

**THE CHALLENGING ROLES OF THE SCHOOL COUNSELLOR IN
THE NIGERIAN EDUCATION SYSTEM IN THE LAST FIVE
DECADES. ISSUES AND CONCERN**

BY

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to examine the challenging roles of the school counsellor identified for him by the National Policy on Education and various policy statements of various governments functionaries at different forums in the last five decades. In highlighting the roles, the paper examined various submissions and policy statements for the necessity and importance of guidance and counselling in the Nigeria's educational system. Some of the various expected roles of the counsellor such as a specialist, curriculum planner, test and measurement expert were discussed. The issues at stake are the non-provision of an enabling environment for counsellors and lack of adequate and proper planning of training of would be counsellors are recognized as problems. The paper concluded by stating that genuine and honest policy has to be put in place for the programme of guidance and counselling to succeed. The paper therefore recommended among others that the bill been sponsored by the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) which is before the National Assembly be personal vigorously so the all legislation be put for counselling and practioners in Nigeria.

Introduction

Counselling can be described basically as a enabling process designed to help individuals come to terms with life and ultimately to grow to greater maturity through learning to take responsibility and make decisions for themselves, Jones (1977). This service referred to as guidance and counselling in the Nigerian context has received much more public attention than any other field in the last two to three decades. Speeches have been made by various public officers in Education (both Federal and State). Educational and private individuals alike, and all have addressed the need to revamp Nigeria's educational system with a more productive and functional type that incorporates guidance and counselling. The central operator of the programme being the school counsellor. In a landmark address delivered at the 1976 launching ceremony of the Counselling Association of Nigeria then (CAN) now (CASSON) Colonel (Dr) Ahmadu Ali then Federal Commissioner of Education states interalia:-

Guidance and counselling is an educational innovations that enjoys myfull support. Any educational system will be deficient without educational guidance. Our students need to be helped by personal counseling, career educational and vocational guidance to discover their talents, aptitudes and to make intelligent career decisions. (p1-2)

A year after this celebrated speech for guidance and counselling, the Federal Government of Nigeria endorsed it total commitment and support the guidance and counselling movement when in 1977 (revised edition) National Policy on Education (NPE) states:

In view of the apparent ignorant of many young people about career prospect, and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors will be appointed in post primary institutions. Guidance and counselling will also feature in teacher's education programme (p. 30)

In a separate but relate submission at the National Workshop on transition from Junior to Senior Secondary schools held in Ilorin on June 7th 1988, the then Minister of Education, Professor Jibril Aminu (now a Senator of the Federal Republic of Nigeria representing Adamawa state) noted:

My ministry as well as all the state ministries of education are aware of the heavy reliance placed on guidance and counselling for most aspect if the new 6-3-3-4 system to actually succeed...My ministry therefore attached greet importance to guidance and counselling and is determined to staff all secondary schools with counsellors as soon as possible. For this reason my ministry is actively encouraging the production of counsellors in such a number that will meet the requirements to employ as many trained counsellors as could be found on the market now. I do know that the economy is not buoyant enough but we are determined to employ and place in school as many counsellors as we can afford. (p. 2-8).

The various policy pronouncements discussed on the provision of guidance and counselling services so far has shown clear genuine intensions from different governments and the national policy on education but the issues that remains to be addressed and implemented is what specific place is recognized or should be recognized for the school counsellors, in terms of firstly status of the counsellor in school, secondly should counsellor be certified or licensed before practice? And thirdly is the status of guidance and counselling in the National Policy on Education adequate? This issues and the professional roles of counsellor as seen by the authorities in guidance and counselling formed the focus of this paper.

Status of the Counsellor

Idowu (nd) observed that, National Council on Education (NCE) being the highest policy making body on educational matters, commissioned a task force in 1988 to study and report on some vital issues related to guidance and counselling in Nigeria. After a series of meetings, the task force recommended that counsellors should be allowed to practice on the basis of their training and that because of the impact on status, counsellors should be structured on a career ladder different from that of other school staff. This seems to be a major policy decision for counselling practice.

Should counsellors be certified and licensed for practice?

