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THE IMPORTANCE OF SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP PRACTICES ON EASING THE TEXTBOOK BURDEN ON SOUTH AFRICAN UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

The argument advanced in this article is that excellent shepherd leadership practices serve as a condition necessary for affording South African university students easy access to the required book chapters instead of enduring the burden of having to buy the full books. In order to embellish this viewpoint, relevant data were collected through focus group interview discussion sessions (FGIDs) with a sample of 40 purposefully sampled participants from a target population of university students, lecturers and local textbooks sales personnel. These participants were first categorised into 4 focus groups of 10 members each and were interviewed for a duration of between 40 minutes and one hour per focus group. By adopting an interpretivist paradigm, utilising a qualitative research approach and descriptive phenomenology as a strategy of enquiry (design genre), the study was able to explore the lived experiences of the participants. The two key research questions guiding the study were; how can the key university lecturers as curriculum leaders and shepherd leaders ease the textbook burden on South African university students? and What role can textbook publishing companies play towards easing the textbook burdens on university students? Deploying shepherd leadership as the theoretical lens for viewing and analysing the data through inductive and/or thematic approach, the study's main finding was that since the biggest cost that university students have is books and given that most of the books are only used for one semester, their exorbitant prices more often than not, lead students to resort to photocopying while publishers lose out. The study concluded that using such new platforms as E-Illumin 8, can help students alleviate their textbook burden since it allows them access to specifically prescribed book chapters at a time instead of buying the full books. The chief recommendation from the study was that university lecturers need to work in cooperation with the key book publishing companies to embrace any new and innovative ways to ease the textbook burden on students whilst also ensuring that publishers do not lose out.

Keywords: *Textbook burden, book publishers, shepherd leaders, South African university students*

1. INTRODUCTION

This study seeks to show the role of shepherd leadership by university lecturers towards helping ease the textbook burden on South African university students. Monama (2019:6) contends that ensuring that university lecturers liaise with textbook companies to make the required textbook chapters available instead of making the university students endure the burden of having to buy the full books is one of the best ways in which the lecturers, as the students' shepherd leaders, can alleviate the exorbitant textbook prices, especially in view of the fact that most of these textbooks are only used for one semester (Monama, 2019:6). Rantloane (2019:6) supports the above idea by arguing that more often than not many lecturers advise their students to read certain book chapters in textbooks and not the whole book and therefore encouraging them to buy specific book chapters goes a long way towards easing the exorbitant payments on textbooks. In the next section the focus is thus on the role of university lecturers' protective role as shepherd leaders for their students.

2. BACKGROUND TO THE PROBLEM

In an article on the tyranny of textbooks in higher education, Mathews (2012) notes that the current situation in South Africa's higher education institutions is so dire that the four billion-Rands -a-year textbook business, which is part of the fiscus, only serves a small percentage of the textbook needs of the higher education students. From this view, it follows that the importance of textbooks for university students cannot be over emphasised because they play a vital role in the teaching and learning process by providing the basic framework within which much of the classroom activities occur and also their availability gives every student the best possible opportunities for learning (Mathews, 2012). It is on account of the dearth of research studies on the textbook challenges affecting university students, as Mathews (2012) contends, that in their protective role as shepherd leaders, university lecturers ought to shield their students (sheep) from financial hazards, extravagant expenditures and financial destruction or damage, which normally occurs through the actions of unscrupulous textbook sellers (Simpson, 2005).

Further to the aforementioned problem of the dearth of research studies on the lack of adequate textbooks in higher education institutions as further argued by Monama (2019), this study was prompted by the view that just as would happen in Israel when the shepherd-leader would lie down at the gate physically to protect the sheep from wolves coming into the sheepfold, literally putting his life on the line for the sheep (Simpson 2005), as shepherd leaders university lecturers also need to guard their flock of students from the financial predators masquerading as genuine textbook sellers. As Dykstra (2010) notes, this can be one of the most fundamental lessons to learn from John Calvin, a great shepherd leader of our history. As a shepherd leader and preacher, he knew what the expressions, "feed the flock", "keep the wolves at bay", "minister to the lambs" and "give muscles to the bones of the warriors ... and skill to their hands" meant (Gritters 2009:19). Therefore as shepherd-leaders, university lecturers need to strive to feed their lambs and the sheep, bringing them to good pasture lands and water, grooming and clipping them, playing the role of midwives to enable the delivery of new lambs, directing and teaching them to stay on course and in unity, seeking new ways and means of avoiding exorbitant payments when the avenues for cheaper ones are available and this essentially is what protecting the sheep in the case of their students implies.

