Psychotrauma and literacy of the adolescent internally displaced people (IDPS) in Nigeria: implications for redefining content area literacy

[1]Abiola MO., [2]Abiola T.

[1]Unilorin Secondary School, Ilorin, Kwara State, Nigeria, [2]Medical Services Unit, Federal Neuropsychiatric Hospital, Barnawa-Kaduna, Nigeria.

Corresponding author:

Abiola MO., Unilorin Secondary School, Ilorin, Nigeria. Email:

abiola_muyideen@yahoo.com

Abstract

Introduction/Methodology: By its very nature, illiteracy could lead to insecurity that could be further worsened by psychotrauma anywhere in the world.. Family, social, economic, political and other aspects of human security will tend to remain at stake in Nigeria if literacy is not adequately enhanced among adolescents in Nigeria, most especially among the Internally Displaced People (IDPs).

Results: The review first identified adolescent IDPs literacy major needs as inability to attend school and have access to educational materials and scholarship. It also discussed how the literacy needs could be acquired, enhanced and utilized as an instrument to overcome the mind wounds which affect their overall wellbeing. This entailed literacy processes that motivate and engage the adolescent IDPs, including strategic teaching and learning in terms of focused reading and writing structured to inculcate leadership qualities.

Conclusion: It was concluded that the framework that guided the study be employed in overcoming the three major literacy problems (educational, emotional, and health-related) that IDPs face at their respective camps. It was however recommended that content area teachers must have an extensive knowledge base and develop strategies to facilitate the reintegration of the adolescent IDPs back into their community for personal growth and national development.

Keywords: Literacy needs, Adolescent literacy, Content area literacy, Adolescent IDPs, Psychotrauma

Introduction

Psychotrauma is a compound word whose meaning is an offshoot of the two root words "psycho" and "trauma", just like classroom from "class" and "room" whose meaning is slightly different from its roots. "Psycho-" refers to mind or mental[1] while "trauma" is an extremely distressing experience that causes severe emotional shock and may have long-lasting psychological effects. [2] Therefore, "psychotrauma" is a mind wound that affects the overall wellbeing of an individual's life.[3] Psychotrauma occurs when an individual experienced a traumatic event, which may involve witnessing someone's actual death or personally experiencing serious physical injury, assault,

rape and sexual abuse, being held as a hostage, or a threat to physical or psychological integrity.[4] In Nigeria, terrorism, reprisal attacks by the Nigeria armed forces, communal clashes, militancy, kidnapping, Ebola-cum-lassa fever outbreak, natural tragedy such as flood, are some of the traumatic events that have been a serious source of worry, recently. [3] This has led to the astronomical rise in the numbers of displaced people – women and children being the highest hit.[4]

Internally displaced people are "persons or groups of persons who have been forced or obliged to flee or to leave their homes or places of habitual residence in particular as a result of or in order to avoid the effects of armed conflict, situations of generalised violence, violations of human rights or natural or human-made disasters, and who have not crossed an internationally recognised state border."[4] The 2014 Global Overview reported that Nigeria has the highest number of IDPs in Africa. On a global scale, Nigeria, having a total of 3.3 million IDPs, is only ranked behind Syria with 6.5 million IDPs and Colombia with 5.7 million IDPs – women and children being the highest hit.[4]

Problems Faced by Internally Displaced Adolescents

Three major problems (i. e. educational, emotional, and health-related) are faced by the internally displaced adolescents during their stay at their various camps.[5] Among these problems, education was rated as the highest by the respondents. The educational problems encountered by the respondents include their inability to attend school activities or educational programmes, inability to access scholarship opportunity while in camps, and inability to access educational materials. Similarly, among African Refugees in Oru Camp, Nigeria, educational problem was found to be the most prominent.[6] A report has it that the non-provision of alternative educational opportunity for school-age individuals that constituted the larger proportion of IDPs could be responsible for that outcome.[5] In 2009, the Norwegian Refugee Council maintained that the longer the adolescents stay in camp, the more they become worried over their educational aspiration.[7]