For a body of skilled people to be recognized as professionals, there is the need for such individuals to be specially trained and certified. Such bodies have always had ethical committees that regulates the roles of practitioner through the licensure. The Counselling Association of Nigerian (CASSON) endorsed this requirement and at its 1988 Maiduguri Conference set up a certification and licensed board (CALB) to, among other functions

recommend to the association policy guidelines for member certification and licensure. The board is charged with the responsibilities to certify counsellors as having met the standards for the general and specially practice of professional counselling in Nigeria.

The counsellors certified by CALB may also identify with other professional Associations. The CALB code ethics provides a minimal ethical standard for the professional behavior of all counsellors certified by it. This code provides an expectation of an assurance for the ethical practice for all who use the professional services of counsellors certified by CALB. In addition, it serves the purpose of having an enforceable standard for all counsellors certified by CALB.

Is status of Guidance and Counselling In the National Policy on Education adequate?

The first official document which make direct reference to school guidance and counselling in Nigeria was the 1981 version Policy on Education (FRN 1981). The 1982 version of the NPE has since undergone a number of versions with the latest on published in the year 2004. In this version, guidance and counselling is sub-section of educational services such as the libraries and the educational resource centre or provision of health facilities. Government in this sub-section 11 on educational service indicated that “educational services facilitates the implementation of educational policy goals and the promotion of effectiveness of educational system” (NPE 1981, p. 51).

The policy went on a little from what was stated in the 1981 version by saying that: In view of a apparent ignorance of many young people about career prospects, and in view of personality maladjustment among school children, career officers and counsellors should be appointed and government shall continue to make provision for the training of interested teachers in guidance and counselling. Guidance and counselling shall also

feature in teacher education programmes. Proprietors schools should provide guidance counsellors in adequate number in each primary and post primary schools (NPE 2004, p. 5i). The little prominence given to guidance and counselling in the policy documents deserves more attention than the mere mentioned and compressed into just six lines (see section 10 Paragraph 83, No 11). Where it is treated as an ancillary educational service sandwiched between Teachers Resource Centers, Educational Resource Centers, language Centers, Audio-Visual Centers, Science and Mathematical Centers/Workshops, National Book development Connals, Libraries, Radio and Television, Correspondence education and the National Teachers Institute.

This little scope with which guidance and counselling is viewed in the NPE may also go a long way to explain why Guidance Counsellors and counselling is viewed with levity both by school administrators and teachers as well. Far beyond this little scope however, lies numerous roles and functions guidance and counselling can play in the overall school programme.

The Challenging Role of the School Counsellors in the Nigerian Schools.

Professional literatures have indicated various roles for school counsellors in the past. Shertzer and Stone (1980), for example stated the counsellors have roles such as:

- i. Quasi administrators who act in the absence of principals, they assign teachers and students to classes and are responsible for extra curricular activities.
- ii. Generalist who have specific fumation but have priority placed on orientation, group guidance, a developer of cumulative records as well as a testing expert.
- iii. Specialist who gave counselling priority over all other activities.
- iv. Change agent or

v. Psychological Educator

On the Nigerian scene, some attempts were made by Nwoye (1983) in a survey to define and outline counsellors roles to which he found that school counsellors were responsible to principals, teachers, students, parents and the community in certain ways. Some of the counsellors responsibilities he listed are as follows:

- i. Organize orientation to help new students from primary to secondary schools to adjust to new environment.
- ii. Define interpret the objectives of the guidance programme to the principals, teachers, students, parents and the members of the community.
- iii. Identify guidance need of students and keep teachers informed of development which may have bearing on classroom situations.
- iv. Assist teachers in providing group guidance experiences to students through talks, club and classroom activities.
- v. Coordinate the accumulation, development and effective use of meaningful data through interviews etc. for effective implementation of the continuous assessment procedures.
- vi. Help principal to provide information to parents about school policies etc.
- vii. Assist parents to have a realistic perceptions about their children's attitudes, interest etc.
- vii. Collect and disseminate to parents information concerning career and opportunities for further education, training and curricular offerings etc.

