

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

OVERCOMING ACADEMIC STRESS AND BURNOUT AMONG STUDENTS WITH VISUAL IMPAIRMENT IN INCLUSIVE EDUCATION IN NIGERIA

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Introduction

Since the existence of man on earth, there have been different health challenges including stress and burnout causing harm or death to humans. Stress and burnout are considerable health issues related to poor school performance, loss of interest in completing school works, alexithymia (that is problems of feeling emotions) and poor health (Lin & Huang, 2014). School related stress and burnout are serious psychological responses which affect every student in schools. As noted by Onwubolu (2010), everybody experiences stress as a physical pressure or worry caused by unresolved problems of life. Experiencing stress in one's life is unavoidable once one engages in any activity, but it can be dangerous to one's health if it persists for a long time. Burnout is as result of being extremely tired due to heavy physical and mental works performed by an individual. Every student especially students with visual impairment experience stress and burnout more especially in their academic pursuit. Vision is usually taken for granted by those who possess intact sensory system. It is not easy to realize how visual impairment affects the various aspects of a person's wellbeing especially in learning. Stress and burnout are leading causes of school failures of many students with visual impairment due to their inability to perform visual reading task like others. This chapter therefore provides information about overcoming academic stress and burnout of students with visual impairment in inclusive education in Nigeria. The following concepts will be discussed in this chapter which include: defining visual impairment, academic stress and burnout, inclusive education, overcoming academic stress and burnout, conclusion, suggestions.

Students with Visual Impairment (SVI)

Impairment is a damage done to the tissues or organs in the body especially tissues or organs responsible for sight, hearing, feeling and taste. The tissues or organs that are responsible for sight and hearing are focused here because of their

importance in learning. Any damage to the organ of sight spell dooms to the child that is affected because seeing objects at a distance like on a whiteboard or blackboard may be difficult. The child may also have trouble reading such objects and may be unable to focus on the objects or follow them. In addition, the child is prone to constant misrepresentation of non-verbal information or messages. The child's learning and performing like others will be affected due to impairment done to the organ of vision. Impairment according the Individual Disabilities Education Act (IDEA, 2004) is a vision that even with correction; adversely affect a child's educational performance. Ozoji (2010) informed that impairment is a biological condition and reflects anatomic and physiologic loss or deficit or dysfunction in a person. A person who experiences this condition is refers to as a person with visual impairment. Visual impairment (VI) is a generic term that includes a wide range of visual problems such as myopia (nearsighted), hyper myopia (farsighted), astigmatism (blurred vision), retina and optic nerve disorders. VI is one of the most common congenital or acquired diseases in children leading to 1-3 children in 100 affected. It is an umbrella term that accommodates all types and degrees of visual loss or deviation (Ozoji, Unachukwu & Kolo, 2016). Students with visual impairment (SVI) have different types and degrees of visual loss that affect their school performance. There are some who have residual vision that can assist them in class work and for sight and, those with no residual vision at all. SVI who has visual losses cannot successfully use vision as a primary channel for learning except by other means such as Braille. Visual impairment (VI) causes SVI having visual losses to experience difficulties with normal daily activities such as reading, driving, walking and social interactions which may have negative impact on the student's socio-emotional development. SVI in addition, are more likely to experience mobility and educational difficulties, as well as an increased risk of falls, fractures, injuries, poor mental health, cognitive deficits and social isolation. They may also present with more emotional and behavioral difficulties than their sighted peers (Sun et al 2018; Hu et al 2019). SVI may find it difficult to read printed materials, walking to the classrooms unaided, carrying out class works and relating with peers cordially and successfully in and outside classrooms.

