Managing Adolescents’ Maladaptive Behaviour in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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Abstract
Maladaptive behaviour has been a regular feature of adolescents in Nigerian secondary schools. Examples of maladaptive behaviour include cheating, drug abuse, examination malpractice, truancy, cultism, aggression, sexual immorality, rape, destruction of property, fighting, bullying to mention but a few. It is gradually becoming a permanent social menace that seems to defy solutions in our secondary schools. This paper takes a look at the general characteristics of adolescents with maladaptive behaviour, causes of maladaptive behaviour, strategies of managing maladaptive behaviour and the personnel involved in the management of maladaptive behaviour. The paper also recommends among other things that principals should be empowered to discipline students with maladaptive behaviours and discipline decisively without any external interference.

Introduction
Secondary schools are established with the aim of producing students who are worthy in character and learning. Students are expected to acquire knowledge, skills, experience and discipline that will help them sharpen their destiny and rebuild them from what they used to be to what they intend to become. Students at this level of education predominately fall between the ages of eleven to eighteen. This period is described as the adolescent period which has been christened by some psychologists as a period of storm and stress and many changes occur in the life of the individual which if not checked, may result in maladaptive behaviours.. (Okobia & Ohen 2006; Oladele, 1998; & Nwachukwu 1995)
The readiness or willingness of an individual to demonstrate decent and decorous conduct, respect for authority, high sense of responsibility, love for orderliness, eagerness to discharge duties with promptitude and efficiency makes an individual a 'normal person'. When an individual fails to discharge these characteristics, maladaptive behaviour is said to have occurred. Though maladaptive behaviour may be difficult to define due to the differences in cultural standards as every culture has its accepted behavioural patterns and norms. However, maladaptive behaviour can be explained to mean a shift away from age long appropriate behaviour which significantly affects individual growth and societal development. That is, any behaviour tagged maladaptive runs contrary to generally accepted pattern of behaviour for the age and environment of the individual and this behaviour negatively affects him and other persons around. (Ughamadu, & Enueme, 2002)

Maladaptive behaviour in Nigerian secondary schools has been a running sore in the educational system of this country. In the past few years especially since 1970s after the Nigeria’s civil war, the footprint of maladaptive behaviour has become so visible in our learning institutions especially among the secondary school students. This ugly menace as also had its expression in section 26 of the National Policy on Education, which expressed national concern about acts of maladaptive behaviour in post primary schools. Sub-section 4 and 5 explicitly cautioned against the practices of maladaptive behaviour in schools. (NPE 2004). This has made the public to pay more attention to the problem of maladaptive behaviour in the school system with the result that the rich and the poor as well as the government and the governed became worried.

**General Characteristics of an Individual with Maladaptive Behaviour**

Iwuoma (1993) asserted that the following characterizes a maladaptive individual:

a. He is unable to build or maintain satisfactory relationship with peers and teachers;

b. He is generally moody or unhappy in situations where other children express excitement and happiness;

c. Truancy is common among maladaptive individual;

d. The person may exhibit inappropriate behaviour under normal conditions;

e. He is often dependent on teachers and peers. He hardly attempts a new task without reassurance by somebody;

f. Anxiety;

g. Task avoidance;

h. Negative over reaction;

i. Low self esteem.

Oloruntimihim (1991) and Osigbemeli (1990) agreeing with the view of Iwuoma specifically added that the things that constitute maladaptive behaviour in school include, the following behaviours: disobedience to teachers and school's rules
and regulations; stealing other student's property(ies); staying in hostel during lesson; wearing of unauthorized assorted dress(es); maltreatment of junior student(s); smoking; alcohol consumption; drug consumption; involvement in secret cult activities; participation in students' unrest; participation in examination malpractices; immoral relationship with female student; unauthorized exit from school;

Causes of Adolescents’ Maladaptive Behaviour

1. **Family Background**
   Adolescents’ family background characterized by frequent fighting between parents, lack of parental love and affection, divorce, and different forms of deprivations – psychological and materials could lead to maladaptive behaviours. In addition, adolescents from polygamous background tend to be maladaptive than those from monogamous background. Adolescents from broken homes also exhibit maladaptive behaviour especially when both parents are separated and cannot reinforce and motivate these adolescents.