Ipaye (1986), listed 20 areas of a counsellors professional responsibilities. He pointed out in his discussion of these 20 areas that he had included some areas that in

other countries would belong to other schools personnel like psychologist, social worker etc. it is quite evident that these personnel are not presently available in our schools and he therefore suggested until such a time when they are available, school counsellors would have to perform there functions. Considering the submission from professional literature, this paper highlighted six (6) main challenging roles of counsellors in Nigerian schools:-

The School Counsellor Roles as a Professional and Specialist in Counselling.

Lar, Okpede and Bulus (1992) asserted that, the counsellors role as a trained professional in human affairs is crucial. He engages in a specialist session of one to one counselling process where the ultimate goal is self-understanding, self-reliazation and self-actualization of the client. The counsellor is expected to devote a great deal of his/her time to counselling. Just in the same way that a teacher in a school is employed to guide and stimulate students learning, so also is a school counsellor employed to use his/her skills to assist students, to resolve their everyday problems or conflicts which have been or may be, obstructing their search for learning.

The Counsellor as curriculum Planner

Idowu (nd), opined that counsellors should be active in the development and implementation of school curriculum activities and programmes designed to facilitate students development. Counsellor should involved in, all stages of curriculum development and professional body, e.g. CASSON should take a position regards the operation of any curriculum innovation. This is because most of the curricular course offering in our schools are designed to develop students intellectual ability only without due consideration for their emotional and physical well being. Counsellors presence on

such bodies will help to ensure that course offerings are broad-based and their assessment procedures cover all the three domains of learning.

Counsellors should be more active in schools by suggesting to authorities innovative and more pragmatic activities that can make students' learning more rewarding. Extra-curricular activities are educative and they can be meaningfully structured to serve a complementary function to the school curriculum. The counsellor who takes an active part in the formation and running of clubs and associations is more likely to understand students better as he/she gains insight of the students' potentials in and outside the classroom.

Counsellors Role as a Test and Measurement Expert.

Counsellors are expected to play a significant role in the co-ordinations, the accumulation, development and effective use of meaningful data through the use of test and non-test devices for the smooth implementation of the continuous assessments of students at all levels of secondary school. Continuous assessment information provides a useful tool in helping to make transition decisions on students from JSS or from SSS to further education or employment.

The counsellor appraises students through diagnosis. All the vital information needed in helping students to understand their strengths and weaknesses—their abilities, interest, interpersonal relationships etc. are derived through testing. Ipaye (1986) defined diagnosis as a measure that helps the counsellor to make certain conclusions, no matter how tentative about clients' characteristics, the extent/magnitude/type of his/her problems, probable ways and means of offering help.

Nwoye (1990), summarises the role of the counsellor in test and measurement as follows:-

- i. Coordinating the task of accumulating meaningful information concerning students through interviews, tests and inventories.
- ii. Supervising the creation, organization and preservation of confidential files of students data.
- iii. Interpreting students information to students, parents, teachers, principals and other authorities, professionally concerned with the training of these students.
- iv. Identifying students of the school who have special abilities or needs; this exercise requiring that he possesses some competence in test and inventory development.

When certain attributes of students are to be gathered and standardized test are not available, problems may arise. It is the responsibility of counsellors to construct local and standardized tests where necessary. Counsellors are expected to have been trained in test construction and instrument development and such knowledge should be part to practical use in schools.

The Counsellor Role as a Career Developer

The system provides a medium through which students can be trained toward a goal, which usually ends up in a career. The school counsellor with a developmental purpose, prepares students using their educational resources to attain a career choice. This is done by the counsellor as Nwoye (1991) posited that:-

- i. Assisting students and their parents to relate students interests, aptitudes and abilities to current and future educational and vocational opportunities and requirements, long range educational plan and choices.

- ii. Gathering for and giving the students and parents information's concerning opportunities for future education.
- iii. Helping students and parents in understanding appropriate procedures for making applications and plans for financing students educational goals beyond the senior secondary.
- iv. Holding regular decisions with school authorities and other officers concerned affecting changes in the schools curricular offerings, at which occasions he depends a point of view that, in making changes in school curricular offerings, students abilities, interest and needs should always be considered.
- v. Helping in the educational and occupational planning of pupils who intend to withdraw or here been graduated from school.

