

TOWARDS ENHANCING THE EFFICACY OF PARA-COUNSELLING PRACTICES FOR PROFESSIONAL AND ETHICAL CONSIDERATION IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN GOMBE STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper examined the roles of teachers as para-counsellors and their enhancement for effective counselling, ethical and professional consideration. The paper discussed about a professional counsellor and qualities of a good counsellor. It also takes a look at professional ethics in counselling, the need for enhancing the efficacy of para-counsellors, i.e guidance and counselling masters in secondary schools for ethical and professional practices. The paper concluded that the need to enhance the efficacy of the para-counsellors or the school guidance and counselling masters becomes inevitable to meet up with the inadequate number of counsellors to help in curbing common social problems among the students. As a way forward, the paper suggested that because of inadequate trained counsellors, school management and administrators should not just place any teacher in the position of a guidance and counselling master, but where there is need to employ the services of an ordinary school teacher, experienced ones should be considered. In addition the paper suggested that teachers assigned as guidance and counselling masters be given capacity building training in guidance and counselling so as to give them basic knowledge, techniques and skills in the counselling task.

Keywords: Enhancing, Efficacy, Professional Counsellors, Counselling ethics, Para-counselling practices.

INTRODUCTION

Counselling plays a vital role in the client growth and development. It contributes in no small measure to the total wellbeing of a client. This could be socially, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. Counselling fosters interest and welfare of a client and promotes formation of healthy relationships. Unlike guidance services that can be dispensed by any other experienced individual, counselling requires more than a mere experience in a subject matter but a good knowledge and skills that could be acquired through professional training. The central focus is how the counsellee could be able to repose confidence and trust in the counsellor and the counsellor as well is expected to respect and protect the client's right to privacy and confidentiality. However, it is on the basis of how relevant counselling effects are to individuals particularly those who are having one challenge or the other and wish to share out with someone who they could confide in that prompted this discussion with the secondary school students and teachers at the center. There has been increase in the number of schools establishment and students enrolment without the corresponding increase in the recruitment of trained counsellors.

The increase in students enrolment into secondary schools relatively resulted into the challenge of increase in malfeasance activities such as cultism, drugs or substance abuse, theft, truancy and other maladaptive behaviours (Chibuko, 2008). During secondary school period of life, the individual student experiences various developmental changes which sometimes are traumatic. Consequently, this period of growth and development is also described as a period of storm and crisis experience (Denga, 2001). According to Ruttoh (2014), those students of secondary

schools are predominantly adolescents who make successful transition from primary school level to the present stage. She further maintained that the stage is often characterized by youthful exuberance, a turbulent period of development full of psychological crisis. Eremie (2006) also observed that secondary schools have turned to be the recruitment grounds for anti-social or dangerous group (cliques). These social changes culminated into social problems, which call for the services of guidance and counselling. As the need for personal social guidance is becoming essential and inevitable, to both youth and adults in the society, the need for having guidance counseling personnel and units cannot be overlooked (Hatch, 2008). The paper looks into how secondary school teachers could be engrafted and enhanced as para-counsellors to meet up with the challenge of inadequate number of trained counsellors who can help in salvaging the teeming secondary school youths from the menace of evolving social vices in our societies today.

The enhancement practices has to do with augmenting, raising or improving the efficacy of the secondary school teachers counselling practices who are appointed as school guidance and counselling masters without any prior training that could enable them function very well. This could be done through capacity building training like workshop, counselling conferences, symposium or seminar organization where they may be exposed to the knitty-gritty of the counselling demands. Echebe (2012) opined that for any effective counselling task, the counselling personnel must possess knowledge, skills, techniques and theories of counselling. The capacity building will help in adding some counselling characteristics or features to the para-counsellors where they will be lifted and engrafted into the counseling practices.

Ethical Considerations in counselling by Secondary School Teachers (para-counsellors)

Counselling work can no longer be based strictly on the "counsellor knows best" philosophy, but should be based both on the personal relationship that exists between the counsellor and counsellee and the diagnosis of the problems and solutions concerning risk and ethics. Questions concerning counselling professionalism, professional ethics and the ability to cope with work are intertwined in many ways with everyday working situations. It would appear that ethical issues often become concentrated, visible and cause friction in the various relationships and boundaries to be found in counsellors' daily work settings. According to Echebe (2012) that anyone who wants to be practically productive and effective in counselling, such an individual must possess knowledge of some counselling skills, techniques and theoretical frameworks. School counsellors should always be aware of ethical standards in their work in maintaining their integrity and that of the profession. Every kind of profession involves ethics but the fact that some guidance and counselling masters or para-counsellors in secondary schools are untrained and working with the minors who are at their crucial stages of emotional and mental development, they need to bear in mind the issue of ethical standards in counselling.

