

**ADJUSTMENT STRATEGIES FOR IMPROVING STUDENTS'  
ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENTS IN SENIOR SECONDARY SCHOOL  
CERTIFICATE EXAMINATIONS**

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***Abstract***

*Adolescence stage is a crucial period in human life. During this stage, individuals experience complex developmental changes that usually lead to disruptive behaviours which if not properly handled can breach academic achievements. It is the wake of this backdrop that inspired this paper to attempt discussions on adjustment strategies that can take care of the adolescents' chaotic behaviours in order to enhance improvement in their achievement in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations, notably WAEC and NCEO. The paper started with a brief overview of the adolescence stage and the impact of the developmental changes on adolescents' academic achievements. It further highlighted the need for adjustment strategies for secondary school adolescents and then concluded accordingly. In line with the discussions and conclusion made, the paper recommended that Guidance Counsellors should be engaged to help adolescent students to understand their physical changes and how to manage them and also sensitize school authorities on how to guide adolescents to channel their energies appropriately. In addition they should guide the authorities on how to improve learning situation in their school to help boost students' academic achievements.*

***Key Words: Adolescence, Characteristics of Adolescence and Adjustment.***

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**Introduction**

The Senior Secondary School period, coincidentally, is the adolescence stage of life. The stage lies between the end of childhood and the beginning of adulthood. In other words, it comes in between the years 12 and 21. In the face of this age bracket, Okpala and Ifelunni (2003) added that adolescence stage falls between late primary school period and the end of the secondary school age. However, the period varies from culture to culture depending on the cultural practices and socio-economic conditions of the society (Chauhan, 2013).

The Senior Secondary School period being the adolescence stage is marked by a lot of physical, mental, social and emotional characteristics which usually pose a lot of influences on the behaviour of adolescent individuals. Attesting to this claim, Chauhan (2013) pointed out that adolescence period witnesses great changes in all developmental dimensions of the individual. In specific terms, the period in the physical aspect, features growth spurt particularly in height and weight followed by

excessive energy. There is also the appearance of the primary and secondary sex characteristics. Boys witness enlarged penis and scrotum. Hairs appear on the public regions for both boys and girls. Breasts develop in girls and they also experience their menstrual periods which is usually marked with the first appearance referred to as '*menarche*'.

Mentally, adolescents achieve more cognitive abilities such as abstract reasoning than they did during their previous stages of life. In the social aspect, they are usually conscious of how they look including the way they dress. They love the company of their peers and enjoy social activities. In the process, they indulge in the habits of excessive drinking of alcohol, smoking and sexual promiscuity. In the emotional dimension, they always seek avenues for venting out the excessive energies bottled up in them. As a result, they engage in frequent arguments, quarrels, bullying, fighting and occasional protests or rioting to achieve their demands.

It is important to note that the complex nature of adolescents' life as highlighted has a lot of negative consequences on the individuals' behaviour and academic work especially when they are not carefully handled. This situation therefore calls for need to adopt adjustment strategies that will help in the-school adolescents to achieve well in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations with particular reference to WAEC and NECO. It is on this background that this paper is established.

### **Consequences of the characteristics of secondary school adolescents on academic work**

It is on note that adolescence period is characterized by complex developmental changes. Obviously, without proper adjustment, the developmental changes can lead to disruptive behaviours which are usually unfavourable to academic work. This agrees with the view of Akuto and Ojogbane in Denga and Ekoja, (2008) that paying inappropriate attention to behavioural disorders of adolescents constitutes a big block to their academic achievements. The main point is that, in the physical aspect, the numerous and rapid changes that occur in the bodies of adolescents usually pose a lot of worries which can dampen their ego for academic work. It is quite clear that a person who is emotionally upset is usually prone to be aggressive and as a result, he can develop negative attitude towards his functions including academic work.

