

Teachers of Agriculture as Agents of Psychosocial Supports in Schools

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Abstract

Currently, there is an increasing rate of violence, disasters, conflicts, and health challenges in our various homes and societies. These situations impact the psycho and social well-being of both students and teachers and their teaching and learning relationship within and outside the school system. Therefore, this paper exposes teachers of agriculture to the psychosocial support and psychosocial well-being of students, how to identify students who may need psychosocial support, principles, and the mechanisms of providing psychosocial support to students in Schools. The papers also discussed the challenges to psychosocial support in schools and strategies to psychosocially support students in secondary or high schools, to prevent pathological consequences of social stigmatization, discrimination, and potentially traumatic situations among students, teachers, and other stakeholders in the education sector for improved academic achievement in schools. It recommended among others that teachers should be able to identify and protect vulnerable students that may be socially marginalized, stigmatized, and/or discriminated against in society and schools.

Keywords: *Challenges, Teachers of Agriculture, psychosocial support, strategies, traumatic incidents*

Introduction

The increasing rate of violence, disasters, conflicts and health challenges in our various homes, societies, states, nations, regions, and continents really affects both students and teacher's psychological well-being either directly or indirectly. This situation, in most cases, leads to social stigmatization and discrimination among students and impacts on the economic, social, emotional, physical, and educational lives of students and teachers heavily in Africa today. In education, the impact has become unbearable, hence demands that teachers at all levels of education become knowledgeable about psychosocial support, types, importance, principles, and challenges, to improve teaching and learning against any unpleasant circumstances in our environment. This is because no meaningful education takes place amidst psychological and emotional disturbances emanating from violence, disasters, conflicts, and health challenges in our environment. The emotional wounds in most cases are less visible than the destruction of

homes, but it often takes far longer to recover from such impact, especially in education, than to prevail over material damages. The early support and counselling processes in schools allowed any psychological affected population (students and teachers) to cope better with most challenging psychological situations, but these days, such measures are lacking in terms of availability, quantity, and quality. Recently, the idea of psychosocial support germinated and is gaining momentum in health and other sectors with little or no emphasis on education for the benefit of teachers, students, school administration, ministries, and the societies at large. Therefore, this paper attempts to expose teachers of agriculture to the psychosocial support and psychosocial well-being of students, how to identify students who may need psychosocial support, principles, and the mechanisms of providing psychosocial support to students in Schools. The paper equally discusses challenges to psychosocial support in schools and strategies to psychosocially support students in secondary or high schools, to prevent pathological consequences of social stigmatization, discrimination and potentially traumatic situations among students, teachers, and other stake holders in the education sector for improved academic achievement in schools. It might also be extended in form of informational and instrumental support to specifically teachers of agriculture and other readers. Even though the administration of psychosocial support requires additional professional development for teachers in schools, there is still need that teacher be informed no matter how shallow, to enable them to provide at least first aid psychosocial support to their students who may need it to enhance their psychosocial well-being and academic achievement in schools.

Teacher of Agriculture

Education involves teaching and learning geared towards developing the intellectual and physical ability of an individual to enable one to become beneficial to oneself and for the society. It involves teaching of knowledge and experiences to pupils by the teacher and the pupils' acquisition of what was taught to them through practice. It is the process by which teachers develop individuals physically, mentally, socially, economically, morally, or emotionally through exposure to certain activities in and outside the classroom environment.

A teacher, according to Obanewa in Asogwa (2010), is someone who has undergone the necessary and recommended training in teacher preparatory programmes and is charged with the full responsibility of managing the classroom in such a way as to enhance the learning behaviour of the students. A teacher of agriculture also known as an agricultural educator is a trained person who assists students to gain knowledge, skills, and virtues in agriculture at primary, secondary or tertiary level of education. This process of guiding students to acquire competence in subjects such as agriculture is termed as teaching. It could be informal or formal depending on the person involved as a teacher and the environment in which the activities take place. At any level of formal education, teachers of agriculture have a very fulfilling career by virtue of the responsibility they must influence the future of young learners. The teachers perform a key function in a student's attitude and vocation prospects in agriculture. In most cases when students are difficult to deal with, teachers exhibit a great deal of patience and apply some professional ethics to achieve their goals. Besides, the responsibilities of teachers of Agriculture include preparing lessons according to approved curricula, organizing and giving lessons, assessing pupil progress, maintaining school rules and regulation and good student-teacher relationship for smooth learning. Believing teachers of agriculture as the pivot of success of agricultural

development in schools. Ezeani (2012) stressed that they should be trained in both knowledge and skills in agriculture as well as methodology of imparting them to students, since the teacher has the sole responsibility of imparting knowledge, skills, and attitude to students in the subject. On their responsibilities in schools, the authors continued that a teacher of agriculture should:

- impart knowledge and skills to students in various areas of agriculture such as crop production, soil science, animal science, forestry, fisheries and agricultural management;
- stimulate students' interest to participate in agricultural activities in the school; and
- encourage students to promote the growth and development of agriculture in the school through co-operative and clubs, among others.

