Role of School Counsellors on Improving Students Adjustment Post COVID-19 Pandemic

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Abstract

This paper examined the coping strategies on students' adjustment in the schools after the resumption from COVID-19 Pandemic and the roles of counsellors. Different coping methods are also highlighted that students can employ to handle the numerous problems they will face during and after pandemic. It is important to emphasize that effective tactics along mutual understanding are the key to successful learning and performance. The definition of adjustment and the many types of adjustment, as well as the need for student adjustment following the pandemic, were all examined. The problems and experiences of students during the COVID-19 were also discussed. As a result, it is recommended that counselling guidance recognize the diversity that exists in order to provide solution to any problem encountered. In addition, all stakeholders should work together with counsellors to attain his or her objectives. Finally, the Federal Government should work to develop to technology related facilities so that the country's educational system can compete with the best in the world.

Keywords: Coping strategies, Students Adjustment, COVID-19 Pandemic.

Introduction

The crisis caused by the COVID-19 Pandemic has far-reaching effects on almost all social sectors all over the world, Stephan Gerhard Huber and Christoph Helm (2020) and the educational sector is not left behind. All educational institutions around the world were closed in March 2020 in an attempt to prevent the spread of the virus. Di Pietro, Biagi, Costa, Karpinsin & Mazza (2020). This has led to most schools operating online in order to ensure continuity of education. Hence, this has made the lives of students upended as they became physically disconnected from their teachers, classmates, and key support systems (counsellors). Di Pietro.,Biagi,Costa.,Karpinski & Mazza (2020) pointed out that the switch from physical learning to online learning because of the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to affect students negatively, especially those in primary, lower, and upper secondary schools who have higher difficulties in adapting to the new learning environment. Moreover, it may greatly affect students from disadvantaged backgrounds who have no access to relevant digital learning resources like laptops or computers good internet connection, adequate power supply, quiet home environment to study etc. All these may result to negative emotional well-being, loss of internal motivation towards learning and significant learning loss, low interest in reading that caused poor performances. Example was the last Joint Admission Matriculation Examination (JAMB) 2021 out of 6,944,368 students that sat for the examination only 973,384 passed while 5,970,984 failed which means that 14% passed while 86% failed (JAMB 2021). This is indeed the poorest in the history of the JAMB Examination in Nigeria. It was also said by the JAMB Registrar Professor Oloyede who disclosed that only 0.06 percent representing about 803 of the more than 1.3 million candidates who sat for the 2021 Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination scored 300 and above. A total of 1,338,687 candidates registered for the 2021 UTME, which commenced nationwide on 19th May 2021 and ended on July 3rd. He admitted that candidates performed below expectation these years when compared to previous years for

obvious reasons, especially the COVID-19 pandemic leading to the closure of schools and insecurity which made it impossible for many schools to cover the necessary syllabus. He noted that the statistics in the last four years for example showed that those who scored 120 and below were about 99.99 percent of the candidates, 99.92 in 2019,99.80 in 2020, and this year 99.65, a drop of 0.25 percent from that of last year. He added that those who scored 160 and above, last year were 69.82 percent. While this year is 45.62 percent, disclosing further that those who score more than 300 over 400 last year were 0.26 percent of the candidates, this year 0.06 percent and in 2019, 0.16 percent of candidates of scored above 300. Oloyede Isaac (2021). The reasons for this are those teenagers, who are meant to spend their time reading books and learning are now glued to social media 24 hours a day, looking for a date, a way to scam people, or a way to gain a large number of followers. This usually leads to wider disparities in cognitive capacity (DI Pietro and his colleagues (2020).

This global pandemic has brought about many changes to our society, which will have long-term effects on our youth and adolescent. Due to social isolation and adverse childhood experiences, there are concerns about sociality technology addiction, and school safety as schools attempt to transition to a state of normalcy. This crisis will require coordinated efforts to assist students in not only getting back on track academically, but also in helping students cope with the trauma they have and are continuing to experience. As a result, counselors can be used to obtain a better understanding of the social and emotional effects of the Covid-19 pandemic by collaborating with administrators to emphasize using school counselors as mental health providers in schools. As school doors begin to reopen for physical learning, students are arriving having experienced significant learning loss, various forms of trauma, increased mental health, low motivation for learning among others, Savitz-Romer.(2020).

