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MANAGING STUDENTS DISTRESS IN NIGERIAN HIGHER INSTITUTIONS OF LEARNING: CAUSES, EFFECTS AND REMEDIES INFERRED BY A COUNSELOR

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Abstract

The study explained the major concept of student's distress in Nigerian university institutions. It also ex-rayed the prevalent causes and its effect on the Nigeria educational system as strikes, examination malpractice, marginalization, polarization of students unionism, administrative laxity, improper conduct of examination, examination mal-practice etc. and possible strategies adopted by the counselor in curbing the challenges. The study recommendations that counselors should at least once or twice a year fund and organize conferences/seminars and workshops (with invitation of resource persons) to keep students and teachers abreast on effect of students distress and how to minimize the incidence and wisdom in managing life resources for national development among others

Keywords: Distress, University, Institutions

Introduction

Nigerian university institutions of learning are characterized by alarming rate of students distress such as administrative laxity/ inadequate communication and information flow, non- involvement of the students union body in certain decision making process of the institutions, improper conduct of examinations, cultism, strikes, examination malpractice, marginalization, polarization of students unionism, economic status of students, religious factor, poverty, social factor, arbitrary increase in the tuition and other chargeable fees etc. which led to destruction of lives, properties and untimely interruption of planned academic calendar which affect the Nigerian society globally. Our schools from primary to universities have been bedeviled by all forms of challenges arising between students to students, authorities and staff, staff and students, management staff and other members of staff. These challenges are inevitable and will remain an integral part of the school system because of the differing nature of the staff and students as well as the nature of the school as a formal bureaucratic organization with its attendant rules and regulations. Various school authorities expect their staff and students to conform to certain behavioral pattern when it comes to official issues but these challenges are

bound to occur in all situations as the individual desires may be at variance with the school objectives. It is against this background that Davis (2009) asserted that between 2010 to date, not less than ten thousand students distress were recorded in the various university institutions of learning across Nigeria and most students derive joy in such. Many students see these challenges as opportunities to go on holidays in order to ease tension, while the challenges are viewed by some other students as an ample opportunity to escape from the tight economic situation on the campuses restraining their feeding habits to an improved one. While others use it as an avenue to settle scores and others vent their anger on those lecturers they carry their courses over, (Kunle 2009).

Conversely the resultant effects of student unrest are usually drastic because in the process most lives are lost, properties worth millions of naira are destroyed and well planned academic calendar is usually, sadly and untimely interrupted, (Aguba 2009). Notably the crash academic programme which often follows the reopening of university institutions after the students' unrest has raised a lot of questions and suspicion about the value and credibility of academic certificates obtained in many of the affected Nigerian universities of learning.

According to JOWICE 2014, guidance and counseling within the frame work of education is an enlightenment process where the counselors help students by encouraging their growth. Students in Nigerian educational higher institutions like their counterpart of the world face diverse social problems that affect their life in school and prevent them from functioning properly. However, for the purpose of this study we will limit ourselves to students distress in the Nigerian universities, causes and effects that seems to have adverse effects to human development globally, particularly in the university institutions and possible ways of settling, handling or managing these challenges in a manner that peace would be perpetually install in our schools. This article obviously will aim at serving as a brochure or a catalogue of solutions for student's distress that is usually common in schools.

Literature Review

Conceptual Issues

Students Distress: generally unrest means restiveness, riot, protest, conflict, crises etc. According to Okpala (2001), students' unrest refers to a combination of action and conduct that are considered socially unacceptable, unwholesome and worthless. In the same vain, Dare (2009) define it as a breakdown of relationship between the students and the managers of higher institutions, by implication, it means a fault of either the students or the manager of institutions of both. Again Kamali (2008) sees students distress as a breakdown of communication between the student's body and the managers of higher institutions leading to lawlessness. Therefore, communication gap between the students' body and the managers of higher institutions is bleed and can lead to students' distress.