Basically, there are three ways visual impairment is defined which include; medical, legal and rehabilitative, and educational definitions. Medical Definitions: The eye care health specialists such as Ophthalmologists and Optometrists evaluate a child's visual abilities through ophthalmic examination using two criteria in determining the quality of vision of that child. The two criteria are visual acuity and visual field. Visual acuity (VA) is the clarity with which a person can see things or objects clear and sharp. VA is most often measured through the use of Snellen chart. When a child's VA after Snellen scale is 20/200 or less in the better with best corrections, such a child can be referred as having impairment. Normal acuity is 20/20. The first number is the distance at which a child can see a specified line on eye chart while the second number is the distance at which a child with normal vision can stand and see the same line. A child with VA of 20/200 has to stand not

more than 20 feet from the chart to see the same line that a normally sighted child can see from a distance of 200 feet. (National Society for the Protection of Blindness, 1994) Visual Field (VF) is the area seen by the eye at a given moment. That is the range at which a child can see from the central to the peripheral (sides) without turning his head (Ozoji et al, 2016). The range for a normal vision is 180° while that of a child with visual impairment ranges from 5° to 10°.

Legal Definition: The second type is legal definition as used by government and rehabilitation agencies. A child is considered legally blind if his visual acuity is 20/200 in the better eye after correction (e.g.: glasses). A child is considered eligible for special services from the Department of Rehabilitation Services if his visual field of vision is not greater than 20 degrees (Smith 2007).

Educational Definition: A child is considered educationally blind if he can only learn through tactile or auditory channel (Haring, McCormick, & Haring, 1994)). That means that vision is ruled out for learning not taking cognizance of its impact in learning. As noted by the American Optometric Association (AOA, 2019) up to 80% of a child's learning in school is through vision. According to AOA, it is estimated that over 60% of pre-school learners have an undiagnosed vision problem informing that 80% of learning in the classroom is vision. The majority of vision problems that interfere with reading and learning are very treatable while some are not. Some are not seeing clearly and sharply because (20/20) is just one of 17 visual skills critical to academic success.

Academic Stress and Burnout

Stress is a state of worries or mental tension caused by a difficult situation and serves as natural human response that prompt one to address challenges or stress in one's life (WHO 2023). Stress in itself is a physical or emotional pressure one is exposed to in life. It is also a mental pressure or physical pressure or worries caused by problems in somebody's life. In addition, stress is a combination of factors that affect each individual differently. These factors may include; frustration, anger, exhaustion, or fatigue, disappointment and the likes. These factors either singly or in combination affect the academic performances of many students including those with visual impairment which may likely lead to academic stress. There are different types of stress which includes: acute stress, episodic and chronic stress. Acute stress - in a short term, is a mental health condition that can occur within the first month after experiencing a traumatic event. It involves stress responses including anxiety, intense fear or helplessness, flashbacks or nightmares. Episodic Stress - when a person expresses acute stress frequently. If you have episodic, you may feel like you the always under pressure or that things are always going wrong. This can be exhausting both physically and mentally, irritability or uncontrolled anger, rapid heartbeat and panic attack. Chronic in other hand is a consistent sense of feeling pressures and overwhelmed over a long period of time (Yaribeygi, 2017).

Some of the symptoms include; pains, insomnia or weaknesses, less socialization and unfocused thinking.

On the other hand, three types of stress are distinguished, which include; harm, threat and challenge. Harm simply means a damage to something which is caused by a particular course of action. It is a physical injury to a person or an animal which is usually caused on purpose. Then, Harm Stress is a hazard of the workplace. The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA, 2021) informed that harm stress plays a part in human problems such as; headache, high blood pressure, heart problems, skin conditions, asthma, arthritis, depression, anxiety and overwhelming. Threat Stress: Threat is a statement or action likely to caused damage or danger to a person. Threat Stress is a potential stressor that one feels that one cannot handle. (Hu, Li, Wan, Reynolds & Wang, 2009). Challenge is the feeling one has when faced with a situation unprepared for, such as; job scope, responsibility, workload and time pressure. These are in one way or another brings about academic stress.