The school counselors have a key role of support in students' re-adjustment and effective learning post-Covid-19 resumption.

The counsellors' expected role of support is enabled by professional training and competence to aid a seamless re-adaptation process of students to the new social, emotional, psychological, and academic order. This paper, therefore, intends to look at the coping strategies for students' adjustment in the school after Covid-19 pandemic and the counsellor's role. This paper covers the concept of Adjustment, types of adjustment, need for after Covid-19 pandemic, Theories of adjustment, students' challenges and experiences during Lockdown, and role of counselors on students' adjustment after resumption from Covid-19 pandemic.

The Concept of Adjustment
The dictionary of education cited by Sharma (2016), defined adjustment as the process of finding and adopting models of behaviour suitable to the environment. In the light of the above definition adjustment is a process where one builds variation in one's behavior in order to achieve harmony with oneself, others, or the environment with the aim to maintain the state of equilibrium between the individual and the environment. Pankay, Anju, Santosh, Padhgey (2017), explained adjustment as the behavioral process of balancing conflicting needs against obstacles in the environment. In order to balance these conflicting needs, an individual needs to learn certain ways to cope with these situations and at the same time maintain harmony with his/her environment. That is, a process of seeking between internal and external demands, between the need for continuity and adaptability to the new, and between the self and others in the larger environment. An adjustment has been analyzed as an achievement as well as a process in psychology. Adjustment as an achievement emphasizes the quality or efficiency of an individual that is, how effectively a person could perform his/her duties in different circumstances. To interpret adjustment as an achievement, criteria must be set to judge the quality of adjustment. Sharma (2016), stated four criteria evolved by psychologists to judge the adequacy of adjustment.

a. Physical health
b. Psychological comfort
c. Work efficiency and
d. Social acceptance.

Adjustment as a process on the other hand is of major importance to psychologists and teachers. It entails examining the interaction of the individual with the external world. Sharma (2016), pointed out that students' adjustment largely depends on their interaction with the external environment in which they live as they always try to adjust to it. According to Pankay Sigh et. al. (2017), the adjustment process involves:

i. A need or motive in the form of a strong persistent stimulus.
ii. The thwarting or non-fulfillment of their needs.
iii. Varied activity or exploratory behaviour accompanied by problem-solving.
iv. Some responses that remove or at least reduces the initiating stimulus and complete the adjustment.

Types of Adjustment Needed for Students after the Covid-19 Pandemic

The adjustment needed for students after COVID-19 pandemic are: Psychosocial Adjustment, Social Adjustment, Emotional Adjustment Academic Adjustment.

a) *Psychosocial adjustment* refers to peoples' capacity to adapt to the environment, which implies that the individual has sufficient mechanisms to feel good, integrate, and respond adequately to the demands of the environment and achieve his/her objectives.
b) *Emotional adjustment:* The condition or process of personal acceptance of an adaptation to one's circumstances which may require modification of attitudes and the expression of emotions that are appropriate to a given situation.
c) *Educational adjustment* of pupils has been secured merely by the grouping of pupils alike in one or even in several respects.

d) *Social Adjustment* is defined as the degree to which an individual engages in competent social behaviour and adapts to the immediate social context (Crick & Dodge 1994).

In the context of this paper, adjustment would be categorized into two: Normal and Abnormal Adjustments. When the relationship between an individual and his environment is in accordance with the norm, then the behavior of the person concerned is considered normal.

Abnormal adjustment means gross deviation from the norm which requires clinical investigation and intervention. Such deviations are referred to as Maladjustment. Jobin (2010) explains that Maladjustment takes place when the relationship between an individual and his environment is not according to established standards or norm.

