

An Overview of Resilience and Academic Achievement of Adolescents in Nigeria

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Abstract. This paper looks at resilience and academic achievement of adolescents in Nigeria. The paper discusses the concept of resilience, which is a kind of bounce back from risks or traumatic situations, and academic achievement defined as academic success. The work is situated on Richardson Glenn's Three Waves Meta Theory of Resiliency. The first wave discusses the identification of resiliency characteristics. The second wave centres on the processes needed to acquire the characteristics while the third wave discusses the enactment of the processes to explore the characteristics. This work also looks at the risks factors that make students give up easily such as religious crises, terrorism and socio- economic background of the family. The paper also looks at how resilience could be fostered through two main protective factors, the internal and the external factors. The internal factors focus on the individual's assets within him- self-efficacy and locus of control. The external factors are environmental factors which include the family, the school and the community. Based on the issues raised in this paper, recommendations are made.

Keywords: Resilience, Academic Achievement and Adolescents.

1. Introduction

One of the problems that in facing Nigeria today is high rate of school drop outs and poor academic achievement amongst the students at

all levels of education. Over the years, the general performance of students in our schools has been very low. Salim (as cited by Abdullahi in Gidado 2010 p174) said that “for the past few years, the performance of students in English language has tended to be worse than the previous year’s”. According to him, since English is the medium of instruction in Nigeria schools, it is presumed that the same is obtainable in other subjects. Supporting this view, Omosidi (as cited in Gidado 2010), said that there is a significant relationship between students' performance in English language and mathematics. This implies that if students perform poorly in English language, they will perform poorly in mathematics Akimade (2010), posited that “the achievement of secondary school students in public examinations provides yet another indicator of the inefficiency and wastage in this tier of the educational system”. He brought out statistics of entries and credit level passes in the May/ June WAEC examination in Nigeria, some of which are as follows: In 2005, 1,072,607 registered for WAEC, 1,051,557 sat for the examination, 375,850 passed and the pass grade stood at 35.74%. In 2006, 1,162,046 registered for WAEC, 1,137,181 sat for the examination, 559,854 passed bringing the pass grade to 49.23%.

Alao (2015) said that "the continuous cry about the falling standard of Nigerian educational system, coupled with the below average academic performance of most students in examinations like West African Senior School

Certificate Examination (SSCE) and National Examination Council (NECO), has been a source of worry to educational stakeholders". This is worrisome especially when you look at their inability to qualify for admission into the universities and other tertiary institutions as a result of poor performances. This poor performance of students could be as a result of many risk factors they might have been exposed to. These factors could be socio-economic status of parents, religious or political crises, and terrorism.

The socio- economic status of the parents: The socio- economic situation in the country coupled with the high level of illiteracy, poverty and material deprivation has thrown many parents into untold financial problems. This can be a hindrance to students' academic pursuit and performance. (Shittu, Mohammed & Akanle, 2011).

Religious or political crises: Nigeria is often faced with religious or political crises. This make students lose their parents and thereby drop out of school. Most adolescents who have passed through such traumatic experiences have lost concentration in school. Those that manage to continue have not performed well academically. To overcome this negative trend, Nigerian adolescents need to develop resilience. Many people have carried out researches on academic achievement but only very few researches have been carried out on fostering resilience in adolescents. As a result of this development, they "become house maids or engage in other menial jobs to support their academic pursuit". (Jimoh as cited by Shittu et al 2011). Because of this also, many students have taken schooling as a part time vocation and school attendance is not on regular basis. "The resulting problem posed by this is poor academic performance in school examination". (Jimoh as cited by Sittu et al 2011).

Terrorism: This is another thing posing a great danger in our country today. There has been series of bombings in different parts of the country. Recently in Kano, Nyaya, Terminus and Bauchi road in Jos. Other activities of the terrorists include the abduction of Chibok secondary school girls by the group known as Boko Haram (western education is forbidden),

the threats of abducting students in Benue state and so many others. Some adolescents are forcefully conscripted into the sect. These activities of the Boko Haram have caused many children to stay out of school or attend school only when they feel secured. When students eventually go back to school, their academic performance is likely going to be low and they will leave school without achieving much academically.

Many of these factors interfere with the learning and educational process of Nigerian students. Although many adolescents faced with similar risk factors have managed to overcome the stressors and shown positive adaptation in the face of adversity. This has been possible because of some protective factors- "assets and resources" (Masten & Coastworth as cited in Speight, 2009). Assets are the positive factors that reside within an individual such as self-efficacy, competence and locos of control, while resources are the external factors such as parental support, the learning environment and the community. These factors will be discussed fully in this paper. Those that have overcome various stressors, we refer to them as resilient adolescents.

Resilience differs among individuals. Experiences of the same adverse event or condition may differ across adolescents. For example, divorce of one's parents may be considered as negative event while in some, it may be considered positive, if it removes conflict from home. Resilience also differs with events. If one is bereaved for example, his resilience of lack of money. Resilience can be different in religion. What is viewed causes resilience to a Muslim might not cause reliance to a Christian.

