



School Counselors for Today's Children: Progress and Challenges of the Practice in Nigeria

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Abstract

The utilization of guidance and counselling services in Nigeria have expanded due to development in diverse settings such as home, industries, hospitals, welfare centres, banks, marriage registries, schools, remand and correctional centres. School counselling takes place within the school settings where the professional counsellors work with students, families and other school personnel to provide the best all round education for today's children. School counselling is designed to facilitate students' achievement, improve students' behaviour and attendance, assist in the maximum functioning and development of students' physically, mentally, morally and socially. The 21st century is characterized with changes in family system; challenges of permissive society; gap between the rich and the poor; unemployment; unequal opportunities; poverty; domestic violence; corruption, moral decadence, insurgencies, problem of national integration, school unrest and expansion in the enrolment of students in schools both primary, secondary and university. It is often the efforts of professional school counsellors that could help children cope and adjust to the threats posed by these challenges. However, despite the recognition of guidance and counselling by the Federal government and its inclusion in the school curriculum, many Nigerian schools do not have counsellors and where they have, they were compelled to combine teaching of school subjects with rendering counselling services. Consequent upon this, it was suggested that government should ensure proper implementation of school guidance and counselling in the Nigerian school system. Thus, this will aid the effective and efficient delivery of counselling services among school-aged children.

Key words: School counsellors, children, Counselling practice, professional progress, professional challenges,

Introduction

Issues relating to the progress and effective practice of school guidance and counselling in Nigeria have continued to gain wide research in the past decade. In the context of moulding today's children who are the nation builders and tomorrow leaders, school counsellors are faced with a lot of challenges which have

hindered the practice and progress of the profession in Nigeria. Guidance and counselling is aimed at bringing about maximum development and self-realization of human potential for the benefit of the individual and the society. School guidance and counselling is a process of providing help for school-aged children which gives them opportunity within their social and moral



values to attain their optimum best. It entails a conscious concern for the past, present and future life of school-aged children in a continuum.

School-aged children are in the formative years of life, that is, a stage of identity formation and self-concept as well as a time of rapid growth and change. The appropriate time to frame good behavioural patterns and characteristics in human is at the early stage of life. They are open to a myriad of options and virtues learnt at this stage are maintained and carried over to adulthood. Early guidance and counselling programme help school-aged children to harmonize their abilities, interests and values; enhance their adjustment and resolve educational, social and psychological problems by providing the child with an increased understanding of the educational, vocational and social information needed to make wise choices. This is geared towards improving the self-image of the children, facilitating better achievement, developing their full potentials and becoming psychologically mature.

In Nigeria today, corruption, dishonesty, moral decadence, injustice, cheating, bribery, extortion, insurgencies, stealing and looting of government treasuries, domestic violence and poor scholastic performance are order of the day. Teachers have reported maladaptive behaviour such as drug and sexual abuse, violation of school rules and regulations, lateness, use of abusive words, truancy, bullying, school disruption, emotional disorder and mental distress among school-aged children. However, Durojaye in Durosaro(2004) submitted that behavioural and

emotional problem among today's children emanated from the fact that the Nigerian family had experienced significant change which have resulted in the breakdown of family cohesiveness and increased rate of divorce.

Today's children are faced with unique and diverse challenges including developmental problems which could hinder their intellectual, physical, social, emotional, moral and vocational development as well as their overall achievement in life. They are living in an exciting time, with an increasingly diverse society, new technologies and expanding opportunities. To help ensure that they are prepared to become the next generation of parents, workers, leaders and citizens; every child needs support programme such as the one provided by school guidance and counselling which assists to impart specific skills and learning opportunities in a proactive and preventive manner that ensures students can achieve school success and developmental competencies.

Effective guidance and counselling programmes enables school-aged children to develop positive self-image and actualize their adjustment need that leads them into the future. According to Gichinga (1995), the need for formal guidance and counselling in African countries is recognized at the present time more than ever before. The Nigerian government has realized the importance of counselling services to attain national goals and development that is why school counselling was included as one of the educational services (National Policy on Education, 2004:15). This study becomes imperative so as to create awareness to the general public that despite the inclusion of



school counselling into the Nigerian educational system, it has not been properly implemented and that professional school counsellors are faced with numerous challenges in the cause of disseminating their services.

