

SOCIO-ECONOMIC IMPLICATIONS OF THE NIGERIAN ECONOMIC RECESSION ON STUDENTS AT NNAMDI AZIKIWE UNIVERSITY, AWKA

Abalogu, Divine Maduka PhD.

Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
Anambra State
08066672095
dm.abalogu@unizik.edu.ng

&

Azor, Cynthia Chinelo

Department of Religion and Human Relations
Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka
azorcynthia2@gmail.com

Abstract

This study explores the socio-economic implications of the Nigerian economic recession on students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The research delves into the effects of the economic downturn on students' academic performance, moral values, social behaviors, and well-being. It highlights how the harsh economic environment has brought issues such as financial hardship, mental health challenges, and engagement in unethical practices, such as examination malpractice, internet fraud, and transactional relationships. The study adopts quantitative research methods. Questions were to a number of students from various faculties within the university, while in-depth interviews were conducted with academic staff, guidance counselors, and student affairs personnel. Secondary data were also drawn from academic journals, reports, and official publications on Nigeria's economic climate and its impacts on the educational sector. The research discovers that the economic recession has significantly affected students' academic focus and moral judgment, pushing many to seek alternative means of survival, often in unethical ways. The study also identifies the role of social pressure, peer influence, and lack of financial support as contributing factors to these behavioral shifts. Based on these findings, the study recommends that the university administration should establish more financial aid schemes and scholarships to assist economically disadvantaged students. There is also a need for counseling services that address both the psychological and financial challenges students face. Furthermore, it advocates for stronger moral and ethical education programs within the curriculum to counter the negative influences that the economic downturn has fostered. In conclusion, while the Nigerian economic recession has posed significant challenges for students, targeted interventions focusing on financial, psychological, and moral support can help mitigate the long-term negative effects on student populations.

Keywords: *Assessing, Socio-Ethical, Repercussions, Nigeria, Economic, Crisis, Students, Nnamdi Azikiwe University Awka.*

Introduction

Nigerian slipped into economic recession in the second quarter of the year 2016 which was seen by many as the worst economic crisis Nigeria has ever faced in the past decades. The current economic recession facing Nigerians has affected virtually every sector of the economy. In recent time, it is a fact that Nigeria economic situation is worsened by the day, as the prices of foodstuff and other basic need have increased to alarming rates. The current economic recession has caused extreme poverty and suffering of the masses; as the cost of living has been highly affected for everyone. Historical evidence abounds on the need to diversify the Nigerian economy beyond oil revenue. The Nigerian Labour Congress (NLC) in 2020, states that over 80% of Nigerians live in poverty due to the economic situation in the country. There is high cost of transportation, lack of portable water, epileptic power supply and poor aggregate infrastructure. Social indices are fast declining as oil revenue continues to fall. The economy is deteriorating in human development indices, the quality of education and healthcare has collapsed, with extreme poverty, acute hunger and starvation prevailing amongst the poorest poor (Agri, Maliafia and Umejiaku, 2017).

At the heart of Nigeria's economic woes lies a confluence of factors including plummeting oil prices, declining revenue, political instability, and institutional inefficiencies. These socio-economic challenges have effects such as: poverty, unemployment, inflation, and widening socio-economic disparities across the country. Amidst these turbulent economic challenges Nigerian universities which includes Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik), is faced with funding shortages, deteriorating infrastructure, and resource constraints, thereby impacting the quality of education and students' academic experiences.

Apart from the above listed challenges, students of Unizik have taken to different forms of lives. According to A. C. Nwodo (personal communication, 15th June, 2024) there is a rise in robbery of lodges, insecurity and stealing of students' properties. These were not common but as a result of the economic recession, they are now the order of the day. On the other hand, it is now common to find students who engage in digital prostitution which is known as hook-up, cybercrime (Yahoo plus) and selling of illegal drugs such as methamphetamine (*mkpurummiri*). C. E. Anyanene (personal communication, 18th June, 2024) states that students engage in all these activities to achieve success and earn a living.

Therefore, this research is aimed at evaluating how the school and government can help in cushioning the socio-economic effects of the Nigeria economic recession on students of Unizik. It will further be an eye opener to highlight the positive and negative consequences of the economic recession on Unizik students. It will evaluate the response of the church and government towards steaming the response of the church and government towards steaming the tide and make recommendations on how students should plan for the future in the midst of the economic recession.