2. **Socio-economic Status of Parents**
   Maladaptive behaviour has also been attributed to poverty arising from low socio-economic status of parents. Adolescents from poor homes are usually deprived of some basic needs of life. The fact that poor parents may not be able to satisfy all their needs, the children may take to other means such as stealing and the likes to provide for themselves and satisfy their materials quests.

3. **The School**
   Unruly behaviour of some teachers and lack of adequate support services like over crowded lecture halls, unequipped laboratories, libraries and hostel accommodation where they are available may lead to students’ maladaptive behaviour. Some teachers with loose manners often influence students negatively. Besides, dysfunctional school administration and hostile leadership style could cause students maladaptive behaviour.

4. **Peer Influence**
   Some times, adolescents follow the dictates of their peers. This is described as ‘peer uniformity’ that is they want to conform to the group’s ‘norms’ because they want to belong. They usually don’t bother whether these attitudes they try to conform to are in line with societal value or not (Omeje 2005). This to some extent, has contributed to maladaptive behaviour usually exhibited by these adolescents.

5. **Influence of Mass Media**
   Adolescents of today are greatly influence by what they watch from films (Home videos) and certain presentations by the mass media. Ochiagha (1999) observed that adolescents have greater attraction to view human sexuality films and related programmes. Some of these adolescents who watch some of these films usually want to ‘try out’ what they have watched hence, resulting in maladaptive behaviour.
Other probable causes of adolescents’ maladaptive behaviour as postulated by Oloruntimehim (1991) and Osigbemeli (1990) include parental rejection and single parenthood; anti-social behaviour exhibited by parents and significant others such as excessive drinking of alcohol, spouse brutality, frustration; brain damage and mental retardation, drug abuse, erratic and inconsistence in handling matters by parents; too much restriction and rules by parents, school and society; self defeating attitude and idleness.

Strategies of Managing Maladaptive Behaviour of Adolescent in Schools

Some strategies that can be used to manage adolescents’ maladaptive behaviour in schools according to Ajayi, (1984) among others include the following:

Counselling/Counselling Curriculum in Schools

Counselling is therapeutic in nature, that is, it is aimed at helping individuals resolve an already existing crisis. Milner and Palmer (2001) stressed that counselling denote a professional relationship between a trained counselor and a client. This relationship according to them is usually person-to-person, although it may sometimes involve more than two people. It is designed to help clients to understand and clarify their views of their lives and to learn to reach their self-determined goals through resolution of problem of an emotional or interpersonal nature.

Adegoke (2004) noted that counselling curriculum is a total and comprehensive approach that integrates a curriculum of counseling into the educational process for all students in the school, and that counseling in our schools should not be viewed as peripheral, tangential or something to be tolerated. Counselling should not be undermined, as it serves as one of the major strategies through which maladaptive individuals can be assisted to desist from such behaviours.

Reinforcement

Reinforcement is any event or stimulus which will increase the probability of a response recurring. It could also be explain to mean a process of strengthening or emphasizing a feeling or idea or a habit to cause a process to increase its intensity (Onwuegbu & Okobia 2004). There are basically two types of reinforcement, they are positive and negative reinforcement. Both can be used as corrective measures. However, for it to be effective in the correction of adolescents’ maladaptive behaviour, the child’s background must be seriously taken into consideration.

