affirmed the relationship between emotional intelligence and success and even performance. Researchers have reported that individuals with high emotional intelligence perform better in all aspects of management roles. In a longitudinal study, Ashkanasy, Hartel, & Daus (2002) reported that individuals with low emotional intelligence performed at a lower level than the high emotional intelligence teams while individuals with average emotional intelligence raised their performance to be at par with high emotional intelligence. Research evidence has shown that there was significant, relationship between emotional intelligence and its components, (self-awareness, self-management, and relation control, and social awareness (Farahbakhsh, 2012), EI has effects on children's social skills, emotional skills, well-being and academic performance (Durlak, Weissberg, Dymnicki, Taylor, & Schellinger, 2011), people with high EI experienced less depression and social stress compared to their counterparts with less EI (Ruiz-Aranda *et al.*, 2012).

Emotional intelligence levels of social workers are important in achieving positive work atmosphere and helping relations. It has been observed that many social workers are in the profession with "blind spots" resulting from trauma they personally experienced in their family (Sellers & Hunter, 2005). Based on this, it is important to foster developable and integrated capability to execute task in a social work context resulting in behaviour that contributes to desirable results. This work found its premise on the observed inadequate emotional skills of social workers. While, there are documental evidence on the effectiveness of EI in fostering human performance, successes and efficiency, there is dearth of literature on its use in the field of social work in Africa in general and particularly Nigeria. In addressing the gap, this study set out to address three objectives. First, it examined the emotional intelligence of social workers; second, the main effect of emotional intelligence on participants' level of emotional labour was investigated and third, the generated hypothesis seeking significant effect of emotional intelligence training programme on emotional labour skills of social workers was tested.

2 Method

2.1 Design and Participants

A pretest - post-test quasi-experimental design was adopted. A total of 48 social workers randomly selected from two Non-Governmental organisations in Ogun State, Nigeria participated in the study. Twenty-four participants each were randomly assigned to the experimental treatment group and the control group. Since professional social work is relatively new in Nigeria, there are few professionals in the field thus limiting the sample size to forty-eight (48) participants (though within the acceptable benchmark for an experimental study).

2.2 Instrument of the Study

The Emotional Labour Scale (ELS), developed by Pratti (2004), was used in this study to obtain pre-post treatment mean scores of the subjects on emotional labour. This scale is a fusion of Brotheridge and Lee (1998) and Grandey's (1999/2003) versions of ELS. It is a 19- item scale. The Emotional Labour Scale measures the various types of emotional effort, which include Surface Acting Scale Q1 Q5 & 19 ($r = .87$); Active Deep Acting Scale: Q6 Q8 ($r = .93$); Passive Deep Acting Scale: Q10 14, 16 ($r = .63$) and Non-Acting Scale: Q18, 17 ($r = .70$). Examples of the items are: "I put on an act in order to deal with clients in an appropriate way", "I put on a 'show' or 'performance'", "I consider expressing emotions required in my job as work". The overall Cronbach alpha = .70. The scale is on a five-point Likert scale and the scoring is thus: Never = 1, Occasionally = 2, Sometimes = 3, Frequently = 4, Always = 5. The scale has been used by Nigerian researchers (Jimoh, 2008; Nwankwo, Kanu & Obi, 2012) and was found to be reliable. Confirmatory factor analyses provide support for the six-factor measurement model because the values obtained for the goodness-of-fit index, the adjusted goodness-of-fit index, and the Tucker-Lewis-Index were all above 0.90, which is an acceptable level of fit (Brotheridge & Lee, 1998). Brotheridge and Lee (2002) reported good combined coefficient alpha for the role characteristics (frequency, intensity, and variety) subscales (= 0.71), as well as for the deep acting and surface acting subscales (=0.89, =.86).

2.3 Procedure

The training commenced with introduction, rapport building, orientation as well as motivation to participate in the training programme. The subjects balloted for distribution into the experimental group and the control group. The emotional labour scale was thereafter administered on them to collect pre-test scores against which post test scores shall be compared. An eight-week of 8 sessions of training in emotional intelligence was carried for the experimental group (emotional intelligence). The participants in the experimental group were exposed to emotional intelligence programme. The control group was however not exposed to any treatment; but was taught the study skills. The training programme was executed through series of lectures, case study analysis and take home assignment. At the end of the training sessions, the emotional labour scale was re-administered on the participants to collect post-test scores. The outline of the intervention packages of the experimental group is as follows: Experimental Group (i) The meaning, nature and importance of Emotional labour (ii) The meaning, nature and importance of emotional intelligence technique (iii) Domains and clusters of emotional intelligence (for instance, motivation, empathy, social skills) (iv) Simulation exercise using each of the emotional intelligence domains in handling emotional situations (v) Post test administration and formal closing of the programme.

2.4 Method of Data Analysis

The Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) was employed to analyze the data collected through pre-post test treatment administration.