Courage and responsibility should be some of the important traits for effective shepherd leadership (Dykstra, 2010). Every shepherd-leader in an educational institution is expected to possess a great deal of courage as it speaks of being of good cheer in the face of threatening circumstances (Resanne, 2014). As a quality of spirit, courage thus enables the leader to face danger or pain without showing fear and it is also true to state that it entails ideas of boldness, confidence and bravery (Wright, 2014). In the case of university lecturers as shepherd leaders, it is pertinent to note that a timid lecturer or shepherd leader will, for example, leave his or her sheep (students) vulnerable, insecure and aimless if he or she does not challenge any exploitative processes in their procurement of resources, be it food or in the case of this study, textbooks and book chapters. A courageous one is inversely the one who is prepared to stand firm for what he believes for his or her sheep (students), for example, being able to persuade textbook publishers to sell single book chapters to his students and for such exploits he or she is more often than not reputable as this is regarded as a clear show of bravery and tenacity (Resanne, 2014).

Shepherd leaders who assume responsibilities put their lives at risk for the sake of the safety of their flock (Resanne, 2014). In fact, they are not the hired hands that tend to abandon the flock when the enemy appears to destroy and kill the flock. The task of responsibility for such servant leaders is not just for the leader's personal integrity but are, as Kuiper (1998:140) asserts, "not only for dignity, but also for usefulness". This implies they assume the responsibilities to fulfil a purpose, role, or function or to undertake a duty or hold office or to perform specifically determined functions without fear or favour (Kuiper, 1998). Briefly, such shepherd leaders possess the courage to challenge any unfair practices in any system. They also have the boldness to face the demanding or the stimulating situation head on. In the case of university lecturers, possession of such shepherd-leadership traits means they are not afraid to take exception to issues that may threaten the security or the courage of the students (their sheep). They may also have the courage to participate in the changing environment for their sheep in which case they are deemed as being proactive to change (Resanne, 2014).

In a university setting, the above view implies leaders who are at the cutting edges of the changing context and the threatening environment of their sheep (Franklin, 2009). For Franklin (2009:412), "such leaders are in God's mission and therefore they must lead in a rapidly changing world – in social, cultural, economic, political and religious environments and at local, national, and global levels". These kinds of shepherd-leaders participate in the eschatological journey with their sheep, on the grounds that they are also human beings still under construction. This shepherd-leader metaphor is clearly expounded in the biblical book of 1 Samuel (17:34-37) where David says to Saul,

Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine. Saul said to David, "Go, and the Lord be with you."

An effective shepherd-leader is expected to possess such courage as that of the young shepherd David in beating off cruel and unjust attackers. He or she may be required to defend his students (or sheep) from unfair and damaging accusations or practices. This leadership

position or role may demand readiness to confront false accusers and willingness to support victims of unjust financial prejudice or attack. As Strauch (2006:149) notes, the fact remains that if one is not a positive encourager, he or she will probably be a poor admonisher.

3. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK FOR THE STUDY

The theory of shepherd leadership suggests that shepherd leaders should be leaders who lead to ensure the well-being of their followers through the behaviours of guiding, providing and protecting their interest (Cobb, 1999). Literally, a shepherd is a person who herds flocks or groups of animals and such a person protects sheep from animals that would attack them, keeps them from wandering and otherwise takes care of the flock (Cobb, 1999). The word can also be a noun and verb that describes a carer or implies to care for a group, sheep, other animals and even people (Cobb, 1999). Described as shepherd leaders, university lecturers thus follow and watch over, look after or guide their students in all their work in academia (D'Souza, 2000). As a theory of leadership, the concept implies a selfless service to subordinates and it requires a commitment to serve without the potential of immediate recognition or reward (Strauch, 2006:85). In the Christian religion Jesus is often referred to as "the good shepherd" because he looked after his people in a manner real shepherds look after their sheep (Resane, 2014). Further to the above, it is important to note that the symbolism of Christ as a shepherd comes directly from the gospel of John (10:11–18) in which Christ is leading the faithful and will lay down his life for the sheep, or those who are faithful to him (Resanne, 2014). Drawing from Resanne (2014), such a title when applied to university lecturers implies that they lead their faithful students like sheep in ways that are proper, characterised by careful spending just as Jesus the good shepherd did to his disciples in the New Testament where the maxim is John 10, particularly verses 14 and 16 in which Jesus says:

I am the good shepherd; I know my sheep and my sheep know me—just as the Father knows me and I know the Father—and I lay down my life for the sheep.