In schools, the teacher's professional duties may extend beyond formal teaching. Apart from the classroom setting, teachers of agriculture may supervise study halls, organize field trips for students, help with the organization of school functions and serve as supervisors for extracurricular activities. In some education systems like secondary or high schools, teachers may be responsible for student discipline (Kiprop, 2012). Teachers of agriculture cannot successfully perform the functions without good mood and psychological stability of the students in the school, hence the need for the teachers to understand and carry out certain psychosocial support to create conducive environment for effective learning among students. This will help teachers of agriculture to work with students and others using knowledge, technology, and information in and with the society (Caena, 2011) to achieve educational goals in the curriculum for the students.

Concept of Psychosocial Support

The definition of psychosocial support may not be easily and correctly understood by students and teachers who are not psychologically inclined in the profession. So, it is necessary that we define some related terms to accommodate all class of readers for easy reading, accommodation, assimilation, analysis, synthesis, and application of this chapter. Such terms are stated thus:

Psycho is the mind, thinking and soul of a person (involving internal aspects, such as feelings, thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, and values) (Amaana Consult Centre, 2020). Psychology means the scientific study of human mind, thinking, character and mental states of a human being and animal (Molden & Dweck, 2006), whereas social is one's external relationships and interaction within an environment. This includes interactions with others, social attitudes, values (culture), and the influence exerted by one's family, peers, school, and community (Tyler, 2009). Psychosocial is a close connection between psychological aspects of human experience and the wider social experience (Bragin *et al.*, 2014a). Psychosocial well-being is the meeting of a person's internal and external needs to make he or she physically, mentally, and socially healthy or stable (Ventevogel *et al.*, 2013). Psychosocial support entails the provision of active help, encouragement, or resources to stabilize and sustain both psychological and social needs of an individual, family, and community (Goldstein, 2013). It could be on emotional, social, health, educational and spiritual needs of an individual. Examples include people living with HIV, Tuberculosis, their partners, and their caregivers or educationally disadvantaged. Psychosocial support is a process of facilitating resilience within individuals, families, and communities by respecting the independence, dignity and coping mechanisms of individuals and communities (The Psychosocial Framework of 2005–2007 of the International Federation). Psychosocial

support is the provision of psychological and social resources to a person by a supporter intended for the benefit of the receiver's ability to cope with problems faced (Manley, 2010). Psychosocial support is a range of assistance and backing from caregivers, family members, friends, neighbours, teachers, health workers, and community members offered to both the individual and the social environment in which one lives daily to improve and sustain one's emotional, social, physical, educational, spiritual and health needs in the society. It could be extending to help, and support provided by specialised psychological and social workers.

In the context of this paper, psychosocial support refers to actions that could be taken by teachers of agriculture to provide psychological and social resources to a person by a supporter intended for the benefit of the receiver's ability to cope with problems faced and enhance his academic achievement. Currently in the country, common psychosocial support includes mental health counseling, education, spiritual support, group support, and many other such services. These services are usually provided by mental health professionals, such as psychologists, social workers, counsellors, specialized nurses, clergy, pastoral counsellors, and others. These professionals might also refer one or one's family to other sources if they identify other needs. It could also be provided by teachers to their students who may not have access the professional services since no meaningful education can take place in any student with emotional disruptions.

Three Core Aspects of Students' Well-being

Psychosocial support for students ought to be geared towards their psychosocial well-being which may include their coping abilities, position in society, and ability to access such resources as food, water and shelter, social services, education, security, and health care. At the individual level, there are three aspects of well-being that influence a student' or child's ability to cope with an emergency, stigmatization or discrimination. They are Competence well-being, emotional well-being, and social well-being. Competence well-being includes life and vocational knowledge and skills, the use of appropriate coping mechanisms, and the ability to process information to access and sustain resources (Artz, 2016). In the statement of Tangmunkongvorakul (2019), emotional well-being is one's sense of security, trust, self-confidence, comfort, welfare, health, good fortune, and hope for the future. Spiritual well-being is also included since it influences many of these factors and sense of order in the world and meaning to experiences. Social well-being is one's ability to form and maintain positive relationships with peers and adult role models who promote healthy functioning of the society (Gómez-López, 2019). It entails one having a socially relevant function and identity within a community.

