



Guidance And Counseling: Panacea For Examination Anxiety Among Adult Learners In Continuing Education Programmes In Rivers State

Agi, W. Comfort¹, Haliru, Aisha² & Adepoju, Rebecca Bola

**Department of Educational Foundations
Rivers State University, Port Harcourt
Comfortagi@gmail.com, Phone No: 08030958193**

ABSTRACT

The study focused on examining the role of guidance and counseling as panacea for examination anxiety among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers state. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1540 respondents comprising of adult learners who have spent a minimum of three years in continuing education programmes organized by tertiary institutions in Rivers state. The sample size of 540 was determined using the stratified random sampling technique. The results of the analyzed data revealed that Guidance and counseling is a veritable tool for curbing examination anxiety among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The findings of the study also indicated that examination anxiety is a serious educational problem since it contributes to academic failure, psychological distress, depression, academic underachievement, and in its worst case suicide among adult learners who are subjected to the compulsory conventional methods of testing in our tertiary institutions. The study recommended that Policies should be developed to put in place new ways of evaluating adult learners in other to minimize the negative consequences of examination anxiety.

Keywords: Examination Anxiety, Adult Learners, Guidance and counseling, Continuing Education.

INTRODUCTION

Anxiety is a health condition that involves fear and nervousness displayed by a person who feels inadequate about a future event. Anxiety, According to the American Psychological Association (2014) is an emotion that presents tension, worry, and physical changes. Viewed from a positive angle, anxiety can help a person become more cautious to avoid danger. It can motivate a student to study hard for an anticipated test. However, in a severe case anxiety can lead to negative results (Holmes & Cassady 2014). Examination has been identified as a major cause of anxiety among various categories of adult learners. The nervousness that runs through the learners mind during and before the actual testing produces anxiety. This form of anxiety can lead to academic failure, insecurity, psychological distress and academic underachievement (Hembree, 1998). Spielberger (2010) conceptualizes examination anxiety as a form of anxiety in which a student expresses fear and nervousness before and during the test due to lack of confidence in their ability to perform well in a test, leading to inability to demonstrate knowledge even though they know the study material. This condition can limit the learner ability to perform to their real level of proficiency leading to lack of confidence and low self-esteem. In a related view, Harpell and Andrews (2013) opined that students who are greatly affected by examination anxiety usually express feelings of helplessness and incompetence, worry and negative thoughts, increased heart rate, feeling nauseated, frequent urination, increased perspiration, cold hands, dry mouth, and muscle spasms. Emotions such as lack of concentration panic and worry may be present. Hope (2010) further posits that

students with examination anxiety will have symptoms like sweating, increase in heartbeat, dizziness, doubt, uneasiness, worry, trembling hands, etc.

Continuing education in Nigeria is an educational endeavor embarked by most adults in order to keep up with the new knowledge required to perform responsibly in a chosen career so as to effectively discharge their social roles as imposed on them by the society. According to Tahir (2000) Continuing Education connotes that subset of adult education that seeks to positively link the needs and aspirations of adult citizens with educational activities, for development of their potentialities and for the socioeconomic and political development of a nation state. In Nigeria presently, the practice of continuing education has been broadened to include the provision of educational activities that will meet the needs of illiterates, the dropout, the underprivileged, educationally disadvantaged, the oppressed, the unserved, different categories of professionals, the down-trodden, and the back ward. Thus, continuing education offers a wide range of training or education to meet the needs of all shades of people. However, at the tertiary level, continuing education exists in most institutions as either centers for continuing education or Directorate of Continuing Education.

In order to establish academic credibility, Assessment through examinations has always played a special role in the implementation of continuing education programmes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. In most cases, conventional methods of assessments are employed in the implementation of these programmes. This means that adults who enroll for these programmes are subjected to class attendance and examinations. According to Osagie (2001) Adult students constitute an increasing segment of students enrolled in continuing education programmes in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. Therefore, the presence of adult students in significant numbers must be recognized as institutions face increased demands to demonstrate their academic credibility and effectiveness. Adult students differ from conventional secondary school leavers in attitudes, goals, learning experiences, and learning styles, consequently, assessment models and methods drawn from programs for traditional students cannot be assumed to have instant applicability to adults. Njoku (2016) recommends that adults need a realistic assessment of academic strengths and weaknesses that reflects the individual's particular constellation of skills. This kind of assessment requires more complex methods than those used with students entering the university directly from secondary school. Ndubaku (2012) opined that the subjection of adult learners to conventional methods of assessment contributes to examination anxiety for these adult learners. This view is supported by Zeidner (1998) who opined that adult learners who have the potential to do well in an examination can be limited by high level of anxiety due to the method of assessment, thereby affecting their educational and career opportunities.