Counselling Adolescents in Moral Values

Moral values enable individuals to determine whether their relationship with others is appropriate and reasonable. Moral curriculum is being advocated here because students need to be taught to imbibe virtues like truth, patience, honesty, kindness, loyalty, respect and patriotism. This will go a long way in easing tension and anxieties that can lead to maladaptive behaviours (Ochaigha, 1999).
Other strategies that can be adopted in curbing maladaptive behaviour include indirect manipulation of environment to alter specific aspects of students’ behaviour and use of influence. Personnel involved in the Management of Adolescent Maladaptive behaviour In Secondary Schools Managing students’ maladaptive behaviour in secondary schools requires a cooperative attitude of all stakeholders in the education industry if tangible results are to be achieved. This is what Kwaja (2009) referred to as the ‘concept of team approach’ All involved in the handling of the secondary school child must not leave any stone unturned. Those involved are the Guidance counsellors, The School Principals/teachers, the Government and Non Governmental Organizations.

The Role of Counsellors

The counselor, according to Ifelunni (1997) is a trained expert who is exposed to enough psychology necessary to understand and predict human behavour. His role is fundamental if maladaptive behaviour in schools is to be curbed. Although he depends on referral of problem students by their various class masters or through the administration of questionnaire to identify them.

The secondary school guidance programme is non-existent without the counsellor as it is primarily concerned with specialized services to the students (clients). The counsellor offers direct services through face-to-face contact with the students and this is done either individually or in groups. It is important to note here, that these students especially during the secondary school years are largely adolescents; and this is a periods that is characterized with ‘storm and stress’ and a number of ‘try out’ activities are usually exhibited, which many a time runs contrary to acceptable norms. A number of these students become maladjusted at this stage if they are not properly guided which of course, results in maladaptive behaviour, and it takes a trained specialist (counsellor) to be able to identified these students and help resolve whatever turbulence that may have resulted at this developmental stage in which they have found themselves. (Nwachukwu, 1995).

Odoemelam (1991) asserted that, the counselor uses his skills to assist the students’ during their personal and social development. He works to enhance their emotional development and education by promoting self understanding, proper use of special services in the school and making referrals to other services within and outside the school. The counsellor being a member of staff of the school shares in their responsibilities, contributing his specialized skills, knowledge and experiences in these dimensions. Among the roles the counsellor performs in the school setting which ultimately help in the reduction of students’ maladaptavie behaviour, include: Counselling Services, Orientation Services, Information Services, Diagnostic Services, Test and Measurement Services, Curriculum Planning Services, Educational and Vocational Services, Continuous Assessment, Consultation services, Placement and Follow Up services, Community Services, and Referral Services.
Role of the Principal/School Authority

The principal occupies a unique position in the entire school set up. He is at the apex and supervises other school personnel. Principals of schools have very significant role to play in ensuring that there is discipline among students in secondary schools. This is because of the strategic leadership position he occupies in the day to day activities of the typical Nigerian secondary schools. Anwana (1991) identified him, in one hand as a teacher who to some extents shares the guidance responsibilities of the teacher and in the other hand, as the determinant of the fate of the students. The principal/head teacher is the chief executive that directs other school personnel and activities to ensure that the goals of the schools are realized among which the curbing of maladaptive behaviour in schools is.

Lackadaisical attitude of school's administrators towards the students' welfare is a factor that promotes maladaptive behaviour in school. There is no doubt that students have many needs and if they are not provided, it can lead to restlessness and frustration of the student and eventual maladaptive behaviour.

Aghanta (1996) stressed that an administrator should make himself/herself available to students at all times and communicate with them regularly. When an administrator makes himself/herself unapproachable or incommunicado, this can lead to unruly behaviour of the students. The role of supervision of students in the school system cannot be overemphasized. Through this, students will be guided from displaying over zealous actions.

A school administrator is expected to lead by example and serve as role model to the students. He/she needs to be hardworking, tolerant, honest and humane among others. When an administrator displays contrary traits, this can lead to maladaptive behaviour on the part of the students since adolescents learn by modeling and role playing. Maladaptive behaviour can encourage social vices which can undermine societal peace. Among these vices are prostitution, rape, cheating, kidnapping, armed robbery etc. The issue of maladaptive behaviour can further lower the image of parents since it is believed that parents occupy significant position in the moral training of their children. When a child displays negative behaviour, greater part of the blame would be for the parents. It can further lower the image of the school where it is prevalent. Such schools would be treated as 'pariah' among other schools in the community or society.