A Brief Survey of Nnamdi Azikiwe University

Okeke (2014) describes that Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka also known as Unizik was formerly Anambra State University of Technology (ASUTECH) established in 1980, with campuses in Enugu, Awka, Onitsha and Abakaliki (now capital of Ebonyi). Following the split of old Anambra state into two states, Enugu and Anambra States in 1991 the Awka campus of the University later became the new Anambra State University, owned by the new Anambra State government. Later it was renamed as Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka and was taken over by the Federal Government during the military regime of Gen. Ibrahim Badamosi Babangida to become a Federal University. Since then Unizik has witnessed various heights of development for academic excellence and has enjoyed relative peace free of riots up to 13 years now. The succession of Unizik Vice Chancellors are as follows: Prof. Festus Aghagbo Nwako (late) the first Vice Chancellor 1991-1998, Prof. Pita Ejiofor 1998-2003, Prof. Ilochi Okafor 2003-2008, Prof. Boniface Egboka 2008-2014, Prof. Ahaneku, 2014-2019, Prof. Charles Esimone 2019 - 2024 and the current Acting Vice Chancellor in the person of Prof, Carol Arinze-Umobi. Unizik has the following Faculties: Faculty of Agriculture, Arts, Basic Medical Sciences, Biosciences, Education, Engineering, Environmental Sciences, Sciences and Technology, Law, Management Sciences, Medicine, Pharmaceutical Sciences, Physical Sciences and Social Sciences. Each of these faculties have a number of departments too numerous to mention.

Evaluation of Nigerian Economic Recession

Nigeria is currently experiencing its worst economic recession which has led to widespread hardship and hunger. Like many nations, Nigeria has experienced economic shocks from beyond its shores in recent years, but there are also issues specific to the country, partly driven by the reforms introduced by President Bola Tinubu when he was sworn into office in May 2023. Mahir (2024) states that one of the most alarming indicators of Nigeria's economic downturn is its surging inflation rate. According to Mahir, recent government data show that inflation soared to a staggering rate of 29.9% in January 2024 marking its highest level since 1996. The primary drivers behind this sharp increase are the rising prices of essential commodities such as food, petrol, gas and non-alcoholic beverages. For some citizens of Nigerian who are living below average, this relentless upward trajectory in prices has eroded purchasing power and heightened financial insecurity. According to Ozili (2020), the economic downturn in Nigeria was triggered by a combination of declining oil price and spillovers from the COVID-19 outbreak which did not only lead to a fall in the demand for oil products but also stopped economic activities from taking place when social distancing policies were enforced. Ogbonna (2024) in his report states how bad the economy is when he states the overall annual inflation which is the average rate at which prices go up is now close to 30% which is the highest figure in nearly three decades.

However, the monthly minimum wage set by the government and which all employers are supposed to observe has not changed since 2019, when it was put at 30,000 naira. According to Adebajo (2024), one of the factor that is pushing up inflation is an issue that Mr Tinubu inherited from his predecessor, Muhammadu Buhari, which included the previous government had asked the country's central bank for short-term loans to cover spending amounting to \$19bn. According to Moghalu (2024) the second mistake that was made was the exchange rate unification and a further effort to float the naira in an environment that was already a wash with naira liquidity, that is to say a loose monetary environment was an error. According to Mahir (2024) while inflation may be the most visible symptom of Nigeria's economic malaise. The root causes are deeply entrenched in structural weaknesses and vulnerability to external shocks. Nigeria's heavy reliance on crude oil exports and its largest foreign exchange earner has long been a source of economic instability.

Yenle (2017) states that it is unfortunate that the educational system in Nigeria is not left out of the heat of the economic recession especially when government owned institutions are shielded under the guise of TSA (treasury single account), which leads to shortfalls in the payments of teachers/lecturers salaries, non-payment of annual increment and accumulated promotion arrears for many years, poor infrastructure, among other factors would definitely cause a lot of harm to the sector. For this reason, majority of parents and stakeholders are afraid of poor quality delivery services in this sector as majority of them cannot afford their children's' school fees. Most especially those parents whose wards attend private schools are left with no option than to withdraw them to public schools.

Shafiq (2010) opines that research on school quality in developing countries was challenging because formal data collection initiatives on schools were typically infrequent. This is a fact about Nigeria because millions of children roam the streets during school hours and both government and parents give little or no attention because they cannot cater for the academic needs of these innocent children.

According to Yenle (2017), It is also evident that the government also suffers from the same crisis as they find it difficult to release grant, payment of workers (teachers) allowances, purchase of books, subscription for journals needed for effective education curriculum delivery, staff training through workshops, conferences and seminar as well as the rate of renovation of dilapidated building. The rate of unemployment in Nigeria is upsetting, the pace of scientific and technological advancement is slowed down, the improvement and solution on environmental problems for the use and convenience of man becomes elusive. All these point to the economic crisis in the nation which needs to be handled fast.