Theories of Adjustment

Piaget theory of cognitive development gave a significant importance to the process of adjustment. He studied the process of adjustment from different angles as he based his theories on two biological tendencies, Organization and Adaptation, Babee & Khoshhal (2017). Human beings are designed to organize their experiences into logical sets of meanings. The concept of organization assumes that people have a tendency to organize their thinking into psychological structures which help us to understand and interact with the world Babee & Khoshhal (2017).

Adaptation on the other hand is the ability to adjust to the environment, the process by which humans match the original experience and the new experience and this may not fit together. Piaget described two processes used by the individual in his attempt to adapt: Assimilation and Accommodation. Both processes are used throughout life as the person increasingly adapt (adjust) to the environment in a more complex manner.

According to Sharma (2016), a person who carries his values and standard of conduct without any change and maintain this in spite of major changes in the social context is referred to as an Assimilator.

While an Accomodator take his standards from his social context and changes his beliefs in accordance with the altered values of the society. A state of equilibrium in an organism is established when there is a balance between assimilation and accommodation.

Hence, a well-adjusted individual is one who is able to meet his psychological, biological and social needs successfully and also establish a balance between his internal needs and external demands of the society through appropriate behavioural responses. (Sharma. 2016).

Students Challenges and Experiences during Covid-19 Pandemic

All over the world, students faced with many difficulties and problems in the light of the corona virus pandemic which have made them reflect on the lives and the world around them. The novel Corona virus which emerged in late 2019 has affected millions of people around the globe and caused thousands of deaths. According to World Health Organization 2020, (WHO) it belongs to a family of a virus that caused illnesses including severe acute respiratory syndrome (SARS) and middle east respiratory syndrome. The novel can lead to various symptoms including coughing, sneezing, respiratory or breathing problems and even multiple organ failures. In response to the rapid spread of the virus, governments around the world have urged citizens to avoid large gatherings, shaking hands, hugging, eating in public, and a variety of other activities and behaviours. Many countries have declared a national lockdown and taken drastic measures to reduce and curtail the spread of the virus. Staying indoors and being unable to carry on with their usual social activities can cause boredom and negatively affect people's mental health. In addition, the most educational institution was shut down in order to curb the spread of the virus. The difficulties experienced by the students during Covid-19 pandemic were grouped under family relations, personal social, emotional and academic theme.

- Family Relations: family pressure, family conflict, high expectations of family, conflict with parents, and protection

of boarders in family relationships were among the difficulties students experienced. Stating that the expectations of families at the onset of COVID-19 pandemic were perceived as a problem by students. Most families want their children to study as they did when the school was re-opened.

- Emotional Difficulties: fear of transmission, anxiety and restlessness, loneliness, boredom, depression, death of the loved ones mourning, and fear of losing loved ones are among the emotional difficulties experienced by students at the onset of COVID-19.
- Personal social difficulties: fun, responsibilities, communication conflict, and daily life skills. Students wished the school re-opens as soon as possible because they were either very bored, or very overwhelmed, they would never want to see their friends face, but they even missed them.
- Academic difficulties students experienced uncertainty regarding education, loss of learning, loss of success, effective work, academic responsibilities, and adaptation of distance education.

It is well known that being out of school for a longer period of time affects student motivations and make it difficult for them to complete their academic works. Many students are sitting at home, hoping and waiting for this pandemic to stop. Some at home and still see this unexpected holidays as an opportunity to get some rest, some worried because it causes them to miss their examination. The major problems encountered are loneliness as well as economic and social impact of business shut down, resulting in poverty and hunger cost of data and even the devices to use for effective learning. It is a bit problematic to Nigerian's students because adequate facilities were not made available in schools. Anxiety in the community can rise after the first death of a patient is being reported. Also, misinformation from media and increasing number of new cases can predispose people to serious psychopathology (Rubin and Wessely 2020).