Besides the above citation, several other referent examples are made to the concept of shepherds beginning with the view that they were amongst the first to receive the message of Jesus' birth and visited him (Luke 2:8–20) through the shepherd and sheep relationship used to illustrate Christ's relationship to his followers who referred to him as "our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep" (Hebrews, 13:20) to Jesus speaking of himself as "the good shepherd who knows his sheep and would lay down his life for them" (John 10:7-18). Further examples include the fact that after his resurrection, Jesus commissioned Peter to feed his sheep (John 21:1) and also the idea that in his farewell address to the Ephesian elders, apostle Paul portrayed the church and its leaders as a flock with shepherds (Acts, 20:28). Further to the above, it is also important to note that the metaphor of God as a shepherd is also found in the Old Testament (Rosanne, 2014). As the shepherd leaders for the students (sheep), the university lecturers are thus required, at times, to gently lead their students especially those in their charge, mentoring and sometimes teaching them along the way (Gritters, 2009:19).

4. THE ROLE OF UNIVERSITY LECTURERS AS STUDENTS' SHEPHERD LEADERS

As shepherd leaders to their students, university lecturers need to shepherd them in ways such as caring, encouraging, guiding or herding them in matters of textbook expenditures. This basically implies keeping a watchful eye over how they procure their reading resources

at fairly reasonable as opposed to exorbitant prices (Monama, 2019). Expanding the scope of the shepherd leadership theory implies further unpacking the abovementioned roles into such functions as restoration, feeding, watering, grooming, shearing, midwifery or delivering lambs, leading and protection, which in the case of university lecturers ultimately means taking complete care of the students throughout their stay in academia (Rosanne, 2014). Further to the above views, the lecturers as the students' shepherd-leaders have the role of directing them as their flock in the world of education and helping them not to be of the extravagant world but to spend as cautiously as possible (Monama, 2019). It is in this sense that shepherd leadership is said to determine the direction of the followers, to teach and steer them towards the paths of righteousness (Calvin, 2009). In the case of student followers, they are protected from financial wolves and beasts through what Wright (2001:277) calls disciplining and protecting the flock as part and parcel of the necessary work of ensuring justice and protection of the flock.

Drawing from Wright's (2001) views, it is clear that the tasks of shepherd-leaders call for the disciplining of the sheep to alert them to the pitfalls of the world. In the case of university students this implies their lecturers as shepherd leaders have of directing and teaching them to stay financially cautious and in harmony with their leaders. As properly led sheep, the university students cannot be in harmony with wolves that appear in sheep's clothing, because they possess a strong sense of discernment (Tenney, 2015). Wolves can in this case be equated to unscrupulous textbook publishers who sell textbooks at exorbitant prices pretending to be in unity with the sheep (Tenney, 2015). These wolves masquerade as angels of light by disguising their authenticity and genuineness in areas of textbook sales, speech and appearance.

The words of Tenney (2015) in his contention that, *the life of the sheep is dependent upon the power and provision of the shepherd. Their recognition of him and his recognition of them establishes that relationship*. Hearing his voice, following his leading, entering the fold through him, and the refusal to follow others was Calvin's picture of belief (2009: 165). The above extract clearly show that generally, there is some symbiotic relationship between the shepherd and the sheep, that is, the leader and his or her followers, which in this study implies the university lecturers and their students and in the final analysis it is pertinent to the caring function, for the capacity to lead is authenticated by the capacity to care (Resanne, 2014). The leadership and the care of the flock cooperate synergistically and when the two are closely related, the deceiving wolves are exposed by the outcomes of their behaviour. As shepherd-leaders, university lecturers therefore teach their students (sheep) to be vigilant regarding the activities of the heartless textbook publishers bent on robbing students of their financial resources.