Counselling is based on the assumption that every individual in any society has had, is having and would have a concern that he alone could not solve (Makinde in Idowu, 2004). The aim of providing school counselling is to:

1. help in the total development of the child;
2. assist school-aged children explore their environment;
3. enable school-aged children to acquire information that would facilitate wise choices and decisions about life and career opportunities;
4. aid children to become purposefully self-directed and able to handle future concerns independently;
5. guide school-aged children to have full respect for the worth and dignity of self and others;
6. assists children in need of special help;
7. Minimize the incidence of indiscipline among school-aged children.

School Counselling in Global Perspectives

School guidance and counselling programme in the world originated from Europe and the United States of America in 1900. School Counselling is a helping profession that is gaining vast recognition in the contemporary society. According to Chen-Hayes, Ockerman and Mason (2014), school counselling is an integral part of the education

system in large numbers of countries and in others it is emerging as a critical support for elementary, middle, and high school learning and/or student health concerns. Hamlet, Gergar and Shaefer (2011) noted that some countries such as Asia with no formal school counselling programmes used teachers or psychologists to do school counselling with a primary emphasis on career development.

The provision of school counselling varies from countries vary based on financial capacity (funding for schools and school counseling programmes), social capital (independent versus public schools), and school counsellor certification and credentialing movements in education departments, professional associations, and national and local legislation (Hamlet, Gergar and Shaefer, 2011). For instance, China has put substantial financial resources into school counselling with strong growth in urban areas. In 2013, school counseling was established in 62 countries and emerging in another seven countries (Chen-Hayes, Ockerman, and Mason 2014).

Chen-Hayes, Ockerman and Mason (2014) reported that an international scoping project on school-based counselling revealed that school counselling is mandatory in 39 countries, 32 USA states, one Australian state, 3 German states, 2 countries in the United Kingdom, and three provinces in Canada. Hamlet, Gergar and Shaefer (2011) asserts that in countries such as India, Japan, Mexico, South Korea, Zambia school counselling is provided by classroom teachers who either have such duties added to their typical teaching load or teach only a limited load that also includes school counselling activities. Kilonzo



in Anagbogu (2002) states that in Kenya the concept of guidance and counselling was introduced to our school system in late 1960's and formalized through the Ministry of Education in 1971. However, countries like Nigeria, Botswana, China, Finland, Israel, Malta, Romania, Taiwan, Turkey and United States have school counselling provided by professional school counsellors.

School Counselling : Nigerian Situation

The situation at present in Nigeria concerning school counselling warrants these questions: Are there school counsellors who are not subject teachers in schools? Are government, parents, teachers and students aware of the invaluable roles of school counsellors? What is the role of the government in school counselling?

In Nigeria, guidance and counselling started in 1959 when the Catholic sisters at St. Theresa's College, Ibadan organized a formal career guidance service for their final year students. The sisters invited civil servants from various government department and ministries to enlighten graduating students about the world and to be trained in human relations. The programme yielded result as 54 out of the 60 participants were employed. This later formed the Nucleus of Ibadan Careers Council in 1962 which together with other similar councils in Lagos, Enugu, Kano and Kaduna formed the Nigeria Careers Councils in 1967 but the council achieved little due to the Nigerian Civil War. In 1976, the Counselling Association of Nigeria was launched as professional association responsible for the welfare of all guidance counsellors in Nigeria.

The Nigerian educational system is all involving as a process of transmitting the societal norms and values toward nation building. So as to make the Nigerian youths to meet up with the challenges of the global trend in technological advancement and by acquiring the relevant skills needed through the assistance from career counsellors in schools, guidance and counselling was incorporated into the school system in 2004. Also, school guidance and counselling is to eliminate overwhelming ignorance of many young people on their choices of career prospects and personality maladjustment among school children.

School counselling in Nigeria has not been given full recognition as other profession especially both in public and private school setting. School counsellors in most schools do not have official office space and necessary facilities and materials such as file cabinet, psychological tests, computer for practice. In some schools they were given office space to share with vice- principals and this have hindered the effective and efficient practice of school counselling because most vice-principals viewed them as rivals while other school personnel display negative attitude towards them.