The Role of Counsellor as a Consultant:

Consultation is an expert advice rendered by a professional. In a guidance programme, it is a process of providing technical assistance to teachers, parents, administrators and other counsellors to identify a merely problems that limits their effectiveness or limit the school effectiveness. Consultation is the key descriptor of the counsellors work especially since he/she is skilled and has all the students-school related information in his/her care. In fact Lar, Okpede and Bulus (1992) asserted that, just like a physician, the counsellor has specialized skills, knowledge and techniques in human affairs. He does consultations at various levels, e.g. with students, teachers, principals, parents and administrators.

The Role of Counsellor as a Community Change Agents:

As a trained profession, the counsellor is trained in the art of human relationship through counsellor qualities like warmth, genuineness, concreteness, respect, love and empathy. The counsellors can effectively bring about positive change in the counselling relationship between him and the client.

Idowu (nd) noted that, as a community change agent, counsellors are responsible for conducting local research studies for accumulating data on clientele needs and problems, as well as their characteristics. Also follow-up studies should be conducted by counsellors on graduates of schools and those who drop out so as to collect relevant data for its (the school) improvement.

The counsellor is a helping professional who advances the personal development of individuals. When he/she does this in and out of the school for the benefits of students, staff, parents and the community, then he/she becomes an agent of change for the community. This the counsellor does by maintaining community contacts to be able to identify resources which are useful for individual students development and for effective change in behavior. The counsellor maintains a list of referral agencies and personnel within the community to which students can be referred. The counsellor acts as a public relation officer to the school by interpreting test results to interested parties by publishing school materials that can be benefit to both school and the community and by helping and clarify issues on students matters which are of a developmental nature. Counsellors help the school to provide information to parents and other community members about the school policies, procedures, courses offerings, educational opportunities as well as

requirements and resources which can be contribute to the overall developments of their wards.

Issues and Concerns on Challenging Roles of the School Counsellor:

Considering the various landable pronouncements from government official both federal and state and policy statements which regards to guidance and counselling whose major operators are the counsellors, the challenging issues that are clear stem from the fact, that apart from those pronouncements and statements nothing concrete is seen on the ground to point to that fact that governments and its agents and agencies are really serious in seeing the practicing counsellors in our schools have all that it takes to practice in terms of enabling environment ranging from administrative bottle necks, physical facilities, financial resources and to cap it all the mere acceptance of the counsellor role in our various schools deserves to be re-examined.

The concern of professional counsellors revolves our issues like apathy on the part of the school administrators and teachers to counselling, lack of proper and sincere commitment on part of governments, its agents and agencies.

Another serious issue of concern is that the training counsellors is not handled in the way a professional specialist helper is to be trained, in most of the universities where the programme is offered at degree and post-graduate levels, the training is almost theoretical, when other professions like law and medicine have a more practical way of training their members such should apply to counselling so that a properly groomed counsellor is produced who can handle issues of human behavior and therapy effectively.

Conclusively, this paper submits that, for counsellors to effectively perform and counselling take its rightful place in our school system genuine and honest policy have to be put in place for the programme.

Recommendations

As a result of the aforementioned issues and concerns raised the paper recommends as follows:

1. The bill to the National Assembly been sponsored by the Counselling Association of Nigeria (CASSON) be vigorously persued, so that the legislation be put in place for counselling and its practioners in Nigeria.
2. Governments at all level from Federal to state should ensure that there is an enabling environments in our schools for counselling practices such as removing administrative bottle necks, provision of physical facilities and financial support.
3. The apathy shown to the practice of counselling by a great number of school administrators and teachers need to be changed by way of coopting the two groups into the counselling committees of their various schools.
4. The training provided to counsellor in tertiary institutions in Nigeria needs to be reviewed, more practical and challenging situations be part of the curriculum. The counsellors should be made to undergo serious training like their counterparts in Law, Medicine, Engineering etc.

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