Academic Stress

Academic stress refers to as those experiences that subject one to pressures, worries, subject overload, time pressure and problems of interpersonal relationship (OSHA, 2021). Academic stress also subject one to feeling of exhaustion due to study demands and having cynical attitude towards one's study, feeling incompetent and disappointment. There are also thresholds of academic stress that could be detrimental to adequate psychological and physical functioning such as hassles and stressors that are common to students with visual impairment but relatively uncommon to others. Some of these hassles and stressors include; home works, test and studying for test, writing assignments as well as class participation. Aside from stressors, dramatic changes that take place when young students with visual impairment enter college for the first time is worrisome. They assume responsibilities they never had before. Responsibilities of cooking, shopping, cleaning, laundry and a myriad of other routine chores need to be attended to. School works seem excessive and it seems that not enough time to accomplish them not there. These excessive school works unattended to may lead to academic burnout.

Academic Burnout

Burnout is a state of physical or emotional exhaustion that also involved a sense of reduced accomplishment and loss of personal identity. Burnout is a state of being extreme tired either physical or mental due to day's hard work. It is a condition that is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and loss of sense of personal accomplishment. McComack (2018) distinguished three types of burnouts as emotional exhaustion, cynicism and academic inefficacy. Emotional exhaustion is the feeling of lack of motivation, trouble sleeping, physical fatigue and hopelessness. Cynicism burnout is the loss of emotional or cognitive

involvement with workplace. When one is expressing cynicism burnout, empathy drops and emotional distance rises, pessimism, irritability, and mistrust abound. Academic inefficacy is the beliefs of students and attitude towards their capabilities to achieve academic success as well as beliefs in their abilities to fulfill academic tasks and successful learning of material.

Academic burnout is the feeling of debilitation, pessimism and low self-efficacy. According to McComack, (2018) academic burnout is exhaustion, disengagement experienced by students due to long term exposure to specific school demands. Academic burnout may develop primarily in individual who work in human services or occupations such as in education, social work, law enforcement agencies, and other emergency services. Individuals who work in these types of human services are likely react to chronic burnout when they over work themselves for a period of time. In addition, academic burnout with regards to SVI result in frustration due to heavy work load of academic assignment unattended to, lack of control over one's environment, lack of commitment among teachers in the school, lack of fairness in giving assignments and uneven distribution or absence of rewards. All these academic pressures placed on the students can lead them to develop academic burnout. Academic burnout manifests in academic pressures such as repeating classes, wanting to change school, many subjects to do, test, examination to write, vocation and resumption week are enough to make learners have feeling of burnout including stress. These pressures create a gap between students with visual impairment and the inability to meet academic demands placed on them. Academic burnout and stress present the following symptoms which included;

- Going to classroom and going back to dormitory unaided.
- Feeling of exhaustion due to extra efforts spent in doing homework.
- Feeling of social isolation due to difficulties in associating with sighted peers.
- Inadequate provision of equipment in the classrooms e.g., Braille embosser, manual typewriter, thermoform machine, Perkins Braille machine.
- Inadequate provision of audio instructional materials such as talking calculators, books, clocks, balls, library and others.
- Inadequate personnel to guide students with visual impairment effectively in the classroom.
- Poor academic support to the students.
- Difficulties in obtaining lecture notes from the sight peers.
- Difficulties in obtaining class outlines and class schedules. The above symptoms are capable of subjecting SVI to academic stress and burnout in inclusive education

Inclusive Education

Inclusive education (IE) is a system of education where all students being able to access and gain opportunities to learn in the same classroom notwithstanding any disability. Ozoji, Unachukwu & Kolo (2016) refer to inclusive education as a re-structured mainstreamed seething which goal is successful learning and social experiences for all learners. The major structure according to the authors is the removal of all forms of barriers to learning and participation so that all learners including exceptional children achieve quality educational outcomes. IE recognizes diversity in learning, and it addresses specific learning need of every learner in the classroom. IE is a system of education where schools, classrooms, programs and activities are designed to suit the learning peculiarities of every learner so that all can participate and learn together successfully. The aim of IE is to facilitate learning environments where teachers and learners embrace and welcome the challenges and benefits of learning diversity in education. IE is about giving equal access and opportunities and removal all the architectural barriers that may impede smooth learning outcomes. SVI learn smoothly in an environment where there are no barriers for them to go the classrooms and come back alone, go to refectory, conveniences, dormitory and bathroom unaided and as well as play with their sighted peers. But where the aims of IE are not in place, SVI is likely to experience academic stress and burnout. It is important for education stakeholders suggest ways to overcome this issue in order to enable SVI learn and achieve like others in the same learning environment.