Curbing maladaptive behaviour in Nigerian secondary schools calls for concerted efforts of the education stakeholders. In this regard, schools' administrators should be alive to their responsibilities, live above board, lead by example, communicate with students regularly and attend to students' problem(s) promptly. Parents should also give proper moral training to their children at the home particularly at the tender age. Teachers should supervise both academic and extra curricular activities of students and should always detect and investigate case(s) of maladaptive
behaviour in the school. School administrators should punish students caught in any act of maladaptive behaviour, to serve as deterrent to others.

The Role of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGO)

Ochiagha (1999) opined that NGOs and religious organizations should set up bodies or committees charged with censoring information that are presented for public consumption. War against immorality and negative sexual behaviours should be addressed. There is need to restore sanity and dignity that would engender appropriate individual and societal attitudes and values toward responsible practices. A united effort of these agencies is called for locally, nationally and internationally. The game of dribbling each other for selfish reasons and interest will continue to bring untold suffering and destruction on our students in particular and human race in general.

The Role of the Government

Government should continue to discharge its responsibilities towards education through proper funding of school, to give room for provision of needed facilities as it has been observed that the lack of certain basic facilities like adequate libraries, laboratories, sporting facilities and the likes has been know to be contributory factors to the causes of maladaptive behaviour in our schools (Aghanta 1996). If these students who are adolescents are kept busy by the presence of these facilities, the likelihood that there will be a reduction in delinquent behaviours is there, as the saying goes “that the idle mind is the devil’s workshop’. Government should also continue to orientate the students against the indulgence in acts of maladaptive behaviour. This can be achieved through jingles in mass media. The government must as a matter of urgency, direct the employment and immediate deployment of qualified guidance counselors to all secondary schools be it private or government owned; as the importance and roles played by these counselors can not be undermined if maladaptive behaviour is to be curbed in our secondary schools.

Conclusion

Adolescents’ maladaptive behaviour in our schools is on the rise and has serious effects on our educational system which include examination malpractices resulting in cancellation of results of both the innocent and the guilty, school drop outs and unwanted pregnancies to mention but a few. The strategies of managing this ugly menace which include counseling/counseling curriculum, reinforcement and counseling adolescents in moral values should not be played down. To tame or reduce the incidence in our secondary school system, the government, school authorities, parents and society should play their roles as expected.

Recommendations

1. Counsellors should be accorded there place within the school setting to enable them discharge their duties as effectively and efficiently as possible.
2. Empower principals to discipline students with maladaptive behaviours and discipline decisively. Often, punishments and sanctions for certain offences are
in the schools books as cosmetics. In practice, principals sometimes do not have the final say in disciplining their students and since students know this, they tend to exploit it.

3. Parental responsibilities need another look. Parents need to revive their roles as parents; it is not enough to have children and leave the responsibility of rearing, guiding and molding them for the school alone.

4. Both the home and the school should endeavour to co-operate in the interest of the children. These schools administration cannot operate in isolation. Therefore, the society also will have to re-orientate its values. Since the school is part of the society, what happens therefore in the society could not fail to gain the attention of the secondary school students. This, in essence means that if the society is disciplined, there will be less disciplinary problems in the secondary schools. The society too should not hesitate to lend its support for the war being waged against maladaptive behaviour.

5. The mass media especially the visual ones should be careful in what to feature and what not to, since most youth imitates and tend to exhibit a lot of what they borrow from these agents of information. As Nigeria is a developing nation, effort should be directed against polluting the characters of our youths since they are the hope of the nation.

6. Finally, the teachers should realize that the future of the country is in their hands whether or not the society appreciates it or not. With the co-operation of the government, the parents, teachers and the students, in the spirit of good understanding, love and charity, the government aim of providing disciplined, honest and patriotic citizens of the nation or country will be attained.

References


