

ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN MANAGING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE AND INSECURITY AMONG TERTIARY INSTITUTION STUDENTS IN MAKURDI METROPOLIS

BY

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Abstract

Students' academic performance is aimed at outcome of education, the extent to which students achieved their educational goals. The purpose of the study was to investigate role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity in Makurdi metropolis. The study targeted undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. The study was guided by two research questions to obtain responses from the participants. Descriptive survey design was used in the study. The targeted population for the study was undergraduate students of the institution in 2019/2020 academic. The sample size of two hundred and fifty (250) was used. The findings of the study showed significant difference how COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity have affects undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance ($X^{2cal} = 95.824^a$ ($df = 3$) $P = 0.000 < 0.05$ and significant difference on role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity ($X^{2cal} = 97.584^a$ ($df = 3$) $P = 0.000 < 0.05$. The study concluded that COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity have an effect on undergraduate students' academic performance. The study recommended provision of medical facilities or clinics, adequate security personnel and professional counsellors on Nigerian campuses to tackle the challenge of COVID-19 and insecurity in contemporary society.

Keywords: Educational Psychologists, Insecurity, Students' Academic Performance, Tertiary Institution

Introduction

Educational psychologists have a fundamental role to play to enhance academic performance among students in an academic environment. As professionals, they are trained to handle emotional, psychological challenges that affect students' academic performance. According to Henson and Heller (2000), Educational psychologists are considered to be experts who apply principles of psychology to education, devoting their professional lives to understand learners, teaching process and instructional strategies that facilitate learning. Primarily, educational psychologists design curriculum content and evaluate the impact of curriculum changes on students' behaviour and student academic performance. The concept of academic performance is aimed at outcome of education, the extent to which students achieved their educational goals. Olofinoye (2005) argues that a good academic performance is the personal commitment and commitment of the student to actualize his/her academic purposes which may include concentrating on one's studies, having confidence to success oriented academic activities in school and so on other to maximally actualize his life career or dream. This underscores the fact students' academic performance entails maintaining a satisfactory academic record and meets the obligations of the courses they are enrolled (Ojukwu & Nwanma, 2015). Gronlund and Waugh (2009) and DuFour (2011) contend that several factors influence students' academic achievement. It is known fact that students cannot learn effectively in an environment that is surrounded with fear that creates emotional imbalance and psychological trauma to them. This calls for creating conducive learning environment (Duplechain et al., 2008).

Coronavirus known as COVID-19 is a transferable disease brought about by a recently identified virus. The virus is a pandemic disease that poses a challenge to human intense respiratory condition. It is contacted through the different respiratory tracts: the mouth and the nostrils, and attacks the human respiratory organs (Danso, 2020). It is certainly true that COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity might have influence students academic attainment especially at tertiary level. In Nigeria, tertiary education is the third stage of education which is regarded as post-secondary. This implies that it comes after the completion of secondary education; these include the Universities, Polytechnics, Monotechnics and Colleges of Education in Higher Education. Tertiary education generally awards certificates such as diplomas, or academic degrees emanating from rigorous training and imparting of knowledge in respective disciplines (FGN, 2014). The state of insecurity is characterised of being in danger or injury, worry, fear, uncertainty anxiety, unsureness, to mention but a few. Olamosu (2000) argues that insecurity is a state or condition in the life of a social unit, system, organization or society in which the existence of a problem assumes critical dimension to the extent that the survival or existence of the social system or structure is threatened. Relatively, Best (2006) consider the concept as a degenerated stage of conflict, threats to human security, intense violence characterized by fighting, death, injury, and so on that occurs. Belend (2015) maintains that insecurity is the state of fear and anxiety stemming from concrete or alleged lack of protection. It can be argued here that insecurity poses a challenge or threat to humanity.

