

ASSESSMENT OF THE PERCEPTION OF UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES' STUDENTS AS REGARDS THE EFFECT OF ECONOMIC RECESSION ON UNIVERSITY UNDERGRADUATES' MOTIVATION TO LEARNING

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Abstract

The study investigated the effect of the contemporary economic recession on university undergraduates in three selected Universities in Nigeria. A descriptive form of the survey was employed. 727 undergraduates from 300 and 400 levels in the three Universities were sampled using stratified sampling techniques. A 13 items Likert-scale questionnaire titled "Assessment of effects of economic recession on University Undergraduates" with psychometric properties of content validity and reliability index of 0.78 was used for data collection. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions, the findings revealed that economic recession affects university undergraduates' motivation to learning. Students are forced to engage in antisocial behaviour in order to meet needs during the period of economic recession and participate less in extra-curricular activities. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that government should as a matter of urgency address the lingering economic recession as it has an untold effect on undergraduate students learning.

Keywords: Economic Recession, Undergraduates Learning and Nigerian Universities

Introduction

It is no news that the Nigerian Economy is currently facing economic downturn that has greatly impacted all aspect of her national life. The impact of the global financial crisis on the Nigerian economy is multifaceted as it leads to a dwindling of the government revenues, affects the Nigerian currency, decline in capital inflow, capital market downturn, investment by foreign

investors with tightness and possible second-round effects on the balance sheet of banks by increasing provisioning for bad debt and decrease in profitability, weakens the banking sector and fuels unmatched, stock market crash, undermines confidence in the financial sector (Ngowgwugwu, 2011).

According to Komolafe (2016), oil prices have crashed to less than \$ 50 per barrel;

Nigeria's production output has tumbled over 400,000 barrels due to militancy activities in Niger Delta region. Oil production plummeted to 1.69 million barrels per day in the second quarter of 2016, down from 2.11 million barrel per day in the first quarter, with oil-based GDP contracting by 17.5% in quarter two compared to 1.9% in the first quarter. According to the National Bureau of Economic Research (NBER, 2012), a recession is defined as "a significant decline in economic activity spread across the economy, lasting for a period of time, normally visible in real Gross Domestic Product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail sales".

The current economic recession has its toll on educational institutions. Educational assimilation and constructive learning are greatly dependent on economic factors. A decline in economic activities, high rate of unemployment, fall in industrial productivity, low circulation of currency and a visible fall in the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) of Nigeria is sure to have a negative toll on attitudes of undergraduate towards education. It is impossible to overlook the fact that prices of books, laboratory sets, calculators, materials, photocopy, printing and other educational resources increased as the currency value decreased. Prices of all indispensable

educational aids have escalated by 70 to 150% (Sobowale, 2016).

A substantial literature documents the positive association between economic deprivation, and students' psychological distress (Adler & Ostrove, 1999; Marmot & Wilkinson, 1999; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003; Williams & Collins, 1995). Students who experience financial hardship tend to suffer from elevated levels of distress because of greater exposure to chronic and acute stressors, including trouble paying bills, poor diet, poor neighbourhood conditions, and inability to purchase educational materials, among others. Persons with relatively low socioeconomic status tend to confront more chronic and acute stressors compared to their privileged counterparts, and thus, on average, have poor mental health (Miech et al., 1999; Pearlin, Lieberman, Menaghan, & Mullen, 1981; Williams & Collins, 1995). Mental and cognitive responses are largely affected by economic factors. Heckman and Masterov (2004) asserted that children brought up in less favourable condition attain less educationally despite the large financial returns of schooling.

Added to this, Quilty (2016) reported that reduced income and the high cost of goods and services as a result of inflation leads to reduced entertainment, dining, and extracurricular activity expenses. The effect of economic recession on students can be as

bad as tyranny. According to research conducted by the American Alliance for educational excellence (2016), more than 5,000 students drop out of school every school day. That calculates to more than 1 million students every year who do not graduate from high school with their peers. Students who drop out may not enrol again or may not be able to recover from learning gaps after they have dropped out (World Bank 2009a). Without a high school diploma, these individuals are far more likely to spend their lives periodically unemployed, on government assistance, or cycling in and out of the prison system (America Alliance for Excellent Education, 2016).