Kang et al 2020 also opined that the present COVID 19 pandemic will drastically increase global stress and mental health burden. According to Xiang 2020, the experience of the on- going COVID-19 pandemic is triggering tension and a timely understanding of mental health is very essential for government, health agencies and the public. The current lockdown during COVD-19 pandemic has profoundly changed the way students experience their studies. Students had similar experiences of confusion as to when the holidays took place when schools were opened or if things were ever going be again to normal. Lockdown was a new experience that taught students on how to be adaptive in their education pursuit. It was mostly a struggle to adapt to this new learning system but the support of their teachers, Counsellor continue to encourage them to persist. During the online learning, student learned that time was significant in learning to achieve their academic goals and creating memories. They needed to put a decent amount of time into reading information to have understanding and to create broad ideas to answer their assessments while cherishing the time with their family. As Charles Darwin said "A man who dares to waste time has not discovered the value of life. Some students were worried about studying and completing assignments at home during the lockdown. This was because they did not have access to the library or physical contact with their teachers in schools. All these calls for counsellors intervention so that students will adjust in the areas they find weak.

Coping strategies on students adjustment after Covid-19 pandemics coping strategies in the study defines the behaviours, thoughts, and emotions that students used to adjust to the changes that occur in their lifes.

Coping strategies are psychological patterns that individuals used to manage thoughts, feelings and actions encountered during various stages of ill-health and treatments. Coping strategies are numerous and varied as the stressors that precede them. Folkman and Lazarus (1988) and Charles carver (2000). Some common strategies for coping responses are:

- seeking social supports
- turning to religion
- using humor and venting emotions
- maintaining a sense of humor and cultivating optimizing
- Using visualization strategies to increase positive feelings
- Using time management strategies when you feel overwhelmed by a busy schedule
- Talking to human resources/counselor if you feel overwhelmed by demands or harassment at school
- Using conflict resolution strategies to mitigate the stress in a relationship
  Folkman and Lazarus (1988) split the coping strategies into four groups. These are:
- Problem-focused
- Emotional support.
  Weiten has identified four types of coping strategies
- Appraisal focused (Adaptive cognitive)
- Problem focused (Adaptive behavioural)
- Emotion focused
- Occupation focused coping
  Billing and Moos (1981), added avoidance coping as one of the emotions focused coping. In reality people can adopt multiple coping strategies. The focus of these coping strategies is to change the meaning of the stressor or transfer attention away. Avoidance of the emotional distress will distract from the negative feelings associated with the stress or emotion focused coping is well suited for stressor that seem uncontrollable.

Role of Counsellors on Students Adjustment from Post Covid-19 Pandemic
The role played by the counselors cannot be overemphasized. In reality, school counselors played many roles including social and emotional, education, academics adviser, conflict mediator, wellness coach, mental health therapist, student champion,

educational collaborator and family liason. Counselors are a lifeline for many students. Counsellors can be hero to students in this time of crisis and help mitigate the negative impact of traumatic events and stress. Below are the roles that counselors need to play to help the students in this era of pandemic.

- They conduct check-in phone calls to make sure students have the necessary equipment and internet access.
- They should help parents with technological shooting
- Arrange for families in need to receive gift cards and community resources
- Re assure stressed-out parents
- To coach families on how to set up a structured school day
- Provide moral support to teachers and administrators
- Giving specific support to student who are struggling with various personal and school related issues
- Rehabilitate the students
- Assure them that all missed classes will be covered
- Those that have become deviant should be rehabilitate.

Conclusion

The Covid-19 pandemic in Nigeria has had a huge impact on the education process in Nigeria. Psychologically, the parents and students are affected because they have to participate directly in educating their children by explaining every subject that is being taken which can only be possible for highly educated parents. The Counsellor's role cannot be ignored rather the parents, all stakeholders in education should assist and support the counselors so that student will adjust to normal. The mechanism to be used will be effective when this is achieved, it will affect the student positively and both the parties will be happy in the end. The use of techniques to carry out distance learning is also an obstacles, especially for parents who do not understand technology. The role of counseling is needed to bridge parents, students, teachers and the school.

Counselling guidance needs to understand the diversity that exists so that it is able to provide the solution to any obstacle experienced.

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227

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