Concerted efforts were made by government and private sector to ensure that effective teaching and learning were carried out during the COVID-19 lockdown. Radio and television stations, online tools to achieve e-learning and social media were employed as useful tools to teaching and learning (Kolawole 2020; Oyeniran & Oyeniran, 2020). The social media tools include, WhatsApp and Telegram applications, for disseminating video recorded lessons, PowerPoint presented lessons, notes, workings, and illustrations on whiteboard/paper, assignments and notifications. These efforts targeted only primary and secondary school students. However, online lecturing was introduced in some few tertiary institutions in the country. The lockdown affected the academic calendar as many institutions do not employ the e-learning. At the globe scene, COVID-19 pandemic has hit hard on education showing 1,530,000,000 learners out of school and 184 country-wide school closures, impacting 87.6% of the world's total enrolled learners (World Health Organization, 2020). Akorede, Ajayi, Toyin and Uwadia (2021) argued that COVID-19 pandemic has caused stress, anxiety and worry for many students. On the other hand, Denga and Denga (1998) stress that the incessant cultists' activities in our various institutions of learning in Nigeria have been a cancer that breeds fear, panic and psychological disequilibrium which in turn affects the learning of the Nigerian child resulting in low academic achievement.

Torales, O'Higgins, Castaldelli-Maia and Ventriglio (2020) argue that university students are facing a variety of challenges in the wake of the COVID-19 outbreak. This implies that outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity pose a threat to undergraduate students' academic performance. It is against this backdrop that the present study was embarked to show fundamental role educational psychologists play to enhance students' academic performance at the tertiary level. It is paramount to note that several studies have been conducted that are related to the present study. The essence of reviewing them is to create a vacuum in order this present study can be filled. Nwakpa (2015) studied effect of insecurity on quality tertiary education in Nigeria. The study was conducted in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, to investigate the effect of insecurity on quality tertiary education in Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to investigate the effect of insecurity on quality of tertiary education and to evolve strategies to solve the problem the study was guided by four research questions. The findings revealed causes of insecurity in tertiary educational institutions, and strategies to be employed. Ojukwu (2017) investigates the effect of insecurity of school environment on the academic performance of secondary school students in Imo state, Nigeria. The study targets at male and female students responded to a self-structured validated questionnaire designed for the study. It was found out that insecurity of school environment significantly affects the academic performance of secondary school students. The study points out some of the factors that constituted insecurity of the school environment which eventually cause boys to leave school and join trading while leading girls to drop out and settle for marriage.

Muhammad & Mohammed (2019) investigated Boko Haram insurgency in the North East Nigeria with a particular focus on its resultant effect on the educational development of Yobe State in particular. The study targeted teachers, administrators and students. The study found out that Boko Haram insurgency has an effect on the educational development. Onete (2020) conducted a study on "Cultism-Associated Insecurity and the Academic Achievement of the Nigerian Student Cross River State Experience". The study investigated the relationship between cultism-associated insecurity and the academic achievement of the Nigerian students. The study targets senior secondary three (SSIII) students. The study found significant relationship between cultism-induced emotion and academic achievement of the Nigerian secondary school students, and also, cultism-associated insecurity significantly predicts the academic achievement of students.

Ogunode (2020) conducted a study to investigate the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on higher institutions in FCT, Abuja, Nigeria. The study was carried out in Abuja. The findings of the study indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the suspension of the academic calendar of higher institutions in FCT, Abuja, larger percentage of the respondents believes that the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the suspension of the research program of higher institutions in FCT, COVID-19 pandemic has also led to the suspension of community service of higher institutions in FCT, Abuja. It was found that online education was adopted as a measure of reducing the impact of COVID-19 effects on higher institutions in Abuja. Aiyedun and Ogunode (2020) studied the effects of COVID-19 on the academic programme of universities in Nigeria. The population of the study comprised of all undergraduate students in public universities in Nigeria. The study found that the COVID-19 pandemic has affected academic programs thereby leading to major disruptions in academic activities. It was recommended that Universities and eventually another educational sector should avoid or minimize the physical presence of academic staff and students, thereby considering the possibility of online teaching and learning. Akorede, Ajayi, Toyin and Uwadia (2021) examined if loneliness, depression and stress are influences of COVID-19 on the psychological wellbeing of tertiary institutions students in Nigeria. The study revealed that loneliness, depression and stress are significant influences of COVID-19 on the psychological wellbeing of undergraduate students. The study concluded that loneliness, depression and stress are influences of COVID-19 on the psychological wellbeing of the students.

