

Refining Ethical Standards in Counselling Services for Reviving Nigerian System of Education in the Post-COVID Era

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Abstract

The paper discusses on how ethical standards in counselling services could be refined in reviving Nigerian educational system in the era after Covid-19. An explanation and discussion of what counselling is has been extensively carried out. Likewise, an exploit into what Nigerian system of education was before the covid-19 era was undertaken and then juxtaposed with what it is after the era. Furthermore, the paper also looked into the values of counselling where principles like that of respect for human rights and dignity, in protecting the safety of the clients and for increasing personal effectiveness, among others, were carefully discussed. Additionally, counsellors' moral qualities in the form of empathy, sincerity, integrity, respect, fairness, resilience, humility and the like were adequately explained. The paper also discusses the ethical principles of counselling and how these could be utilized in reviving Nigerian educational system; such ethics include being trustworthy, autonomy, beneficence, non-maleficence, justice, and self-respect were elucidated. Part of the suggestions made by the paper is that counselling practitioners should work tirelessly, selflessly and committedly in enhancing services that would contribute in inculcating confidence in individuals to ensure the realization of self-confidence for squarely facing life challenges.

Key Words: Refining, Counselling Service, Ethical, Reviving, Education

Introduction

Guidance and counselling services entails the entire programme embarked upon to help individuals to know themselves better by understanding their capabilities, strength and weaknesses and for the system to flourish. In this regard Aliero, Aliero and Tsagem (2022) point that guidance and counselling are series of developmental processes embark upon to assist an individual to understand, accept and utilize his or her abilities and capabilities maximally, make informed decisions and solve his or her own problems by himself or herself. Thus, it is specialized services geared towards assisting persons to maximally utilize their competencies and capabilities by understanding their abilities and overcoming any negative feeling that they may entertain towards their achievements. Similarly, Salawu and Abdulkadir (2011) defined guidance and counselling as a practice primarily concerned with how to assist the individual client to understand himself, the world around him, and so be able to live a normal and well-adjusted life.

Summarily, we could safely assert that guidance and counselling touch all aspects of life in the society and as such is found very relevant, helpful and of utmost importance to the school process because the process is of importance to both the students and the staff; and also plays important role in school-parent-community relationships (Aliero, Aliero and Tsagem, 2022).

Accordingly, and all things considered, the Federal Government of Nigeria's National Policy on Education (NPE, 2014) and the National Policy on Counselling (FME, 2018) stresses the need to put in place and at all educational levels, guidance and counselling programme. Thus, Batagarawa & Dan Inna (2021) observe that for the attainment of the objectives of education delivery at all levels in Nigeria, guidance and counselling services are a very important.

Counselling as a composite programme would play an admirable role in reviving the Nigeria's educational system that has been apparently battered by the COVID-19 by first of all, revitalizing ethical values that need to be adhered to in order to standardized the practice. Thus,

the challenge of working ethically means that practitioners will inevitably encounter situations where there are competing obligations. In such situations it is tempting to retreat from all ethical analysis in order to escape a sense of what may appear to be unresolvable ethical tension. These ethics are intended to be of assistance in such circumstances by directing attention to the variety of ethical factors that may need to be taken into consideration and to alternative ways of approaching ethics that may prove more useful. No statement of ethics can totally alleviate the difficulty of making professional judgements in circumstances that may be constantly changing and full of uncertainties.

Pre- and Post-COVID Education in Nigeria

Education at all levels in Nigeria has been having hiccups over funding and implementation of plans with a glaringly serious continued downfall even though we keep on deceiving ourselves that we are achieving developmental strides. Right from the primary level to the secondary and through to the tertiary level, the story of apparent backwardness is evident chiefly due to lack of commitment and sincerity on the part of most of its stakeholders. Unarguably, the deep cancerous nature of corruption has aggravated the issue; which somehow is evidenced in the way the leaders and powers that be continue to exhibit apathetic and lackadaisical attitudes towards the manner with the educational system is handled in the country; and calls for its revival fell on deep unconcerned ears. The nature of the learning environments are pathetic, teaching and learning experiences remain archaic, recreational activities are nonexistent, the remuneration is pitiable hence most qualified teachers has deserted the profession and non are so far willing to come in, the prestige of the job has been destroyed, funding is a mirage, and the whole society seems to care less about the nature of our educational system, Thus, as late as 2018 the comatose nature of Nigeria's educational system has continued to be a source of great concern to many; to the extent

that renewed calls for reviving the educational sector started in earnest but, to no avail. And then, when we are ‘safely’ living in our cocooned pretense, COVID-19 struck.

For the first time, everybody was rudely awakened to the fact that we have no sustainable structure for our education to continue in case of such disasters. Schools have to be closed and abandoned and when a lot of time is wasted in waiting, the authorities concerned started to look into the possibilities of copying what other countries are doing to sustain the education of their people. But, then it all dawned upon us that we don’t have the structure to do so and to believe we can do it overnight was madness. When countries not as economically strong as us are rolling out educational plans that utilized ICT gateways and platforms, we found that we don’t have what it takes to run as simple as “learning by radio” classes! Of course, the frantic, haphazard, unmastered, by-the-minute, fire brigade approach did nothing other than to confound more problems and confuse the whole issue; the structure to enable is simply non-existent, tutors are not trained on how to use such ICT provisions and those that ended up using them are not qualified teachers or those who are half-baked to take that responsibility, and corruption still played a major role in that. Unarguably, the COVID-19 mercilessly battered to a comatose state what remains of our abandoned and ramshackle system of education. Then the powers that be realized that all the previous calls made were to arm ourselves for this kind of thing, alas their selfishness could not let them see reason.