3 Results

Table 1 results showed that participants in the treatment (emotional intelligence) group recorded a mean score and standard deviation ($x = 54.92$; $SD = 8.324$) while participants in the control group recorded a mean score and a standard deviation of ($x = 46.54$; $SD = 8.278$). The higher means score (54.92) of the experimental group implies that the group displayed better emotional labour than their counterparts in the control group.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics

Treatment	N	Mean	Std Dev.
Control	24	46.54	8.278
Emotional Intelligence	24	54.92	8.324
Total	48	50.73	9.239

Table 2: Main effect of treatment on emotional labour

Sources	Type III Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Corrected Model	844.229 ^a	2	422.115	5.997	.005
Intercept	3756.181	1	3756.181	53.367	.000
Pretest	2.542	1	2.542	.036	.850
Treatment	810.034	1	810.034	11.509	.001
Error	3167.250	45	70.383		
Total	127537.000	48			
Corrected Total	4011.479	47			

a. R Squared = .210 (Adjusted R Squared = .175)

Table 2 results indicated a significant impact of treatment on participants' emotional labour ($F_{(1, 45)} = 11.509$; $p < .05$). Going by this finding, the hypothesis seeking no significant effect of emotional intelligence training on participants' emotional labour was rejected. This outcome implied that social workers' emotional labour was significantly enhanced by emotional intelligence training.

Table 3: Comparison of mean scores of emotional labour between participants in experimental and control groups

(I) Treatment	(J) Treatment	Mean Difference (I-J)	Standard Error	Sig. ^a	95% Confidence Interval for Difference ^a	
					Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Control	Emotional Intelligence	-8.307*	2.449	.001	-13.238	-3.375
Emotional Intelligence	Control	8.307*	2.449	.001	3.375	13.238

Results in Table 3 showed that emotional intelligence training programme had significant effect on participants' emotional labour over the control group with a mean difference and standard error (MD = 8.303; SE = 2.449). This showed that emotional intelligence is more effective than the control (study skills) in enhancing social workers' emotional labour.

4 Discussion

Results of this study indicated that emotional intelligence training made a significant effect on social workers' emotional labour. The increase in the post-test emotional labour scores of the treatment group compared to their counterpart in the control group (as shown in Tables 2 and 3) revealed the difference in result. This outcome has clearly revealed the potency of the training programme (emotional intelligence) in enhancing emotional labour skills of the participants. The results also established the fact that specific teaching of emotional intelligence skills influenced the outcome rather chance. The findings underscore the potency of emotional intelligence in engendering emotional labour of social workers.

In addition, the results confirmed that emotional labour requires emotional competencies as contained in the emotional intelligence domains and clusters (emotional awareness, emotional regulation and empathy). The finding of this study showed that the treatment (emotional intelligence) has significant effect on emotional labour. This corroborated earlier works that found emotional intelligence predicting emotional labour (Brotheridge, 2006; Harvey & Dasborough, 2006; Spörrle, Welpel, & Försterling, 2006). It also confirmed the finding of Gladwell (2005), Cava (2006), and Selby (2007), who found the treatment as positively predicting emotional competencies of participants in their studies. In fact, Schaubroeck and Jones, (2000) and (Yagil, Luria, & Gal, 2008) in their studies reported that trained participants showed higher degree of emotional labour than their untrained counterparts. Treatment participants could adjust their feelings and emotional expressions to more socially acceptable standards, that is, being emotionally adaptable.

The findings of this study agree with earlier works that reported a positive relationship between emotional intelligence and academic success (Razmjoo, 2008; Razmjoo, Sahragard & Sadri, 2009). It also affirmed the findings of Asadollahfam, Salimi, and Pashazadeh (2012) which concluded that participants in emotional intelligence training programme make people manage novel situation, manage stress, have openness to experience, and are conscious of their feelings and those of others. The findings of this study are also in consonance with previous findings that found that EI fostered emotional functioning (Kirk, Schutte, & Hine, 2011; Wing, Schutte, & Byrne, 2006), measured performance outcome (Crombie, Lombard, & Noakes, 2011; Reuben, Sapienza, & Zingales, 2009), and correlated with emotional regulation and wellbeing (Ortner, Briner, & Marjanovic, 2017).

5 Conclusions and Recommendations

In most organisations in Nigeria, little attention is given to the nurturing of emotional competence of their workers and this has brought about negative outcomes. This study has provided meaningful insight and direction into the effectiveness of emotional intelligence training in enhancing emotional labour of social workers. It has also revealed the potency of the technique at influencing emotional labour of social workers. Altogether, the following were the major conclusions drawn from the findings of this study. The efficacy of the predictor variable is a pointer to the fact that workers could perform better if these skills are given to them periodically. There is the need, therefore, to integrate into

the orientation and on-the-job programmes the type of training skills competence that can contribute to the development of an individual's potentials for emotional competence. It is also advocated that the teaching emotional intelligence has become imperative to foster emotional skill of workers for coping in a fast-growing world like Nigeria. Understandably, emotional intelligence skills training programmes influence attitudes, feelings and behaviours can help practitioners provide the best quality of services for those who seek help.

It is therefore suggested that social workers' attitude and behaviour should be further explored by future researchers. Resulting from social workers' competences in the areas of promoting social justice; ensuring protection from family, violence, separation, exploitation, abuse, and neglect; providing needed services; and caring and supporting children, youth, families, vulnerable and communities, it is incumbent on the Nigerian government (through the Presidential assent) to fully enact the Social Work Professionalisation Bill as passed by the National Assembly as far back as 2016. Enacting the law will go a long to enhancing social work practice and in general, the welfare of the citizenry.

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