A careful probe of the relevant literature reviewed by the Researchers has revealed the extent in survey and empirical studies were conducted on the impact and role of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity on students' academic performance in the country but no studies have been conducted to look at the two variables how it has affected undergraduate's academic performance at tertiary institution in Makurdi metropolis. Hence, this study is an attempt to fill the gap.

Statement of the Problem

The advent of corona virus in recent times as well as insecurity challenge in Nigeria has affected virtually all sectors in the country. In the educational sector, schools were closed down for months in order that students at various levels were not affected with the virus. This has a negative effect on students' academic performance. On the other hand, insecurity has generated high tension on Nigerian campuses. Recently, some undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi were kidnapped on campus. This has affected students' emotional stability to cope with their studies on campus. The researchers have observed that several studies have been conducted on COVID-19 and insecurity on campuses in several places even in Nigeria. Some of these studies conducted include that of Nwakpa (2015), Shahzad, Hassan, Aremu, Hussain, and Lodhi (2020), Sundarasan, S., Chinna, K., Kamaludin, K., Nurunnabi M., Baloch G. M., Hossain, S. F. & Sukayt A. (2020), El Said (2021), among others. However, none of such studies have been conducted in Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. It is in view of this backdrop that necessitates the researchers to undertake this study to validate the findings of the previous studies on this discourse in Makurdi Metropolis, Benue State.

Purpose of the Study

The broad purpose of this study is to investigate role of psychology of education in managing academic performance and insecurity among tertiary institution students in the midst of covid-19 pandemic and insecurity in Makurdi metropolis. The specific objectives are to:

1. determine how COVID-19 and insecurity have affected undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance.
2. ascertain the role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 and insecurity.

Research Questions

This study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the ways that COVID-19 and insecurity have affected undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance?
2. What are the role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 and insecurity?

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey design. The descriptive survey design helped the researchers to describe the role psychology of education play in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity in tertiary institutions.

The Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi Campus was adopted as area of study. This is because a large number of students and staff of the institution carried out their academic and work activities. The targeted population for the study was undergraduate students of the institution was 22,000 in 2019/2020 academic session. This study used purposive and simple random sampling technique. In this type of sampling, the research included in the sampling only those that possess some given characteristics and are ready and willing to be part of the study who were selected randomly. A Sample of 250 undergraduate students of the institution was selected to participate in the study. The instrument used for study was a questionnaire. The instrument is titled Psychology of Education, COVID-19 Pandemic and Insecurity Questionnaire (POECPIQ), developed by the researchers. The questionnaire has ten (10) items addressing the two research questions that guided the study.

To ensure validity and reliability of the instrument, the instrument was subjected to face validation by three experts of educational psychologists in the Department of Educational Foundations, Benue State University, Makurdi. Cronbach Alpha formula was used to determine it reliability. A reliability coefficient index of 0.75 was obtained and based on that, the instrument was adjudged reliable.

The researchers with their assistance distributed 250 copies of the questionnaire to the respondents. The direct contact and physical distribution methods were used to administer the copies of the questionnaire. The methods were adopted to ensure that the researchers receive the completed questionnaire at the spot. Descriptive statistics was used to analyze all the raw data collected using simple percentage and mean to answer the research questions. Any mean of 2.50 and above were acceptable while below 2.50 were not acceptable.

Results

Research question one: What are the ways that COVID-19 and insecurity have affected undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance?

Table1: Mean Responses of Participants on ways that COVID-19 and insecurity have affected undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance

S/NO	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	N	\bar{X}	DECISION
1.	COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity have nothing to do with undergraduate students' academic performance.	1.6	16.0	32.0	50.4	250	1.69	Rejected
2.	COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity can set in fear, anxiety, worry to undergraduate	55.2	24.8	20.0	-	250	3.35	Accepted

3.	students on campus. Fear, anxiety, worry that have set in by COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity can enhance undergraduate students' academic performance.	4.0	4.8	60.8	30.4	250	1.82	Rejected
4.	COVID-19 pandemic lockdown and insecurity had helped undergraduate students to study hard during the lockdown to enhance their academic performance.	-	12.0	68.0	20.0	250	1.92	Rejected
5.	COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity cannot affect students research, semester examination and lectures on campus.	16.0	13.2	64.0	6.8	250	2.38	Rejected

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table (1) revealed responses of participants on ways that COVID-19 and insecurity have affected undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance. The results indicate that items 1, 3, 4 and 5 had mean values below the cut-off point of 2.50 and were rejected by the participants while the other item had mean value that is above 2.50 and it was accepted by the participants.