Moreover, most school counsellors are mandated to teach as subject teachers in schools and this has actually jeopardized the practice of school counselling. Based on this, students are confused and are not aware of the differential roles of a teacher and a school counsellor. In schools where school counsellors are given subjects to teach, they practice on part-time basis and this may not allow them to



attend to students concern/ problem as at when required and may not have time to develop laudable programmes that could enhance the maximum development of the students.

Who are School counsellors?

The school counsellors are professionals who hold either Bachelor and or Masters Degree in Educational Guidance and Counselling or Counselling Psychology. Professional counsellors perform tasks that are more than ordinary, requiring a long period of preparation and education. The training of the school counsellors leads to certification and competence. According to Anagbogu (2002), the counsellor is a professional who through diagnosing, planning, predicting, interpreting and evaluating provides educational, personal, social and vocational assistance to the clients in such a way that it would reflect their interests, objectives, potentialities and needs for effective adjustment.

School counsellor is a professionally qualified person who provides useful services to students based on their needs, the understanding of their immediate environment and its influences. They help to meet the needs of students in three domains namely; academic development, career development and personal/social development. School counsellors make a tremendous progress in the field of practice most especially in how they assist students to maximize their potentials (Yahaya, 2004).

Personal Attributes of 21st century School Counsellors

An effective school counsellor must have sincere interest in students' welfare. He/she should be present for others, that is, empathize with clients in their various experiences of sadness and joy. The individual should be willing to serve as a model for students which entails teach by examples. Also, the contemporary school counsellors must remain open to the possibility of broadening their horizons and have the ability to motivate students to seek counselling. School counsellors must be confidants of their students. In counselling, confidentiality is the watchword because counsellors are expected to keep the bond of confidentiality in all matters discussed with them except when such matters are of criminal nature and might impinge on societal balance.

Other attributes include openness and friendliness, devotion to duty, regularity and punctuality at school, humorous and relaxed, firm but yet flexible in action, tolerant, patient and morally upright. Also, school counsellors are expected to have good communication skills which are verbal and non-verbal (eye contact, body movement), questioning an interviewing skills, listening skills, diagnostic skills, motivational skills and management skills.

Where do School Counsellors Practise?

School counsellors provide academic, career, personal and social competencies to all students through various counselling programs at all educational levels: elementary, middle/junior and senior high schools. The majorities of school counsellors are employed by government and work in urban and rural settings. Also, some school counsellors are employed by private-owned schools.



Why Do We Need School Counsellors?

Counselling is a helping relationship which provides unique and needed services. A helping profession may be described as one in which the members are specially trained and licensed or certified to perform a unique and needed service for fellow human beings. Other helping professions in Nigeria include medicine, law, dentistry, psychology and social work. The growing needs of youths which include: attaining individuality, developing philosophy of life, developing a concept of values and desirable behaviour establishing deep personal relationships with individuals of both sexes, making of plans for future living, understanding of personal assets and liabilities, achieving a place in the society and learning to attain adult status through career choice, family and social choice require assistance from professional helpers such as school counsellors.

Moral decadence in the society, changes in home and family life, insurgencies, problem of national integration, expansion in the enrolment of students in schools both primary, secondary and university, economic, social and other interpersonal problems, school unrest; in oyo state for instance, some secondary students burnt their schools to ashes in July, 2016. School counsellors would help in the development of skills, attitudes and potentials of Nigerian youths to realize their fullest possible capabilities for national development.

How do School Counsellors assist Today's Children?

School counsellors assist in inculcating the right values in youths and ensuring that every student develops his/her maximum

possible potentials. They support both youth and families by examining personal and environmental factors that have negative impact on their academic success and overall development. Multifaceted problems such as truancy, stealing, bullying, examination malpractices, unhealthy heterosexual relationships, low self-concept, self-esteem, and personality damage, using abusive language, threatening teachers and failing to comply with teacher's instructions, aggressive behaviour, poor study habit, poor social skills, low motivation and underachievement and handling peer pressure are faced by the 21st century youths. Others include teenage pregnancy, alcohol, drug misuse, suicide, child abuse and neglect, violence, divorce, single parenting, mental health concerns, learning problems such special education needs among students.