The Concept of Counseling:

Counseling generally has been referred to as a personal help or direction given to the individual by the counsellor to understand him or herself. It is against this background that Pever (2015), defines counselling as a personal help carried out mainly by means of interpersonal communication whereby the counsellor helps the counselee in achieving adaptive attitudes, insights, and behaviour. It means helping the individual to utilize his or her psychological positive strengths for development and concentrating on the individuals resources by focusing on the individuals personality, behaviour and emotional assets that could be mobilized. As well, Nnaedozie and Olatunji (2014) see counselling as a process by which a person is help by a

professional counsellor to voluntarily change his behaviour, clarify his attitude, ideas and goals so that his problem can be solved because counselling is a face to face professional relationship between the counsellor and the client in which the counsellor uses professional skills to positively influence the perception, thinking, feelings and actions of the client which combats students crises. It is against this background that Anagbogu (2002), sees counselling as a process of helping a troubled person to understand himself and his work so as to feel and behave in a more personally satisfying manner. On the whole the school counsellor helps the students to come to realization of their aptitude, interests' attainment or abilities, depositions and circumstances to determine success in particular careers and jobs.

Types of Students Distress: Kamali (2008) identified three types of students distress that are witnessed in Nigeria higher institutions as;

- i. **Peaceful Demonstration Approach:** this refers to peaceful protest in which students carry placards with inscriptions indicating their grievances. The students may also march to the administrative building in large number flashing their placards and chanting warning songs. After the exercise, they will disperse to their hostels and lectures continue.
- ii. **Boycott of Lectures:** this type of students' unrest refers to where the students avoid going to classes or lectures until their demands are met.
- iii. **Confrontation Approach:** this is the most drastic approach where students vandalize institution property and attack principal administrator and even lecturers who they failed their courses as a kind of revenge. That is why Oluwasanmi (2014), report cases where students went on rampage burnt down entire school buildings and other valuable school plants. The end result is that when finally normalcy returns in such schools, there will be shortage of pertinent school plant and this will negatively impact on teaching and learning which will also affect the performance of the students in examinations and their chances for furthering their education. The confrontation is usually worsened when the police are invited by the higher authority to restore order and this often leads to loss of lives and property worth millions of naira.

Causes of Students Distress in Nigerian Universities:

A number of factors that are responsible for students' unrest in Nigerian universities among others include:

- i. **Administrative Laxity:** This is identified as one of the factor responsible for students' unrest in Nigerian university institutions. According to Adeniyi (2008) failure or inability of the managers of higher institutions to provide certain basic social and educational facilities such as books, hostel accommodation, laboratory equipment could lead to students' unrest. Others are acute shortage of water supply, and erratic power supply in the campus. For example, 1999, Bayero University, Kano was shut down following students demonstration on poor supply and erratic supply of electricity on campuses. Inadequate communication and information flow, non-involvement of the students' union body in certain decision making process of the institutions, arbitrary increase in tuition and other chargeable fees without prior information could lead to students' unrest.
- ii. **Religious factor:** a study carried out by Kunle (2009), revealed religious factor as the causes of students unrest in Nigerian universities with relevant examples as the students unrest in university of Ibadan in 1986 where the institution was closed down for some months because of Muslim community infuriation, equally at the university of Illorin in 1987 some students who were caught in homosexuality were about to be stoned to death by some group of Muslim students, when the Christian students intervened and finally led to students unrest in that institution. In the same vein 2001, the federal college of education Yola, was closed down as result of students unrest emanating from a clash between the Muslim and Christian students as the students union election result was announced.
- iii. **Improper Conduct of Examinations:** students unrest in the Nigerian universities are caused by failure to follow proper examination conduct, this is where the legitimate and registered students are denied access to seat for examination. This factor is in agreement with a live situation in ABU Zaria where the Economics Department, Faculty of Social Sciences where some students were not given examination card after fulfilling all the conditions and were disallowed from writing their examinations. After the first examination paper was completed, economic students (NESA) called a congress meeting and resolved for boycott for examination by all students of the department until their problems were looked into and resolved.
- iv. **Examination Malpractice:** Examination malpractice refers to any act of omission or commission which compromises the validity and integrity of any examination. According to Oluwasanmi (2014), examination malpractice is an act of disrespect to all rules and regulations guiding the good conduct of any examination or any evaluation process. Nowadays examination malpractice has gone beyond giraffe where students occasionally strain their necks to catch glimpse of what they want to copy from other students' scripts to a variety of sophisticated methods. According to Agidi (2007), over thirty three forms of examination malpractices have been identified. These have been categorized into nine as — externally aided collusion, internally aided collusion, inspection accreditation, hi-tech fraud, leakages, admissions, impersonation, computer fraud and assault/intimidation. However, perpetrators of examination malpractice comprise not just students, but also school administrators, teachers, examination officers, examiners security agents, staff of examination bodies, printers, gatemen, transporters, education inspectors, schools, communities and parents. All these agents and actors of fraud operate in both primary, secondary, tertiary and university institutions in Nigeria.
- v. **Cultism:** cultism is a system of religious belief and practice or an ideology. Erika and Elda (2015) define secret cult as a group of people who share and propagate peculiar use of symbols, passwords or handgrip as a means of mutual recognition and the secret beliefs divulged only to members. Their initiation procedures often involve secret rituals like swearing by some deity, human blood and other procedures, which send shivers down the spines of most people. Secret cult as we understand them in Nigeria is usually organized for subversive and criminal activities. Cultism has existed in Nigerian universities for over decades now, their activities have never assumed such a frightening dimension as witnessed in the 1990s in the University of Jos where there was a clash between occult members leading to loss of lives and closure of the institution. Same in Enugu State