The issue of resilience has not been given much coverage. Students especially in Nigeria give up with a minor challenge. Resilience is saying that in the middle of challenges, adversity, one should not give up.

2. Basic Concepts

2.1 Resilience

Fergus and Zimmerman (2005) defined Resilience as “the process of overcoming the negative effects of risk exposure, coping successfully with traumatic experiences and avoiding the negative trajectories associated with risks”. Carison et al (2012) defined resilience as “the ability of an entity-e.g., asset, organization, community, region- to anticipate, resist, absorb, respond to, adapt to, and recover from a disturbance”. Resilience means the skills, abilities, knowledge, and insight that accumulate over time as people struggle to surmount adversity and meet challenges. Alao, (2015). Educationally, I will define resilience in the light of education as the process of coping with and recovering from adversities with the aim of coming out of school with academic success.

2.2 Academic Achievement

Academic achievement is academic success (Okafor 2007). He added that student's achievement simply means the average students' scores on standardized examination. Academic achievement can be said to be the extent to which a student has achieved his educational goals. Epunam in Kadala (2011) defined academic performance as the learning outcomes of the child which includes the knowledge, skills, and ideas acquired and retained through their course of study within and outside the classroom situations. Academic achievement can be said to be the successful completion of an educational task at any given level.

2.3 Adolescents

An adolescent is that individual who is under the developmental stage called adolescence. Okon (as cited in Ahmed 2008) defined adolescence as "that period of growth in which each individual life begins at the end of childhood and closes at the beginning of adulthood. Rowlett (2014) saw adolescents as a period within the life span when most of a person's biological, cognitive, psychological and social characteristics are changing from what is typically considered child-like to what is considered adult-like. According to the Nigerian constitution, anybody from childhood who is below the age of 18 years is still considered a child. So a Nigerian adolescent who has attained the age of 19 years and above is a child.

In a study carried out by Speight (2009), he examined the relationship between self-efficacy, resilience and academic achievement among African-American urban high adolescent students in Washington DC. The study hypothesized positive relationships between self-efficacy, resilience and achievement and also examined the contribution of self- efficacy and resilience in predicting academic achievement. The researcher used correlation statistics, multiple regression analyses and analysis of variance. The researcher also explored the contributory effect of select demographic variables (i.e. authoritative parenting, role models, and socioeconomic status) on the variance in self-efficacy and resilience. Results indicated that resilience was significantly and positively correlated with achievement, self- efficacy and authoritative parenting.

Fayombo (2010) conducted a study to find out the relationship between personality traits and psychological resilience among the Caribbean Adolescents. She used a random sampling of 397 fourth to upper sixth form adolescents from six secondary schools in different parishes in Barbados. Their ages ranged from 14 to 18 years old. 205 were females and 192 males, of which 320 were Barbadians while 177 were from a number of Caribbean countries Guyana St. Vincent, St Lucia and Jamaica. She used Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Step wise Multiple Regressions to conduct her analyses. She found out that the healthier the personality traits, the more resilient the adolescent. She also discovered that adolescents who have unhealthy personality such as neuroticism may not be psychologically resilient. Her study also discovered that adolescents who were always being prepared, getting chores done right away and paying attention to details were found to be resilient indicating that probably they are usually calm in stressful situation which strengthens their inherent ability to cope stress.

3. Fostering Resilience in Nigerian Adolescents

Every individual has what it takes to be resilient. What is needed is the use of protective factors. Protective factors are “factors that moderate, buffer, and insulate against negative stressors, and mitigate the impact of risk on an adolescent behaviour or development” (Benson & Pittman as cited in Rowlett 2014). Protective factors can also be seen as the characteristics of an individual student or the school environment that reduce the potentially negative effects of the risk factors. The risk factors are environmental conditions that increase the chances of an adolescent experiencing negative outcome in mental health, social adjustment, and academic achievement. Some risk factors include traumatic life events such as the death of a parent or parents, family conflict, socio-economic disadvantages, terrorism and so many others. The protective factors could be internal residing within the individual, such as self-efficacy, locus of control, and competence or external which refer to the environmental influences such as the family, the school, and the community. The internal assets nurture commitment, values. And social needs for positive development. The external assets (or what others refer to as resources) surround adolescents with an environment of care, support and empowerment.

4. Some Factors that can Foster Resilience in an Adolescent

4.1 Self- Efficacy

Some psychologists see self- efficacy as the reciprocal relationship between student’s beliefs about their capacity and the effort they put forth leading to achieving success. It is the expectation that one is capable of carrying out behaviour or producing a desired outcome. Pajara (citing Bandura in Speight 2009) said that self- efficacy is the belief individuals hold about their capabilities and about the outcomes of their efforts and this greatly impact and influence the way in which they will behave. In other words, how people behave is influenced by their cognitive beliefs than by the results of previous performance. Self efficacy determines the kind of goals adolescents set for themselves and how they pursue such goals. Adolescents therefore

should be encouraged to look inward and believe in what they can do.