Nigeria is currently undergoing economic recession which implies that key macroeconomic indicator/variables are on the negative side. Similarly, a country is said to be in recession when two consecutive quarters contract or shows negative growth over a period of time. Furthermore, recession is thus defined by Soludo (2009) as consecutive declines in quarterly real gross domestic product and a decline in activity across the economy, lasting longer than three to four months. It is visible in industrial production, employment, real income and wholesale-retail trade. There are various reasons why countries enter into a recession and it all depends on the economic framework of that country. For Nigeria, a recession could be triggered by a dip in government revenues or a drop in consumer spending. A drop in oil prices for example, can trigger a drop in government spending as to the result of government not being able to earn what it used to earn before the drop. In Nigeria where government are the highest spenders in the economy, a drop in Government spending can overturn into a drop in consumer spending which in turns means business cannot invest in products and services. According to Agum (2022), the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of an economy is the value of goods and services produced in an economy like Nigeria. GDP is basically the sum of consumer spending, government spending, Investments and then net exports. It is a good measure of economic activity in an economy and is a benchmark for government budgeting, income and expenditure, investment inflows in and out of an economy, to mention a few, the private sector also relies on the GDP of a country to determine which areas have robust economic activity, thereby helping them decide where to invest.

Analyzing the shocks experienced in the Nigerian economy as a result of economic recession, Ajakaiye and Fakiyesi (2009) assert that, there are concerns regarding how rapidly the global economic crisis penetrated the Nigerian capital market, especially given that there is hardly any thriving domestic mortgage market. The decline of indicators of activities on the Natural Resources Fund (NSF) before the escalation of the crisis on the global scene in July 2008 became a source of concern for many. Emerging facts according to Ajakaiye and Fakiyesi (2009) reveal that the economic recession has been made evident in the capital market through various channels. Foreign portfolio investment withdrawals and withholdings in order to service financial problems at the foreign investors' home, as well as prospects of reduced foreign direct investments, are bound to affect investor confidence in the economic health of Nigeria. Evidence on the foreign portfolio withdrawals show that the total financial inflows to Nigeria between 2007 and 2008 increased by 21%, while that between 2008 and 2009 is predicted to reduce by 38.6%. According to Adams (2013), economic recession is the credit crunch experienced by lending (particularly bank) to institutions which affects businesses that require short and long-term money, including banks' lending to corporate organizations as well as inter-bank and short-term lending. In a country like Nigeria, where mortgages and credit card purchases are not well developed, this credit crunch became manifest in weakened risk assets of banks that had given out loans to some investors to invest in other financial instruments (particularly secondary market purchase and initial public offerings IPOs). In the hope of making quick returns through a quick turnaround of their portfolio. This was what was termed otherwise 'margin lending'. This may also be termed Nigeria's own version of the 'subprime problem'. Resulting in an exploding domestic stock market, stock prices and astounding returns to both the speculators and providers of the margin funds (the banks).

Other factors that have a serious impact on the stock market are what can be called the ‘intensifiers.’ These include policy interpretations by the market, which may have been induced by the slow government initial stand on the economy. This also includes interpretation of announcements, proclamations and rumors by the market. Examples include the proposed recapitalization plan of the stock market players (stock broking firms), as well as rumours on the termination of margin lending by banks. According to Agum (2022), in a globalized world, transactions are carried out in different countries and integrated markets. The world has over the past two decades headed towards liberalization and deregulation, with the goal of integrating world markets. Nigerian markets, although not well integrated into the world market, have been facing serious destabilizing effects since the emergence of the economic recession. Ajakaiye and Fakiyesi (2008) enunciate that as a result of economic recession, the capital market has been shrinking; thereby causing major international hedge funds which have been withdrawn; and the international credit line has faded out of loadable funds for domestic industry.

Socio-Economic Life of Unizik Students Prior to Nigerian Economic Recession

Presence of Security and Peace

Security and peace are fundamental aspects of life within any university community. Security serves as the bedrock upon which a conducive learning and living environment is built. Within the university setting, security encompasses not only physical safety but also emotional well-being and the protection of property. Peace, on the other hand, refers to the absence of conflict and the presence of harmonious interactions among individuals. Universities implement various measures to ensure the security and peace of their communities. According to A. Anthony (personal communication, 15th March, 2024), the university has experienced security prior to the economic recession. Ultimately, the collective efforts of students, faculty, staff, and administrators are essential in maintaining security and peace within the university community. Through collaboration, vigilance, and a shared commitment to upholding safety and harmony, Unizik created an environment where individuals can thrive academically, socially, and personally.

Affordable School Fees/Levies

Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik) has long been recognized for its commitment in providing affordable education to its students. Over the years, the university has implemented policies and initiatives aimed at ensuring that school fees and levies remain within the reach for students from diverse socio-economic backgrounds. According to A. Alisigwe (personal communication, 14th March 2024.), one of the key factors contributing to Nnamdi Azikiwe university affordability is its status as a public university in Nigeria. As a government-funded institution, Nnamdi Azikiwe University receives financial support from the government, allowing it to offer education at subsidized rates compared to private institutions. This governmental support helps keep tuition fees and other levies relatively low, thereby making education accessible to a wider range of students. Moreover, Nnamdi Azikiwe University has established scholarship programs and financial aid schemes to assist students facing financial constraints. These initiatives provide assistance to students who may otherwise struggle to afford the cost of education.

