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Emergent Psychological Trends affecting University Students through Global Economic Crises

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Abstract

The struggle for survival has taken a turn, striking educational growth in Nigeria. Parents and guardians of students may be struggling to feed their families in the current economic global crises, not to talk of shelter and other life luxuries. Students whose parents and guardians are under tight economic situation are not likely to satisfy their physiological needs, safety and security needs as well as the need for love and belonging. These crises is very likely to influence cognitive imbalance and emotional disturbances among students, which in turn is likely to affect their concentration and motivation in school. Learning may therefore be difficult to occur in this kind of situation. Thus, present study investigated the emergent psychological trends affecting university students in the global economic crises. It is obvious from literature that university students suffer depression, anxiety, helplessness and burnout. Empirical studies also showed that university students suffered in their studies due to inability to pay school fees, which leads to dropping out of schools as a result of hard economic situation, and many find it difficult to feed. In addition, students used to engage into part time labour out of school hours in order to sustain themselves in school. It is recommended that students exhibiting symptoms of psychological trends should be immediately referred to counsellors and therapists. Government and other stakeholders in education should provide palliatives to parents and guidance of students in order to ease their struggle.

Keywords: Psychological Trends, Education, Economic Crises, University Students

Introduction

The strength of individuals towards attainment of any set goal or objectives lies upon satisfaction of basic needs. Students at universities have such needs for upkeep that ranges from tuition, purchase of learning material, course hand-outs, among others. Some university students in Nigeria are independent, such that they take responsibility of their needs, while others are dependent on their parents, guardians and caregivers. In recent times, the global economic crises have touched all and sundry, since hardship and the struggle for survival has become the business of the day. The current economic hike in Nigeria is catastrophic, thus rendering university students desperate for upkeep. The economic crises may not be unconnected to the removal of fuel subsidy as well as other economic and monetary policies in Nigeria, which were tough debated across media houses and social media. Moreover, the prices of all commodities are at top gear, which keep increasing without proper regulation. Hence, civil servants that include guardians and parents of the university students finds it impossible to sustain the situation with the meagre amount they receive as salaries and wages. Hence, it is to be noted that these trends of economic crises propels intolerance to uncertainty and meaning in life, and also significantly predicts depression and anxiety (Korkmaz & Güloğlu, 2021). On

the other hand, depression and anxiety negatively correlates with academic achievement among students (Khesht-Masjedi et al., 2019).

Furthermore, the political and economic situation were termed unpredictable and uncertain, necessitating the evolution of global cyclical nature of economic development (Poruchnyk et al., 2021). This evolution came with synchronization of national business cycles that influences the political, institutional and environmental components. It follows national cycles that transforms labour market, fiscal policies and business activities. This is more stable in developed countries, unlike developing nations like Nigeria. It is obvious that Nigerian situation in the current economic crises is not far from the country's low sovereign savings and fiscal leakages, lack of clarity over economic policy, as well as inconsistencies between economic policies political/security factors (Mba, 2021). Hence, both the privileged and the less privileged citizens have been affected by the economic crises in Nigeria, thereby featuring in every sector of the economy with negative consequences. In effect, extreme poverty has hit majority of the households who struggle to have at least a single meal in a day. Consequently, university students whose basic needs are not met, are not likely to be motivated towards academic engagement. Therefore, the purpose of the present study is to investigate the emergent psychological trends affecting university students in the global economic crises.

Psychological Trends affecting University Students in Nigeria

The ongoing economic crises has bedevilling consequences on the mental health of the university students, thereby disturbing the progress of their period of candidature through psychological trends that include depression, anxiety, helplessness, and burnout.

Depression: Depression is a mental health disorder that involve momentary sadness, despair, discouragement, and resentment. In addition, depression has to do with symptoms or syndrome of mood swings, in that, an individual experiences persistent decreased pleasure, guilt, hopelessness, irregular eating pattern, and disrupted sleeping. In fact, the depression has been categorized as a mood disorder (American Psychiatric Association, 1994, 2013). Moreover, depressed individual exhibit certain actions that include irritability, sadness, grandiosity, brooding, unhappiness and elation, which could be categorized as being in the affective psychological domain (Muhammad et al., 2018). On the cognitive domain, individual experiencing depression exhibits actions that include pessimism, negative thinking, suicidal thoughts, poor judgment loss of interest and motivation, lack of focus, and inability to concentrate.

Studies have shown association of depression with academic activities and engagement of university students, which was unfavourable and most likely attributed to the current economic crises. Muhammad et al. (2018) revealed that school failure emanating from poor academic performance is associated with depression. They maintained that depression is a risk factor, since students that are depressed are not likely to have clear focus, adequate motivation, and positive thoughts. Similarly, severe sleeping problem, poor academic performance and lack of social support were found to be related to depression among university students (Peltzer et al., 2013). Hence, it is obvious to see that someone who does not meet his basic needs cannot have good sleep as well as maintaining good academic grade. This is unsafe and risky to the students, since good academic performance is key to their academic progress. It is to be noted that good academic performance is the determinant of school success, because it is used for placement, promotions, and grading. Additionally, Umar et al. (2023) found a significant negative relationship between depression and academic performance among university students. This mean that as depression increases, the academic performance of the university students' decreases. Therefore, it is an indication that consequences of the cause of depression among

Anxiety: Anxiety is a mental health disorder that described how a person's sensory perceptual distortions reflects in the proportion of non-psychotic processes which interferes with concentration and attention (Woolfork, 2009). Anxiety usually affects cognitive performance as well as information processing, thereby making it difficult for an individual to be productive. Moreover, individuals that were found to be anxious exhibits difficulties when learning and making commitment to memory (Mueller, 1980). Generally, there is a popular agreement that test anxiety has a detrimental effect. When individuals are pressurized to make high scores in a test, their anxiety is bound to increase. University students with high test anxiety worry about not doing as well as they would like to do on a test. Most students find examinations stressful and many focus on expectations of failure and the undesirable consequences of personal inadequacy (Soffer, 2008).

