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CHAPTER ONE

THE ROLE OF EDUCATIONAL PSYCHOLOGISTS IN PROMOTING MENTAL WELL-BEING AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL STUDENTS IN NIGERIA

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1.0 Introduction

The mental well-being of secondary school students has become a major concern in contemporary education systems worldwide, particularly in developing nations like Nigeria. Adolescence, which coincides with the secondary school stage, is a period marked by rapid physical, emotional, and psychological changes. These transitions often expose students to stress, anxiety, depression, peer pressure, and academic challenges that can adversely affect their mental health and learning outcomes. Consequently, maintaining sound mental well-being among students has become a central focus in educational psychology.

Educational psychologists play a critical role in promoting the mental well-being of students by identifying, assessing, and addressing emotional and psychological issues that may hinder academic and social development. Through counselling, psychological assessment, and intervention programs, educational psychologists help students develop coping strategies, build resilience, and improve self-esteem. They also collaborate with teachers, parents, and school administrators to create supportive learning environments conducive to positive mental health.

In the Nigerian context, where students often face pressures related to academic performance, socio-economic difficulties, and limited access to mental health services, the role of educational psychologists is indispensable. Their interventions not only enhance students' mental well-being but also contribute to improved academic achievement, social adjustment, and overall school effectiveness.

This chapter therefore examines the role of educational psychologists in promoting mental well-being among secondary school students, highlighting their functions, strategies, and the challenges they encounter in the school setting. It also explores practical approaches to strengthening psychological support systems within schools to foster holistic student development and sustainable educational outcomes. Thus, this chapter is discussed under the following subheadings.

1. Concept of mental health
2. Roles of Educational Psychology in the Promotion of Mental Health in Schools in Nigeria
3. Challenges Militating Against Effective Mental Health Programmes in Secondary Schools in Nigeria
4. Possible Solutions to the Problems of Mental Health Programmes in Nigerian Secondary Schools

2.0 Conceptual Terms

2.1 Mental Health

World Health Organization (WHO, 2018) defines mental health as "*a state of well-being in which an individual realizes his or her own abilities, can cope with the normal stresses of life, can work productively, and is able to contribute to his or her community.*" This definition emphasizes not only the absence of mental illness but also the presence of positive psychological functioning and social well-being. It presents mental health as a holistic concept that integrates emotional stability, productivity, and social contribution. American Psychological Association (APA, 2020) defines mental health as "*a state of mind characterized by emotional well-being, good behavioral adjustment, relative freedom from anxiety and disabling symptoms, and a capacity to establish constructive relationships and cope with the ordinary demands and stresses of life.*" This definition highlights emotional balance, adaptability, and interpersonal competence as key indicators of sound mental health. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, mental health (2019) refers to "*our emotional, psychological, and social well-being. It affects how we think, feel, and act, how we handle stress, relate to others, and make choices.*" This definition situates mental health at the core of human functioning, influencing cognition, emotion, and behavior. It underlines the interconnectedness between mental health and daily life decisions. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC, 2021) defines mental health as "*a state of emotional, psychological, and social well-being in which an individual can function effectively in daily life and contribute meaningfully to their community.*" This definition mirrors a public health perspective, emphasizing mental health as a determinant of societal productivity and social engagement. Keyes (2002) conceptualizes mental health as "*a syndrome of symptoms of positive feelings and positive functioning in life.*" He introduced the concept of the "mental health

continuum,” which ranges from flourishing (high well-being) to languishing (low well-being). This definition broadens the understanding of mental health beyond the absence of mental illness to include positive psychological growth and life satisfaction (Ofole, & Agokei, 2014).

2.2 Roles of Educational Psychology in the Promotion of Mental Health in Schools in Nigeria

The roles of educational Psychology in the promotion of Mental Health in Schools in Nigeria includes:

Psychological Assessment and Early Identification of Mental Health Problems

One of the primary roles of educational psychology in Nigerian schools is the early identification of students with mental, emotional, or behavioral difficulties. Educational psychologists use various psychological tools, tests, and observation methods to detect issues such as anxiety, depression, learning disabilities, and behavioral disorders. Early identification allows for timely intervention and prevents minor emotional challenges from escalating into severe mental health conditions. This proactive approach supports academic achievement and emotional stability among students (Ofole, & Agokei, 2014). Psychological assessment and early identification of mental health problems play crucial roles in educational psychology when it comes to the promotion of mental health in schools in Nigeria. By conducting psychological assessments, educational psychologists are able to identify and understand the various cognitive, emotional, and behavioral factors that may affect students' mental health. This allows them to develop effective strategies and interventions to address these issues and promote mental well-being in school settings. Additionally, early identification of mental health problems is key in preventing mental health issues from escalating and negatively impacting students' academic performance and overall well-being. By utilizing their knowledge and expertise in mental health, educational psychologists can identify warning signs and provide early interventions to support students' mental health needs. This not only benefits individual students, but also contributes to creating a healthier and more supportive school environment for all students.