A cursory glance at adult education programmes in our tertiary institutions will show the imperative need of instituting in them well-organized programme of guidance and counseling. According to Okoye (2007) adults learners are sure to face many academic challenges that will require some external help. One of the major objectives of guidance and counseling in educational institutions is to facilitate the adjustment of students in the learning environment, giving adequate guidance with respect to academic challenges. In a related view, Adejumo (2015) suggests that guidance and counseling in an academic environment plays the role of developing within the learners coping mechanisms for self-adjustment. According to Kochhar (2010), professional help from a guardian counselors is needed to enable learners make wise choices to be successful in competitive examinations. In his view, adult learners need to be guided to develop good study habits, prepare for examinations properly and face examinations with confidence. These views suggest that the role of guidance and counseling as a panacea for examination anxiety among learners cannot be over emphasized. It's against this backdrop that the researchers decided to embark on the study to ascertain the role of guidance and counseling as panacea for examination anxiety among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers state.

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of guidance and counseling as panacea for examination anxiety among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers state. Specifically, the study attempted to achieve the following:

1. Identity the symptoms of examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State.

2. Examine the consequences of examination anxiety on the educational achievement of adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State.
3. Ascertain the role of guidance and counselling as panacea for examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State.

The following research questions guided the study

1. What are the symptoms of examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State?
2. What are the consequences of examination anxiety on the educational achievement of adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State?
3. How does guidance and counselling contribute to reduction of examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State?

METHODOLOGY

The study focused on examining the role of guidance and counseling as panacea for examination anxiety among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers state. Three research questions guided the study. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 1540 respondents comprising of adult learners who have spent a minimum of three years in continuing education programmes organized by tertiary institutions in Rivers state. The researchers targeted this population to enable them get firsthand information from adult learners who have a rich reservoir of experience with reference to examination anxiety in continuing education programmes in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The sample size for the study was 540 respondents. The sample size was randomly selected from 300-500 level adult learners enrolled for continuing education programmes in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. The instrument that was used for data collection was a structured questionnaire titled “QGCPEARS” The response option was a 4-point modified Likert scale of strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree (2), and strongly disagree (1). The number of responses obtained was multiplied by the number of weights. The number of responses were added together to obtain the total weight agreement which is divided by the number of respondents to get the mean scores. The decision to accept or reject any item in the questionnaire was based on a criterion mean of 2.5 and above. While any item in the research instrument with less than 2.5 mean score was rejected. For data analysis, mean statistics was used to analyze data on the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Research Question 1: *What are the symptoms of examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State?*

Table 4.1 Mean Response of Adult Learners on Symptoms of Examination Anxiety

| S/N | Statements | Mean | Decision |
|-----|---|-------------|--------------|
| | The following are symptoms Of examination anxiety among adult learners | | |
| 1 | Tension | 3.11 | Agree |
| 2 | Negative Thoughts | 3.04 | Agree |
| 3 | Cold Hands | 2.84 | Agree |
| 4 | Lack of Concentration | 3.18 | Agree |
| 5 | Increased perspiration | 2.96 | Agree |
| | Grand Mean | 3.03 | Agree |

Table 4.1 indicates that respondents agreed with all the items. The grand mean of 3.03 shows that tension, increased perspiration, colds hands, negative thoughts and lack of concentration are all symptoms of examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. This finding is well in line with the views of Harpell and Andrews (2013) who opined that students who are greatly affected by examination anxiety usually express feelings of helplessness and incompetence, worry and negative thoughts, increased heart rate, feeling nauseated, frequent urination, increased perspiration, cold hands, dry mouth, and muscle spasms. Hope (2010) further supports this finding when he posits that students with examination anxiety will have symptoms like sweating, increase in heartbeat, dizziness, doubt, uneasiness, worry, trembling hands etc.