Ethical Values in Counselling

Counselling ethics could be described as professional set standards or principles which help counsellors in the conduct or discharge of guidance and counselling services (American Counselling Association, 2014). Echebe (2012) defines ethics as standards of right and wrong; 'that part of science and philosophy dealing with moral conducts, duty and judgment'. Ethical issues in school counselling can be intricate or complex which need professional approach and ethical considerations. To be ethical means for one to be devoted or strictly adhere to spelt out or

prescribed standard or to be morally just. Every profession has code of ethics as guidelines or principles regarding professional behaviours, values and practices. For instance the Nigerian Medical Association (NMA), the Nigerian Bar Association (NBA), the Nigerian Union of Teachers (NUT), the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) etc all have their code of conducts or ethics observed or kept by any registered member; and any member found wanting is punishable as prescribed by the principles of that particular profession (Mahuta, 2009). The following are overview of ethical issues in counselling:

Confidentiality and its Boundaries: Guidance and counselling masters or school counsellors need to establish and maintain a trusting relationship that can allow their students or clients confide in them. This could be done by respecting their confidentiality and privacy. However, some situations demand counsellors or guidance and counselling masters divulge information of their clients which may be in the clients' best interest where the law or professional ethics permit that to parents, guardians or appropriate third party. For instance, if a student is threatening to harm him/herself the parents, guardians or medical authorities have to be notified. But in whatever circumstances, ethical information about a client should be kept confidentially by the counsellor or the school guidance and counselling master.

Professional Distances: According to Adeyemi and Esere (2007) distance in communication is a space kept between two or more individuals during communication which could be cultural or contextual and respected. However Counsellors or guidance and counselling masters need to bear in mind by respecting their clients' social, private or public communication spaces during counseling services. In the same vein school counsellors' relationship with the students should always remain within the

context of the counsellors or teachers professional ethics, since the students are minors who may not always understand relationship boundaries. The task is on the counsellors or para-counsellors to explain explicitly and professionally the counselling ethical and professional boundaries in counselling where necessary. Thus, romantic closeness and relationship with the clients or students are serious breach of ethical standards, regardless of whatever, they are illegal. Counsellors and teachers should endeavor to respect and keep the professional distance in counselling.

Respect differences in norms, beliefs, values and culture or tradition: Our country Nigeria as described to be the giant of Africa explosively increases every now and then in terms of population which also have diverse ethnic groups, culture/tradition, religion and beliefs. School counsellors or Guidance and counselling masters (Para-counsellors) need to be sensitive to that, they should also be aware of their own culture and not being bias by imposing them on their students. Hence, they should develop an understanding of how social and economic inequalities as well as gender and other social biases impact on students and their families.

Equal Accesses to Opportunities and Support: Regardless of a client's social background, physical condition or whatever, school counsellors are expected to be fair and just in providing equal opportunities as demanded by each client. They should ensure that students or clients are given the necessary counselling service. This is to say school counselors should not show favoritism to a client over others but to accept them and treat them based on their needs regardless of their challenges, beliefs and value orientation (Echebe, 2012).

Dual Relationships: School counsellors should be careful of relationship that could compromise their objectivity and impair or affect their ability to ethically dispense fair counselling services. For instance, counselling children of relatives, close friends or romantic partners. If such relationships are unavoidable, counsellors should go extra mile to keep to their objectivity and ethical values. In case a counsellor developed interest in the clients, he/she should not disclose such feelings to the client until after the helping relationship has ended and taken some period of time.

Roles of a Teacher

The word teacher is defined or described by many educators from different perspectives. "A teacher is the only person who is capable of imparting knowledge and shaping the youths to the wider scope of knowledge. Teachers are capable of living and molding the youths such that their power is paramount as they determine the fate of the society. Both teachers and parents live with the children for a long time and hence they are capable of imparting knowledge, skills and values that cannot be easily challenged by the society." (Nyerere: 27th August 1968).