Provision of Counselling and Emotional Support

Educational psychologists play a critical role in providing counselling and emotional support to students experiencing psychological distress. Through individual or group counselling sessions, they help learners develop coping mechanisms, manage stress, and build resilience. This intervention enhances students' ability to handle academic pressure, social conflicts, and family-related issues, thereby improving their overall mental well-being. Counselling also promotes self-awareness and emotional regulation, essential for positive mental health (Okobia, & Okorodudu, 2004). As a primary agent of socialization, schools have a significant influence on the development of students. Therefore, it is essential for educational psychologists to implement effective

interventions to promote mental health in schools. One of the key roles of educational psychology in this regard is providing counselling and emotional support to students. Counselling and emotional support provided by educational psychologists aim to address the psychological and emotional needs of students. Through counselling, students can receive guidance and support in dealing with personal problems and academic challenges. This not only helps students cope with their issues but also promotes their overall well-being and mental health. Educational psychologists also play a crucial role in identifying and addressing mental health concerns among students. By providing emotional support and counselling, they can help students develop coping strategies and promote resilience. This, in turn, can help prevent mental health issues from becoming severe and promote better mental health outcomes in students. In addition to providing counselling and emotional support to individual students, educational psychologists also work towards creating a positive and supportive school environment. They collaborate with teachers, parents, and other school staff to promote mental health awareness and implement strategies to address mental health concerns effectively.

Teacher Training and Mental Health Awareness

Educational psychologists collaborate with teachers to raise awareness about mental health and train them to recognize signs of psychological distress among students. Teachers are often the first to observe changes in students' behavior and performance; thus, their capacity to identify and refer students for psychological help is vital. Educational psychologists organize workshops, seminars, and mental health education programs that equip teachers with knowledge on classroom management, stress reduction, and student support (Eze, & Okorodudu, 2020). The role of educational psychology in the promotion of mental health in schools in Nigeria involves two important aspects: teacher training and mental health awareness. Teacher training is essential in ensuring that educators are equipped with the necessary skills and knowledge to identify, understand, and support students with mental health issues. This includes providing training on how to create a positive and inclusive learning environment, how to recognize signs of mental health problems, and how to provide appropriate support and resources to students in need. On the other hand, mental health awareness plays a crucial role in promoting mental health in schools in Nigeria. This involves creating awareness among students, teachers, and the wider community about the importance of mental health, the signs and symptoms of common mental health disorders, and where to seek help and support. By increasing mental health awareness, educational psychology can help reduce stigma surrounding mental health and encourage individuals to seek help when necessary.

Development of Supportive School Climate and Mental Health Program

Educational psychologists contribute to creating a supportive school environment that promotes students' emotional safety and social belonging. They design and implement mental health programs, peer support systems, and social-emotional learning (SEL) activities that encourage positive interaction and empathy among students. A psychologically safe school climate reduces incidences of bullying, isolation, and violence — factors that negatively impact mental health. The development of a supportive school climate and mental health program is crucial in promoting mental health in schools, especially in Nigeria. Through the use of educational psychology, we can understand and address the unique needs of students and create a positive and inclusive learning environment. By implementing evidence-based strategies and interventions, such as promoting positive relationships between students and teachers, providing mental health support and resources, and fostering a sense of belonging and community, we can promote mental well-being and academic success. Additionally, educational psychology can aid in identifying and addressing specific challenges and stressors that may be present in the Nigerian school setting, such as poverty, violence, and cultural stigmas. By acknowledging and addressing these issues, we can create a more supportive and understanding school climate that promotes mental health for all students. Through the roles of educational psychology, we can work towards creating a holistic and comprehensive approach to promoting mental health in schools in Nigeria.

Collaboration with Parents and Community for Holistic Mental Health Promotion

Educational psychologists also play a key role in fostering collaboration between schools, parents, and the wider community in promoting student mental well-being. By engaging parents through workshops and counselling sessions, they ensure continuity of psychological support at home. This collaborative approach enhances consistency in behavioral management and reinforces positive values that support emotional development. Such partnerships are essential in the Nigerian context where socio-economic and cultural factors influence mental health outcomes (Olayinka, 2016).