Through these efforts, Nnamdi Azikiwe University has been able to maintain a balance between providing quality education and ensuring affordability for its students. By prioritizing accessibility and inclusivity, the university continues to uphold its mission of empowering individuals through education, regardless of their financial circumstances.

Good Academic Performance of the Students

Academic performance of a student is defined by Okorie (2014) as the learning outcomes of the child. According to Epunam (1999), this includes the knowledge, skills and ideas, acquired and obtained through their course of study within and outside the classroom situation. It is the outcome of determination, hard work, of student in academic pursuit. Pandney (2008) views that academic achievement as the performance of the pupils in the subjects they study in the school. This determines the students’ status in the class. This gives undergraduates an opportunity to develop their talents, improve their grades and prepare for future academic challenges. Kathryn (2010) documents that academic performance refers to a person’s performance in a given academic area (for instance reading or language arts, mathematics, science and other areas of human learning. Academic performance relates to academic subjects a child studies in school and the skills the child is expected to master in each. Academic performance refers to excellence in all academic discipline, in a class as well as extra-curricular activities. It includes excellence in sporting behaviour, it includes excellence in sporting behaviour, confidence, communication skills, and others. Okorie (2014) asserts that academic performance refers to how well a student is accomplishing his tasks and studies. Academic performance in school is evaluated in a number of ways. For regular grading student it demonstrates their knowledge by taking written and oral tests, performing presentations, submission of homework and participating in class activities and discussion. Adesemowo cited by Okorie (2014)

opines that teachers evaluate in the form of assignment, test and examination to describe how well a student has done.

Many undergraduates enjoyed reading and studying while coping with the economy before the recession. This was because they studied under a conducive environment. Some undergraduates before recession were able to purchase text books or materials.

Average Cost of Living

Nnamdi Azikiwe University has historically benefited from a relatively moderate cost of living before the recession. Situated in Awka, Anambra State, the university's location in a semi-urban area contributes to the affordability of living expenses compared to major cities. One factor contributing to the university's average cost of living is the availability of affordable accommodation options both on and off-campus. Furthermore, the cost of essential goods and services, including food, transportation, and utilities, tends to be reasonable in Awka and its surrounding areas. Local markets and eateries offer affordable meals, while public transportation options are accessible and inexpensive, making it easier for students to navigate the city without breaking the bank. Nnamdi Azikiwe University students enjoyed average cost of living which enables students to manage their expenses while pursuing their academic goals. By providing affordable accommodation and access to essential amenities, the university ensures that students can focus on their studies without undue financial burden.

Negative Implication of Nigerian Economic Recession on Unizik Students

Insecurity and Arm Robbery

The current Nigerian economic recession has adverse effects on various aspects of life for students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik). One of the most troubling consequences has been the increase in insecurity and armed robbery, which has a significant negative impact on the safety and well-being of the students. According to A. C. Nwodo (personal communication, 20th April, 2024), this rise in crime is driven by several factors which is related to the economic downturn, including unemployment, financial desperation, and weakened social structures. As the economic crisis persists, many families are plunged into financial instability, and the struggle to meet basic needs becomes more acute. This financial desperation has led some individuals to resort to criminal activities, including armed robbery, as a means of survival. For Unizik students, this heightened risk is particularly alarming. Many students live off-campus in areas that are less secure, making them vulnerable targets for criminals seeking quick financial gains. The increase in armed robbery incidents around the university and its environs has instilled fear and anxiety among the student body. The economic crisis has led to job losses and a lack of employment opportunities, particularly for young people, including those who have recently graduated or are still studying. With limited job prospects, some individuals, particularly those who feel marginalized or hopeless, may turn to crime as an alternative means of income. This shift in behaviour exacerbates the already fragile security situation around Unizik, where students and staff alike are increasingly at risk of being targeted by desperate criminals. According to S. C. Nwakaeze (personal communication 20th May 2024), the economic downturn has also strained social structures and support systems that might otherwise help deter crime. Families that are struggling financially are less able to provide for their children, leading to increased instances of young people being left to fend for themselves. In such situations, peer influence and the lure of quick money through criminal activities can become more enticing. For students at Unizik, this means an increased likelihood of encountering peers who may be involved in or supportive of criminal behavior, further compromising their sense of security.

