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Impact of Global Economic Crises on Students' Mental Health in Nigeria: Educational, Psychological and Counselling Implications

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Abstract

The paper scrutinized the prevalence of global economic crises on students' mental health and the imperatives of educational review, psychological services and counselling strategies, as panacea to their maladaptive reactions to the circumstances they found themselves in school settings. Students in Nigeria are battling with numerous academic stressors and are also affected by economic meltdown among others. Some of the challenges they face also include financial, difficulties, uncertainty regarding their future and anxiety. Measures were taken by stakeholders to reduce the enormity of the problems, in response to the mental health crises among Nigerian students. Therefore, post empirical data were analyzed quantitatively. The paper examined economic crises and delves into repercussions of global crises on the mental health of the students in Nigeria and offers insights into the effectiveness of best practices of educational approaches, psychological services and counselling strategies. Recommendations were suggested which includes; collaboration among educators, psychologists and counsellors within Nigerian educational system becomes highly imperative. Proactive measures should also be put in place by relevant authorities with a view to seeing that, mental health of the students at all levels of education is facilitated without further delay.

Keywords: Economic crises, students, mental health, counselling strategies.

Introduction

The impact of global economic crises on mental health of students is an issue of growing concern, especially in developing countries such as Nigeria, where people particularly students are facing numerous challenges. The economic crises was as a result of depressed economy which is characterized by declining in business activities, falling prices, rising unemployment, increasing inventories, public fear and panic, reduction in revenue, profit and personal income, mass retrenchment, amplified crime rate and insecurity. Depressed economy experiences decline in real Gross Domestic Product exceeding 10 percent. (Enterprise Development Centre, 2017) Researchers have prescribed some of the indices of a depressed economy which leads to global economic crises and its multiplier effects include; brain-drain, decaying infrastructure, academic wastage, under staff, poor salary for staff, lack of promotion as at when due, wide spread cases of unpaid workers' salaries, inadequate staff, poor working conditions, industrial strife, insecurity in the school system, decline in productivity and indiscipline.

Economic crises, are also marked by skyrocketing unemployment rates, inflation, and financial instability, cast a long shadow over the mental well-being of students in Nigeria. These crises

exacerbate the challenges already faced by students, including financial constraints, uncertainties about their future, and heightened familial pressures. It is against this backdrop that this paper embarks on a critical review of existing research to shed light on the prevalence and severity of mental health issues faced by Nigerian students during economic downturns.

A part from the economic crises, there is also the issue of prevailing mental health among students. By definition mental health is a state of well-being in which individual has the ability to cope with the normal stresses of life, work productivity and make contribution to family and community (World Health Organization, [WHO, 2019](#)). Mental Health has also been defined as a state of well-being in which the individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively and fruitfully, and is able to make a contribution to his or her community. It is the successful adaptation to stressors from the internal or external environments evidenced by thoughts, feelings and behaviours that are appropriate and congruent with local and cultural norms (Townsend as cited by [Afolayan, 2023](#)).

On the opposite however, mental illnesses represent a significant burden of disease in the developing world, yet they remain one of the most neglected health problems. Discussing the alarming rate of Mental illness, [Afolayan, \(2023\)](#) further cited the report of World Health Organization ([WHO, 2021](#)) that approximately 75% of people with mental illnesses in low-income countries do not receive any treatment. It is also believed to be the largest single cause of disability, and the range of mental health conditions can make life very challenging. The report explained that the reasons was due to a combination of factors, including limited resources, poor mental health infrastructure, and cultural barriers. As a result, individuals suffering from mental illnesses often go undiagnosed and untreated, leading to a decreased quality of life, increased morbidity and mortality, and significant economic and social costs.

Absence of Mental health results in Mental illnesses, which according to WHO are health conditions involving changes in emotion, thinking or behaviour (or a combination of these). Mental illnesses are associated with distress and/or problems functioning in social, work or family activities ([WHO 2016](#)). These conditions further escalate to health issues such as stress. Stress is not a psychiatric diagnosis, but it's closely related to mental health. Stress can be the cause of mental health problems and make existing problems worse like anxiety or depression. Economic crises lead to economic depression which also further leads to human depression. For the purpose of this discussion, depression is here defined as over thinking. This excess can be due to certain things in our lives that are not going on the way it should be. It may be due to financial reasons, lack of employment, poverty, frustration or other related issues.

Another psychological problem is fear. Fear is one of the most powerful emotions that can have a very strong effect on our minds and body. Fear is considered as a bad thing and makes us make bad decisions. However, Fear is also a good thing because, it is the response to our survival i.e. we ran for dangers. Anxiety and adrenalin are connected to the feeling of fear.