The social disposition of adolescents culminating in superfluous dressing, excessive intake of alcohol, gregariousness and sexual relationship with the members of the opposite sex, may also be detrimental to academic work. It is common to hear of adolescent students who spend their school fees on buying costly wears and make-ups, drinking excessively, chasing and sleeping with girls in hotels and attending parties with them. There are also a good number among them that devote too much time on the use of information communication technology devices in preference to their school work. As Andural, Aboho and Ikyumen in Denga and Ekoja (2008) observed, information communication technology has enormous

contributions towards enhancing students' learning but it is not without its negative influence on their academic work. According to them, it rubs students of their precious time for studies as they always sit for hours watching films, browsing pornographic sites in the cyber café, playing games using computer, using immoral audio and video CDs that help in polluting their lives and also distract them from their studies. Besides, there are cases of students who die of HIV/AIDs because they relate sexually with the opposite sex and in the process terminate their education. Situations like all these are unfavourable to academic achievement.

On the cognitive aspect, adolescents' increased mental abilities always make them to believe that they can compete favourably with their teachers or school authorities in academic matters. As a result, a lot of them usually argue wrong points tooth and nail with their superiors. The fact therefore, remains that students who reject facts or correct ideas presented by their superiors are usually prone to be identified with poor academic achievement.

In line with the emotional dimension, the temper outbursts that usually arise, lead adolescents to violent acts in which they are usually held responsible to the detriment of their academic work. In such circumstances, a good number of them disobey their teachers or school authorities, violet school rules and regulations, engage in frequent quarrelling, bullying, fighting, protesting or rioting. Such disruptive behaviours usually earn them sever punishments which range from manual work, corporal punishment, suspension and expulsion and even serving jail terms in prisons. In the process of carrying out such punishments, they will forfeit school work either temporarily or permanently which in any case will usurp their academic work.

The summary of the points discussed above is that the disruptive behaviours during adolescence stage usually interfere with students' academic work in the school. In that face, the students will fail to perform creditably. It is for this reason that adjustment strategies are needed to enable them achieve well in Senior Secondary School Certificate Examinations (WAEC and NECO) and in education generally.

#### **Need for adjustment strategies for secondary school adolescents**

Simply put, the term adjustment means to bring improvement in a situation that is apparently faulty or inadequate. So, when we talk of making adjustment, we mean improving, modifying or bringing a situation to a more acceptable standard or status. Hence, we can adjust a situation such as time, date, event, speed, human behaviour, academic achievement, functioning of machines or technical devices and so on. Relating this idea to individuals' life, the things that aid proper functioning usually need adjustment for optimal achievement.

The concept, '*adjustment*' is a psychological term though its systematic emergence is traced to Darwin (Mangal 2012). According to Mangal, Darwin referred to the term as *adaptation* which according to his theory of evolution means that those species which adapted successfully to the demands of living, survived and

multiplied while others which did not, died out. Contributing to this idea, Chauhan (2013) pointed out that biologists used adaptation strictly for physical demands of the environment but psychologists use the term adjustment for varying conditions of social or inter-personal relations in the society. It is on this premise that Chauhan defined adjustment as reaction to the demands and pressures of social environment imposed upon the individual. According to him, if the demands are not fulfilled, they lead to discomfort or inefficiency.

It is clear from the foregoing that adjustment is imperative in human life for the purpose of modifying inadequacies that interrupt normal functioning of individuals. This claim lends credence to the remarks of Crow and Crow in Mangal, (2012) that an individual's adjustment is adequate, wholesome or healthful to the extent that he has established harmonious relationship between himself and the conditions, situations and persons who constitute his physical and social environment. Relating this idea to the confines of this paper, adjustment does with the process of assisting students to modify certain natural and environmental conditions to enable them improve on their academic achievements. Specifically, this paper focuses on secondary school adolescents. Adjustment as it concerns them therefore implies the strategies intended to bring improvement in their disruptive behaviours and poor academic performances.

In recent times, there have been public out-cry on students' poor performances in WAEC and NECO examinations. Research findings and statistical evidences abound to prove that students' achievements in these public examinations are relatively poor. For example, findings of Anyebe and Anyebe; Ojogbane and Akuto, in Denga and Ekoja, (2008) and Anashie, Ebuta and Adie, (2014) show that academic performances of students in Senior School Certificate Examinations in Nigeria in recent times are not encouraging. While Anyebe and Anyebe blamed the fault to students' lack of seriousness to their studies, Anashie, Ebuta and Adie maintained that the ugly trend is rather due to teachers' ineffectiveness, not minding other factors that could pose challenges.

