Strategies for Coping with Discouragements among In-School Adolescents in Nigeria

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Abstract
This paper suggested strategies that Nigeria in-school adolescents could use to overcome discouragement that threatens their academic progress and has the capability of jeopardizing their future. In this paper, the term in-school adolescent was explained and reasons why discouragement is bad such as the termination of academic progress among others were highlighted. The paper further examined signs of discouragement that in-school adolescents could manifest to include aloofness, loss of interest in friends and group activities, frequent complains and criticisms about self and others, fault finding and absent mindedness. As the paper progressed, factors that could cause discouragement among in-school adolescents were highlighted. Some of such factors that this paper identified included: repeated failures in academics, childhood abuse, un-met needs as well as ill-health and fatigue. To cope with discouragement, the paper concluded by suggesting that in-school adolescents could encourage themselves in the Lord, refuse to be discouraged since discouragement is a choice, resist to be alone by making good and responsible friends as well as trying new approaches as it is likely that the individual might be doing the right thing the wrong way.

Keywords: In-school Adolescents, Discouragement, Consequences, Causes, Signs,

Review Paper

Introduction
Discouragement refers to a feeling that one is no longer having the confidence or enthusiasm to do something (Hornby, 2000). Confidence, enthusiasm or will power is the propeller that drives action and the grease that oils the wheels of every successful life endeavors. The moment one begins to lose confidence or the will power to continue on a project, efforts begin to dwindle and possibly extinguish if the source of discouragement is allowed to persist. The pain about yielding to discouragement is that the individual knows that what he/she is doing or about to do is good and worthwhile but he/she is hesitant to either continue or begin it. Discouragement is dissatisfaction with the past, distaste for the present and distrust of the future (Bible.org, undated) and this can be disastrous to whoever that finds him/herself in this condition.

Discouragement is universal (The Christian Broadcasting Network, 2016, Parker, undated and Taylor, 2016). No human being, no matter the class has immunity against discouragement, whether the individual is rich or poor, educated or illiterate, black or white, leader or subject. Religion does not really matter in matters of discouragement as people of high or low faith are affected. Adults as well as youths or adolescents occasionally get discouraged. It is therefore, not an abnormality to feel discouraged occasionally. What is
rather abnormal is when the individual allows him/her self to be discouraged so much that a viable project embarked upon be aborted or terminated.

Adolescents are the individuals within the growth period of childhood and adulthood (Omede and Odiba, 2000; Merriam-Weber Dictionary, undated and Free Dictionary, undated). They are individuals that have evidently left the childhood stage characteristically but yet to become grown adults too characteristically. Many psychologists refer to this period as abeyance in view of the fact that there are no much officially defined policies to guide this stage of development. The adolescents themselves are sometimes confused because of certain feelings in their growth characteristics that are alien to their bodies and cognitive comprehensibility. These adolescents sometimes get confused because socially they cannot integrate properly with both the children and the adults. The children refer to them as adults while the adults refer to them as children. What can be more confusing and discouraging? Growth and development (biological, social and cognitive) are said to be most rapid at this stage as developmental psychologists noted. This stage corresponds to the formal operational stage of the Piagetian theory of intellectual or cognitive development. The biological, social or cognitive changes and restructuring that take place at this stage of adolescence are capable of living the adolescent in great confusion and discouragement if not properly guided and guarded.

Adolescents undoubtedly, face a lot of discouragements in life endeavors and particularly in their efforts to develop themselves educationally. The in-school adolescents are those in between the onset of puberty to age eighteen years (12-18) that are in schools developing their educational careers. Most adolescents at this stage with normal development should be at the junior and senior secondary school levels while those with special growth case could be at the primary or tertiary education levels. The purview of this paper is the adolescents in schools, the level of education notwithstanding.

There are many things inherent in the school system added to some external restrictions that could predispose the in-school adolescent to abort his/her educational pursuit or to manage to graduate with weak result. There are provable evidences that in-school adolescents face discouragements and get dissatisfied with life endeavors. The sizable numbers of in-school adolescents that recklessly abuse drugs, who are alcoholics, practice cultism, engage in examination malpractices, lose interests in studies, who are truants and who occasionally, spearhead schools and community riots as well as volunteering as political thugs and social touts are indicatives of discouragements and frustrations. Evidence of discouragement among in-school adolescents also reflect in poor academic performance, low grades and forceful or willful withdrawal from an academic program or school. The effect of discouragements on the in-school adolescents is bad not only to the individual adolescent but the Nigeria society in general. If the adolescents are seen as the future leaders, then they are to be helped by exposing them to strategies that could help them overcome discouragements as students and probably in other life endeavors and this is what this paper attempted at.

