
GUIDANCE AND COUNSELLING: A CONCERN FOR EFFECTIVE EDUCATIONAL COUNSELLING IN THE 21ST CENTURY NIGERIAN SCHOOLS

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ABSTRACT

Guidance and counselling in Nigeria is characterized by a number of problems which have brought untold hardship to the quality of counsellors and in turn, quality of educational counselling. Some of the problems include dearth in quality counsellors, imbalance in students to counsellor ratio, government attitude towards the plight of counsellors, would be counsellors lack of access to quality practicum. This exposition therefore focuses attention on counsellor education and counsellor quality, as well as conclusion and suggestions to enhance quality of guidance and counselling

INTRODUCTION

The Federal Government of Nigeria in recognition of the fact that for education to serve as an instrument for human and national development, guidance and counselling needs to be incorporated in its processes for appraising and grooming the nation's talents (Arene and Durojaiye in Salawu, 2014). The achievement of effective guidance and counseling as demonstrated in the National Policy on Education (2013) depends undoubtedly on the qualities of guidance counsellors. The National Policy was fashioned out to make individuals informed on the apparent ignorance of young people about career prospects, and in view of personality maladjustment among school children. However, these cannot be achieved without giant step been taken towards counselors educational qualities. Hence, the counselor is seen as the pivot on which any meaningful

guidance and counselling process hangs. On this premise there is need for well trained, qualified, efficient, effective and dedicated counsellors to perform this noble task.

Counsellor Education in Focus

In a developing nation like Nigeria with multi-ethnic and religious diversities, critical economic and socio-political crisis, guidance and counselling is the only known potent instrument for social reconstruction or behavioural change and counsellor education is the foundation of effectiveness and quality guidance and counselling in the school system. Ever since the early 1970s, Nigeria has come to appreciate the need for mounting effective guidance and counselling programme in support of the nation's educational system. The new National Policy on Education in Nigeria has come out boldly as earlier stated to highlight the need for an appreciation of guidance and counselling programme as an essential ingredient in our educational programming.

Apart from the efforts of the academic and professional products of Teachers College Columbia in popularizing the merits of guidance and counselling services within the educational system in this country. Day to day events go to prove that our school children need some kind of professional counselling in order to benefit from the education to which they are being exposed (Tambuwal, 2014). Such counselling services are needed to help the pupils make wise and meaningful utilization of the educational experience to which they are being exposed to at all times. Besides, the products of our educational system need professional guidance and counselling services in order to make wise and useful vocational choices and further academic pursuits. Above all, with life becoming more complicated and demanding in the country and with traditional culture merging with western improved culture, our young adolescents find life so sophisticated, problematic and challenging that they need some supportive professional guidance and counselling services to help them not only to solve problems but

more importantly to acquire skills for self-problem solving (Tambuwal, 2014).

Based on the above, counsellor education must be tailored through production of counsellors capable to contribute their quota through counselling to the realization of seven major reasons why guidance and counselling services are necessary in Nigeria (Okon, 1984). These reasons are as follows:

The need to develop and conserve skilled workforce, the growing needs of young people, social change and how it inflicts its growing problems on children, youth and their families, basic concerns and problems of students, Problem of national integration, changes in the family and home life and increasing enrolment in Nigerian educational institution and the need to prepare for productive life.

Summarily, the purpose of counsellor education from the above exposition is the production of sufficient number of professionally qualified, positively motivated, efficient, creative, knowledgeable, competent and dedicated counsellors to see the development of the Nigerian society through guidance and counselling programmes.

Counsellor Quality in the Guidance and Counseling Enterprise

First and foremost, it is pertinent to understand in a clear term the two major components, that is, the term "counsellor" and the concept "quality". The term "counsellor" in this context, simply refers to one who engages in guidance and counselling activities having received formal training and certificated in the field of guidance and counselling or counselling psychology. The concept "quality" refers to the attribute which makes a thing what it is or worthwhile. Ogbole in Isaac and Tijani (2008) sees quality as the character or attribute of an object by reason of which it is valued by those who deserved it. It also refers to the traits, attitude or behaviour that is cherished in an object or human being.

Since all aforementioned reasons are to be accomplished within a guidance and counselling process by the guidance counsellor, it therefore becomes necessary for guidance counsellors to possess additional qualities apart from their academic qualifications. Thus, Haurin and Paulson in Salawu (2014) listed what they considered as qualities and characteristics a counsellor should have to facilitate effective counselling. These qualities are:

Emphatic understanding, Friendliness, Stability, Sympathetic attitude, Sense of humour, Patience, Objectivity, Tactful, Tolerance, Calmness, Social intelligence, Poise, Sincerity, Fairness, Neatness, Broadmindedness and Pleasantness.

However, counsellor should not only be able to help people to help themselves to live their lives more effectively, but he should also be able to give assistance to the individual to help them understand themselves, their world and to make intelligent adjustments and choices (Alao, 1981; Rao, 1981 & Shertzer and Stone, 1976). In the same vein Sambo (2013) opines that counsellors should also possess the following qualities: Assist students in making right choices of school subjects and courses. making transition from one school to another, making transition from school to employment, helping students and their parents make a plan of study, obtaining and circulate information on admission and examination like JAMB, obtain and circulate information on scholarships and bursaries to students, write letters of recommendation for students and help students write applications for employment.