Importance of teachers' psychosocial support

Providing psychosocial support to students by the teachers is important because of the following reasons.

1. Most students are adolescents who need support to cope with normal developmental issues, such as wanting to feel normal, be accepted, loved, or fit in with peers.
2. Early psychosocial support can manage (prevent or control) stressors and, in some cases, additional vulnerabilities and challenges that all adolescents face or may experience.

3. It can help students gain self-confidence and coping skills for good academic pursuit.
4. It helps individual learners to heal the psychological wounds and rebuild social structures after an emergency or a critical event. That is for the learners to cope better and become reconciled to everyday life.
5. Proper psychosocial support can increase students' understanding and acceptance of all comprehensive educational and support services provided by the parents, community, teacher, and school administration.
6. It enhances psychosocial well-being of students for better societal, family and school adjustment and improved academic performance.
7. Progressive psychosocial support may help prevent students from entering most stigmatizing and discriminating situations or from developing more severe educational problems.
8. It helps to maintain a continuum of class, family and community-based care and support during and after humanitarian crises and to prevent immediate or long-term mental health imbalances.
9. It creates opportunity for the teacher to meet community-identified needs.

Phases of Psychosocial Support

Psychosocial support can be 2 phases: preventive and curative.

- a. **Preventive:** This phase is geared towards helping an individual to avert the risk of developing mental health, emotional and academic problems (Arango, 2018).
- b. **Curative:** This is an encouragement granted to individuals, class, and communities to overcome and deal with already existing psychosocial challenges that may have arisen from the shock and effects of crises, emotional or academic disturbances (Weare & Nind, 2011).

These two phases of psychosocial support promote the formation of resilience in the presence of new calamity or other challenging life settings for sustainable livelihood and education.

Types of Psychosocial Support in Schools

There are many different types of useful support groups in schools; they are as follows.

- **Student adolescent support group:** Students of the same age or challenge may want to form their own support groups to discuss some of the special challenges they face. These groups may involve recreational activities (sports, crafts, drama, etc.) as well as time for discussion on how to cope with their challenges and make progress academically. It is best if they are led by an adolescent registered with care and treatment agency, such as an Adolescent Peer Educator (Edwards-Jones, 2016).
- **Playgroups for younger adolescents:** Children living with similar health, physical, emotional, or academic challenge such as HIV can play together and where caregivers have a chance to share and talk with them privately. This group can make use of child-friendly actions, such as games, drawing, art, and music (Vujovic et al., 2014).

- **Student young mothers support group:** Students who are mothers or young mothers may want to have their own support group. Such group can provide needed psychosocial and emotional support to mothers and can help them understand, seek, and access key post-natal and other services. The groups can also address concerns specific to mothers, such as safer infant feeding, care of HIV-exposed babies the importance of adherence to HIV and other related services (Edwards-Jones, 2016).
- **Student couples support group:** Couples, including discordant couples as well as those where both partners are living with similar academic challenge or with HIV, may wish to form support groups. Couples can share common concerns and challenges in the subject and can support each other to live positively with HIV and progress academically (Stephenson et al., 2017).
- **Student post-test club:** This group is for any students who have been certified weak for a particular subject; they do not need the members to divulge their status. They often focus on promoting that subject and education in the community and they also provide a social environment for members to meet each other and to discuss important issues, such as how to improve academically on the subject or stay negative, being in a discordant relationship, and so on (Guay et al., 2010).

Areas of Need for Psychosocial Support

Both students may require increased psychosocial support due to extreme challenges, such as:

- Displacement from home;
- Severe social exclusion and isolation for peers and other social groups;
- Stigma and discrimination due to past or present mistake and or records;
- Extreme poverty;
- Substance abuse such as pregnancy, HIV/Aids;
- Physical or sexual abuse/violence (rape, incest);
- Exploitation;
- Migration;
- Fear of arrest due to sexual orientation;
- Chronic mental health issues, psychiatric disorders, and learning disorders;
- Disabilities; and
- A stressful past. Many situations and events that push students into vulnerable circumstances in the first place (like parental illness and death, lack of substitute parental care, abuse, violence) may have a lasting effect on their well-being and education. No teachers or child will be able to concentrate in the classroom for effective teaching or learning and improved academic performance amid any of the above listed situations, hence would need psychosocial support for productive education (Amuche, 2017).