Collaboration with parents and community is an essential factor in promoting holistic mental health in schools in Nigeria. This collaboration plays a crucial role in the overall improvement of mental health among students. As roles of educational psychology in the promotion of mental health, it is important to involve parents and community members in various activities and initiatives. One way to promote collaboration is through regular communication between schools and parents. This can be achieved through meetings, newsletters, and other communication platforms. By involving parents in the educational process, they become more aware of their child's mental health and can provide necessary support and guidance. Community involvement is also vital in promoting mental health in schools. This can be done through partnerships with local organizations and mental health professionals. These partnerships can provide resources and support for students and their families, as well as promote awareness and understanding of mental

health. Collaboration with parents and community can also lead to the development of school-wide policies and programs that focus on mental health promotion. By working together, schools, parents, and community members can identify the specific needs and challenges of students and implement effective strategies to address them.

3.0 Challenges Militating Against Effective Mental Health Programmes in Secondary Schools in Nigeria

The challenges militating against effective mental health programmes in secondary schools in Nigeria includes:

Shortage of Trained Educational Psychologists and Counsellors

One of the major challenges hindering effective mental health programmes in Nigerian secondary schools is the acute shortage of trained educational psychologists and guidance counsellors. Many public schools either have no counsellors at all or employ unqualified personnel to fill these roles. This shortage leads to poor identification, intervention, and management of students' mental health issues. Without professional guidance, schools struggle to establish structured mental health programmes or offer adequate psychological support to students (Egbule, 2010). The shortage of trained educational psychologists and counsellors, combined with cultural stigma and misconceptions about mental health, as well as inadequate funding, has greatly hindered the development of educational psychology in promoting mental health in schools in Nigeria. These issues have created a significant barrier to adequately addressing the mental health needs of students in Nigerian schools. The lack of trained professionals in the field of educational psychology has made it difficult for schools to provide proper mental health support to their students. Without proper training and expertise, educators and staff are often ill-equipped to identify and address mental health issues in students, leading to a lack of early intervention and support for those in need.

Cultural Stigma and Misconceptions about Mental Health

In many Nigerian communities, mental health issues are still misunderstood and stigmatized. Students experiencing emotional distress or behavioral problems are often labeled as "lazy," "possessed," or "stubborn" rather than being viewed as individuals in need of psychological support. This stigma discourages students from seeking help and limits the willingness of parents and teachers to engage with mental health services. The cultural barrier thus remains a significant obstacle to the implementation of effective mental health programmes in schools (Olanrewaju, Afolabi, & Akinbode, 2019). Cultural stigma and misconceptions about mental health further compound the problem. In many Nigerian communities, mental health is still largely

misunderstood and seen as taboo. This stigma can prevent students from seeking help and support, further exacerbating their mental health issues.

Inadequate Funding and Poor Policy Implementation

Mental health programmes in Nigerian secondary schools suffer from insufficient funding and weak policy support. Many educational budgets do not allocate specific funds for mental health initiatives such as counselling centres, awareness campaigns, or training programmes. Although the National Policy on Education emphasizes guidance and counselling, its implementation at the secondary school level remains poor due to lack of financial and administrative commitment. Consequently, mental health services are underdeveloped and inconsistently applied across schools (Federal Republic of Nigeria 2013). Inadequate funding for mental health services in schools has also contributed to the problem. Many schools in Nigeria do not have the resources to provide adequate mental health support, including hiring trained professionals, implementing effective programs, and providing necessary resources for students with mental health needs. As a result, the development of educational psychology in promoting mental health in schools in Nigeria has been greatly hindered. It is imperative that these issues are addressed in order to improve the well-being and academic success of Nigerian students.

Large Class Sizes and Overburdened Teachers

The development of Educational Psychology in promoting mental health in schools plays a crucial role in Nigeria. However, there are several challenges hindering its progress, namely large class sizes, overburdened teachers, lack of awareness, and inadequate mental health education. In this abstract, we will discuss each of these problems and their impact on the development of Educational Psychology in promoting mental health in schools in Nigeria. The overcrowded nature of Nigerian classrooms makes it difficult for teachers to pay adequate attention to students' emotional and psychological needs. Most teachers are already overwhelmed by academic responsibilities and lack the time or training to monitor students' mental well-being effectively. This situation limits the early identification of students with psychological problems and hinders school-based interventions (Okoli, & Onwuasoanya, 2015). Large Class Sizes: One of the major challenges facing the development of Educational Psychology is the issue of large class sizes in schools. With a growing population and limited resources, schools in Nigeria are forced to accommodate a large number of students in each class. This has a direct impact on the quality of education and the ability of teachers to provide individualized attention to students. It also hinders the implementation of effective strategies for promoting mental health, as teachers are unable to focus on each student's specific needs. Overburdened Teachers: The second problem hindering the

development of Educational Psychology is the overburdening of teachers. With large class sizes and a lack of support staff, teachers are burdened with an overwhelming workload. They are not only responsible for teaching their subjects, but they are also expected to address the mental health needs of their students. This puts a strain on their mental and emotional well-being, ultimately affecting their ability to promote mental health in schools.