5. THE UNIVERSITY LECTURERS' SHEPHERD LEADERSHIP ROLE AS STUDENTS' GUIDES

Among the major roles of the shepherd-leaders is that of guidance, which in this research implies giving direction or helpful suggestions to their students (sheep) regarding a decision or future course of action to take in easing the textbook procurement burden (Rantloane, 2019). It is part of the university lecturers' official curricular responsibilities to offer guidance or show students the way by setting and holding a course. It is important to note that in the process of guiding the sheep, the shepherd leader is expected to be ready to exercise control over the sheep in order to guide and direct them to prevent them from wandering off into danger (Resane, 2014). The important piece of a shepherd's equipment, besides his rod to protect

and defend the sheep, is his staff to guide and direct them (Resanne, 2014). The staff is the ever-present symbol of the shepherd's authority and its primary purpose is supervising, guiding and directing. As shepherd leaders university lecturers are also expected to lead their students like sheep in order to courteously exercise the authority and to shape their behaviour accordingly because one member of the student body may, for example, need to be nudged to the left and another to the right. In times of uncertainties, student followers feel secure when their shepherd leaders wield authority wisely, decisively and assertively (Resanne, 2014). It has been shown herein that the shepherd-leaders' functions of caring, protecting, guiding and directing the flock requires courage but despite the shepherd-leaders being required to act courageously, firmly and decisively, they are not expected to portray the harsh treatment towards their sheep and such behaviour is guided by the fundamental maxim drawn from Strauch (2006:55), which is as follows:

"There is no place whatsoever for egotism in the practice of servant leadership work, especially for those who lead and teach the community ..."

It is also important to note that in the Old Testament, God is portrayed as a shepherd who sets the pattern by gathering his flock in his arms (Isiah, 40:11); bandaging those that are hurt (Ezekiel, 34:16) and leading them to a place of refreshment (Psalms, 23). All these images clearly convey tenderness, nurture and devotion. In addition, in the New Testament, we hear of the Good Shepherd (Jesus) who knows and cares for his sheep individually and that this care involves sacrificial depths and we are furthermore informed of the good shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep (John, 10:11) and all these facts are driven home by D'Souza (2000:45) and Strauch (2006:46) in their assertion that kindness is key to leading people effectively.

6. AIM AND OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The research is aimed at demonstrating how shepherd leadership practices by university lecturers help ease the textbook burden on South African university students. In pursuit of this aim, the following objectives were developed:

- To examine the cheaper ways through which university students can circumvent paying exorbitant textbook prices and yet still access important book chapters
- To determine the role textbook publishers can play in easing the textbook burden for university students
- To establish new and innovative ways through which university students can minimise photocopying books from libraries while publishers lose out
- To identify possible interventions university lecturers as the students' shepherd leaders can adopt towards easing the textbook burden on their students

7. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study is guided by the following research questions:

- What are the cheaper ways through which university students can circumvent paying exorbitant textbook prices and yet still access important book chapters?
- What role should textbook publishers play in easing the textbooks burden on university students?
- Which new and innovative ways can university students adopt to minimise photocopying books from libraries while textbook publishers lose out?
- What possible strategies do university lecturers as the students' shepherd leaders need to follow towards easing the textbook burden on their students?

8. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The issue of controversy this study wishes to explore centres around the view that one of the biggest costs that university students have is books. While most of the books are only used for one semester, their exorbitant prices sometimes lead to students either "paying through their nose" or photocopying them from libraries, which ultimately results in some of the book publishers losing out (Monama, 2019:6). Despite being aware of some of the legal aspects pertaining to the publishing industry for example, copyright laws, intellectual property rights among others and despite the view that there are government grants made available to many students from non-affluent family backgrounds in the year 2019 for the purposes of buying textbooks, many still cannot afford these books. Rantloane's (2019:6) contention on the above challenge is that in many instances where, for example, students need to write specific examinations or tests and their responsible lecturers herein after the shepherd leaders, give them the scope of specific chapters to be covered, for example five chapters, they might not for example, have the one thousand two hundred Rand (R1200) to buy a whole textbook. The aforementioned thus calls for a paradigm shift towards easing the textbook burden for the university students in South Africa.

9. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is envisaged that part of the practical significance of the study upon its completion is that its findings would help contribute to studies in the field of curriculum leadership especially given the dearth of research in this field (Mathews 2012; Monama 2019). By helping higher education students gain insight into the new and innovative ways of accessing cheaper book chapter reading material while minimising photocopying textbooks from university libraries, the study hopes to make a significant contribution (Rantloane, 2019). Further to the above, it is also hoped that the study will raise an awareness of the strategies that university lecturers as the students' shepherd leaders in liaison with book publishers, can adopt to ease the textbook burden on their students. Over and above, the study is also expected to contribute to theory by adding to the existing body of literature on cheaper ways through which university students can circumvent paying the exorbitant textbook prices while still having access to important textbook chapters for their studies (Rantloane, 2019).

10. RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

In this section, the research paradigm, design, population and sampling, data collection methods, ethical considerations and measures to ensure trustworthiness are examined.

The research paradigm

The study is located within an interpretivist paradigm, a philosophical world view greatly influenced by phenomenology in advocating the need for researchers to consider the subjective interpretations of human beings and their perceptions of their life-worlds as the starting point in understanding social phenomena (Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2012). Given that interpretivism is an anti-positivist paradigm (Mack 2010), it thus views reality as is, not objectively determined but socially constructed (Kelliher, 2015). It is for this reason that the paradigm is adopted for this study of university lecturers in their social contexts or natural environment where there is a greater opportunity to understand the perceptions they have of their own activities as students' shepherd leaders. Given this philosophical underpinning, it follows therefore that the ontological assumptions of interpretivism are that social reality is multiple and subjective since dissimilar people interpret phenomena differently. As Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007:19) assert, my role as the interpretivist paradigmatic researcher would be to understand, explain and demystify social reality through the eyes of the different participants, i.e., university lecturers and students as well as textbook sales personnel.

The research approach and design

Given the view that a research design is the plan or strategy that moves from the underlying philosophical assumptions to specifying the section of participants, the data gathering methods to be used and the data analysis to be done (Nieuwenhuis 2016:72), it follows that based on the researcher's ontological and epistemological orientation, the approach adopted herein is broadly qualitative while the research design is a descriptive phenomenological one. This implies that in this qualitative study the strategy of enquiry (design genre) is a descriptive phenomenology. The motivation for the approach adopted is to explore the meanings individuals or groups ascribe to their social action as shepherd leaders in higher education institutions to negotiate the human life-world, the lived world as experienced by students in their everyday textbook procurement situations and relations (Van Manen, 2007). As a phenomenological study, it seeks to understand the meanings certain university lecturers' lived experiences hold for them as participants and to determine what their experiences as curriculum leaders and shepherd leaders to their students mean in terms of their lived experiences of helping students ease the textbook burdens in their higher education institutions (Moustakas, 2014).

Population and sampling

The researcher's epistemological orientation to the interpretivist paradigm led him to adopt a non-random sampling strategy to purposefully draw the sample for the empirical study from university lecturers, students and textbook sales personnel. These categories of people constituted the target population from which a sample size of 40 participants was purposefully sampled. The sample size was also determined by the popular view in the interpretivist paradigm that sample sizes for qualitative research ought to be generally smaller especially when compared with those typical of the positivist or post-positivist paradigms (Bertram & Christiansen, 2014; Hesse-Biber & Leavy, 2012). The above views thus clearly show that while the target population for this study were South African university lecturers, students and textbook sales personnel, the sample of study was a total 40 participants all purposefully sampled.

Data collection method and ethical considerations

The data generation process for this study was conducted using focus group discussion interviews (FGDIs), which McLafferty (2004) describes as semi-structured group discussions, moderated by a discussion leader, held in a formal or informal setting for the purpose of obtaining data by means of group interaction on a designated topic. This data collection technique enabled me to moderate and direct the discussions towards the desired areas of the research focus (Nieuwenhuis, 2016). To ensure that the FGDIs took off smoothly, all the participants, that is, the university lecturers, students and textbook sales personnel were asked to first divide themselves into 4 focus groups of 10 members and each of the groups was interviewed twice for the duration of between 40 minutes and one hour in order to capture the participants' general perceptions of their roles in the shepherd leadership matrix. The rationale for giving such FGDI time was to ensure that the interview discussion sessions covered virtually all the items stated on the focus group discussion protocol or interview guide. All of the FGDI sessions were audio-recorded for later transcription. The interviews were initiated through what Odimegwu (2004) describes as the funnel strategy and it adopted semi-structured questions to first ease the participants into the discussion before delving into full throttle deliberations about shepherd leadership. To ensure that all the FGDIs were conducted without disrupting the institutional tone of lectures, days were identified when the lecturers, students and textbooks sales personnel had free time in their schedules.