Therefore, to ease off the pain, students/youths tend to do scary things just to put an end to the pain which they believe will be everlasting. They go to the extent such as jumping into bodies of water, using rope to hang themselves till they die, taking poisons including overdose of certain drugs and in extreme cases committing suicide (using guns to shoot themselves in cold blood). Some of the school leavers engage in deviant behaviours such as kidnapping, armed robbery, prostitution and ritual killing. Some of these unwanted behaviours are as a result of unemployment which according to [Salawu and Abdulkadir \(2011\)](#) has become a major problem for Nigeria.

Symptoms of Mental Health issues include the following;

- A. Psychological: Sad mood, loss of interest and excess fear
- B. Physical: Aches, sleep, appetite, weakness
- D. Behavioral: Aggression, excess speech, isolation and self-harm
- E. Imagining: Voices, people and things

According to [Afolayan \(2023\)](#) people with mental health conditions around the world are exposed to a wide range of : human rights violations, stigmatization, hostile society, banishment, flogging, hunger, restraining, abuse and neglect, as well as discrimination.

He further pointed out that Nigeria with a population of over two hundred million, it is estimated that as much as 30 percent of the population suffers from mental illness. This means that more than 54 million people are dealing with mental illness with little to no help. Mental health is one of the most neglected areas of health globally. This was true before COVID-19 (coronavirus), but the pandemic has further worsened the status of mental health.

Educational reform is definitely needed to stimulate creativity, independent thinking, and exploitation of diverse competences, positive attitude and mind-set. These can be realized through entrepreneurship education and in line with this vision, the Federal Republic of Nigeria ([2014](#)) outlined the goals of secondary education in Nigeria. They includes:

- (a) Offer diversified curriculum to cater for differences in talents, opportunities and future roles.
- (b) Provide trained manpower in the applied science, technology and commerce at sub- professional grades.
- (c) Inspire students with a desire for self-improvement and achievement of excellence.
- (d) Raise a generation of people who can think for themselves, respect the views and understand our broad national goals and live as good citizens.
- (e) Provide technical knowledge and vocational skills necessary for agricultural, industrial commerce and economic development.

Counselling has been recognized as an aspect of guidance. Although, there are divergent views regarding this issue. However, Counselling is considered here, as a person to person encounter which is referred to an individual counselling, while a counsellor and more than two persons is called group counselling. Counselling as a concept has been seen by different people in many ways from face to face, dialogue, interview, as well as, to other forms of interactions. Counselling generally is seen as the process by which the counsellor (a person who is specially trained)assist a client to face, understand and accept information, ideas, skills, about himself/herself and their interaction with others, so that they can make effective decision about their various life choices. Thus, the counsellor is a helping professional, who is trained in human psychology and exposed to psychological methods which he/she uses to advise clients in their educational, personal-social and vocational needs. Therefore, there are strong links between economic crises, mental health and illness, psychological services and counselling strategies, as well as, role of the counselors in the delivery of professional counselling services to all stakeholders at various levels. The National Policy on Education ([NPE, 2014](#)) and

National Policy on Counselling (2018) stresses the need for guidance and counselling programme to be put in place at all educational levels and further outlined the objectives of guidance and counselling programmes in behavioural terms.

This review also delves into the role of counselling services within Nigerian educational settings. It evaluates different counseling models and their efficacy in addressing students' mental health needs. Early identification of at-risk students and the timely provision of support are highlighted as pivotal components of a successful counseling approach (Musa, 2021). Moreover, the paper discusses the potential of technology to expand the reach of counseling services, especially in light of the prevalence of remote learning and social distancing measures during crises. The impact of global economic crises on students' mental health in Nigeria has drawn the attention of scholars and researchers. Farha (2019) explored the psychological distress experienced by Nigerian students during economic downturns, highlighting the rising anxiety levels and decreased overall well-being. This underscores the urgency of addressing mental health issues in this context.

Some of the researchers who examined the issue of mental health include; Garba (2018) emphasized the role of peer support networks in mitigating the adverse effects of economic downturns on students' mental health. Also a study conducted by Nuhu, Umar, Yahaya and Dan'inna (2019) on the Evaluation of Counselling Services in Umaru Musa Yar'adua University, Katsina, Nigeria revealed challenges in accessing counselling resources and stressed its prospects. In another study conducted by Odenga (2020) on coping mechanisms among Nigerian students during economic crises, emphasizes the importance of effective psychological support from all the stakeholders, with a view to ensuring that students are given necessary skills of facing the various challenges as a result of prevalence of mental health within the school setting, as a result of economic crises.

Similarly, Chikere (2021) examined the effectiveness of school-based counselling programmes in alleviating the psychological impact of economic crises, highlighting the need for tailored interventions. The tailored interventions can , if effectively carried out by professional counsellors, go a long way in reducing the severity of economic crises facing the students.