The current economic recession in Nigeria has its toll on students, families, firms and the nation at large as major changes are made in order to cope (Graetz, 2017). However, these economic and lifestyle changes may have an excruciating effect on individuals, the society and the nation at large. In the face of economic hardship, students in tertiary institutions nationwide have resolved to all sorts to meet end means. As a result, students who find it difficult to pay for transportation would be absent from classrooms and have no means of paying for educational materials which they need. Some of them would have to earn a living by taking part-time jobs that compete with lectures, study, and rest time.

It is logical to think that if this problem persists, it may be difficult for students to obtain a good academic grade. There is also a tendency for an increase in anti-social activities and behavioural problems among undergraduate students inside and outside the campus. This effect of economic hardship on students' performance has drawn the attention of various researchers and scholars (Alaimo, Olson, & Frongilo, 2001; Bergeson, 2006; Jyoti, Frongillo, & Jones, 2005; Rowan, Cohen, & Raudenbush, 2004; Winicki & Jemison, 2003; Mitchell, 2015). A recent research conducted by Kormos and Kiddle, (2015) on 740 students revealed that students facing economic hardship perform below their contemporary in English language examinations. It is, therefore, necessary to assess the possible impact of the sudden economic crisis on students' learning in higher institutions. Hence, this study sought to assess the impact of the ongoing economic recession on undergraduate students.

According to McKinney (2007), the economic recession is a period of general economic decline and is typically accompanied by a drop in the stock market, an increase in unemployment, and a decline in the housing market. National Bureau of Economic Research (2009) defined an economic recession as a significant decline in economic activity spread across the

economy, lasting more than a few months, normally visible in the real gross domestic product (GDP), real income, employment, industrial production and wholesale-retail. A recession is associated with high unemployment, low GDP, and high inflation (McKinney, 2007).

Economic recession spells doom on the generality of the people and the society. The crisis of economic recession in Nigeria has actually led to low-interest rates, but these events have also destroyed jobs, hamstrung economic growth and led to sharp declines in the values of many homes and businesses (Bernanke, 2002). A recession forces the Government to dig deeper into reserves and external borrowing to suffice its expenditure, thus plunging the economy into debts, causing effects such as inflation. Inflation directly boils down to the individual citizen who has to spend more on goods and services as the cost of living escalates (Bradshaw, 2009).

The economic recession in Nigeria has a great effect on every aspect of the country including the educational sector; according to the Nigerian Minister of Education, Mallam Adamu Adamu, students in tertiary institutions attend lectures every day with the trauma that they live under high price transport fares, a high price in materials and reading texts. The prices of books, laboratory sets, calculators, materials, photocopy, printing and other educational

resources climbed when the currency was officially devalued. Prices of all indispensable educational aids have escalated by 70 to 150% (Sobowale, 2016). Iverson and Walberg (2002) revised 18 studies of 5831 school-aged students on a systematic research of educational, psychological and sociological literature. Accordingly, they had concluded that students' ability and achievement are more closely linked to socio-economic environment and intellectual stimulation present in the environment. Egbule (2014) asserted that if financial needs are adequately met students' performance will be enhanced.

Motivation is a highly important part of education as it is one of the most important factors driving learning (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2011). Understanding the role of learner goals, self-related beliefs and self-regulatory processes are essential before effective instructional programs for learners studying in different social contexts can be designed and implemented (Kormos & Kiddle, 2015). According to Marzano (2007), learning does not begin with cognitive processes but rather, it begins in the self-system because it is through this system that students decide very quickly whether they are going to pay attention or not (Marzano, 2007).

Economic factors such as access to learning resources at home and at school can also

have an impact on students' autonomous learning behaviour where students are motivated to learn on their own (Benson, 2007). Students who are provided with needed learning materials are automatically motivated on their own and stand a better chance of becoming autodidacts. In a situation of economic recession where purchasing power is severely low, students' motivation is likely to be affected as learning materials are unavailable. According to Marzano (2007), stress and prolonged economic pressure can have negative effects on learning and on our well-being; this effect is usually evident in lack of motivation.