Moreover, the economic recession has led to inadequate funding for law enforcement and security agencies, impairing their ability to effectively combat crime. Underfunded and overstretched, these agencies often struggle to maintain a visible and proactive presence in communities, including those around Unizik. This lack of effective policing gives criminals opportunity who feel they can operate with relative impunity. Consequently, students feel less protected and more exposed to the dangers of armed robbery and other forms of crime. The psychological impact of increased insecurity cannot be understated. The constant threat of armed robbery and the fear of becoming a victim can lead to significant stress and anxiety among students. This heightened state of alertness and concern for personal safety can detract from their academic focus and university experience. Students may find themselves reluctant to participate in evening classes, study sessions, or social activities that require them to move around campus or the surrounding areas, particularly after dark. This limitation on freedom and movement further undermines their educational and social development. In addition to these direct impacts, the rise in armed robbery and insecurity has implications for the university community. Moreover, the presence of crime can disrupt campus life and create an atmosphere of mistrust and fear, which is detrimental to fostering a healthy and conducive learning environment.

Starvation and Hunger

According to S. C. Okeke (personal communication, 20th May 2024) the current Nigerian economic recession has impacted on the lives of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik) students, with one of the most severe consequences being increased starvation and hunger. This economic downturn has brought financial instability thereby leading to a significant number of students struggling to afford basic necessities including food and other edibles. The effect of this recession on students' feeding and upkeep is not encouraging. One of the primary reasons for the rise in starvation and hunger among Unizik students is the sharp increase in the cost of living. Inflation rates have soared, thereby driving up the prices of food and other essential commodities. Many students who rely on limited allowances from their families find it difficult to make ends meet. The financial support they once received from their families has often dwindled due to the widespread economic hardship affecting households across the country. This situation leaves students with insufficient funds to purchase adequate and nutritious food. The economic recession has led to a significant reduction in employment opportunities for students. Part-time jobs that many students depend on to supplement their income have become scarce. Businesses facing their own financial challenges have cut back on hiring thereby leaving students without the means to earn the money they need to sustain themselves. The loss of these income sources further aggravates the food insecurity situation, forcing students to choose between essential needs such as paying for accommodation, tuition, and food. The nutritional quality of meals available to students has also declined. These low-cost alternatives typically lack the essential vitamins and minerals necessary for maintaining good health. As a result, students' diets have become increasingly imbalanced thereby leading to malnutrition and a host of related health issues. The physical and cognitive effects of poor nutrition have severely impacted students' academic performance and well-being.

According to C. Omeogha (personal communication 14th May, 2024), the economic recession has strained the university's resources and its ability to support students. Financial aid programs and meal subsidies that could help alleviate some of the hunger issues are often underfunded or unable to meet the growing demand. This lack of institutional support exacerbates the situation, thereby leaving many students with no safety net to fall back on. The social stigma associated with food insecurity also prevents some students from seeking help, further deepening their struggles. The impact of hunger on students extends beyond immediate physical health concerns. Chronic hunger and malnutrition can lead to long-term cognitive impairments, thereby reducing students' ability to concentrate, retain information, and perform well academically. The stress and anxiety caused by not knowing where the next meal will come from can also lead to mental health issues, including depression and anxiety. These factors create a vicious cycle where hunger affects academic performance, which in turn can limit future opportunities, perpetuating the cycle of poverty and food insecurity.

Furthermore, the Nigerian economic recession has brought about a severe increase in starvation and hunger among Unizik students. According to F. Collins (personal communication, 30th April, 2024), the rising cost of living, reduced employment opportunities, declining nutritional quality of available food, and inadequate institutional support have all contributed to this dire situation. The physical, cognitive, and emotional toll of hunger is immense, thereby affecting students' academic performance, health, and quality of life. Therefore addressing these challenges requires urgent and comprehensive measures to provide financial support, improve access to nutritious food, and strengthen the safety nets available to students.

Involvement in Corrupt Practices and Crime

According to C. M. Okoye (personal communication 20th May 2024) the current Nigerian economic recession has impacted the lives of students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik), thereby driving a worrying increase on the involvement of corrupt practices and crime among them. This trend has directly tied the economic downturn which includes financial desperation, unemployment, and the erosion of moral and social values. These elements collectively contribute to a deteriorating environment where students are more susceptible to engaging in illegal activities as a means of coping with their financial hardships. Also financial desperation is a primary catalyst for the rise in corrupt practices and crime among Unizik students. The economic recession has led to significant financial instability, with many students struggling to cover basic expenses such as tuition, accommodation, and daily living costs. Faced with mounting pressures and limited legitimate avenues to secure financial support, some students resort to dishonest means to make ends meet. This includes engaging in examination malpractices, forging documents, and participating in various forms of fraud. The immediate need for money often overshadows long-term consequences, leading students down to a path of corruption. Unemployment and underemployment are also contributors to this issue. The economic recession has resulted in a scarcity of job opportunities, both for current students seeking part-time work and recent graduates looking to enter the job market. The lack of employment prospects pushes some students to engage in criminal activities such as internet fraud which is commonly known as Yahoo Yahoo, drug trafficking, and other illegal enterprises. These activities are often seen as quick ways to generate income, albeit through illicit means. The inability to secure honest employment thus becomes a driving force behind students' involvement in crime.