Each focus group discussion was scheduled on a different date and day. The whole FGDI process was preceded by ethical clearance procedures in which the researcher first sought clearance from the universities and textbook publishing houses where the lecturers, students and textbook sales personnel were sampled. This involved obtaining informed consent from not only the university and textbook publishing house authorities but also the consent to participate from the researched or participants themselves (Mutekwe, 2017:156). In pursuit of this objective, would-be participants were requested to complete consent forms after the researcher's explanation of the objectives of the study and the modus operandi the study was to assume. Other ethical principles made clear to the participants included guaranteeing them confidentiality, anonymity, non-maleficence and the autonomy to voluntarily decide whether to participate in the study as well as drawing their attention to the fact that as participants, they were at liberty to withdraw from participating in the study without any strings attached should there be a need to withdraw (Mutekwe, 2017). However, none prematurely withdrew from the study.

Data analysis

In this study, the data analysis process followed was a means by which the researcher tried to establish the manner in which the study participants of this empirical research made meanings of the phenomenon of shepherd leadership by examining their perceptions, attitudes, understanding, knowledge, values, feelings and experiences towards easing the textbook burdens for the university students. In an attempt to approximate the participants' construction of the phenomenon of easing the textbook burdens, an inductive and thematic approach was followed for the purpose of allowing the research findings to emerge from the frequent, dominant or significant themes inherent in the raw data without the restraints imposed by a more structured theoretical orientation (Nieuwenhuis, 2016:109). This implies that the codes or sub-themes emerging from the focus group discussion interview sessions were identified before being clustered into code families or superordinate themes as Nieuwenhuis (2016)

calls them. These resultant themes following what Miles and Huberman (2002) call data reduction and display processes constituted the basis for the discussion of the findings as reported in the subsequent sections.

11. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The discussion of findings for this study are examined under the following key themes as they emerged from the focus group interviews held with the participants: how university lecturers as curriculum leaders and shepherd leaders ease or circumvent the paying of exorbitant textbook prices by their students; the role played by shepherd leaders in minimising the cost of textbooks, the role of textbook publishers in easing the textbooks burden on students and possible interventions university lecturers as shepherd leaders can adopt to ease the textbook burden on their students. A detailed discussion of findings under each of these themes augmented by research findings from other relevant studies is offered in the following sections.

How university lecturers as curriculum leaders and shepherd leaders can ease or circumvent the paying of exorbitant textbook prices by their students

It emerged from the FGDIs with some university lecturers that there are cheaper ways of easing the burden on students and one such way is what the book publishers' focus group interview revealed as a new platform that allows students access to the required book chapters instead of having to buy the full textbooks. In pursuit of this idea, two of the focus group discussion interview (FGDI) participants (herein after referred to as Siphon and Lesego) had the following to say:

Siphon: *There is, for example, a new local company coming up with a platform called E-Illumin 8, which is a local start up helping students to lower the cost of education by making prescribed reading material cheaper such that students are able to buy chapter they need instead of buying the whole book.*

Lesego: *Honestly speaking, being able to buy a chapter is our unique selling proposition. It is actually one of the things that makes us different from any other platform out there. When I realised that even in 2019, students couldn't afford to buy many books, I wondered what was going on. In most cases a lecturer prescribes say, three or five chapters of a textbook for students to use in preparation for writing an examination or test, but the students don't have the money to buy the whole book, which might cost between one thousand two hundred and one thousand five hundred Rands. With my new platform, students can be able gain better access to the chapters because they can afford to share and buy a few of the chapters at a time.*

It is clear from the views expressed in the above extracts (verbatim statements) by the FGDI participants that with the new marketing initiatives such as the one offered by E-Illumin 8, university students can overcome the burden of paying exorbitant prices for the textbooks they need by simply buying the required chapters at a cheaper price than the whole textbook. This also stands as the unique selling proposition offered by the platform and it also enables book publishers not to suffer the economic effects of photocopying of the textbooks by students. The above views lend credence to findings by Mathews (2012) who also noted that platforms such as e-textbooks, Cengage, Red-shelf and Vital-source are among the list that

can help provide alternative means by which higher education students can access cheaper textbook reading material.