Test anxiety may be influenced by a wide range of factors such as environmental factors (Aremu and Sokan, 2003); teacher factor and psychological factors within the students, (Ngwoke, 2010). Such psychological factors encompass the individual's cognitive variables such as motivation, adjustment, study skills, gender and others. Study skills are ways in which each learner begins to concentrate on process and retain difficult information. It is a combination of many biologically and experientially imposed characteristics that contribute to effective learning. Broadly, any skill which boosts a person's ability to study and pass examinations can be applied to all fields of study (Hills and Benlow, 2008). There are ways a student can study to increase their ability to retain information and to think critically. They include mnemonics, effective note taking, effective time management, summarising, use of key words, and others. There are also several other methods of studying, such as memorization, communication skills, flash card training, condensing information, summarizing, use of key words, acronyms, organizations and life style changes (Parker, 2010).

Helplessness: Helplessness is the belief that you lack agency in a situation. When we feel as though nothing we do will have any effect on our circumstances, *nothing* is what we typically choose to do. Though there are certainly emotional components to helplessness, researchers typically focus on the cognitive and behavioural components. Helplessness in terms of a mental state because research has shown that after experiences in which we lack control, the sense of helplessness can become a disposition. In other words, being helpless in one instance can make us feel helpless in all instances, leading us to become withdrawn, a-motivated, and depressed (Pryce et al., 2011).

Moreover, learned helplessness another mental state in which an organism forced to bear aversive stimuli, or stimuli that are painful or otherwise unpleasant, becomes unable or unwilling to avoid subsequent encounters with those stimuli, even if they are "escapable," presumably because it has learned that it cannot control the situation (Seligman, 1972).

It is to be noted that learned helplessness is a basic principle of behavioural theory, demonstrating that prior learning can result in a drastic change in behaviour and seeking to explain why individuals may accept and remain passive in negative situations despite their clear ability to change them. Seligman argued that, as a result of these negative expectations, other consequences may accompany the inability or unwillingness to act, including low self-esteem, chronic failure, sadness, and physical illness. Valås (2001) explained that students with Learning Disability and Low Achievement showed significantly more helplessness. In tackling learned helplessness, Eldowah and Alnajashi (2017) posits that the multi-strategy approach to teaching had a positive effect on students' attitude, achievement and their general learning traits, thereby reducing their scores on the learned helplessness scale. In addition, provoking

intrinsic motivation by linking the key concepts with daily life and continual feedback, and employing meaningful repetitions via multiple representations, had a positive impact on students' learning outcomes and their attitude toward the subject. While a general effect of the multiple approach teaching strategy was obvious on reducing scores of learned helplessness scale; there was significant negative correlation between scores of learned helplessness and students' attitudes, indicating that the decrease of learned helplessness is related to an increase in positive attitude.

Burnout: Burnout is a syndrome characterized as having physical and behavioural symptoms ranging from increasing anger, frustration, suspicion and paranoia associated with colleagues' influences on one's own personal career ambitions, excessive rigidity and inflexibility in practice, and the appearance of characteristics of one who suffers from depression (Bridgeman et al, 2017). Freudenberger (1974) described those individuals susceptible to burnout as being dedicated and committed, but it is equally important to recognize that burnout is not an acute condition but rather a culmination of the effects of professional responsibilities and work environment. Burnout syndrome has three dimension, viz; (1) emotional exhaustion, (2) depersonalization and cynicism, and (3) decreased sense of personal accomplishment (inefficacy). These three domains exist on a continuum, beginning with emotional exhaustion, or an individual's feeling of emotional strain and physical depletion attributed to his or her work. Hence, university students experiencing emotional exhaustion may feel apathetic and indifferent about their studies and can no longer become engaged in academic activities. Furthermore, as emotional exhaustion becomes more severe, depersonalization and cynicism occur, with the university students having a negative attitude toward their studies and feeling detached from academic activities. In some cases, depersonalization may not be detrimental, but when it is preceded by emotional exhaustion, professional satisfaction continues to deteriorate. The third component, reduced personal accomplishment, refers to feelings of incompetence and decreased work productivity even in the face of achievement. University students feel that no matter what they do, it is not enough and that there is always more work to be done. University students may begin to dislike their studies, which they once loved and do not realize the effect they are having on the lives of others.

Conclusion

From the discussions so far presented in this paper, the authors concluded that university students are suffering numerous psychological challenges credited to the current global economic crises. These psychological trends (anxiety, helplessness and burnout) have been reported by literature to have damaging effects on the academic performance of the students.

Recommendations

Based on the foregoing discussion, the following recommendations were offered:

1. Students that exhibiting symptoms of psychological trends should be immediately referred to counsellors and therapists.
2. Government and other stakeholders in education should provide palliatives to parents and guidance of students in order to ease their struggle.

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