According to Young (2010), the recession may also factor in students' goals considering the increasing cost of higher education. This may shift the focus of college from learning to earning. Undergraduates are more likely to sort of means of earning instead of focusing attention on learning.

The inability to meet physiological needs leads to lack of motivation and concentration among students. Mitchell (2015) reported that 87% of students who come to school experience lack of energy and motivation as a result of hunger and food insecurity associated with economic recession.

It is hypothesized that parents of upper socio-economic classes have more positive

attitudes towards their children's schooling and have high expectations and standards for their children. The parent's ability to provide books and equipment for the school, combined with a positive attitude, stimulates and motivates the children to learn (Ajayi et al, 2017). Additionally, socioeconomic status affects motivational and self-regulation variables through parental expectations, influence and modelling (e.g. Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Gardner, 1985; Noels, 2001). Students brought up in economic hardship have parents who are apparently busy trying to make ends meet and neglect the place of influence, modelling and motivation of their children. These children go to school without a clear reason and lack the intrinsic motivation needed for the educational achievement.

Kormos and Kiddle (2015) surveyed the English language learning motivations of 740 secondary school students belonging to different social classes the results suggest that social class has an overall effect on motivational factors with self-efficacy beliefs being the most strongly related to economic factors. Students are reported motivated to learn in times of economic buoyancy than in the face of economic recession. A substantial literature documents the positive association between Socio-economic deprivation and antisocial behaviour (Adler & Ostrove, 1999; Marmot

& Wilkinson, 1999; Mirowsky & Ross, 2003; Williams & Collins, 1995). This unpalatable state of leading students to unhealthy lifestyles which in turn reduces academic performances. Dodge, Pettit, & Bates (1994) as cited in Jensen (2009) asserted that students who are victims of economic hardship are more likely to have social conduct problems, as rated by both teachers and peers over a period of four years. Besides the macroeconomic effects, an economic downturn can also affect individual's physical health and psychological well-being (Aytaç & Rankin, 2009).

Behaviour research shows that children from impoverished homes develop psychiatric disturbances and maladaptive social functioning at a greater rate than their affluent counterparts do (McCoy, Firck, Loney, & Ellis, 1999). The poor economic conditions affecting most native communities, damage self-esteem and can result in depression, drug and violence, all of which contribute to the high suicide rate (Ian, 1994). Marzano and Kendall, (2008) lamented that with students from poverty, who often join the classroom with one-half the vocabulary of their middle-class counterparts, we have the makings of a disaster in the classroom.

According to Bradshaw (2011) Crime rate has been on the increase as a result of the high cost of living brought about by the

recession. This is as a result of many students resolving to theft and fraud in order to get extra naira for their upkeep and tuition fees. Also, students have limited supervision from parents who are charged with the responsibility of checking lifestyle of students. Parents are busy with ways to make extra income during periods of economic recession.

According to Frasilho, Matos, Gaspar and Almeida (2016) during the period of economic recession, there is less money around, parents are more irritable and nervous than before, there are fewer family outings and vacations. Parents are also tense and tend to be more aggressive during the period of economic recession, thus rendering them emotionally inaccessible to their children. McElwee, (2009) urged parents and teachers to be aware of the potentiality of substances becoming escape routes from the reality of economic hardship, vigilant for behavioural change as repeated requests for painkillers maybe useful clues of an addiction problem.

Educational materials are indispensable in teaching-learning situations. The significance of educational resource materials in education cannot be overemphasized. According to Bradshaw (2009), Learning materials are important because they can significantly increase student achievement by supporting student

learning. It aids the student to explore knowledge independently.

A significant feature of most educational resources is that they cost a lot to gain access (Iiyoshi & Kumar 2008). The increase in the price of commodities usually associated with economic recession also affects educational resources. It is impossible to overlook the fact that price of books, laboratory sets, calculators, materials, photocopy, printing and other educational resources climbed when the currency was officially devalued. Prices of all indispensable educational aids have escalated by 70 to 150% (Sobowale, 2016). This great increase in the price of educational materials has a significant correlation with low academic performance. A study conducted by Ezewu (1994) showed that socio-economic status of parents affects children's education and particularly academic performance in any subject as it dictates the financial expenditure including fees, textbooks and other equipment.