According to F. Collins (personal communication, 30th April, 2024), the economic downturn has also eroded moral and social values, further exacerbating the problem on financial hardships which can lead to a weakening of ethical standards, as the struggle for survival takes precedence over maintaining integrity. Students who might have previously adhered to strong moral principles find themselves compromising their values in the face of economic pressures. This moral erosion is compounded by an environment where corruption is pervasive and often goes unpunished, creating a sense of negative attitude among students. Peer influence plays a role in the involvement of Unizik students in corrupt practices and crime. According to C. E. Anyaene (Personal communication, 14th May 2024), a financial pressures mount, students may observe their peers engaging in illegal activities and achieving apparent success. The desire to keep up with peers or to emulate their seemingly successful lifestyles can lead students to participate in similar illicit activities. This peer-driven cycle of corruption and crime perpetuates itself, as more students are drawn into these practices by the actions and influences of those around them.

Moreover, the weakening of institutional support structures has contributed to the rise in corrupt practices and crime. According to K. Anoruo (personal communication 14th May 2024), the economic crisis has strained the resources of the university and other institutions responsible for student welfare. Financial aid programs, scholarships, and other forms of support are often insufficient to meet the needs of the growing number of students facing economic hardships. The lack of adequate support leaves students feeling abandoned and desperate, thereby making them more susceptible to engaging in corrupt and criminal behaviours as a means of survival. The psychological impact of the economic crisis also cannot be ignored. The stress and anxiety associated with financial instability can impair judgment and decision-making, pushing students towards risky and illegal activities. The constant pressure to secure financial stability can lead to a sense of hopelessness and desperation, driving students to take actions they might otherwise avoid. The current Nigerian economic crisis has significantly increased the involvement of Unizik students in corrupt practices and crime. Financial desperation, unemployment, erosion of moral values, peer influence, and inadequate institutional support all contribute to this troubling trend.

Depression/Emotional Imbalance

The current Nigerian economic crisis has had severe repercussions on the mental health of students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik), leading to widespread depression and emotional imbalance. The financial instability, lack of opportunities, and stress associated with the economic downturn have created an environment where mental health issues are increasingly prevalent among students. These factors collectively contribute to a deteriorating mental health landscape, thereby manifesting in various forms of psychological distress. One of the primary causes of depression and emotional imbalance among Unizik students is the pervasive financial instability. According to I. F. Okonkwo (personal communication 14th May 2024) the economic recession has left many students and their families struggling to meet basic needs, including tuition fees, accommodation, and daily living expenses. This constant financial pressure creates a persistent state of anxiety and worry, as students are uncertain about their ability to continue their education and sustain themselves. The stress of balancing academic responsibilities with financial challenges can become overwhelming, leading to feelings of hopelessness, which are hallmark symptoms of depression.

Moreover, the lack of job opportunities exacerbates this mental health crisis. The economic downturn has resulted in high unemployment rates, thereby leaving many students without the means to support themselves through part-time jobs or secure employment after graduation. The fear of an uncertain future, coupled with the immediate need for financial stability creates a profound sense of insecurity. This uncertainty about their career prospects and the ability to achieve personal and professional goals contributes significantly to emotional imbalance and depressive symptoms. According to S. C. Okeke (personal communication 20th May 2024) the economic recession has also led to a reduction in the quality of life for many students, which negatively impacts their mental well-being. Poor living conditions and inadequate access to health services can exacerbate physical and mental health issues, thereby creating a vicious cycle where physical ailments contribute to emotional distress and vice versa. The struggle to maintain a basic standard of living takes a toll on students' emotional resilience, making them more susceptible to depression. Also, the social implications of the economic recession affect the mental health of Unizik students. The inability to participate in social activities due to financial constraints leads to social isolation, which is a significant risk factor for depression. Students who feel disconnected from their peers and unable to engage in communal experiences may experience feelings of loneliness and inadequacy. This social withdrawal further deepens their emotional imbalance, as they lack the support networks that are vital for coping with stress and adversity. The academic pressures that accompany financial difficulties add another layer of stress for Unizik students. The need to excel academically while grappling with financial instability creates an intense pressure to perform. The fear of academic failure, combined with the stress of managing financial burdens, can lead to burnout and mental exhaustion. This chronic stress can manifest as depression, anxiety, and other

emotional imbalances, severely affecting students' ability to function effectively in their academic and personal lives.