How to Identify Students Who May Need Psychosocial Support

For a teacher of agriculture to identify a student who may need psychosocial support, it is necessary to understand some of their reaction to traumatic occurrences. Some of the common and normal responses of adolescents to traumatic incidents are:

- Seek isolation, becomes less communicative to peers, teachers and parents;

- Sleep disturbance, may be finding it difficult to sleep at all times;
- Becoming more irritable and sensitive every slightest issues;
- Increased risk-taking behaviours so as to cope with the situation or for survival;
- Aggression – fights, destructive, arguments always;
- Disobedience, especially towards authority, teachers and parents;
- Tries to get involved in activities to get a sense of belonging and control like rescuing and organising at the school or camps;
- Angry, frustrated and may feel very helpless even to communicate;
- Depression due to loss around him or her;
- Self-guilt for not being able to do enough or for having survived;
- Difficulty to concentrate in most cases even in academics;
- Dropping out of school, work, or academic achievement; and
- Aches and pains due to stress most often.

Good knowledge of these situations would assist any teacher of agriculture to identify students who may need psychosocial supports in his/her class.

Principles of Psychosocial Support in Schools

Psychosocial support can be in form of developmental support, disorder prevention and remedial activity. In any case, for teachers of agriculture to provide relevant psychosocial support, they could be guided by the following principles.

1. Psychosocial support should be a daily routine in every student's life. Students are supposed to be psychologically supported daily as they are faced with issues every time that test their knowledge and skills, strength and weakness, superiority, and inferiority abilities.
2. The central idea is that every child or young person is an individual and should be supported in every ramification for good personality development.
3. Where remedial activity is required, co-operation with specialized services, also treatment if needed, should be involved for improved result.
4. There should be a confidential relationship between an employee and a young person. It is highly essential that one's confidentiality be maintained to avoid worsening the situation that required the psychosocial support.
5. Referral service is necessary for proper and complete psychosocial support. A teacher who provides psychosocial support to his student may involve active presence of a worker and doing things together or refer to a professional worker.
6. There should be regular daily routines effects on feeling safe by the student. The teachers evaluate the effect of psychosocial support to their students on daily bases until established that the student can personally cope with the situation before decreasing the rate of occurrence.

Mechanisms for Providing Psychosocial Support for Students

Teachers may adopt any of the mechanisms to provide psychosocial support for the students to boost their academic achievement in schools.

- **Individual counseling:** This is a situation the teacher approaches the student or family to obtain necessary information for possible advice and suggestion on how to cope with the ugly situation.
- **Group counseling:** Where the incidence involves the entire class, or family (that is, the child and family as treatment groups, the teacher can provide psychosocial support without be specific to any student while the class.
- **Activities:** The teacher may decide to engage the student in activities of a collective therapeutic nature such games, relaxation, representation, among others.
- **Periodic meetings:** The teacher may have to have meetings with the student, parents, staff, administration or any other important personal at certain interval.
- **Meetings and courses in life skills:** The teacher may need to meet with the student often to discuss relevant courses to his/her life skill and the measure for improvement. The meeting may focus on time management, psychological trauma, stages of development and so on.
- **Transfer of cases from the school to another center:** Where the case is getting out of hand, the teacher may need to through the school administration and parents refer the student to a higher professional or centers in psychosocial support.
- **Individual and collective family consultation:** The teachers, in this case, may have to first discus with the student and proceed to the family for collective consultation on what could be done to stop or ameliorate the situation that demand psychosocial support.
- **Writing to parents:** It is especially important to communicate the student's parents probably through writing in matters of physical and psychological health, and educational and social matters. It may be costly and time consuming for a teacher to trace the family of the student physically, teachers are therefore expected to communicate to the parents through telephone, mail or letter write to ensure that psychosocial support if provided for the student for improved academic achievement.

Challenges to Psychosocial Support in Schools

Several challenges may be faced by teachers of agriculture in providing psychosocial support to students. Such challenges are suggested thus.

1. There is unwillingness of individuals, families, or communities to participate psychosocial support programme. Students may not be willing to present themselves to teachers for any psychosocial support in the school.
2. Sometimes, the teacher or workers may be attacked by the person or persons being psychologically supported.
3. Methods used for designing, implementing, monitoring, and evaluating psychosocial programmes used by the teacher may not be compactible to the person, family or community culture.
4. There is incompetence and lack of capacity building for the teachers in psychosocial support.
5. Time constraint may not permit the teacher to adequately plan, implement and assess his psychosocial support programme to a student for comprehensive result.