Values of Counselling

Values inform principles. They represent an important way of expressing a general ethical commitment that becomes more precisely defined and action-orientated when expressed as a principle. Thus, the fundamental values of counselling (<https://www.bacp.co.uk/>) in refining education include a commitment to:

- i. Respecting human rights and dignity. One of the core values in counselling principles is in championing respect for human right and dignity which could be achieved when counsellors practically show a commitment for human reverence and also appeal to individual dispositions.
- ii. Protecting the safety of clients. Another core value that practitioners ought to display is in protecting the safety of the client. This done by avoiding and vehemently adhering to the tenet of guarding individual's safety by protecting their secrets in all ramifications, unless in circumstances that warrant releasing such.
- iii. Ensuring the integrity of practitioner-client relationships. Practitioners should foremost ensure the integrity of the relationship that exists between them and their clients. In this regard, they shouldn't cease being good role models and epitomes of acceptable moral character; they should always be guided by the fact that the relationship between them and their clients is thoroughly professional.
- iv. Enhancing the quality of professional knowledge and its application for the benefit of self and others. This could be achieved through conferences, workshops, seminars and through research and publications. Practitioners should work toward adding to existing knowledge novel ideas and findings that could prove beneficial to the profession.
- v. Alleviating personal distress and suffering by being readily available to give helping hand in helping individuals in need. Counsellors should understand that they should be committed to helping individuals and should be a code of honor for them. They should do whatever possible within their powers and ability to see that they bring succor to others.

- vi. Fostering a sense of self that is meaningful to the person(s) concerned by always being very simple, straightforward and genuine; presented in such a way that the concerned other would not find it any difficult to understand what he is meant to.
- vii. Increasing personal effectiveness. This could be achieved by enhancing and improving upon personal knowledge, experience and expertise from other professionals. In this respect, practitioners should be open to corrections, ideas and collaborations.
- viii. Enhancing the quality of relationships between people should be a guiding principle for practitioners as is entrenched in the counselling profession. They should work towards ensuring that relationships between people is nurtured and maintained.
- ix. Appreciating the variety of human experience and culture in such a way that the counselling principle of “for all people” is maintained. In this way, practitioners should be available to and ready to work with all people in order to promote the idea of multiculturalism.
- x. Striving for the fair and adequate provision of counselling and psychotherapy services should be another guiding principle so that clients are treated justly and provisions that will enhance prompt and ideal counselling services are made adequate. In this regard, clients would not be taken undue advantage of.

Personal Moral Qualities of Counselling Practitioners

In order to achieve values of counselling, the practitioner’s personal moral qualities are of the utmost importance to clients. Many of the personal qualities considered important in the provision of services have an ethical or moral component and are therefore considered as virtues or good personal qualities. It is inappropriate to prescribe that all practitioners possess these qualities, since it is fundamental that these personal qualities are deeply rooted in the person

concerned and developed out of personal commitment rather than the requirement of an external authority. Personal qualities (<https://www.bacp.co.uk/>) to which counsellors are strongly encouraged to aspire include:

- a. Empathy: the ability to communicate understanding of another person's experience from that person's perspective.
- b. Sincerity: a personal commitment to consistency between what is professed and what is done.
- c. Integrity: commitment to being moral in dealings with others, personal straightforwardness, honesty and coherence.
- d. Resilience: the capacity to work with the client's concerns without being personally diminished.
- e. Respect: showing appropriate esteem to others and their understanding of themselves.
- f. Humility: the ability to assess accurately and acknowledge one's own strengths and weaknesses.
- g. Competence: the effective deployment of the skills and knowledge needed to do what is required.
- h. Fairness: the consistent application of appropriate criteria to inform decisions and actions.
- i. Wisdom: possession of sound judgement that informs practice.
- j. Courage: the capacity to act in spite of known fears, risks and uncertainty.

Counselling Ethical Principles for Sustaining Nigeria's Educational System

Principles direct attention to important ethical responsibilities. Each principle is described below and is followed by examples of good practice that have been developed in response to that principle (<https://www.mindtools.com/>). Ethical decisions that are strongly supported by one or more of these principles without any contradiction from others may be regarded as reasonably well

founded. However, practitioners will encounter circumstances in which it is impossible to reconcile all the applicable principles and choosing between principles may be required. A decision or course of action does not necessarily become unethical merely because it is contentious or other practitioners would have reached different conclusions in similar circumstances. A practitioner's obligation is to consider all the relevant circumstances with as much care as is reasonably possible and to be appropriately accountable for decisions made (<https://playtherapy.org/principles/>).