University of Technology (ESUT) where normal academic activities came to a halt for several days. Similarly in 1998 cultist unleashed terror on examination officer at the University of Maiduguri. In the same vain in 1994 at Ahmadu Bello University, Brotherhood Fraternity leaders were apprehended in Zango village in Zaria was about to carry out initiation ceremony of their new recruit and their leaders were expelled from the university.

According to Oboada, Nwachukwu and Egbezor (2005:65), peace on campus initiative (an organization formed to help control cultism on Nigerian campuses) revealed that as at September, 2003, 5000 students and teachers have died on Nigerian campuses as a result of cult-related violent clashes. The frequent outbreak of cult wars in some campuses has generated feelings of fear and social insecurity among students and teachers. The unhealthy rivalry among secret cult groups often intensifies acts of terrorism and hatred among students on campuses. There sometimes result in the closure of universities for quite a long time, which has negative effect on implementation of academic programs.

Negative effects of University Students Distress / Challenges on Nigeria Education System:

The effects are the outcomes or negative effects of student distress on the Nigerian education system academic growth and Nigeria at large..

1. University institutions are charged with the responsibility of producing the man power for the country, and these challenges that lead to closure of schools serve a serious handicap to the laudable objective of higher institution in Nigeria in the area of man power production. According to Igwe (2014) in a study finds that a group of students that had indulged in the consumption of illicit drugs were found exhibiting severe mental complications and as such could continue with their education. This will subsequently affect their performance in the labor market and Nigeria.
2. Students distress has dealt seriously with academic standard in Nigerian university institutions. The challenges paralyze and interrupt the planned academic calendar. When the institution after reopen after a long closure, the crash academic programme approach is often is often implore in order to cover the lost lectures, in the process, the

caliber of students produced are either half-baked or not baked at all. The credibility of Nigerian certificate from the higher institutions are often doubted and questioned by scholars in developed countries of the world because of the short period of lectures emanating from closures of institutions.