However, Chaloupka (2018) provided a valuable international perspective on the role of educational institutions in supporting students' mental health during economic crises. This global perspective underscores the importance of adapting and implementing effective counselling strategies in the Nigerian context. These studies collectively emphasize the significance of educational psychological services and counseling strategies in addressing the mental health challenges faced by Nigerian students during global economic crises. Thus, collaboration among educators, counsellors, and various stakeholders within the Nigerian educational system is deemed indispensable. A holistic approach that seamlessly integrates mental health support into the educational experience can yield more favorable outcomes for students (Federal Ministry of Education, 2020).

Therefore, increased mental health challenges is in consistent with Farha (2019) and Odenga (2020), who stated that, Nigerian students experienced a significant increase in mental health challenges during economic crises. These challenges included heightened stress, anxiety, and depression.

Another challenge in ensuring mental health support among students in educational institutions in Nigeria, is limited access to Counselling services. According to Nuhu, Umar, Yahaya and Dan'inna 's study (2019) many students faced difficulties in accessing psychological and

counselling services in Nigeria, particularly during economic downturns. This limited access exacerbated the mental health burden.

Importance of Peer Support was stressed by [Garba's research \(2018\)](#) which underscored the importance of peer support networks among Nigerian students. Such networks played a crucial role in providing emotional support during economic crises.

The comprehensive review of literature on the subject of discussion has shed light on the impact of global economic crises and the mental health of Nigerian students. The issues discussed have significant implications for the development and implementation of educational psychological services and counseling strategies. The analysis of the reviewed empirical studies affirmed the effectiveness of School-Based Counseling. Also, Omotola's work ([2015](#)) on the long-term effects of economic crises in Nigeria resonates with the findings, as it emphasized the enduring impact of such crises on individuals, including students. It is evident from the review that these crises manifest as heightened stress, anxiety, and depression among students ([Olson, 2016](#)).

These strategies encompass preventive measures, such as resilience-building programmes and financial literacy initiatives, and responsive interventions, including the provision of counselling services and mental health awareness campaigns. The effectiveness of these strategies within the Nigerian context is a key focus of this review.

In the face of economic crises, the importance of preventive measures cannot be overstated. As demonstrated by [Bolaji and Tunji's research \(2018\)](#), integrating resilience-building programs and financial literacy education into the curriculum equips students with the skills needed to navigate economic challenges effectively. Additionally, creating an environment that encourages open discussions about mental health, as advocated by [Adeshina et al. \(2020\)](#), can destigmatize seeking help and promote early intervention.

Similarly, a report by [Adekunle and Okonkwo \(2019\)](#) revealed that economic downturns can lead to increased stress, anxiety, and depression among students in Nigeria. Moreover, Sarah's study ([2020](#)) found that students experienced heightened psychological distress during economic crises, with 70% of participants reporting symptoms of anxiety and depression. These findings underscore the urgency of addressing the mental health challenges faced by Nigerian students during economic turmoil.

A number of scholars such as [Denga \(2022\)](#), [Chikere's study \(2021\)](#) among others, indicated that school-based counseling programmes in Nigeria had a positive impact on students' mental health during economic crises. These programmes offered coping strategies and emotional support. The reasons given include, mental health issues such as; Thinking; concentration, memory, judgments and false beliefs, as well as, Psychological: sad mood, loss of interest and excess fear were considered to have certain advantages. According to [Orewa \(2018\)](#) on the resilience of Nigerian youth during economic adversity is noteworthy to highlights the potential for students to overcome mental health challenges with appropriate support. However, analysis from the discussion suggested that it align more with [Olayinka and Sills \(2020\)](#), who argued that proactive intervention, such as effective counselling services, is essential to mitigate the detrimental effects of economic crises on mental health.

One of the key issues the review exposed was the limited access to counseling services among Nigerian students ([Hassan, 2019](#)). According to [Ajuwa \(2021\)](#) the stigma associated with seeking help further exacerbates this problem. This underscores the need for de-stigmatization and increased availability of psychological support services in addition to counselling services

Conclusion and Recommendations

The impact of global economic crises on students' mental health in Nigeria is undeniable. Economic crises have far-reaching effects, particularly on the mental health of students in Nigeria. The paper discussed the importance of preventive measures, counselling services, and collaborative efforts within the Nigerian educational system to address the mental health challenges faced by students during periods of economic uncertainty with a view to safeguarding the mental well-being of Nigerian students while promoting academic success. The mental well-being of Nigerian students during global economic crises demands immediate attention and action.

It is recommended that; By implementing evidence-based counselling strategies and reducing barriers to accessing psychological services, Nigeria can alleviate the adverse effects of economic adversity on students' mental health.

Similarly, Vocational counselling on the other hand can be provided enables individuals to use their acquired skills and knowledge in order to make best possible decisions about work and learning.

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