Being trustworthy: honouring the trust placed in the practitioner (also referred to as fidelity). Being trustworthy is regarded as fundamental to understanding and resolving ethical issues. Practitioners who adopt this principle act in accordance with the trust placed in them; strive to ensure that clients' expectations are ones that have reasonable prospects of being met; honour their agreements and promises; regard confidentiality as an obligation arising from the client's trust; restrict any disclosure of confidential information about clients to furthering the purposes for which it was originally disclosed.

Autonomy: respect for the client's right to be self-governing. This principle emphasizes the importance of developing a client's ability to be self-directing within therapy and all aspects of life. Practitioners who respect their clients' autonomy: ensure accuracy in any advertising or information given in advance of services offered; seek freely given and adequately informed consent; emphasize the value of voluntary participation in the services being offered; engage in explicit contracting in advance of any commitment by the client; protect privacy; protect confidentiality; normally make any disclosures of confidential information conditional on the consent of the person concerned; and inform the client in advance of foreseeable conflicts of

interest or as soon as possible after such conflicts become apparent. The principle of autonomy opposes the manipulation of clients against their will, even for beneficial social ends.

Beneficence: a commitment to promoting the client's well-being. The principle of beneficence means acting in the best interests of the client based on professional assessment. It directs attention to working strictly within one's limits of competence and providing services on the basis of adequate training or experience. Ensuring that the client's best interests are achieved requires systematic monitoring of practice and outcomes by the best available means. It is considered important that research and systematic reflection inform practice. There is an obligation to use regular and on-going supervision to enhance the quality of the services provided and to commit to updating practice by continuing professional development. An obligation to act in the best interests of a client may become paramount when working with clients whose capacity for autonomy is diminished because of immaturity, lack of understanding, extreme distress, serious disturbance or other significant personal constraints.

Non-maleficence: a commitment to avoiding harm to the client. Non-maleficence involves: avoiding sexual, financial, emotional or any other form of client exploitation; avoiding incompetence or malpractice; not providing services when unfit to do so due to illness, personal circumstances or intoxication. The practitioner has an ethical responsibility to strive to mitigate any harm caused to a client even when the harm is unavoidable or unintended. Holding appropriate insurance may assist in restitution. Practitioners have personal and professional responsibility to challenge, where appropriate, the incompetence or malpractice of others; and to contribute to any investigation and/or adjudication concerning professional practice which falls below that of a reasonably competent practitioner and/or risks bringing discredit upon the profession.

Justice: the fair and impartial treatment of all clients and the provision of adequate services. The principle of justice requires being just and fair to all clients and respecting their human rights and dignity. It directs attention to considering conscientiously any legal requirements and obligations, and remaining alert to potential conflicts between legal and ethical obligations. Justice in the distribution of services requires the ability to determine impartially the provision of services for clients and the allocation of services between clients. A commitment to fairness requires the ability to appreciate differences between people and to be committed to equality of opportunity, and avoiding discrimination against people or groups contrary to their legitimate personal or social characteristics. Practitioners have a duty to strive to ensure a fair provision of counselling and psychotherapy services, accessible and appropriate to the needs of potential clients.

Self-respect: fostering the practitioner's self-knowledge and care for self. The principle of self-respect means that the practitioner appropriately applies all the above principles as entitlements for self. This includes seeking counselling or therapy and other opportunities for personal development as required. There is an ethical responsibility to use supervision for appropriate personal and professional support and development, and to seek training and other opportunities for continuing professional development. Guarding against financial liabilities arising from work undertaken usually requires obtaining appropriate insurance. The principle of self-respect encourages active engagement in life-enhancing activities and relationships that are independent of relationships in counselling or psychotherapy.

Suggestion

Based on the discussion, the following suggestion are made:

- i. Counselling practitioners should work tirelessly, selflessly and committedly in enhancing services that would contribute in inculcating confidence in individuals to ensure the realization of self-confidence for squarely facing life challenges.

- ii. Stake holders in Nigerian education system, by working convincingly and with all sincerity, should improve in providing and utilizing modern approaches and cutting-edge technologies in providing counselling services to schools towards entrenching such realistic services that would prove vital for the realization of our goals, aims and policies of education.
- iii. Counselling practitioners should improve upon upholding the principles that underlie the counselling practice in order to attract people that would eventually feel respected and fulfilled in all ramifications.
- iv. Henceforth, the society and those charged with the responsibility of running the educational sector should be aware that we need to truthfully face problems of our educational system with the view to finding lasting solutions devoid of personal partialities that will be detrimental to our collective survival.
- v. People should be made aware that counselling services are meant for them and geared towards satisfying their needs by providing professional advices and this would be achieved in an atmosphere of respect for human dignity, respect, sincerity, empathy, confidentiality, beneficence, autonomy and non-maleficence.

Conclusion

Our educational system could benefit greatly from what counselling would offer. Many problems faced by individuals could also be adequately handled through counselling; in this respect, the government should find realistic ways of inculcating counselling services in our educational system which would focus on solving problems for both the individuals and the system by utilizing modern approaches and cutting-edge technologies in achieving set goals. Finally, the society should give counselling a chance to prove its mettle in settling issues that are a source of concern.

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