Due to an overall drop in financial markets' asset values and increasing unemployment rates, it is reasonable to assume that the financial situation of many households deteriorated over the last year. It could also be predicted that people already in the labour force (i.e., employees) would have been affected more in terms of their income as a result, Students have to totally forfeit

or reduce the purchase of educational resources during an economic recession.

Research Questions

This study answered the following research question:

1. What is the perception of university undergraduates as regards the effect of economic recession on university undergraduates' motivation to learning?
- 2 What is the perception of university undergraduates as regards the effects of economic recession on undergraduates' engagement in antisocial behaviour?
3. What is the perception of university undergraduates as regards the effects of economic recession on students' involvement in extra-curricular activities?

Methodology

This study adopted a descriptive research of survey design. The study was carried out among selected University undergraduates from three Federal Universities in Nigeria. The selected Universities were the University of Ilorin, the University of Port Harcourt and Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto. These universities were selected to cover three out of the six geopolitical zones in the country. Undergraduates of 300 and 400 level constituted the target population. Three faculties were sampled for the study through stratification while simple random sampling technique was adopted in the selection of 727 University undergraduate

out of 11,217, this is in line with The Research Advisors Table for sample selection which stated that 727 is appropriate in a population of 10,000-25,000 at 95% confidence level and 3.5% margin of error. A 12 items Likert-scale questionnaire titled “Assessment of effects of economic recession on University Undergraduates” was used to elicit the needed data. The content validity of the instrument was established by experts from Educational Research, Measurement and

Evaluation Unit of the Department of Social Sciences Education, Faculty of Education, University of Ilorin and a reliability index of 0.78 using a sample of 122 undergraduates from three faculties in the University of Lagos. A test re-test approach was adopted with an interval of three weeks. The scores of the first administration were correlated with that of the second using Pearson Product Moment Coefficient approach.

Results

Research Question 1: What is the perception of university undergraduates as regards the effect of economic recession on university undergraduates’ motivation to learning?

Table 1: Undergraduate response on economic recession and motivation to learning

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.	Rank
1	The economic recession has affected students’ budget on reading materials due to the hikes in prices.	727	3.54	0.64	1 st
2	Students reduce their spending on feeding due to the increase in the prices of food	727	3.46	0.58	2 nd
3	The purchasing power of students allowance has increased due to the current economic situation.	727	2.52	0.97	5 th
4	Economic recession poses challenges of poor feeding among students due to high prices of foodstuff.	727	2.87	0.78	3 rd
5	Economic recession prevents students from going to school often due to budget constraint.	727	3.54	0.89	4 th

Source: Field Survey, 2017.

***Mean ≥ 2.5 = Agreed, Mean < 2.5 = Disagreed**

Table 1 shows that respondents agree to the fact that the economic recession greatly reduces students’ motivation to learn with the mean score of all the items being above 2.5 (the benchmarks for acceptance of items

of the scale). It can be observed that the students perceived economic recession to have effect on their budgets as regards reading materials; expenditures on and school attendance in that order.

Research Question 2: What is the perception of university undergraduates as regards effects of economic recession on undergraduates' engagement in antisocial behaviour?

Table 2: Undergraduate perception as regards effect of economic recession on antisocial behaviours

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.	Rank
1.	<i>Students' now engage in Substance Abuse (smoking, alcoholism, drug abuse and trafficking, etc.)</i>	727	3.06	0.86	3 rd
2.	<i>Students' now engage in economic cheating (stealing clothes, mobile phones, shoes, foodstuffs, money; burglary and armed robbery)</i>	727	3.09	0.67	1 st
3.	<i>Students' now engage in sexual deviance (prostitution, rape, immorality, homosexuality, lesbianism, and premarital sex.</i>	727	3.07	0.82	2 nd
4.	<i>Students' now engage in cultism and related violence (occult activities, fighting, murder, and grievous assault).</i>	727	3.04	0.77	4 th
5.	<i>Students now engage in examination misconduct (forgery, cheating, 'dubbing and impersonation).</i>	727	2.95	1.05	6 th
Total					

***Mean ≥ 2.5 = Agreed, Mean < 2.5 = Disagreed**

Table 2 shows that undergraduates do perceive economic recession as a driving force for students' engagement in antisocial behaviours such as *sexual deviance, substance abuse, cultism and related violence, and examination misconduct.*

Question 3: What is the perception of university undergraduates as regards the effects of economic recession on student's involvement in extra-curricular activities?