6. The school administration may not be in support of the teacher's extraordinary effort to help the student out of the situation.
7. Some parents may misinterpret or misunderstand the teacher's effort to be something else.
8. Teachers may be tempted to take undue advantage of the information obtained from the student for selfish purpose.
9. There is no provision of such programme in the school currently. Hence, there is poor monitoring and evaluating frameworks for most of the programmes.
10. Teacher may find it difficult to identify individuals or families that require psychosocial support.
11. There is little or no fund for proper implementation of psychosocial support programmes in the communities and schools.
12. Mental health and psychosocial needs often significantly exceed the response capacity of the teacher or local services.
13. Conflict situations may further strain the already scarce or inadequate resources of health systems, undermining their ability of the teacher to provide quality care to those who are in dear need of it.
14. In conflict situations, initial relief supports are usually focused on more immediate and obvious nutritional and health issues making mental health, psychosocial care and education matters a secondary concern.

Strategies to Ensure Effective Psychosocial Support in Schools

Governments, communities, and teachers can adopt the following strategies to ensure that psychosocial well-being and psychosocial support are provided, protected, and promoted among students in secondary or high schools.

1. Ensuring that mental health is embedded in primary health care and community care services to meet basic health needs of students in societies.
2. Identifying and protecting vulnerable students or groups e.g. socially marginalized, stigmatized and/or discriminated people in the society and schools.
3. Activities and programmed psychosocial supports should be integrated as far as possible with other professionals like teaching profession. Teachers should refer students to other psychosocial support professionals or involve them in difficult cases to avoid casualty.
4. Engaging with students or communities to always facilitate self-sufficiency and confidence among vulnerable students.
5. Monitoring students' social, emotional and education progress to ascertain when there is a change that requires psychosocial support.
6. Providing psychological first aid in emergency situations by all categories of teachers.
7. Ensuring specialist services and drugs are available in various community psychosocial support providers.
8. Using the (early) recovery phase as an opportunity to improve baseline services to other vulnerable students and communities.
9. Disseminating timely information about the emergency, relief efforts, legal rights and coping mechanisms to the affected students or population.

Educational Implication

The implication is the learning may not be effective if the psychosocial challenge of a student is not first taken care off through psychosocial support. The provision of any form of psychosocial support by teachers will motivates the learners into learning with the conviction that the teacher wants his/her comprehensive development in life. It can help students gain self-confidence and coping skills for good academic pursuit. Proper psychosocial support can increase students' understanding and acceptance of all comprehensive educational and support services provided by the parents, community, teacher, and school administration. Psychosocial support will help individual learners to heal the psychological wounds and rebuild social structures after an emergency or a critical event, hence, cope better to become reconciled to everyday life. Progressive psychosocial support may help prevent students from entering most stigmatizing and discriminating situations or from developing more severe educational problems. It creates opportunity for the teacher to meet community-identified needs

Conclusion, and Recommendations

The increasing rate of violence, disasters, conflicts and health challenges in our various homes, societies, states, nations, regions, and continents really affects both students and teacher's psychological well-being either directly or indirectly. This situation, in most cases, leads to social stigmatization and discrimination among students and impacts on the economic, social, emotional, physical, and educational lives of students and teachers heavily in Africa today. In education, the impact has become unbearable, hence the need for psychosocial support at all levels of education system. It is pertinent that teachers at all levels become knowledgeable about psychosocial support, types, importance, principles, and challenges, to improve teaching and learning against any unpleasant circumstances in our environment. Therefore, it was recommended that:

1. Teachers should be able to identify and protect vulnerable students that may be socially marginalized, stigmatized and/or discriminated in the society and schools. Teachers should provide psychological first aid in emergency situations and refer students to other psychosocial support professionals in difficult cases to avoid casualty.
2. Every school administration should constitute committees on psychosocial support for identification and support to vulnerable students for effective learning and societal stability. They should provide psychological first aid in emergency situations by all categories of teachers.
3. The Ministry of Health should embed mental health in primary health care and community care services to meet basic health needs of students in societies.
4. The Ministry should provide in-service training to teachers on the need, categories, and strategies for psychosocial support in school systems.
5. The curriculum planners should integrate activities and programmed psychosocial supports into the school curriculum for sustainability of psychosocial support in the society.
6. Psychosocialists should engage with students or communities to facilitate self-sufficiency and confidence among vulnerable students.

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