The school counsellors often administer and analyses validated psychological tests to diagnose various problems and challenges faced by youths after which behavioural inoculation (preventive counselling), behavioural first aid (developmental counselling) and behavioural treatment (curative counselling) are used in handling the problems and challenges. Preventive counselling takes place when the school counsellor inoculated youth against behaviours that are detrimental through teaching the pro and con of such behaviours, teaching adequate and relevant skills such as interpersonal relations and decision making skills, assisting students to understand their potentials, aptitudes interests and personality characteristics. Developmental counselling lay



emphasis on developing and enhancing positive behaviour in youth.

Moreover, school counsellors give curative counselling by using psychotherapies for prevention and or remediation of behaviours that could hinder the development and psychological well-being of youths. On the other hand, psychotherapies could also be used to enhance behaviours beneficial to the maximum development of youths. Psychotherapies such as cognitive therapies, behavioural therapies, cognitive behavioural therapies, transactional analysis, gestalt counselling, eclectic counselling, motivational enhancement therapy, rational emotive therapy, reality therapy, value clarification techniques, mindfulness-based therapy are often used by school counsellors in their day-to-practice.

What else do School Counsellors do?

School counsellors render orientation service for newly admitted students and information service which entails providing educational, occupational and personal-social information. Placement service which includes helping to choose the right class (science, social science and art), subject combination, higher education and other educational training and examination is also done by school counsellors. Appraisal service which is done through the administration and analysis of psychological test is one of the unique functions of school counsellors. Appraisal is the value judgment of an individual based on the result of assessment of various relevant characteristics of the person. Appraisal service helps students to better understand themselves and because the analysis is systematic and continual, the information about the student allows the

counsellor, teachers and parents to help the student in their tasks.

School guidance and counselling programme focuses on academic, career, social and emotional curriculum which is delivered through classroom lessons, small group and individual consultation. Counselling service which could either be one-on-one otherwise referred to as individual counselling or group interaction/ counselling is another service being rendered by school counsellors. Group counselling is mostly used and effective for preventive and smooth engendering as well as reformatory (remedial) such as social skills training groups and life skills training.

Referral service if necessary could also be done by the school counsellor after the counselling session. Students who require special services may be referred to appropriate centre or specialist such as doctor, nurse, special educators, developmental psychologists, and another counsellor depending on the nature of problem at hand. Follow-up service done by school counsellors entails visit to places in the community to collect data, conduct research and keep up with past students for planning and evaluation purposes. Follow-up is also done for referral cases.

School Counsellor: Progress in the Practice

It is noted that school counsellors provide services in individual counselling, small group counselling in which family may be included and larger group for students experiencing the same problem/concern. Thus, the nature of the problem/concern determines

the type of counselling service to be offered either individual, small group or large group.

This paper therefore highlights some of the counselling services provided by the 21st century professional school counsellors.

1. Counselling for the prevention, reduction and management of maladaptive behaviours such as fraud, arson, cultism, violent reactions, human trafficking, child assault and abuse, drug abuse, sexual abuse, armed robbery and corruption which have increased tremendously among today's youth.
2. Professional counselling to address the issues of divorce, single parenting and parental neglect which are on the alarming rates in today's family system.
3. Counselling as preventive medicine. This entails enlightenment and counselling on sexually transmitted diseases, HIV/AIDS, Hepatitis B among youths. Also, in the prevention of sickle cell anemia disease, genetic counselling is offered by professional counsellors.
4. Counselling to assist students' challenges of frequent changes in the world of work and high rate of unemployment in the country.
5. Counselling support for children being denied of the necessary parental love, care and support. As a result of economic depression and changes in value, most parents work from morning to night to make ends meet and their children are left in the hands of care givers. Such parents may also need counselling.

6. Guidance and counselling services for handling multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural resources conflicts being experienced in Nigeria today. Examples of such conflicts are Boko Haram insurgency, Niger Delta Crises, Religion crises in northern part of the country as well as political violence.
7. Counselling for special needs students which include physically, mentally and visually challenged student as well as those with hearing impairment and learning problems.
8. Counselling for trauma-related recovery for students recovering from virtually any trauma and accident.
9. Counselling students at risk of dropping out of school so as improve study habits, manage time judiciously and plan positively for the future.
10. Counselling to foster socialization and peer-interaction skills and as well boost self-confidence and self-esteem in students.