Lack of Awareness and Mental Health Education

There is a general lack of awareness about mental health among students, teachers, and parents in Nigeria. Most schools do not include mental health education in their curriculum, and discussions about psychological well-being are often neglected. Without adequate awareness, students may not recognize symptoms of stress, anxiety, or depression, and teachers may fail to refer affected learners for professional help. This gap reduces the overall effectiveness of school mental health programmes (Adeoye, A. O., & Olatomide, O. (2013). Lack of Awareness: Awareness about mental health is still lacking in Nigeria, and this is another challenge affecting the development of Educational Psychology in promoting mental health in schools. Many students, teachers, and parents do not understand the importance of addressing mental health issues in schools. This leads to a lack of support and resources for mental health education and services, hindering the progress of Educational Psychology in this field. Inadequate Mental Health Education: Lastly, the lack of proper mental health education in schools is a significant problem that needs to be addressed. Without adequate education about mental health, students are not equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills to take care of their mental well-being. Teachers also lack the necessary training to recognize and address mental health issues in the classroom. As a result, the potential of Educational Psychology in promoting mental health in schools remains unfulfilled.

4.0 Possible Solutions to the Problems of Mental Health Programmes in Nigerian Secondary Schools

The possible solutions to the Problems of Mental Health Programmes in Nigerian Secondary Schools includes:

Recruitment and Training of Qualified Educational Psychologists and Counsellors

To address the shortage of trained personnel, government and education authorities should prioritize the recruitment and professional training of qualified educational psychologists and guidance counsellors in all secondary schools. Teacher education institutions and universities should strengthen their psychology and counselling programmes to produce more competent professionals. Regular in-service training, workshops, and certification courses should also be organized to enhance the skills of existing school counsellors and teachers in mental health management.

Public Education and Campaigns to Reduce Stigma on Mental Health

There is an urgent need for nationwide awareness campaigns to dispel myths and misconceptions about mental health. Schools, media organizations, religious institutions, and NGOs should collaborate to educate the public on the importance of mental well-being. Integrating mental health education into school curricula can also help students and teachers understand that psychological challenges are normal and treatable. Reducing stigma will encourage more students and families to seek professional help when needed.

Adequate Funding and Effective Policy Implementation

The government should allocate specific funds within the education budget for mental health initiatives, including counselling centres, school-based intervention programmes, and awareness activities. Educational policies that emphasize guidance and counselling, such as the National Policy on Education, must be effectively implemented and monitored. Ministries of Education at both state and federal levels should ensure that every school has functional counselling units supported by trained staff and essential facilities.

Reduction of Class Sizes and Integration of Mental Health Support into Teaching

To help teachers identify and support students with mental health needs, class sizes should be reduced to a manageable level. This allows for more individualized attention and stronger teacher–student relationships. Teachers should also receive basic mental health training to enable them to identify warning signs of distress and refer students to counsellors. Integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) into classroom instruction will promote empathy, self-awareness, and emotional regulation among learners.

Incorporation of Comprehensive Mental Health Education into School Curriculum

Mental health education should be formally incorporated into the secondary school curriculum as part of life skills or civic education programmes. This will help students understand emotional intelligence, stress management, and coping strategies. Educational psychologists and curriculum planners should collaborate to design age-appropriate mental health content that promotes positive attitudes toward psychological well-being. Additionally, periodic school-based seminars, peer-mentoring programmes, and workshops can strengthen students' awareness and resilience.

5.0 Conclusion

The chapter examined the role of educational psychologists in promoting mental well-being among secondary school students in Nigeria. The chapter concluded that psychological assessment and early identification of mental health problems, provision of counselling and emotional support, teacher training and mental health awareness, development of supportive school climate and mental health program and collaboration with parents and community for holistic mental health promotion are the roles of educational Psychology in the promotion of Mental Health in Schools in Nigeria.

Also shortage of trained educational psychologists and counsellors, cultural stigma and misconceptions about mental health, inadequate funding and poor policy implementation, large class sizes and overburdened teachers and lack of awareness and mental health education are the problems militating against development of educational Psychology in the promotion of Mental Health in Schools in Nigeria.

Recruitment and training of qualified educational psychologists and counsellors, public education and campaigns to reduce stigma on mental health, adequate funding and effective policy implementation, reduction of class sizes and integration of mental health support into teaching and incorporation of comprehensive mental health education into school curriculum are the possible solutions to the problems of Mental Health Programmes in Nigerian Secondary Schools.

Revise Questions

1. Define mental health
2. Explain five Roles of Educational Psychology in the Promotion of Mental Health in Schools in Nigeria
3. Discuss five Challenges Militating Against Effective Mental Health Programmes in Secondary Schools in Nigeria
4. Highlights five possible Solutions to the Problems of Mental Health Programmes in Nigerian Secondary Schools

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