Constant feelings of unhappiness, memory of fearful events, frequent nightmare, and negative self-concept are some of the myriad of challenges that constituted the emotional problems of adolescent IDPs in the Jos

Camp.[5] Corroboratively, psycho-social problem was significantly noticed among African Refugees in Oru Camp.[6]

Adolescence and Adolescent Literacy

Adolescence – the period lasting from approximately age 10 to 19 – is characterised by many socio-emotional changes.[8] It is a transition between childhood and adulthood which leads to rapidly changing behaviours, identity disturbances and strong emotions. Although these characteristics can frustrate or confuse parents, they are developmentally normal and a natural part of an adolescent's growth. However, antisocial behaviour in adolescents is a serious problem that can lead to increased instances of juvenile delinquency. Although professional intervention is often necessary, several important steps could be taken to help circumvent juvenile delinquency by parents who are worried about antisocial behaviour in their children.[9]

Critical to adolescent development and well-being is literacy. Literate adolescents are those who can use writing, reading, speaking, listening, and thinking skills to learn what they need to learn and demonstrate that learning to others who wish to know.[9,10] Adolescent literacy is the ability to read, write, understand and interpret, as well as discuss multiple texts across multiple contexts.[12] This explains why adolescent literacy is more than an emphasis on reading comprehension.[13-15] It involves equipping adolescents with an expansive spectrum of erudition and skills, including solving problems creatively, finding and critically evaluating information and communicating effectually.[16]

Adolescent literacy is an all-encompassing idea which includes other academic literacies such as information literacy, technological literacy, mathematical literacy, and scientific literacy. These literacy experiences may include the use of traditional print materials, the Internet, social media, instant messaging, texting, and video games, all of which can be used as tools for understanding academic content as well as forming social relationships.[12] It is expected that the 21st century adolescents will be able to read a variety of texts including, but not limited to, traditional print text and digital (multimodal) text; author words and images in fixed domains as well as multimodal settings; talk about a variety of texts with others, including teachers, peers, members of their own communities, and the larger world population; interact with text in discipline-

specific ways within and across all subjects inclusive of, but not limited to electives, career and technical education and visual and performing arts.

IDPs have many opportunities to work with print and non-print materials to make meaning and build relationships in their academic and social worlds while they are still in camp. Understanding how best to support these learners' literacy development is essential. To do this, internally displaced adolescents need access to engaging and motivating content and instruction to support their continued development. Areas to consider include the following: provide opportunities for internally displaced adolescents to work with text that is inclusive of print and non-print materials; offer web-based learning experiences; implement multiple assessment methods that demonstrate students' strengths as well as needs; expand the focus on disciplinary literacies; increase the number of early childhood, basic and senior secondary school literacy specialists; offer access to relevant resources; provide appropriate professional development for educators.[12]

For content-area teachers to meaningfully and effectively address the inherent challenge of developing academic literacy habits and skills while deepening content area learning, basic and senior secondary school teachers must have an extensive knowledge base and a set of promising strategies to employ. Meltzer's Adolescent Literacy Support Framework goes along to investigate what adolescent literacy development might look like within the context of internally displaced adolescent educational reform.[10] That framework describes four components that the adolescent literacy literature consistently references as key to helping all adolescents develop literacy across the academic content areas. Those four components — motivation and engagement for literacy, literacy strategies for teaching and learning, paying attention to the reading and writing demands of each content area, and structures and leadership — each then subdivided into three to five practices.