**Why is discouragement bad for the in-school adolescents?**

When an in-school adolescent allows him/herself to be discouraged to discontinue his/her educational pursuit or other viable and useful projects due to some seemingly insurmountable inhibitions or challenges, what it could mean is that:
1. The adolescent in question is prevented from actualizing his/her potentials. He/she has permitted that his/her academic progress should be terminated. Obstacles are meant to be stepping stones. An adolescent that aborts his/her educational career stands to regret it tomorrow and it might be too late then to redeem the error. In addition, if the adolescent manages to graduate but with a weak result, it is good but not very good as the adolescent could be sure to meet further discouragement or frustrations especially now that the world is full of competition, a world that has no attention now for mediocrity. It is advisable to be the better and best of what one wants to become professionally.

2. In the life of the adolescent, the devil is winning over God. God forbid it! To be educated is good as it could unlock the keys to a glorious future. It is God’s plan that His people grow in knowledge. Anything that is contrary to this must be resisted. Education or training brings out the best potential in an individual.

3. The individual stands the risk of exposure to sicknesses and diseases if feelings of discouragements are permitted over time. Feelings of discouragements could sometimes result in anxiety, loneliness and insomnia and these have strong telling effects on one’s health. When an adolescent cannot think healthy to act healthy, frustrations and discouragements are sure to deepen and the consequences could be grievously demoralizing.

4. The adolescent could get to a level of thinking suicide in some extreme cases. When an adolescent cannot find any good reason to live, when he/she sees him/herself as a failure and life gets so sour and distasteful, if he/she cannot find meaning or fulfillment in life, he/she might not delay to terminate his/her life. Many of these frustrated and discouraged in-school adolescents are used as suicide bombers wasting their lives and some of those of the society because of their hatred for self and the society. The “Boko Haram” insurgency in Nigeria uses many youths and adolescents as suicide bombers.

5. The individual adolescent could doubt the person of God. Many questions will begin to arise. Does God really love me? Does He really answer prayers? If He does, why is my case different? These questions suggest that the adolescent is in doubt of the love of God. And when he/she cannot reason out these questions positively, he/she gets gradually drifted from God and so become hatchery for conceived evils.

What are the signs of discouragements in an in-school adolescent?

When an in-school adolescent begins to suddenly and consistently manifest some of the following observable characteristics, he/she is supposed to be assisted by friends, mates or the teachers as well as the school trained counselor.

1. Aloofness: When the individual suddenly begins to standoffish, avoiding friends, groups of people, religious fellowship and even classroom lessons on flimsy excuses, he/she is on the pathway to discouragement and should be assisted to come off it.

2. Frequent complains and criticisms about self and others: He/she is found to always be criticizing the teacher, the subject and even the topic of the day baselessly.

3. Unhealthy comparison: He/she sometimes compares him/herself with others and always rating him/herself lower.

4. Fault finding: There is nothing anybody does that he/she accepts to be correct or good. Finds fault with his/her friends, teachers and even religious leaders. He/she finds fault with him/herself. They are sometimes very clumsy as they write and cancel what they write many times over.
5. Absentmindedness: Their attention strays. They occasionally jerk to attention when people engage them in discussions.
6. Repeated hisses and sighs: These are signs of exhaustions and that they are distasteful with lives and their surroundings.

**What are the causes of discouragements among in-school adolescents in Nigeria?**

Factors that predispose any individual to discouragement could equally adequately predispose in-school adolescents to discouragement if such factors are left unchecked in schools. Discouragement according to The Christian Broadcasting Network (CBN) (2016) is a disease that is unique to human beings, and it’s universal. Adolescents are human beings and so location notwithstanding, they are not immune to discouragements. Although, according to Taylor (2016) discouragement is a condition of the mind and not one of outside circumstances, it should be noted that there are some external causatives that trigger that state of the mind which the CBN (2016), Slide Serves (2016), Church Leaders (undated) and Parker (undated) identified to include fatigue, frustration, failure and fear. These and other factors are discussed in this paper as each factor is examined in relation to the in-school adolescents in Nigeria thus:

1. **Repeated failures in academics**: When a schooling adolescent is confronted with repeated failures in a particular subject of study, or end of term semester or sessions examinations or in any of the qualifying examinations such as the Senior Secondary School Certificate Examination (SSCE), Unified Tertiary Matriculation Examination (UTME) or the prescribed post-UTME that are bases for qualifications and selections of candidates into the tertiary institutions in Nigeria, discouragements are bound to set in. The affected student will lose the desire and motivation to continue writing these examinations or device other means of passing these examinations with consequences that might be disastrous. Some in the process had enlisted into cultism, armed robbers and other illicit gangs for escapism.