Allied to the findings cited, there are statistical records on students' performances in WAEC and NECO examinations across the country in the past five years (2013 - 2017). In specific terms, the records x-rayed the number and percentage of candidates who passed at Credit level and above in English language and Mathematics. The table below contains the information.

**Statistical Record on Students' Academic Achievements in English Language and Mathematics in WAEC and NECO Examinations in the Past Five Years (2013-2017).**

WAEC					NECO				
S/N	Year	Total noof candidates	5 Credit Passes including English and Mathematics	%Passes	S/N	Year	Total No of candidates	5 Candid Passes including English and Mathematics	%Passes
1	2013	1,543,683	639,760	29.17	1	2013	1,034,263	719,593	69.575
2	2014	1,692,435	529,425	31.28	2	2014	978,886	511,931	52.29
3	2015	1,593,442	616,370	38.70	3.	2015	969, 491	664,747	68.56
4	2016	1,552,758	878,040	52.97	4	2016	1,022,474	904,992	88.51
5	2017	1,559,416	923,486	59.22	5	2017	943,350	754,053	70.85

**Source:** premiumtimesng.com (2013-2017)

Now, in realization of the negative impacts of the in-the-school adolescents' disruptive behaviours as earlier discussed, it may be correct to argue that there is correlation between these behaviours and poor academic achievements in WAEC and NECO examinations. It is in the face of this belief that this paper attempts to look into the need for adjustment strategies for Senior Secondary School students in Nigeria to enable them improve on their low performances in the examinations under review. Among the needs are the following:

- (a) Adolescent students need adjustment for the numerous physical changes that occur in their bodies. This will help to reaffirm their confidence which will make them to always face their academic work with sincere determination. It is obvious that adolescents who feel shy or worried about their physical characteristics that are not gratifying are usually dejected or depressed. A situation like that is not favourable to academic work and therefore need adjustment.
- (b) In the social aspect of life, it is a known fact that some adolescents engage in disruptive behaviours such as excessive drinking and smoking, inordinate desires for sex, high tendencies towards luxurious life and too much devotion to information technology programmes including watching games and pornographic films. Following these negative tendencies, students while away the precious time that they should devote to gainful academic work. In the face of such lapse therefore, the students need adjustment to enable them adopt normal behaviours that can boost their studies and academic achievement.

- (c) Similarly, adolescent students need to be helped to adjust well in the excessive energies and emotional outbursts that usually push them to violent acts. If this is achieved, they will always remain calm and focused towards their school work.
- (d) They also need to adjust in their increased mental abilities which sometimes make them to argue facts and issues with their superiors. Adjustments in this dimension will make them to respect others' views and avoid behaving in manners that are insulting especially to their superiors.
- (e) Adjustment is also crucial for the students in school curriculum, learning programmes as well as learning resources. If all these are modified to suit the students, they will help to beef up their performances in the Senior School Certificate examinations.

### **Challenges to adjustment strategies**

A lot of factors pose challenges to adjustment strategies for in-the-school adolescents. The fact is well known that adolescents' developmental characteristics and their reactions to situations differ from individual to individual, family to family, culture to culture or from society to society. This corroborates the view of Chauhan, (2013) that the adolescence period with the attendant developmental changes in all dimensions depend much on the dictates of the culture of their society or the prevailing socio-economic conditions. In that circumstance, an adjustment strategy that is deemed fit in a particular setting may not be relevant in the other. Specifically, some of the factors that pose challenges in adjustment process in the direction discussed include:

- (a) **Individual differences:** Admittedly, no two individuals are exactly alike in the way they look, the way they behave or the way they react to situations. Supporting this claim, Clifford (1990) pointed out that no two persons are exactly the same in their personality attributes even including identical twins. With regard to adjustment to situations, some people are rigid while others are flexible in doing that. So, as a result of these varying dispositions, adjustment strategies for secondary school adolescents are always not very easy.
- (b) **Differences in socio-economic status:** Another fact that is well noted is that adolescents from well-to-do parents or families usually behave differently from their counterparts who come from poor families especially in the way they dress or keep their bodies, the material things they acquire and their financial involvement in social events and relationship with members of the opposite sex. Also, adolescents in urban areas differ in their modes of life from those in rural areas. Based on the differences pointed out here, helping secondary school adolescents to adjust is usually difficult.
- (c) **Religious and cultural differences:** Obviously, some adolescents are Christians or Muslims while others are traditionalists. Even among those who are Christians, are others who belong to different denominations. As a matter of fact, the behaviours of the adolescents in these various categories are usually not the same. For example, while those adolescents, who are devout Christians

or Muslims may hate drinking, smoking or sexual practices, those who are less devoted may not desist from the negative tendencies. Similarly, some cultures permit traditional rites like initiation ceremonies, title taking and others as opposed to Christian or Muslim faith. It is clear from the differences highlighted that adjustment strategies will find it difficult to take care of those variations.

- (d) Ignorance:** In the actual sense of it, helping students to adjust in their behavioural problems and academic achievement is the role of school counselors. But as it stands, only very few secondary schools in Nigeria today have guidance counselors who should render such services. Following the shortage of the experts, ordinary teachers who attempt to play the role do it in the wrong ways because they adopt unscientific approaches.
- (e) Peer group influence:** In many cases, members of adolescence peers usually oppose the adjustment strategies meant for their colleagues. This agrees with the observation of Denga, (2003) that adolescents obey the code of conducts introduced by their peers more than those instituted by their parents or teachers.
- (f) Influence of information communication technology:** The advent of information communication technology, though has helped to bring the whole world closer to people, there are many situations where it does more harm than good. For instance, students devote most of the time they should use for their studies after school watching games, immoral films, musicians and others. In support of the impact of this ugly trend, Anyebe and Anyebe in Denga and Ekoja (2008) remarked that although information technology has enormous benefits towards enhancing students learning, it is not without its negative influence on the educational system including making students to engage in programmes that rob them of chances for gainful academic work.

### **Conclusion**

The poor performances of students in Senior Secondary School Certificate examinations in recent times is very much annoying considering the huge amounts of money which parents invest on the education of their children. It is clear from the discussions by this paper that students' poor performances stem from their disruptive behaviours which arise from developmental changes that occur in them in different aspects. In line with this circumstance, there is need to seek services of Guidance Counselors who will adopt relevant adjustment strategies that will help secondary school adolescents to focus properly on their studies so as to achieve well in school certificate examinations (WAEC and NECO)

### **Recommendations**

Based on the discussions of this paper and the conclusion that follows, the following recommendations are given:

(1) Secondary school adolescents should be properly counseled to understand that the physical characteristics which they usually undergo are mere developmental changes some of which are temporary whereas others will remain as proves of maturity. This understanding will help to dispel worries which usually rub the students the zeal to face school work seriously.

Allied to the counseling service of helping the students to understand the reason for their physical changes and how to get about them, school authorities should assist them to always channel the excessive energies that accompany their physical development to other useful avenues instead of venting them out towards behaviours that are unlawful.

(2) Pertaining to mental, social and emotional aspects, school authorities should understand that behavioural problems in those dimensions are usually psychologically induced. For that reason, they should always apply caution in the type of punishment they administer for the students disruptive behaviours especially where the punishments involve suspension and expulsion which have the flaws of retarding or halting academic progress.

(3) For the increased mental abilities of adolescent students, school authorities should also assist them to direct their abilities towards academic benefits such as debates, drama, essay competition, quizzes, riddles and jokes.

(4) Adolescent students also need to be properly counseled on the dangers inherent in excessive alcohol and drug in take in the normal functioning of the brain. They should also be made to realize the devastating effects of HIV/AIDs on the lives of individuals and academic endeavours as well.

(5) The content of the school curriculum including curricular and extra-curricular activities, learning resources and teaching methods should be adequate so that students will be induced to learn with devotedness instead of resorting to unruly behaviours that are known to be detrimental to high academic achievement.

(6) As peer group influence also contributes in generating adolescent social problems like smoking, drinking, sexual acts and disobedient to family and societal codes of conducts, students during that stage should be made to understand the consequences of joining bad companies or sticking to their unconventional rules.

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