What was also pleasing to note through the FGDs was that some of the platforms such as E-Illumin 8 have entered into an agreement with many book publishing companies such as Juta books and have almost 10 textbooks for qualifications that include Education, Communication, Accounting, Statistics, Auditing and Business for offering separate book chapters to university students. Siphon further pointed out that he has so far also held fruitful talks with other academic book publishers to join the platform for the academic year 2020 and this development is currently in the pipeline. He further pointed out that the app is available on the apple and android app stores at a price of forty-seven rand ninety-five cents.

The role played by shepherd leaders in minimising the cost of textbooks

Most of the FGD participants, particularly the lecturers and textbook sales personnel, were unanimous that the use of the E-Illumin 8 platform is one of the new and innovative shepherd leadership ways through which university lecturers can help prevent their students from not only photocopying textbooks from libraries but also ensure a reduced cost of the textbooks without making book publishers suffer the economic effects of such practices. The above view clearly implies that for the book publishing companies to realise more profits on textbooks, encouraging students to buy a few book chapters at a time might go a long way in ensuring that they end up having bought the full textbooks chapter after chapter but at affordable prices. One of the FGD participants, herein after called Linda, had this to say to show the new and innovative ways to minimise photocopying textbooks and the challenges associated with the practice:

Linda: There are now many local book publishing companies coming up with new and innovative ways to ensure publishers don't lose out while students also don't break the banks to access information. With platforms such as E-Illumin 8 and the encouragement of lecturers to recommend specific book chapters as opposed to the purchase of full textbooks by students the cost and effects of photocopying textbooks will certainly be curtailed.

In pursuit of the above view, it is important to also observe and note the vital role played by the new and innovative way implicit in Siphon's contention that their unique selling proposition is their offer to sell specific book chapters to students, an innovation he argues makes them different from any other book selling platform that may be out there. Asked to briefly discuss the negative and positive effects of photocopying textbooks from the university libraries, the lecturers' FGDs and that of the textbook sales personnel were ambivalent that although the process of photocopying textbooks might appear cheaper in view of the photocopying prices often charged by many university libraries, the practice more often than not leads to unethical academic practices such as economically depriving some of the lecturers who may be among the writers of some of the textbooks. Further to this, it also emerged from some of the students' FGDs that some of their student counterparts often get tempted to earn extra income by selling photocopied books to others, which they also viewed as a violation of the economic rights of the writers and textbook publishers who end up losing out in terms of royalties or book selling profits as it were. Similar findings were reported by Rantloane (2019) in his outline of why he left his organisation to start what he calls something new in the field of e-textbooks for which he was passionate about. In his view, his e-textbook project for higher education students is expected to make a fulfilling impact by avoiding selfish ways of selling student textbooks at exorbitant prices. He also notes that through such electronic initiatives he will soon be able to fulfil his long-term view of branching out into other textbook genres on the Red-shelf platform of e-textbooks.

The role of textbook publishers in easing the textbook burden on students

The FGDIs on the role of textbook publishers in lessening the burden on students revealed that they have an enormous part to play in the process. Firstly, it was unanimously agreed that due to the semesters of current university education, most of the new textbooks university students are expected to buy can barely be used for one semester, certainly their exorbitant prices can be a real problem for the students, necessitating an over reliance on photocopying and therefore textbook publishers certainly need to come up with new measures and programmes to encourage the purchase of book pieces such as specific chapters at a time in order to ease the burden on students. Textbook publishers also need to constantly liaise with university lecturers and students to ensure all are abreast with developments in the textbook publishing industry in so far as it relates to lowering the cost of prescribed reading material to make them not only cheaper but also affordable to the students.