School Counsellors: Meeting with Challenges

1. In Nigeria, the inconsistent government policy confronts the practice of counselling. Despite the recognition of counselling by the Federal government, many Nigerian schools do not have school counsellors. There are instances whereby trained school counsellors teaches as subject teachers or combine teaching with counselling.
2. Guidance and counselling programme has little support from the government financially and morally for the promotion of guidance and counselling activities in

schools and for efficient job performance of school counsellors. Thus, no adequate funding is provided for school counselling programme.

3. Parents, teachers and students lack adequate knowledge about the roles of school counsellors. Consequent upon this, some vice principals in public schools view school counsellors as rivals (Yahaya, 2004). Also, some principals have false impression that a school can function effectively and profitably without school counsellors, to this end, much attention is not given to it.
4. Many schools in Nigeria lack adequate facilities to provide effective school counselling. Such facilities include office space other than staff room for school counsellors, storage facilities such as file cabinet, shelves, standardized psychological tests and non-test devices as well as transport facilities.
5. Cultural belief system, background and religion have negatively influenced the effective practice and utilization of school counselling programme. For instance, some students due to their background hold the belief that their problem must not be shared with any stranger. Thus, school counsellors are viewed as strangers due to difference in religion, language and cultural background. Some Nigerians see school counselling programme as an invasion of individual's privacy.
6. In many Nigerian schools, the school timetable does not make provisions for guidance and counselling activities. In other words, school activities in whole session are designed without giving specific period of

time for students to engage in formal guidance and counselling programme.

7. The blue print on guidance and counselling educational institutions in Nigeria, FME (2001,:42) stated that in order to achieve the stated objectives of secondary education, the Ideal counsellor/student ratio should be 1:300 but yet some schools do not have school counsellors and those that have only one school counsellor to over a thousand students.

School Counsellors: Meeting the Challenges

1. Discovering more efficient ways to render invaluable service to more students.
2. Acquisition of adequate knowledge for administering and analyzing psychological test.
3. Developing new interventions and strategies aimed at assisting students.
4. Having a growth orientation. That is, be open to change and willing to acquire more knowledge in counselling practice.
5. Being aware of special education and services available for students with special needs.
6. Engaging in public awareness and enlightenment on the invaluable role of guidance and counselling programme.
7. Arranging for guidance activities in the school time table and implement all the services required for a guidance and counselling programme.
8. Establishing the procedure for the student referrals when necessary.



9. Assessing learners entry behaviors and various psychological needs should be identified and addressed.
10. Pursuing the professionalization of counselling in Nigeria at a rigorous pace.

Recommendation

1. School principals could encourage board participation in guidance and counselling programme.
2. Government should organize in-service training for school counsellors to update their knowledge. Counsellors should be exposed to on-line counselling through training in information technology (IT) in order to keep pace with present level of globalization. Also, there should be deliberate efforts by government through the Ministry of Education to train more school guidance counsellors .
3. Provision of adequate funds for counselling service which include availability of counselling clinic, psychological tests and relevant equipments such as computers and internet facilities, tape recorder which are needed to run the counselling programme
4. Parents should actively participate in the promotion of guidance and counselling activities in schools.
5. School authorities should give the school counsellors free hand to create awareness of the counselling programme and advertise the services

they can render to both staff, students and parents in the school and beyond.

6. Workshops and seminars could be organized for school principals who see school counsellors as unimportant in the school setting and teachers who have no regards for guidance and counselling activities.

Conclusion

Guidance and counselling programme is an essential educational support service without which the aims of education cannot fully be realized. Counselling programme is effective in fostering physical, mental, moral, social and personal competence which results in the self-actualization and total development of Nigerian children if guidance and counselling programme is well conceptualized by the Ministry of Education and implemented by the school counsellor with the support of the school administrators.

Professional counsellors should be activist in promoting and educating both public and government officials on the significant roles of school counsellors. The task is to make school counselling an effective and well organized one being provided to students on full-time basis. Government and policy makers should ensure the full implementation of school guidance and counselling programme. To this end, guidance and counselling programme should reflect on the school time-table and school counsellors must be provided with all the necessary facilities and materials required for effective counselling and should not be given subjects to teach but rather be allowed to



practice effectively as a professional within the school setting.

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