Tambuwal (2014) ascertains that a counsellor must be a specialist and good man or woman who is knowledgeable, conscientious and dedicated. According to Tambuwal (2014) the following qualities must also be possessed by counsellors: Demonstrating genuine respect for the worth and dignity of individual (client); Helping an individual to achieve personal freedom, confidence in himself and health self-image; Assisting school administrations and teachers provide healthy environment which enhance maximum teaching and learning;

Encouraging the adoption of school curricular which will satisfy the total developmental needs of students; Providing students with relevant educational, occupational, personal-social information which will help them in decision making; Helping students understand themselves realistically (their capability, interests, values, aptitudes, experience, needs, problems and fault). So that they can use such knowledge to make informed decisions; Helping students in educational, vocational planning and decision making; Referring students problems to appropriate communities, agencies which have requisite professional competencies to deal with such problems; Helping students to be placed in appropriate classes, group or work places; recognizing students with special needs and providing them with appropriate educational experiences to meet those needs; Maintaining of complete confidence;

Encouraging students to participate in school activities which are related to their interests and social development; Participating in research work which will help the school to meet the need of its students more adequately; Helping student utilize the school and community resources more effectively; Helping each student understand the relationship between education and work by involving him in work-related programme; Helping an individual use his leisure time wisely and Helping an individual adjust to his new environment.

Maximizing Counsellor Qualities for National Development

Development simply put, refer to any positive change in the society. The change could be in terms of economy, health, social and political life of the people and by extension, the nation (Isaac & Tijani, 2008). There will no be meaningful national development without the consideration to counsellor quality and quality of education our children receive since they are expected to be the leaders of tomorrow. Since the client is the centre of counselling, the counsellors are the hub of the counselling process. For it is upon their number, their education and training, their quality and devotion to

duty, effectiveness and efficiency, their competence and their confidentiality depends on the effectiveness, capability and possibilities of the counselling process and enterprises.

The implication of this view is that guidance and counselling is the only known instrument of behavioral change. Therefore, both government and all the educational practitioners should maximize guidance and counselors' quality for national development. In doing this, attention must be given to the following:-

Practicum in Guidance and Counselling

Practicum in guidance and counselling refers to some of the practical ways by which "would be" counsellors or counsellors in training are supervised by experts. Counsellors handle real client problems under systematic supervision and evaluation. Counselling practicum provides the student counsellors and supervisors a good opportunity to learn and acquire practical experiences and skills which would lead to professional growth and self evaluation (Salawu, 2014).

Guidance counsellors' qualities receive lip services in many of our universities that offer degree in guidance and counselling. It is indeed a point of concern that practicum in guidance and counselling that forms the basis of counsellor education has been bastardized or reduced to nothing by the universities administration because of failure to provide satisfactory funds to lecturers to carry out this noble exercise. In some of the universities the "would be counsellors" or "counsellors in training" hardly spend more than three weeks of serious practicum and within this period, they hardly receive the critically necessary clinical supervision by their lecturers. The essence of practicum in guidance and counselling therefore, is to enable counsellors in training learn and acquire the skill of assessment, treatment and evaluation through practical exposure to relevant clients. Counselling practicum is therefore, similar to the experience which medical doctors, nurses, student teachers and lawyers are usually exposed to while still in training.

Professionalization of Guidance and Counselling

By being professional, the writers mean those who are actually trained in the realm of guidance and counselling. Many people engage in the guidance and counselling enterprise without any formal training from the onset. Therefore, the writers stand is based on the premise that one has to spend four years to obtain a degree in guidance and counselling (B.Ed. Guidance and Counselling) in order to maintain quality.

Admission Process

A major area of concern in our effort to produce qualified guidance counsellors for our school systems is the admission of unqualified candidates into our Faculties of Education to be trained as teachers and counsellors. Similarly, Isaac and Tijani (2008) declare that:

It is indeed unfortunate to note that it is only in education that "failures" are given official candidacy among those who are to be prepared for teacher training programme.

In line with the above, the criterion of high standards of admission for 'would' be counsellor or counsellors in training raises problem of quality. It appears that guidance and counselling does not attract the best entrants in training.

CONCLUSION

The realization of the potentialities of guidance and counselling as fashioned out in the National Policy on Education as to make individuals informed on the apparent ignorance of young people about career prospects and in view of personality maladjustment among school children depends largely on the counsellors. Excellent guidance and counselling policies are meaningless unless there are equally excellent counsellors to see to their realization. Therefore, both government and all the educational practitioners should maximize guidance counsellors quality for national development. In doing this, attention must be given to practicum in guidance and

counselling, professionalization of guidance and counselling and the admission process.

SUGGESTIONS

The authors of this paper wish to make the following suggestions in order to achieve effective educational guidance and counselling in Nigeria:

1. Enough money should be made available by the school management to lecturers for effective supervision of the student counsellors
2. To maximize counsellor quality, the prospective counsellor should attend a four years degree programme in guidance and counselling in any reputable university.
3. The ongoing effort to professionalize guidance and counselling should be maintained.
4. Regular in-service training should be organized for the counsellors in various secondary schools.
5. Counsellors should be remunerated promptly and adequately as this will enable them perform excellently in the developmental orientation of our great nation. In the same vein, adequate fund should be expanded on our universities and colleges of education and other institutions that are involved in the production of counsellors.

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