Ensuring that students are able to buy a book chapter as opposed to buying a whole book at a time was cited by many participants in the university lecturers' FGDIs. Another issue that also emerged in this FGDI is that other than being able to buy only specific book chapters needed, the book publishers also need to help ensure that after downloading the purchased book chapters, students are also able to access the study material offline. In pursuit of this view, one FGDI participant referred to as Moses had this to say:

Moses: I am imagining students who manage to buy the book chapters and needs to study when they get home but don't have data. It is in this sense I am arguing that it is important that they get an offline capability.

Further to the view implicit in the above verbatim statement, one textbook publishing house FGDI participant, who will be referred to as Norma in this study, claimed that when she started with the E-Illumin 8 platform, she expected a lot of push back from the academics and academic publishing industry, but was pleasantly surprised that they embraced the idea. In her words she says:

Norma: I was very impressed and surprised at how open-minded they were. I think it is because the way I am approaching this is that I am not necessarily cannibalising their system but I am just opening up a new market for them. With my platform, the students they lost with high textbook prices will now be able to buy the chapters at a cheaper price instead of photocopying the textbooks.

In further explaining her views in the FGDIs, Norma noted that her first semester effort in 2019 (as a book publishing house platform agent) and with the uptake of the E-Illumin 8 platform app has been very good, though it went down a bit in the second semester. She also pointed out that upon speaking to other textbook publishers, she learnt that the second semester is the slowest because it is a short one. Her parting words: *"I am really looking forward to next year, 2020 so we can get more books online"*. This is a sure sign and hope for the future of university students that the textbook industry is poised to change and reduce the seemingly exorbitant cost of university education in South Africa. These views support Monama's (2019) findings in his contention that e-textbooks are the best way to go due to the fact that they constitute the biggest cost that university students have to meet some of which are only used in one semester, a situation that leads to some students resorting to photocopying them from

libraries. Therefore textbook publishers that can help ease the textbook burden on students will alleviate the burden on the education of higher education students.

Possible interventions by university lecturers as shepherd leaders towards easing the textbook burden on their students

While the majority of students in the FGDs spoke about what they termed conscientious photocopying as one of the intervention strategies they have been using for quite some time, they were also excited about the new and innovative practices mentioned by their lecturers as their shepherd leaders as well as the views of textbook publishing houses, especially on the existence of such platforms as E-Illumin 8. This is a local start up meant to help students lower the cost of education by making the cost of prescribed reading material cheaper to enable them to buy the book chapter(s) they need instead of buying the full books.

It is clear from the discussion in the preceding paragraph that the main intervention strategies for alleviating the students' payment of exorbitant textbook prices emerging from the FGDs included conscientious photocopying, adopting the E-Illumin 8 platform, which is basically a local start-up that helps students lower the cost of education through making prescribed reading material cheaper such that student are able to buy the chapters they need instead of buying the whole textbook. Other programmes also include using the e-textbook vendors platform, Cengage, Red-shelf or Vital-source; all of which are alternative platforms that enable students free access to an expansive catalogue of e-textbooks. According to some of the members of the FGDs, photocopying in itself is not a bad practice especially if it is done for academic purposes. However, the problem arises when unscrupulous students use the practice to profit and deprive book publishers of their economic dues. The second intervention, which is the use of E-Illumin 8, as expressed by members of book publishing houses who were participants in the FGDs, appears to have stolen the lime light as virtually all the students in the FGDs embraced the idea whole heartedly on the grounds that it allows them easy access to the purchase of specific reading material in the form of buying one textbook chapter at a time. Members of the student participants in the FGDs marvelled at the suggestion by members of the textbook publishing FGDs that they are considering ways of making the purchasing of book chapters available offline after being downloaded by the student as a way of easy access when they do not have the data to access them at home without internet facilities.

12. CONCLUSION

The conclusion arrived at because of the findings in this study was that using new platforms such as E-Illumin 8 has the potential to help ease the burden of paying exorbitant prices for textbooks. This is so because the E-Illumin 8 platform that allows students access to specifically prescribed book chapters at a time instead of buying the full book. A further conclusion reached was that of allowing students access to photocopying facilities for prescribed book chapters provided they use the facility strictly for academic purposes.

13. RECOMMENDATIONS

Among the key recommendations from this study were the following; university lecturers as the students' shepherd leaders need to work in collaboration with the key book publishing companies to embrace the available new and innovative ways of easing the textbook burden on students whilst also ensuring that book publishing houses do not lose out and close shops.

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