According to National Policy on Education (2002) a teacher is someone who had undergone approved professional teacher training programme in education at appropriate level and in a recognised teacher training institution and is also capable of transferring idea, knowledge, skills or values into learners. According to Adeyemi (1998) one of the confliction issues in counselling profession is the fact that even the government itself would not create a career ladder for school counsellors; rather they were lumped together and treated as teachers, thus making it difficult for counsellors to be promotable to a career line in counselling. This makes it difficult to create a dichotomy in roles of a teacher and school counsellor. However, some teachers of

secondary schools (para-counsellors) perform multiple functions such as:

1. Counselling: Adeyemi, (1998) opined that knowledge of theories is important, familiarities with techniques are necessary, acquaintance with *in-situ* situations is useful, but when all is said and done, the counsellor's experience is far more crucial in handling many counselling issues and challenges. No wonder many secondary school principals prefer appointing experienced teachers as Guidance and counseling masters than employing the services of a counsellor. Some secondary school teachers' even though not trained as counsellors, but because of their vast life experiences are appointed as guidance and counselling masters who do attend to students' social and academic challenges

2. Facilitating: A teacher is a facilitator of learning processes by skillfully assisting, and guiding group of learners to understand and achieve their common learning objectives.

3. Assessor: A teacher assesses or evaluates his learners' academic progress and also evaluates the curriculum content.

4. An Organizer: To allow for active facilitation of learning a teacher is charged with the responsibility of organizing learning spaces.

5. Learning Resource Developer: This has to do with development and improvisation of instructional materials.

6. A Planner: A teacher is involved in the design of curriculum/ learning contents.

Other functions include keeping adequate records, modeling and mentoring of learners, taking part in policies and decision making, intermediary between parents and school and maintaining communal relationship, identifying the needs of learners and looking for possible means of meeting them.

Professional Counsellors: Qualities and Responsibilities

According to American Counselling Association (ACA, 2014) professional counsellors are trained and licensed mental health therapists who provide assessment, diagnosis and counselling to people facing a variety of life stress and psychological problems. They help people adjust in their relationship difficulties, family stress, jobless challenges mental disorder such as anxiety, depression, trauma and lots of other challenges that can impose negative effects in the well-being of the of the affected. Berg (2009) viewed professional counsellors as individuals equipped with specialised knowledge and skills in guidance and counseling programme, which he regards as a life- long vocation. Professional counsellors can dispense services such as information provision, appraisal, counselling, placement, referral and follow-up; other functions encompass evaluation and sustenance for positive results and longevity. They also provide clues and alternatives for clients to consider in overcoming their challenges, but not deciding for them. Counsellors also assist clients discover their potentials and abilities as well as helping them with possible and good decisions toward attaining to life goals. These attributes clearly distinguished professional counsellors from professional teachers.

Need for Enhancing the Efficacy of Secondary School Teachers as Para-counsellors for Effective Counselling Practices

Most of the secondary school teachers who are saddled with the responsibility of providing guidance and counselling services to students are neither trained counsellors nor counsellor educators. According to Alao (2004) that some school administrators are carried by the multi-dimensional functions performed by some teachers and prefer assigning them to take over the roles of counsellors instead of employing the services of trained counsellors. This could be disadvantageous because the teachers

are not trained as counsellors and so lack the techniques, knowledge, skills and the knitty-gritty involved in the helping relationship. Not only that, counselling has ethical and professional values which any practicing counsellors need to adhere to. Ifelunmi (1997) described a counsellor as a trained expert with counselling skills, knowledge of psychological testing as well as theoretical and practicum understanding needed in the assessment of clients problems and giving necessary assistance. This is to say a counsellor is expected to possess certain peculiar characteristics or qualities that will enable him/her function effectively. However, the need for upgrading or enhancing some secondary school teachers as guidance and counselling masters or para-counsellors become imperative because of the increasing number of students' enrolment into secondary school level and who are at their formation stage.

Way forward: To improve the efficacy of the secondary school guidance and counselling masters (para-counsellors), the paper suggested that teachers appointed as guidance and counselling masters be given rudimentary training in guidance and counselling to enable them acquire basic knowledge, skills and techniques of counselling through workshop, seminar, induction course or other capacity building in counselling. The para-counsellors or the school guidance and counselling masters of secondary schools be mentored by the professionals or trained counselors, and to tackle the challenge of inadequate number of counsellors in secondary schools, the paper suggested that experienced teachers should be appointed as guidance and counselling masters.

CONCLUSION

The need for enhancing the performance of some secondary school teachers as guidance and counselling masters or para-counsellors is inevitable for commensurability with the increasing

number of secondary school students' enrolment and the youthful exuberance. However, not every teacher is to be assigned or appointed as guidance and counselling master but one with vast experience and competency.

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Reference to this paper should be made as follows: Joel Dogo and M. M. Baba (2018) Towards Enhancing the Efficacy of Para-Counselling Practices for Professional and Ethical Consideration in Secondary Schools in Gombe State, Nigeria. *J. of Education and Leadership Development* Vol. 10, No. 2, Pp. 1-12