2. **Repeated corrections and criticisms that are not constructive**: When a teacher or parents and those who are significant to the adolescent repeatedly disapprove of what the adolescent thought to be good, it could predispose him/her to discouragement that could permanently damage his/her personality. The individual could lack courage to be independent and to take initiatives.

3. **Absence of appreciation**: When this does not come from the teacher to the learner, from parents to their children-when feats that deserve commendations are achieved, chances are that such learners or children could suffer discouragement and may not have the courage to embark on similar ventures when opportunities recur. The role that positive reinforcements play in strengthening good performance had been emphasized repeatedly by psychologists. But what is obvious among many teachers and parents is that they praise less good efforts of their students and children and punish more in antithesis, their errors and mistakes. When corrections and criticisms become frequent, it is capable of breeding feelings of inferiority in the learner who erroneously would think that he/she would not estimate to anything good in life and so could lag behind school mates or peers.

4. **Uncomfortable classes, hostels and general school environments**: These could predispose the in-school adolescents to discouragements. Like bad working conditions or tools, poor and uncomfortable learning environment could be frustrating, stressful to the learner and could ultimately lead to discouragement and poor achievement in learning.
5. Fatigue: According to CBN (2016), when one is physically or emotionally exhausted, one becomes a prime candidate to be infected with discouragement. According to CBN, one’s defenses are lowered and things can seem bleaker than they really are. Things that could predispose in-school adolescents in Nigeria to physical, emotional and mental exhaustions are countless. Examples of such are poor school environments due to absence or inadequate basic infrastructures that could make learning stressful, hunger occasioned by irregular payment of salaries to parents of these in-school adolescents who are government workers, crowded school time table and activities as well as sudden loss of parents, breadwinners or caregivers and the incessant notorious activities of terrorists of late targeted at schools, and closure of schools due to frequent industrial actions by Nigeria Union of Teachers (NUT) and Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) as well as Colleges of Education Academic Staff Union (COEASU) and Academic Staff Union of Polytechnics (ASUP). All these factors put pressure on the in-school adolescents and could make them to be discouraged to abort their educational pursuits or manage to finish the program with weak grades.

6. Fear: Fear is behind more discouragements than we’d like to admit (CBN, 2016). According to CBN, this could be the fear of criticism (What will they think?), the fear of responsibility (What if I can’t handle this?); and the fear of failure (What if I blow it?) and that these can cause a major onset of blues. These categories of fears sometimes cross and dominate the minds of many in-school adolescents resulting in low or poor achievements, unnecessary expressions of angers, rationalization, and hatred as mechanisms of defense.

7. Ill-health: Protracted ill-health is another factor that could predispose some in-school adolescents to discouragements and poor performance in academics. Sicknesses and diseases that recur or defy treatments could leave the in-school adolescent disorganized, anxious and generally disillusioned with life and so could lack the courage to face life squarely. Related to this is sudden disability occasioned by man-made or natural disasters that could leave the adolescent temporarily or permanently impaired with associated psychological and emotional consequences.

8. Un-met needs: The inability of the in-school adolescent to meet some of the basic needs of life and those that relate to his/her academic needs can predispose them to frustration and discouragement. Inability to pay school fees as at when due, feed adequately and well, buy relevant school materials could breed discouragement in an adolescent particularly if his/her friends seem to live more affluent.

9. What the adolescent hears, sees or says: What one hears from friends, the media, teachers and significant others as well as what one sees within the school environment remote and immediate and what one continually says to oneself have strong influence on one undoubtedly. “Death and life are in the power of the tongue: and they that love it shall eat the fruit thereof” (Prov.18:21, KJV). The eyes, the ears and the mouth are the three main gates to one’s spirit and soul and so what one does with them really matters. If one constantly lives near negative people and constantly listens to negative thoughts and complaining, one is going to be infested by it (Parker, undated).

10. Childhood abuse: A child who was grossly abused or molested sexually or exposed to child labor will grow with mal-formed personality if not helped. Several of such abused children are in schools today (Meyer, 2006). Such children always live with fear and guilt putting their minds on the past when it should have been on the future (Meyer, 2006).
All these causatives could have telling effects on the adolescent’s academic achievement and social relationships. To help them become happy individuals, they ought to be exposed to strategies that could help them out of this situation.

**Strategies for coping with discouragement as in-school adolescents**

Discouragement is universal and it has a grievous effect on achievement. No matter the negative effects on people, discouragement is curable. Those that have succeeded in curing discouragement are those according to Parker (undated) that have discouragement and not discouragement having them. The following strategies are therefore, suggested to alleviate discouragement among in-school adolescents:

1. **Encouraging one’s self in the Lord:** Like the biblical David encouraged himself in the Lord (1 Sam. 30:1-6), it is suggested that the adolescent turns to God to receive encouragement and for a direction on what steps to take next. The adolescent is advised to read the word of God to find succor and solution and then pray for strength to overcome the source of the discouragement. Receiving God’s unconditional love is the beginning of all emotional healing (Meyer, 2006). Establish a relationship with God through His son the Lord Jesus Christ. “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths (Prov. 3: 5-6). Hooking to God is capable of solving the problems of inferiority complex, forgiving one’s self and others as well as receiving the spiritual help to whether through the knocks and bumps of life.