Research Question 2: *What are the consequences of examination anxiety on the educational achievement of adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State?*

Table 4.2: Mean Responses of Adult Learners on the consequences of examination anxiety on the educational achievement of adult learners

| S/N | Statements | Mean | Decision |
|-----|--|-------------|--------------|
| | The following are Consequences of examination anxiety among adult learners | | |
| 6 | Academic failure | 3.31 | Agree |
| 7 | Psychological distress | 3.30 | Agree |
| 8 | Depression | 2.78 | Agree |
| 9 | Academic underachievement | 3.17 | Agree |
| 10 | Suicide | 3.11 | Agree |
| | Grand Mean | 3.13 | Agree |

Table 4.2 shows that respondents agreed with all the items. The grand mean of 3.13 shows that academic failure, psychological distress, depression, academic underachievement, and suicide are all consequences that can result from examination anxiety among adult learners. Holmes & Cassady (2014) supports this finding when they argued that even though examination anxiety can motivate a student to study hard for an anticipated test, it can as well lead to negative results. In a related view, Hembree, (1998) suggests that examination anxiety can lead to academic failure, insecurity, psychological distress and academic underachievement

Research Question 3: *How does guidance and counseling contribute to reduction of examination anxiety among adult learners in continuing education programmes in Rivers State?*

Table 4.3: Mean Response of Male and Female Adult Learners on guidance and counseling as panacea for examination anxiety among adult learners.

| S/N | Statements | Mean | Decision |
|-----|--|-------------|--------------|
| | guidance and counseling contribute to reduction of examination anxiety in the following ways | | |
| 11 | Help learners face examination with confidence | 2.91 | Agree |
| 12 | Help learners develop good study habits | 2.41 | Agree |
| 13 | Facilitate learners adjustment to the learning environment | 3.00 | Agree |
| 14 | Help learners make wise choices to be successful in competitive examination | 3.12 | Agree |
| 15 | Help learners develop coping mechanisms when faced with examination anxiety | 2.78 | Agree |
| | Grand Mean | 2.84 | Agree |

Data on table 4.3 shows that respondents agreed with the entire item. The grand means of 2.84 indicates that guidance and counseling can contribute to reduction of examination anxiety by helping adult learners; develop coping mechanisms when faced with examination anxiety, make wise choices to be successful in competitive examination, face examination with confidence, develop good study habits and adjust to the learning environment. According to okoye (2007), one of the major objectives of guidance and counseling in an educational institution is to facilitate the adjustment of learners in the learning environment, giving adequate guidance with respect to academic challenges. This view is further supported by kochhar (2010) who suggests that professional help from a guardian counselors is needed to enable learners make wise choices to be successful in competitive examinations. In his view, adult learners need to be guided to develop good study habits, prepare for examinations properly and face examinations with confidence. This finding also agrees with Adejumo (2015) who opined that guidance and counseling in an academic environment plays the role of developing within the learners coping mechanisms for self-adjustment.

CONCLUSIONS

This study has shown that examination anxiety exists among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers State. It is a serious educational problem since it contributes to academic failure, psychological distress, depression, academic underachievement, and in its worst case suicide among adult learners who are subjected to the compulsory conventional methods of testing in our tertiary institutions. Guidance and counseling is a veritable tool for curbing examination anxiety among adult learners in tertiary institutions in Rivers State since it can assist adult learners; develop coping mechanisms when faced with examination anxiety, make wise choices to be successful in competitive examination, face examination with confidence, develop good study habits and adjust to the learning environment

RECOMMENDATION

The following recommendations are made based on the findings of the study;

1. The management of tertiary institutions who organizing continuing education programmes for adults must ensure that they institute in them well-organized programmes of guidance and counseling as this can help the clientele get immediate assistance when faced with the challenge of examination anxiety.
2. In designing the educational policy for the nation, the federal ministry of education should ensure that an appropriate assessment method is developed for adult learners who differ from the traditional college students in attitudes, goals, learning experiences, and learning styles.
3. Counselors should device strategies for identifying adult learners with examination anxiety and provide measures that can help them take examinations with ease through counseling techniques such as learning to cope with time limits by equipping them with facts such as attempting simpler questions first before difficult ones.
4. Policies should be developed to put in place new ways of evaluating adult learners in other to minimize the negative consequences of examination anxiety. Such as evaluating them on achievement, strength and weakness in each area without necessarily using grades.

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