A.   Motivation and Engagement for Literacy

    i. Making connections to students' lives

    ii. Creating responsive classrooms

    iii. Having students interact with each other and with text

B.   Literacy Strategies for Teaching and Learning

    i.   Teaching through modelling, explicit strategy instruction, and using multiple forms of assessment

    ii.   Emphasising reading and writing

    iii.   Emphasising speaking and listening/viewing

    iv.   Emphasising thinking

    v.   Creating a learner-centred classroom

C.   Paying Attention to the Reading and Writing Demands of each Content Area

    i.   Teaching recognition and analysis skills for discourse features

    ii.   Teaching understanding of text structures

    iii.   Explicitly attending to vocabulary development

D.   Organisational Structures and Leadership

    i.   Meeting the agreed-upon goals for adolescents in that particular community

    ii.   Articulating, communicating, and actualising a vision of literacy as a priority

    iii.   Utilising best practices in the area of systemic educational reform

    iv.   Defining adolescent literacy in relation to the larger educational programme

    v.   Providing ongoing support for teacher professional development

    vi.   Using a clear process for programme review and evaluation.

The Conceptual Framework Guiding the Study

The conceptual framework for the review has been distilled from the theoretical perspectives examined in the literature to serve as a guiding scheme. This is as represented in the figure below:
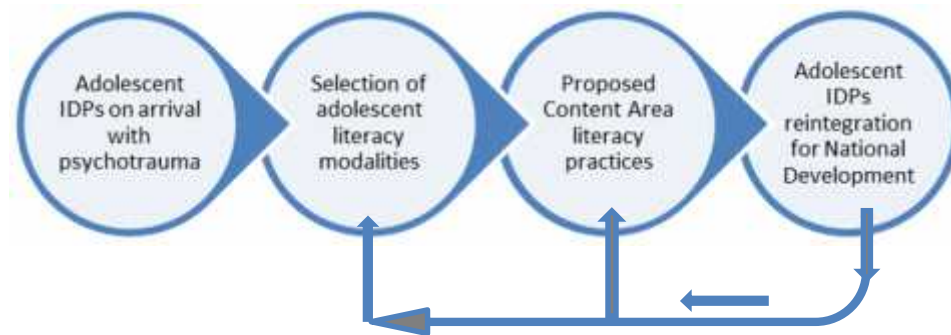
Figure 1: A Reintegration Process Literacy Model of the Adolescent Internally Displaced Persons

The framework reveals that one of the first steps to be taken when an adolescent arrives at an IDP camp should be a screening-cum-assessment process that will help to determine his/her mental, emotional and behavioural issues as well as identify his/her academic strengths and weaknesses. The information discovered at this point can help administrators and teachers develop a plan to serve the new arrival efficiently and well during his/her stay at the camp. The assessment process should include discovering the literacy modalities (i.e. print, e-book, audio) the new arrival would prefer most, since being literate no longer means just learning to read and write traditional print texts only. Moreover, officials from the Ministry of Education should find a way to collaborate with content-area teachers who will be take charge of the teaching-learning process in the various camps. This collaboration must embed literacy instructions in all subjects. This, it is believed, will allow traumatised adolescents to deepen their understanding of the knowledge and skills in content areas which in turn could facilitate their reintegration back into their community for personal growth and national development. The feedback loop indicates that regular assessments to monitor students' progress are important sources of information about how students are doing and what teachers and officials might do to better meet students' needs at the IDP camps.

Conclusion/ Recommendations

In recognition of the serious academic challenges that many adolescent IDPs are

facing because of low levels of literacy achievement, it was thus concluded that the framework which guided the study be employed in overcoming the three major literacy problems (educational, emotional, and health-related ones) internally displaced adolescents are facing at their respective camps. And based on well-grounded educational research and best practice, it was recommended that we employ Salinger's[17] suggestions to enhance literacy needs of adolescent IDPs. These include: strengthening efforts towards engaging and motivating students in general and in all their content-area classes; using a comprehensive approach to assessing students on their arrival and throughout their stay at the IDP camps; integrating explicit instructions into content-area lessons so as to strengthen students' vocabulary and comprehension skills and strategies; selecting materials carefully to reinforce and support student learning as well as provide opportunities for practice; provision of infrastructural changes, teacher support, and leadership that can facilitate literacy instruction.