The economic recession also undermines the availability and accessibility of mental health support services. Financial constraints often mean that universities and health institutions are unable to provide adequate mental health resources and counseling services. For students experiencing depression and emotional imbalance, the lack of professional support can exacerbate their conditions, leading to untreated mental health issues that can have long-lasting consequences. According to A. C. Nwodo (personal communication 20th April, 2024) the current Nigerian economic recession has contributed to the rise of depression and emotional imbalance among Unizik students. Financial instability, lack of job opportunities, reduced quality of life, social isolation, academic pressures, and inadequate mental health support collectively create an environment where mental health issues are prevalent. Addressing these challenges requires a comprehensive approach that includes financial support, employment opportunities, accessible mental health services, and efforts to foster a supportive and inclusive university community. Only through these measures can the negative impacts of the economic crisis on student mental health be mitigated.

Lack of Adequate Attention in School

The current Nigerian economic recession has affected students at Nnamdi Azikiwe University (Unizik), significantly thereby contributing to a lack of adequate attention in school. According to I. P. Orajekwu (personal communication, 14th May, 2024), the economic downturn has created numerous financial, social, and emotional challenges that divert students' focus away from their academic responsibilities, thereby resulting in diminished academic performance and engagement. One of the primary ways the economic crisis has impacted students' attention in school is through financial instability. Many students face immense pressure to manage their limited financial resources, often having to balance part-time jobs with their studies to make ends meet. This juggling act leaves them exhausted and distracted, as they must constantly worry about meeting basic needs such as food, accommodation, and tuition fees. The mental burden of financial stress can overwhelm students, making it difficult for them to concentrate on their studies and perform well academically. The economic recession has also led to increased absenteeism among Unizik students. According to S. C. Nwakaeze (personal communication 20th May 2024), financial hardships force some students to miss classes to work or address personal financial issues. Others may lack the funds for transportation or materials necessary for their studies, leading to frequent absences. Missing classes means students fall behind in their coursework, struggle to keep up with the curriculum, and ultimately lose focus and motivation. This cycle of absenteeism and academic disengagement can have long-term negative effects on their educational outcomes.

According to S. C. Mgbemena (personal communication 20th May 2024), this economic recession has caused a significant reduction in the quality of life for many students, directly affecting their ability to concentrate on their studies. The high cost of living has forced students to compromise on essential needs such as nutrition and healthcare. Poor nutrition can lead to physical health problems, which in turn impact cognitive function and academic performance. Students who are hungry or unwell are less likely to be attentive in class, retain information, or participate actively in academic activities. The constant worry about their health and well-being further detracts from their ability to focus on their education. The economic recession has also heightened emotional and psychological stress among students, contributing to their lack of attention in school. The fear of an uncertain future, coupled with the pressures of financial instability, creates a pervasive sense of anxiety and depression. These mental health issues can severely impair students' cognitive abilities, making it difficult for them to concentrate, memorize information, and engage in critical thinking. The emotional toll of dealing with economic hardships can lead to decreased motivation and interest in academic pursuits, resulting in poor academic performance.

Moreover, the social impact of the economic recession cannot be overlooked. Financial constraints limit students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities and social events that are essential for a well-rounded educational experience. Social isolation and a lack of engagement in the university community can lead to feelings of loneliness and detachment. According to C.G. Ezediaro (personal communication 14th May 2024) when students are socially isolated, they are less likely to seek help or support from peers, further hindering their academic success. The absence of a supportive social network exacerbates their inability to focus on their studies. The economic recession has also strained the resources of the university, affecting the quality of education provided. Budget cuts and financial limitations mean that institutions like Unizik may struggle to maintain adequate facilities, hire qualified staff, and provide essential services such as counseling and academic support. The lack of institutional support and resources can lead to a decline in the learning environment, making it more challenging for students to stay focused and motivated. The current Nigerian economic recession has significantly contributed to a lack of adequate attention in school among Unizik students. Financial instability, increased absenteeism,

reduced quality of life, heightened emotional stress, social isolation, and strained institutional resources collectively undermine students' ability to concentrate on their studies. Addressing these challenges requires comprehensive measures, including financial support, mental health services, improved living conditions, and enhanced institutional resources, to ensure that students can maintain their focus and succeed academically despite the economic hardships they face.

High Cost of Living

According to C. Omeogha (personal communication, 14th May 2024) one of the most immediate impacts of the economic recession is the sharp rise in inflation, which has significantly increased the prices of basic necessities. Food, housing, transportation, and other essential services have become more expensive, making it difficult for students to afford them. For example, the cost of groceries has skyrocketed, forcing students to either cut down on their food intake or spend a larger portion of their limited budgets on food. This financial strain can lead to malnutrition and health issues, which further affect students' ability to focus on their studies and maintain their academic performance. Housing costs have also surged as a result of the economic recession. Many students who live off-campus have seen their rent increase substantially, reflecting broader market trends. Those who were already struggling to afford their accommodation now face even greater financial challenges. Some students have been forced to move to less expensive, but potentially less safe or less convenient, areas. This displacement has led to increased transportation costs and added stress, all of which negatively impact students' ability to manage their time and maintain a balanced lifestyle. Transportation costs have risen significantly as well, thereby further exacerbating the financial burden on students. The increase in fuel prices and public transportation fares means that students must allocate more of their budget to commuting to and from the university. For students who rely on daily travel to attend classes, this additional expense can be overwhelming. The higher transportation costs can also limit students' ability to participate in extracurricular activities, internships, or part-time jobs that are crucial for their personal and professional development.