Overcoming Academic Stress and Burnout.

In order to overcome the academic stress and burnout among students with visual impairment (SVI), it is important to review therapeutic strategy that is relevant in addressing academic problems of these students. The one that is in the mind of the author is the Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT). REBT is psychological strategy developed from cognitive behavioral therapy to manage many types of psychological distresses and emotional disturbances (Ellis & Grieger, 1977). The therapy maintains that emotions are not caused by the actual event in the individual life but rather emanates from how such an individual perceives, interprets and evaluates such events. In addition, life has many common stressors and burnouts or negative of events, however, based on the principles of REBT, individuals perceive these events differently and as such, they have different negative or maladaptive behavior responses to these events. REBT can be used to assist individuals understand that their negative thoughts and their effective responses (e.g., anger, stress, burnout) are based on how such individuals perceive and evaluate sources of these negative life events rather than by the events themselves (Yaribeygi, 2017).

The academic stress and burnout experienced by SVI can lead them to develop emotional disturbance that is correlated with dysfunctional cognitions that are termed as irrational beliefs (Ellis & Grieger, 1977). Irrational beliefs according to the

authors include catastrophizing a situation by judging oneself as not worthy or incapable and turning them into problems. With regards to SVI, their irrational beliefs may include the following; "I cannot read text not Brailled", not able to go to the classroom unaided", not able to go back to dormitory after school", fear of unknown", I cannot succeed learning in this environment", engaging sighted peers to read notes and so on. The SVI who have these irrational beliefs can be assisted by disputing their irrational beliefs and replacing them with positive thoughts. SVI can also be assisted to work towards reducing undesirable emotional behaviors by changing their negative thoughts and beliefs that they will not achieve successfully notwithstanding the academic stress and burnout.

Apart from therapeutic intervention, all-inclusive education schools in Nigeria should be restructured to accommodate all learners whether with any form of disability or not. All-inclusive education in Nigeria should be equipped with both audio and visual learning materials to cater for the diversity of learners. Special educators trained in handling learners with visual impairment should be recruited to guide learners with visual impairment in inclusive education. Guidance counselors and psychologists should also be recruited to assist SVI in school adjustment and peer relationship that are very important in learning.

Conclusion

Academic stress and burnout experienced by students with hearing impairment in inclusive education seem to be a cog in the wheel of their academic progress in an inclusive setting. This may be due to heavy academic load unattended to, inadequate instructional materials to cater for their peculiar learning needs, poor relationship with peers, as well as the architectural barriers that impede their smooth mobility. It has been established that the use of rational emotive behavior therapy would assist in resolving their psychological distress arising from fear of making it in the inclusive education setting.

Suggestions

Based on the conclusion of this paper, the following suggestions were advanced.

- The architectural designs of all-inclusive education classrooms in Nigeria should be redesigned to accommodate and meet the specific learning needs of SVI.
- All the instructional materials meant for SVI should be brailled.
- There is the need to provide audio visual materials such as talking clock, books, and library and so on in all the inclusive education in Nigeria schools.
- There is the need to recruit teachers skilled in the education of SVI to assist these students in inclusive education.
- There is also the need to recruit psychologists and counselors in every inclusive education in Nigeria.
- There is the need to encourage peer relationship among the students.

It is expected that if all these recommendations are adhered to, the academic stress and burnout among students with visual impairment in all-inclusive education would be improved.

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