Research question 2: What are the role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 and insecurity?

Table2:Mean Responses of Participants on role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 and insecurity

S/NO	ITEMS	SA 4	A 3	D 2	SD 1	N	\bar{X}	DECISION
6.	My school has professional counsellors to help undergraduate students cope with COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity and their studies on campus.	22.0	46.0	12.0	20.0	250	2.70	Accepted
7.	Psycho-educational courses are important to all undergraduate students to cope with COVID-19 pandemic, insecurity and their academic performance.	13.6	74.4	12.0	-	250	3.02	Accepted
8.	Employment of more educational psychologists or counsellors in the university system can contribute to enhancing students' academic performance as well as create awareness of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity on campus.	34.8	50.0	15.2	-	250	3.20	Accepted
9.	Introduction of social programmes developed by educational psychologists have nothing to help undergraduate students to conquer fear, anxiety and depression that set in as a result to COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity.	12.8	18.0	45.2	24.0	250	2.20	Rejected
10.	Counsellors have useful counsel to undergraduate students to cope with fears, anxiety that set in as a result of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity	36.0	64.0	-	-	250	3.36	Accepted

Source: Field Survey, 2021

Table (1) revealed responses of participants on role of educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 and insecurity. The results indicate that item 9 had mean values below the cut-off point of

2.50 and it was rejected by the participants while the other items had mean value that was above 2.50 and were accepted by the participants.

Discussion

The responses of the participants had provided the framework for discussing finding of the study based on the hypotheses tested in the present study. The results from the first research question indicate significant difference how COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity have affects undergraduate students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi academic performance(X^{2cal})=95.824^a (df =3) P= 0.000 <0.05. The findings of the study corroborated with previous studies Ogunode (2020), Aiyedun and Ogunode (2020) and Akorede, Ajayi, Toyin and Uwadia (2021) who argue that COVID-19 pandemic has affected undergraduate students' academic performance. Moreover, Ojukwu (2017) stresses that insecurity in the country has contributed to poor academic performance especially at the secondary school level. Cultists' activities have been identified as one of major form of insecurity on Nigerian campuses (Denga & Denga, 1998).

The results from the second research question indicatethat there are significant difference on role educational psychologists in managing academic performance and insecurity among students of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi in midst of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity (X^{2cal})=97.584^a (df =3) P= 0.000 <0.05. The findings of the study are in agreement with previous studies of Owusu-Darko, Yaw, Hughes and Doe (2017) who argue that teacher application of the knowledge of educational psychology can influence students' academic performance. Owusu-Darko, Yaw, Hughes and Doe (2017) stress that educational psychology emphasizes the need of knowing the self for a teacher to play his role properly in the process of education and argue that essential personality traits, interests, aptitude, the characteristics of effective teaching, among others can inspire and help in handling the stress, conflict and anxiety by giving insight in their own personality. Tuckman and Monettic (2011) pointed out that educational psychology helps teachers to produce practical knowledge about educational setting and behaviour, understanding stages of development, knowing the learner, understanding the nature of classroom problem, developing necessary skills and interest in teaching.

Conclusion

Based on the major findings of the study, the conclusion can be drawn that COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity have an effect on undergraduate students' academic performance. The study found that COVID-19 pandemic and insecurityhave affected students' academic performance of Federal University of Agriculture, Makurdi. This is because COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity instil fears, worry and anxiety in the lives of students that affected their academic performance. The study established that educational psychologists have fundamental roles to play to promote undergraduate students' academic performance. These roles include counselling and introduction of social programmes to help students to cope with fear, worry and anxiety in the midst of COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. Government should make standard provision by establishing medical clinics on the campuses to help in fighting against COVID-19 pandemic.
2. Government should employ more professional counsellors on campuses to help students cope fear, worry and anxiety that COVID-19 pandemic and insecurity have set in among undergraduate students.
3. Provision of adequate security personnel should be made available by government and University community to check the prevailing issue of insecurity on Nigerian campuses.

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