According to C. E. Anyaene (personal communication, 14th May, 2024), the economic recession has also led to increased utility costs, thereby adding another layer of financial pressure. The prices of electricity, water, and other essential utilities have gone up, making it more expensive for students to maintain their living conditions. Reliable access to these utilities is critical for students to study effectively and live comfortably. Frequent power outages and unreliable water supply, combined with higher costs, can create a stressful and challenging living environment, hindering students' academic progress and well-being. Healthcare costs have risen as well, thereby posing a significant challenge for students who need medical attention. The increased cost of medical services and medications means that students may avoid seeking necessary healthcare due to financial constraints. This can lead to untreated health issues, further affecting their academic performance and quality of life. The stress of dealing with health problems without adequate support can also contribute to mental health issues, such as anxiety and depression.

Moreover, the economic recession has reduced the purchasing power of students and their families. With incomes stagnating or declining and prices rising, the ability to afford basic goods and services has diminished. Students who rely on financial support from their families may find that this support is no longer sufficient to cover their needs. This financial gap forces students to make difficult choices, often prioritizing essential expenses over educational materials, such as textbooks and supplies, which are crucial for their academic success. The current Nigerian economic crisis has significantly increased the cost of living for Unizik students, affecting their ability to afford basic necessities, housing, transportation, utilities, and healthcare. This financial strain impacts their health, academic performance, and university experience, thereby creating a challenging environment that requires urgent attention and comprehensive support measures. Addressing these issues is essential to ensure that students can continue their education and achieve their potential despite the economic hardships they face.

Conclusion

This study evaluated the socio-economic implications thereby offering a balanced perspective on the effects of the economic recession. Prior to the recession, Unizik students experienced a relatively secure environment with affordable education, satisfactory academic performance, and moderate living costs. However, the negative implications of the recession include: Increased insecurity and incidents of armed robbery have become more common, driven by financial desperation among students. Food insecurity and hunger have led to malnutrition and health issues, severely affecting students' ability to concentrate on their studies. The economic strain has also pushed some students towards corrupt practices and criminal activities, seeking quick financial solutions. These issues have been exacerbated by mental health challenges, including depression and emotional imbalance, resulting from the stress and uncertainty of the economic situation. The financial strain has further led to a lack of adequate attention to academic pursuits, as students are forced to juggle part-time jobs and other responsibilities to make ends meet. The rising cost of living has made it difficult for students to afford basic necessities, further

impacting their well-being and academic performance. These challenges have underscored the need for targeted interventions to support students during economic downturns. The socio-ethical implications of the Nigerian economic recession on Unizik students are numerous and as such educational institutions should focus on providing practical skills and entrepreneurship training, ensuring students are equipped to handle economic challenges. Government bodies need to implement policies that support students financially, reducing the burden of school fees and living costs. Religious organizations can offer moral and emotional support, helping students develop the resilience needed to navigate economic hardships. Ultimately, the goal is to create a supportive and resilient student community at Unizik, capable of thriving despite economic challenges. By fostering a culture of discipline, financial prudence, and mutual support, Unizik students can navigate the current economic crisis and emerge stronger.

Recommendations

Having seen the limitations of this research, the researchers therefore see the need to make the following recommendations based on the problems of economic recession and its effect on students of Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. Consequent on the above, the researcher recommends the following:

- i. Unizik should establish skill acquisition centers on campus to provide students with practical training in various trades and professions. These centers can offer courses in areas such as information technology, agriculture, craftsmanship, and business management.
- ii. The University, in collaboration with government and non-governmental organizations, should design and implement youth empowerment programs. These programs should include mentorship, leadership training, and workshops focused on personal development and resilience.
- iii. The university should explore avenues for providing financial support to students. This can include increasing the availability of scholarships, grants, and bursaries, as well as creating a student emergency fund for those facing unexpected financial hardships.
- iv. Unizik should enhance its counseling and mental health services by increasing the number of professional counselors, offering regular mental health workshops, and creating peer support groups.
- v. The university should partner with local businesses and organizations to create part-time employment opportunities for students. This can include on-campus jobs, internships, and work-study programs.
- vi. The vice chancellor of Unizik should invest in improving campus security by increasing the number of security personnel, installing surveillance systems, and conducting regular safety drills. Also creating awareness programs on personal safety and crime prevention which can be beneficial.
- vii. The university should collaborate with church and religious organizations to provide transformative teachings and training that emphasize moral values, resilience, and ethical behaviour.

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