2. **Refusing to give up:** The adolescent is advised to keep trying and never to give up as “quitter never wins”. What is called failure may be a learning process. It is good to learn from Thomas Edison who made the incandescent light bulb. People said he failed about 1000 times. But against what people called failure, Thomas Edison saw it to be 1000 ways he successfully discovered how a light bulb could not be made. Insist on finding the good in every situation (Slide Serve, 2016). Obstacles are to be seen as stepping stones. Develop a positive outlook on life because outlook determines outcome (Slide Serve, 2016).

3. **Taking charge of one’s sense organs particularly the eyes, ears, and mouth or tongue:** The adolescent is advised to screen what he/she sees and hears and then be careful with what he/she says using the tongue. An adolescent that is facing discouragement should be careful with who he/she listens to as well as watching those who come as friends. Parker (undated) noted that if one constantly lives near negative people and constantly listens to their negative thoughts and complaining, one would be infested by it.

4. **Resisting to be alone:** The adolescent is advised to enjoy and keep fellowshipping with course or classmates, peers and religious groups. Adolescent that is facing discouragement is advised to take initiative to be a friend and then getting him/herself into a safe small group or see a counsellor (Church Leaders, undated). Chances are that certain group behaviors or advise either advertently or inadvertently could provide a solution.

5. **Taking responsibility for one’s discouragement:** Good to avoid bulk passing. Nobody except one’s self that is responsible for one’s discouragement and therefore before anybody comes around for encouragement the individual adolescent is advised to encourage him/herself.
6. **Refusing to be discouraged:** Discouragement is a choice. Do what is right in spite of one’s feelings because no feelings last forever (CBN, 2016).

7. **Observing the principle of Sabbath:** Stress is one of the causes of discouragement. Therefore, take rest or break periodically. One will then return refreshed. Sticking to studies without making time to rest can be stressful and reduces performance with discouragement as the outcome.

8. **Developing new approaches:** Repeated failure is one of the causes of discouragement. That one is failing may not mean that one is doing the wrong thing but the right thing the wrong way (CBN, 2016). This is why it is advisable to try new methods or approaches.

9. **Being in good health:** Good health is a function of many variables such as diet, rest and exercise. As much as it is possible, in-school adolescents are advised to keep healthy by ensuring that they eat right, rest as at when due and exercise their bodies as much as it is possible. Healthful habits and environments are to be kept and maintained as good health is cardinal to academic success. In addition, to promote healthful living, in-school adolescents are advised to be merry and cheerful for a merry heart is like a medicine (Prov. 4:22).

10. **Meeting the financial needs of the in-school adolescents:** To solve the problem of unmet needs, parents are encouraged to step up their efforts in promptly paying their children’s school fees and leaving some amounts of money to them for their daily upkeep minimally. The government of Nigeria should be sensitive to family responsibilities by paying salaries and other entitlements of workers and retirees promptly as well as providing scholarship to her students at the tertiary level of the nation’s educational system.

11. **Encouraging and always rewarding learners for good scholarship:** Teachers are advised to de-emphasize criticisms, praise and approbate a student’s good efforts and correct them in love where they may be wrong. When a learner knows that he/she is been loved by his/her teacher, it could build confidence into him/her as well as trust, feeling of superiority and acceptance that positively correlates to achievement.

**Conclusion**

Adolescents of this century face many discouraging challenges in Nigeria and virtually in other countries of the world. These challenges are capable of ruining their entire life endeavors as many of them abort their educational development or manage to graduate with poor grades while some drift to cultism, armed robbery, kidnapping, and other social, economic and education related crimes such as examination malpractices and certificate racketeering. The impact of discouragement can be great on any individual and more particularly the in-school adolescents who are undergoing growth and development processes. In spite of the deathly effects of discouragement, it is however, curable. Discouragement can be overcome. How discouragement could be overcome by in-school adolescents so that they could become fulfilled and actualize in their great potentials as would-be leaders was what this paper suggested.

**References**

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**Biography**

Jacob Omede (Ph.D) is a lecturer in the Department of Educational Foundations, Kogi State University, Anyigba, Nigeria. He obtained the Nigeria Certificate in Education (NCE) in 1988. First, second and third degrees were obtained from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka in 1995, 2004 and 2009 respectively. His area of research interest is Adolescent Psychology.