4.2 Locus of Control

Anakwe, (2016) defined locus of control as “the extent to which people believe they have power over events in their lives” He said, a person with internal locus believes that he or she can influence events and their outcomes, while someone with external locus of control blames outside forces for everything. Adolescents that have internal locus of control, struggle hard in school for a high academic performance and if they perform low, they blame themselves and find ways of improvement. On the other hand, students who have external locus of control will blame their teachers for low academic performance. Students should be encouraged to develop internal locus of control.

Locus of control can be described as the extent in which adolescents believe that they can control the happenings around them. When adolescents are encouraged to believe that they can control events around them, they will not allow events to weigh them down instead they will build resilience.

4.3 Competence

Competence refers to a variety of adaptive behaviour of children, enabling them to achieve resilience outcomes. Competence can be characterized in broad terms such as over all psychological health and adaptation, or it could be restricted to specific areas such as social function, academic success or emotional health. Adolescents should be encouraged to have confidence in their academic work.

4.4 The Family

The education of adolescents can be influenced by parents’ socio- economic status. Highly socialized and educated parents tend to support their children in school. Adolescents coming out from traumatic situations need to be encouraged by their parents to build resilience by providing the adolescents with learning materials.

Good parenting combined with good financial base can go a long way in enhancing resilience in adolescents. Fostering resilience in children requires that are caring and very stable. It has been discovered that most resilient children have

strong relationship with at least one adult. This helps to reduce risks associated with family. Families that emphasize caring for one another, division of labour, support for one another, help to foster resilience in family members.

4.5 The School

There are a lot of things the school can do to foster resilience and enhance high academic achievement in adolescents. It is said that World Bank has suggested the use of Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools. They looked at social and emotional as involving processes through which children and adults acquire and effectively apply the knowledge, attitudes and skills necessary to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, maintain positive relationship, and make responsible decisions. Social and emotional learning can help adolescents develop the skills, attitudes and behaviours needed to foster healthy relationships with peers, work effectively with peers and teachers. This, they said will foster empathy, respect, co-operation, managing emotions, critical thinking, self control, goal setting and problem- solving. Anakwe (2016) is of the opinion that resilience is the ability to recover, perform and transform from situations of adversity. What seems matters most to learners in these contexts, he said, is the opportunity to make meaning. Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) supports this engagement process and can also help increase adolescent's ability to focus on learning. Operating social and emotional learning in schools can foster resilience.

Another thing the school can do to foster resilience is the introduction of Class- Peer Mentoring Technique. The goal of this is to improve academic performance among students by encouraging their classmates to provide supports and assistance necessary in fostering academic resilience. (Adeyemi, 2014). The processes include instruction, mentoring, regulations, understanding, review, evaluation of learning, and performance. Adeyemi (2014), went further to say that in class peer mentoring, the situation is symbiotic as the person selected as a peer- mentoring friend should equally have an area of academic need to complement the

partner. This can help develop self- worth and self- efficacy, which Adeyemi said are important in improving a student's academic performance.

4.6 The Community

The community can play an important role in fostering resilience in adolescents. When the community consistently expresses her social norms so that adolescents will know what is expected of them, they will sit up. One other thing that the community can do is to give adolescents opportunity to participate in the activities of the community as useful members. The community can make available social organizations that prove resources to residents. The community also ensures that she emphasizes the observance of social norms so that adolescents will know what constitute social acceptable behaviours.

5. Conclusion

Poor academic performance in standardized examination such as WAEC and NECO has is worrisome. This could be as a result of students giving up when faced with some risks factors. These risks factors could be socio-economic background, political crises, terrorism and others. Resilience is what is needed for students to perform better academically. Resilience is the ability to bounce back from traumatic experiences. There are protective factors in every individual that can help him or her overcome the traumatic experiences. Some of these factors are internal such as self- efficacy, locus of control and competence while some of them are external such as parental influence, the school and the community that can help him face the challenges. The adolescents, the families, the schools and the communities have significant roles to play in fostering resilience in a Nigerian adolescent. When resilience is fostered, the Nigerian adolescent will have a higher academic achievement.

6. Recommendations

In view of the above discussion, I will like to make the following recommendations:

- Schools should introduce Social and Emotional Learning (SEL). This will foster the social and emotional development of students. The school should provide opportunities for social interaction among students. Sporting facilities should be provided by the schools.
- Teachers should use the Class- Peer Mentoring as a method in the class to enable students build confidence in others and in them. This will afford the students an opportunity to help one another. Students learn freely and faster from one another. This should be encouraged.
- Parents should consider themselves as an integral part of their children's learning. They should socialize with their children and ensure that children socialize among themselves at home. They should show interest in what their children do in school.
- The community should always make the norms of the community known to her citizens. The community should also make recreational facilities available.
- Every adolescent should be encouraged to do one exercise or the other. They should be encouraged at home to go for games. The school should include in the time table time for sports.

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