All relevant stakeholders (the government, officials from various ministries, teachers, among others) must recognise the need to turn this vulnerable age into an age of opportunity in order for adolescents to achieve their potentials, reach their personal goals, and build a better society. This is significant because every adolescent is a unique creation having some angelic, devilish and even animal-like characteristics. When an adolescent sincerely worships Allah (God) and establishes a close relationship with Him, his angelic attributes become predominant. Such an adolescent is like the angles 'who do not disobey God in whatever He has commanded them, but (always) do what they are commanded to do' (Qur'an, At-Tahrim 66:6).[18]

Similarly, content area teachers must come to the realisation that literacy today is both more important and more complex than ever. Therefore, teachers are encouraged to come to the classroom with resources that are relevant, classroom-tested, and above all, practical. This could fuel a lifelong love of reading and writing, particularly with the rise of online communications where one's written words are one's voice.

References

3. Microsoft Encarta. Psycho-. Microsoft Corporation, 2009.
4. Microsoft Encarta. Trauma. Microsoft Corporation, 2009.
5. Abiola T., Tukur J. Psychotrauma and mental health. IMAN Medical Journal, 2015; 1 (1): 1-2.
6. United Nations. Guiding principles on internal displacement, introduction, 1998: para. 2.
7. Durosaro I. A., Ajiboye S. K. Problems and coping strategies of internally displaced adolescents in Jos Metropolis, Nigeria. International Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences, 2011; 1 (20): 256-262.
8. Dada M. F. Problems, counselling needs and coping strategies of African refugees in Nigeria, 2006.
9. Norwegian Refugee Council. Nigeria: no end to internal displacement. Geneva:IDMC global project, 2009.
10. Anderson R. A. 5 characteristics of adolescent social and emotional development. Retrieved on March 22, 2014, from oureverydaylife.com/5-characteristics-of-adolescent-social-and-emotional-development -4433.html., 2014
11. Miller A. Antisocial behaviour & juvenile delinquency. Retrieved on March 22, 2014 from oureverydaylife.com/antisocial-behaviour-juvenile-delinquency-4434.html., 2014
12. Meltzer J. The adolescent literacy support framework. Providence, RI: Northeast and Islands Regional Educational Laboratory at Brown University. Retrieved on August 11, 2014, from http://knowledgeloom.org/adlit, 2001
13. Meltzer J., Hamann E. Meeting the literacy development needs of adolescent English language learners through content-area learning, Part 2: Focus on classroom teaching and learning strategies. Providence, RI: The Education Alliance at Brown University, 2005
14. International Reading Association (IRA). Adolescent literacy (Position statement, Rev. 2012 ed.). Newark, DE: Author. Retrieved 2/12/2015 from http://www.reading.org/Resources/ResourcesbyTopic/Adolescent/Overview.aspx., 2012.
15. Langer J. A. Contexts for adolescent literacy. In L. Christenbury, R. Bomer, P. Smagorinsky (Eds.), Handbook of adolescent literacy research (49-64). New York, London: The Guilford Press, 2009
16. Martin P. Supporting English language learners with low literacy skills in the high school classroom (14-26) Washington, DC: Council of Chief States School Officers. Retrieved September 27, 2014, from www.ccsso.org/content/pdfs/HSReformELLStudentsPerspectives.pdf., 2003.
17. Scarcella R. Some key factors affecting English learners' development of advanced literacy. In M. J. Schleppegrell & M. C. Colombi (Eds.), Developing advanced literacy in first and second languages: Meaning with power (209–226). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum, 2002.
18. UNICEF, Annual report. New York: Division of Communication 3 United Nations Plaza. Retrieved June 1st, 2016 form www.unicef.org/nutrition/files/UNICEF_Annual_Reprot_2011_EN_060112.pdf, 2011
19. Salinger T. Meeting the literacy needs of students in juvenile justice facilities. Washington DC: National Evaluation and Technical Assistance Centre for children and Youths who are Neglected, Delinquent, or at Risk (NDTAC), 2010.
20. Qur'an, At-Tahrim 66:6.

Conflict of interest: Nil