3. Vanderlization of school plants thereby impacting negatively and a great loss to the society at large. Oluwansanmi (2014) reports cases where students went on rampage and burnt down the entire and other valuable school plants, the damage structure and facilities may not remain the same again even after renovation. The end result is that, when finally normalcy is returns in such schools, there will be shortage of pertinent school plant and this will negatively impact on teaching and learning which will also affect students performances. Again the lecturers and other top managers of the institutions found guilty as a result of students unrest could be dismissed. Some of the students union leaders could suffer from either rustication or expulsion for their involvement. Those expelled may not make it in again in academics and other endeavors of life. As a result of frustration, they could constitute themselves into a gang of robbers or perpetrators of anti-social behaviors in the society.
4. University students challenges breeds social insecurity: this implies that these challenges have produced indiscriminate and almost unmitigated hatred among the students and the teachers which destabilizes academic programs and subsequent performance of students. Dridi (2014) notes that in situation where students and teachers are operating under threats from bullies or other social miscreants, concentration on studies and teaching will be lowered. The students will no longer be able to learn adequately the content of the school curriculum.
5. The students challenges in Nigerian university elongate/lengthen the years of students graduation.
6. Equally university students challenges lead to economic wastage and reduction in the nations GDP and income which bring hardship to the educational system thereby affecting the quality of teaching and learning. Chukwuemeka and Aghara (2010) lament that these challenges causes extra spending in the educational sector thereby impacting negatively on the Nigerian global economy.

Managing University Students Distress through Counseling:

Guidance is the process of helping individuals to understand themselves and their world while counseling is the process where individuals learn about themselves and their world (Yajir, 2011). The need for guidance and counseling in Nigerian higher institutions is greater and important in tackling the student distress and its attendant effects on the society.

The role of guidance and counseling has relevance because it leads to the individuals understanding of him/herself, his morals, and a social and occupational attitude which helps him/her to gear his mind in the proper direction to maintain his emotional balance. Through personal or group counseling the limitations of individual student will be identified which will help in curbing students distress.

Concerning examination mal-practice, the guidance counselor will help the students to develop rational thinking and imbibe good study habit and shun getting involved in examination mal-practice while imbibing self-confidence. According to JOWICE 2014, guidance and counseling within the frame work of education is an enlightenment process where the counselors help students by encouraging their growth. Students in Nigerian educational higher institutions like their counterpart of the world face diverse social problems that affect their life in school and prevent them from functioning properly. Cultism, alcoholism, drug abuse are considered by the counselor as misbehavior. And no misbehavior emanates from students without a cause. When a student misbehaves, he/she has a cause for such misbehavior and need help. The counselors role comes in to help the student identify the root cause of his/her misbehavior. It is only the guidance counselor who will make the students realize the environment he is in that the student will see the futility of displaying such misbehavior.

The functional guidance and counseling unit in the universities follow up student cases to sensitize the students to have values for human life and property.

The intervention of the counselor helps students to get out of their maladies.

The guidance counselor uses skills to combat students challenges and help them to utilize their potentials for more effective living.

Conclusion

Nigerian university institutions of learning are bedeviled by all forms of challenges arising between students to students, authorities and staff, staff and students, management staff and other members of staff. These challenges are inevitable because of the differing nature of the staff and students as well as the nature of the school as a formal bureaucratic organization with its attendant rules and regulations, the resultant effects of student distress are usually drastic because in the process most lives are lost, properties worth millions of naira are destroyed and well planned academic calendar is usually, sadly and untimely interrupted. Therefore, the intervening factors are negatively impact on the students and the larger society. This must be controlled, minimized or resolved using the recommendation.

Recommendations

The following recommendations were made thus:

1. For counseling practice to be effective in eradicating students distress, the educational policy makers and administrators should at least once or twice a year fund and organize conferences/seminars and workshops (with invitation of resource persons) to keep students and teachers abreast on effect of students distress and how to minimize the incidence so as not to hinder teaching, learning and school attendance.
2. Managers of higher institutions should avoid arbitrary increase in tuition and other chargeable fees. If need be, the students should be educated on the reason for the increase and again be informed in good time.
3. Any member or candidates that may be caught and found guilty of crime of examination mal-practice should be punished severely to serve as deterrent to others.
4. The effort of Federal government on eradication of students distress particularly cultism, drug abuse etc. in higher institutions should be intensified. Those found guilty should be made to face the law.
5. Active students unionism should be encouraged on campuses in order to enhance students participation in some aspect of decision making as well as effective communication network between the students and management of the higher institutions.

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