Table 3: Perception of university undergraduates as regards the effects of economic recession on involvement in extra-curricular activities

SN	Items	N	Mean	Std.	Rank
1	Students on campus find it difficult to engage in extracurricular activities due to economic recession.	727	2.99	0.73	3 rd
2	There is a reduction in purchasing power of pocket money given to students results to the low standard of living among students as a result of the recession	727	3.45	0.74	2 nd
3	Economic recession reduces the rate of active participation in various clubs and societies among students	727	3.08	0.74	1 st

Table 3 shows that undergraduates do perceive economic recession as greatly reducing the demands and participation of students in extra-curricular activities. This can be observed as students response to economic recession reduction of the active participation of the students from the three universities in various clubs and societies is ranked highest, reduction of the purchasing power of the students for materials that are useful for extra-curricular activities was ranked 2nd, while difficulty in engaging in extracurricular activities due to economic recession was ranked 3rd.

Discussion

It was discovered from the study that, undergraduates perceive economic recession to have an effect on University undergraduates' motivation to learn in Nigeria especially as regards the effects on their budget on reading materials and hikes in prices of food and other necessities of life, as well as regards school attendance. It implies that the academic performance of the students would be significantly affected as the learners may lack basic necessities for academic success. This is in line with the finding of Kormos and Kiddle, (2015) that students facing economic hardship perform below their contemporary who did not experience economic hardship.

This study also found that undergraduates perceive economic recession to have an effect on their involvements in antisocial behaviours. This is an indication that incidents of different deviant behaviours common among undergraduates today's are possible reflections of economic recession and its attendant hardships on undergraduates. Poverty is profound amongst students and other lower level administrators in various places, including our universities. Therefore, the need to meet up with the challenges of school work and general living expenses has resulted in some antisocial behaviour by students who can no longer afford to worry about the consequences of their misdemeanours. Some of the most common antisocial behaviours such as theft (the most common is Stealing of a mobile phone) cult activities and violence. This agrees with the findings of Marzano (2007) that, prolonged economic pressure and stress have negative effects on learning and on students' wellbeing, evident in lack of motivation. Similar studies have also shown that socioeconomic status affects motivational and self-regulation variables through parental expectations, influence and modelling (Csizér & Kormos, 2009; Dörnyei et al., 2006; Gardner, 1985; Noels, 2001).

It was also found that undergraduates perceive economic recession as having effects in reducing their active participation in clubs and societies. It has been reported that parents' inability to provide books and other necessities for school, stimulates and motivates the children to earn rather than learn. This is responsible for the reduction in the active participation of students in extracurricular activities. This is in agreement with Barrera, Fasih, Filmer, Guaqueta, King, & Rogers (2009) when they stated that, the pressure for more household members to earn income may increase demand for children and youths to substitute for adults in home production and for youths to work outside the home. Working and schooling are reported to have its toll on students' academic performance.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The findings revealed that Nigerian universities' undergraduates perceive economic recession as generally affecting students' motivation to learn, their purchasing power especially as regards educational materials and the provisions of other essentials for learning. The students also reported that economic recession has reduced their involvement in co-curricular activities but has increased their involvements in anti-social activities.

It is therefore expedient that, the Government should as a matter of urgency address the lingering economic recession as it is perceived to have untold effects on university undergraduates.

It is on this basis that the following recommendations are made:

- a. Government and educational related NGOs should as much as possible should support undergraduates in the provision of educational materials and scholarships so as to assists students from low-income households.
- b. Authorities of universities, unions and educational related NGOs should embark on aggressive enlightenment programme on How to discourage students from getting involved in anti-social behaviours despite the economic recession.
- c. Also, University authorities should reduce extra charges to allow students active involvement in social activities / extra-curricular activities in the school.

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